Herman Bavinck’s Trinitarian Theology:
The Ontological, Cosmological, and Soteriological Dimensions of the Doctrine of the Trinity

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael's College

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Abstract

Recent scholarship on the Dutch, Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) has opened up new possibilities for examining the role of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck’s systematic theology. Building on current research, this thesis suggests that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be identified as thoroughly trinitarian by identifying the ways that he uses the doctrine positively (structuring, norming, and informing) and negatively (apologetic) to construct his dogmatic theology. To do this, this dissertation utilizes an intriguing statement made by Bavinck within his treatment of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Reformed Dogmatics* concerning the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity as a framework for understanding his systematic project. Taking this statement to indicate a trinitarian line of reasoning within Bavinck, this thesis argues that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another.

Primarily expositional in nature, constructive in analysis, and creative in its use of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions, this dissertation situates the current thesis within Bavinck scholarship (Introduction), provides an extended defense of using the
dimensions (Chapter 1), and articulates each dimension and their relationships to one another (Chapters 2-4). While the primary goal of this thesis is to contribute to Bavinck scholarship, the closing chapter shifts to suggest Bavinck as a conversation partner to contemporary discussions concerning the systematic role of the doctrine of the Trinity and constructive development of doctrine (Chapter 5).
Acknowledgements

One does not complete a dissertation without aid, support, and encouragement. Looking back, there are countless people without whom this dissertation would not have been completed. First, I must thank my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Mangina, who encouraged me to pursue a topic that I cared about and offered crucial feedback and assistance along the way. Thanks are also in order for the those who served on my committee: Dr. Robert Sweetman, Dr. John Vissers, and Fr. Gilles Mongeau, SJ. Dr. Vissers and Rev. Dr. Mongeau helped shape this project in its early stages, and Dr. Sweetman offered invaluable feedback on the project that shaped my finished project. I thank him for pushing me and engaging me throughout my thesis. The final product is better because of his input.

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Introduction

1. Introduction

Throughout his four-volume magnum opus *Gereformeerde dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics)*, the Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) contends for the irreducible importance of the confession of God’s triunity for the Christian faith and the dogmatic task.¹ Reflecting on the centrality of the Trinity, Bavinck claims: “The entire Christian belief system, all of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God’s Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant.”² This assertion alongside bold claims, such as “every error [in doctrine] results from, or upon deeper reflection is traceable to, a departure in the doctrine of the Trinity” and “the Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all existence is referred back to the triune God, and until the confession of God’s Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life,” clearly indicate Bavinck’s desire to place the Trinity at the centre of his theological project.³

To those writing theology in the wake of the twentieth-century revival of the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck's claims may not seem particularly novel.⁴ However, within Bavinck's late

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² *RD*, II. 333.

³ *RD*, II. 330, 288.

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century context, the doctrine of the Trinity was the subject of significant critique and revision. Even though early modern and post-Kantian challenges to the coherence and relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity were being eclipsed by rationalistic, speculative, philosophical constructions by Schelling, Hegel, and others, serious questions concerning the doctrine’s basic coherency, content, significance, structure, and reliance on classical metaphysics remained. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, the doctrine of the Trinity was in significant disarray. Many abandoned or augmented it in response to post-Enlightenment critiques, insights, and challenges while those within conservative theological circles often articulated the doctrine in traditional forms without adequate engagement with post-Enlightenment philosophy and theology.\(^5\)

It was within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theology and philosophy that Bavinck reprioritized the doctrine of the Trinity, making it central to his dogmatic system. While the statements quoted in the opening paragraph clearly indicate Bavinck’s conviction that an inadequately trinitarian theology will result in one that is deficiently Christian, how Bavinck reprioritized the doctrine of the Trinity within his systematic project remains a pressing question. Despite the broad consensus on concerning the priority of the doctrine of the Trinity, there remain few in-depth treatments of the nature, function, and purpose of the Doctrine of the Trinity in shaping Bavinck’s theology as a whole.

From R.H. Bremmer’s ground-breaking work on Bavinck to James Eglinton’s discipline altering dissertation, the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity has been identified in relation to

individual aspects of Bavinck, such as epistemology,6 doctrine of Creation,7 pactum salutis,8 ethics,9 soteriology,10 the motif of grace restores nature,11 and the formulation of a Christian world and life view.12 Yet, in most of these treatments the trinitarian centre is identified but primarily discussed within the context of other doctrinal, ethical, or philosophical topics. These studies have produced genuine insights and should not be criticized for focusing on systematic and philosophical themes within Bavinck. However, the fecundity of Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity and its role in shaping, norming, and informing his theology is left unexamined or underexamined.

11 See especially E. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1959) 191-5 and Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schippenheijn, 1968), 346ff for the identification of grace restores nature as a trinitarian theme in Bavinck. The identification of grace restores nature as a central motif in Bavinck is nearly universal. The one exception to this is Ronald Gleason’s dissertation, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” in which he argues that Union with Christ is the central motif in Bavinck’s theology upon which all the other motifs and themes rest. While Gleason’s dissertation does rightly highlight the role of union with Christ in Bavinck’s theology, it is more aptly described as a key motif of Bavinck’s soteriology, not theology as a whole. Gleason does relate the *unio mystica* to the Trinity by grounding it in the *pactum salutis*, but his primary focus is on articulating the *unio mystica* as a central motif of Bavinck’s theology. Therefore, even though he notes the centrality of the Trinity, he does not examine it as thoroughly as he could have in reference to the Trinity. See Gleason, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica*,” Ronald Gleason, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” (Ph.D. Dissertation. Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), Chapter 1.
The lack of in-depth treatments tracing the logic and consistency of Bavinck’s own claims concerning the centrality of the dogma of the Trinity becomes even more clear when one surveys the range of proposals concerning the centre of Bavinck’s theology in older scholarship, which range from the covenant of grace (Anthony A. Hoekema), the motif of grace restores nature (Jan Veenhof and Eugene Heideman), the *unio mystica* (Ronald Gleason), and the eschatological nature of redemption (Syndeyney Hielema). Notably missing: the doctrine of the Trinity. Certainly, these scholars mention the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, and Veenhof, Bremmer, Heideman, Gleason, and Hielema explicitly connect their proposals to the Trinity in some way. Veenhof and Heideman even identify the motif of grace restores nature as a *trinitarian* theme. But, they focus on other doctrines or motifs as the *centre* or root of Bavinck’s theology. Part of this approach, as will be examined later in this introduction, can be attributed to a persistent hermeneutical method within Bavinck scholarship that treated him as a thinker with competing lines of thought, aptly named the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis.

Two exceptions to this can be found in John Bolt and R.H. Bremmer. In *Bavinck als dogmaticus* Bremmer identifies the importance and centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in shaping Bavinck’s theology and constantly identifies Bavinck’s theology as trinitarian. He even includes a section entitled “Het gewicht van de triniteitsleer.” However, despite his recognition of the centrality of the Trinity in Bavinck, Bremmer too adhered to a version of the ‘two Bavincks’

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14 Surprisingly, although recognizing the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck, Gleason’s dissertation on the centrality of union with Christ does not explicitly connect the doctrine of the Trinity to the aforementioned theme. Gleason, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica*.”


and criticized Bavinck for the scholastic elements he perceived within Bavinck’s doctrine of God. Thus, he does not adequately integrate Bavinck’s whole *locus De Deo* (*De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*), meaning that the unity of Bavinck’s doctrine of God is not adequately explored. Along with Bremmer, John Bolt’s dissertation, “A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the *Imitatio Christi,*” identifies Bavinck’s theology as thoroughly and consistently trinitarian and argues that Bavinck’s cultural-ethical ideal is rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Bolt, it is Bavinck’s trinitarianism that marks him as a true Neo-Calvinist alongside of Abraham Kuyper. In later articles, Bolt expands his argument and claims that the Trinity is the unifying theme of Reformed thought as a whole. Yet, despite his identification of Bavinck as a trinitarian thinker and articulation of the relationship between Bavinck’s cultural-ethical ideal and the Trinity and Bremmer’s work, the persistence of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis stunted further investigations concerning the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Recent scholarship, however, following James Eglinton and Brian Mattson’s critique of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis has begun to approach Bavinck as a unified thinker, thereby switching from the question that dominated the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis, namely, ‘which Bavinck’ was the true one, to questions concerning the means by which Bavinck synthesizes various elements within his theological project. Significantly, Eglinton roots Bavinck’s (long maligned) organic motif in his doctrine of God and suggests the motif is the key unifying agent in his system. The simultaneous demise of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis alongside of Eglinton’s argument rooting the organic motif in the doctrine of God has created a renewed impetus to examine the doctrine Bavinck identifies as “the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its

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17 Bolt, *Imitatio Christi*, 120.
18 Bolt, *Imitatio Christi*, 120.
dogmas:” the doctrine of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{21} The fruits of this new approach can already be observed within the field. Eglinton’s work itself offers the most thorough treatment of the relationship of Bavinck’s doctrine of God to his systematic theology via his exploration of the organic motif. Recent dissertations have examined the relationship between the doctrine of God and creation in more detail, yielding genuine insights.\textsuperscript{22} And, at least three recent articles have examined the centrality of Bavinck’s doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{23}

While these recent treatments of Bavinck have yielded positive results, they also reveal the need for an in-depth study that concentrates on the fecundity of Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity for the norming, structuring, organizing of his systematic theology. Thus, there is room for new research that articulates the systematic relationship between Bavinck’s doctrine of God proper and his treatment of other theological loci. Moreover, Bavinck scholarship has so far ignored systematic questions concerning the mechanisms and methods by which he maintains unity and distinction in the doctrine of God; the relationship he articulates between God’s essence and attributes; his ordering of the attributes; his view of particular attributes; the over-arching structure of his doctrine of God; and how these particular elements within his doctrine of God are important with the scope of his theological project as a whole.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, Bavinck’s interaction,

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{RD} \textit{RD}, II. 330.
\bibitem{Huttinga} See Huttinga, “Participation and Communicability” and Cooke, "World-Formative Rest: Faithful Cultural Discipleship in a Secular Age."
\end{thebibliography}
utilization, and interpretation of classical trinitarian definitions and structure need to be studied alongside an in-depth examination of his engagement with nineteenth-century philosophical and theological treatments of the Trinity. In sum, the field remains wide open for new, positive contributions.

Such contributions are imperative not only for the field of Bavinck scholarship, which has recently been experiencing a revival, but also for those who are interested in the revival of trinitarian theology in the latter half of the twentieth century.25 If recent scholarship concerning Bavinck is correct, then Bavinck can and should be identified as a trinitarian theologian who reprioritized the doctrine within the context of theology and philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century. Given his location at the beginning of the twentieth century, Bavinck could serve as an interesting conversation partner for theologians who have been identified as part of the renaissance of trinitarian theology in the latter half of the twentieth century. In what ways did Bavinck anticipate the developments of the so-called trinitarian revival? Are there any similarities? Differences? Useful points of correction?

As recent Bavinck scholarship has opened up new possibilities to examine Bavinck’s trinitarian theology, this thesis will suggest that Bavinck’s intriguing comment concerning Tertullian's contribution to the formulation of Trinitarian dogma reveals a trinitarian line of reasoning within worth pursuing. In his section on the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity in Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck writes:

Both formally and materially he [Tertullian] has been of incalculable significance for the dogma of the Trinity. Despite his failure always to surmount subordinationism and to adequately distinguish the ontological, the cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is nevertheless

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25 The translation project of the Gereformeerde dogmatiek, completed in 2007, has been the main impetus for the revival of Bavinck scholarship in the Anglophone world.
Tertullian who furnished the concepts and terms that the dogma of the Trinity needed to articulate its true meaning (emphasis added).26

Within their immediate context, the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions serve as an evaluative tool; however, they indicate a line of reasoning within Bavinck concerning the norming, structuring, ordering, and apologetic role of the doctrine of the Trinity worth pursuing. For Bavinck, it seems that failure to distinguish these dimensions—an inadequate development, an insufficient account of their relationship, or an excessive concentration on one dimension at the expense of the others—leads to an insufficient doctrine of the Trinity. And, given his statements concerning the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for the dogmatic enterprise and the Christian faith, an inadequate doctrine of the Trinity undermines the dogmatic task, the integrity of creation, and erodes the foundations of Christian faith.

1.1 Thesis Statement

This thesis argues that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another. The value of this approach is that it can hold together the positive (structuring, norming, and informing) and negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck’s theology.

1.2 Development and Goals

To do this, this thesis identifies and argues for the usefulness of utilizing the dimensions as a way to understand Bavinck’s trinitarian theology from within Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics.

26 RD, II. 284. Bavinck’s identification of ontological, cosmological and soteriological distinctions in the doctrine of the Trinity is already found in the first Dutch edition of the Reformed Dogmatics. See Bavinck, Gereformeerde dogmatiek, 1st ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1895), 254-5: “Zoo kneedt Tertullianus de stroeve latijnsche taal, om en de unitas en de trinitas in God gelijkelijk te handhaven; zoowel formeel als materieel is hij voor het dogma der triniteit van de grootste beteekenis geweest. In weerviel dat hij het subordinatianisme niet altijd te boven komt en het ontologische, kosmologische en soteriologische in de triniteitsleer te weinig onderscheidt, hij heeft de begrippen en de woorden aan de hand gedaan, die het dogma der triniteit ter uitdrukking van zijne ware meening van noode had.” (Emphasis added)
and other pertinent published writings from Bavinck’s corpus. Thus, it offers a thorough treatment of the context in which he makes this statement (the historical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity)\(^ {27}\) as well as utilizes other pertinent writings from his published corpus that define dogmatics as a science (\textit{scientia}) whose object is God as he has revealed himself “in Christ through his Word” in order to show that Bavinck sees the object of theology (the triune God) as governing its form, structure, and content.\(^ {28}\) Furthermore, after defending the viability of utilizing the dimensions, the thesis articulates how Bavinck distinguishes, develops, and relates the dimensions in light of the non-trinitarian alternatives he identifies.

The \textit{goal of this thesis} is three-fold. First, and primary, this thesis will aim to present the dimensions as a conceptual framework through which to identify Bavinck as a trinitarian theologian and to articulate, analyze, and assess Bavinck’s reprioritization and integration the doctrine of the Trinity in his theology within the philosophical and theological context at the turn of the twentieth century. Consequently, this will contribute to contemporary Bavinck scholarship by offering an in-depth investigation of the inner logic of Bavinck’s trinitarian theology, specifically the fecundity of the Trinity within his thought as he systematically relates his doctrine of God proper to other theological loci. Second, it provides a hermeneutical lens, drawn from within Bavinck’s dogmatics through which to read his theology as a unified whole. This contributes to the growing consensus in Bavinck scholarship that the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis is no longer tenable, and it suggests a possible way to read Bavinck’s theology as a unified whole by offering a lens through which to understand Bavinck’s utilization and appropriation of the

\(^{27}\) An in-depth treatment of Bavinck’s historical account of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is lacking in Bavinck scholarship. One reason may be that it is often considered a foundational but relatively unexciting chapter. This thesis will seek to remedy this lack in Bavinck scholarship and show that this foundational chapter has profound insights that are essential to understanding Bavinck’s theology.

\(^{28}\) \textit{RD}, I.110.
Reformed orthodox tradition and contemporary philosophical and theological insights. Finally, drawing on the dimensions and subsequent articulation of Bavinck’s trinitarian theology, this thesis briefly suggests that the dimensions provide an avenue through which to place his trinitarian theology into conversation with the so-called ‘Trinitarian revival’ in contemporary theology. By proposing a means by which Bavinck’s theology can engage in contemporary theological conversations, this thesis contributes to broader theological scholarship on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Before continuing to the methodological and procedural sections of the introduction, it is important to situate Bavinck historically by providing a brief biography as well as to define and examine the effect of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis on Bavinck scholarship. Even though Bavinck scholarship has increased in the last decade, he still remains a relatively unknown figure beyond Dutch theological circles. Thus, a biography of him is appropriate to the task of situating his theological project historically. Similarly, it is necessary to situate the current thesis more firmly within Bavinck scholarship, especially concerning the way the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis has hampered constructive and creative treatments of the Trinity as a unifying and structuring doctrine within his Systematic theology.

2. Herman Bavinck: The Neo-Calvinist between Two Worlds

29 This thesis will use the term Reformed orthodoxy to refer to the diverse and broad development of Reformed, confessional theology in the two centuries following the Reformation, and it will use Reformed scholasticism to refer to the academic method that this development often utilized. These definitions are utilized in contemporary treatments of the post-Reformational era and in various current treatments of Bavinck. For a good treatment and expansion of these definitions see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformational Reformed Dogmatics*, vols. 1-4, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), I: 33-42 (hereafter, PRRD).

30 This bibliographical section will highlight the aspects of Bavinck’s personal history and context that are most relevant to the thesis. The goal is not to give a detailed presentation and analysis of Bavinck’s life and context but to provide relevant details. For the sole biography of Bavinck in English, see Ronald Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesmen, Theologian* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010). Several helpful and accessible biographical sketches are also available in English, see John Bolt, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *RD* I.11-19; II.11-18; III.10-17; IV. 16-23; and Eric Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 9-27. For a detailed account of Dutch theology in the nineteenth century see James Hutton Mackay, *Religious Thought in the Holland during the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911); Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of A Personal Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989),
Herman Bavinck did not develop his theology in a vacuum; he was shaped and formed by his context. He carried out his work within the ecclesial, intellectual, and social context of the Netherlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wherein he was instrumental as a leading figure in a revival of Calvinism, known as Neo-Calvinism. As such, he can be understood as a man who sought to develop a truly Reformed theology within the context of modernity.31

2.1 Early Life: Son of a Secessionist Pastor

Bavinck was born in 1854 to Rev. Jan Bavinck (1826-1909), a German Reformed pastor in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk (CGK) who later served as a pastor in Kampen, where the CGK’s Theological School was located, and Gesina Magdelena Bavinck (1827-1900). The CGK seceded from the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK), the national church in the Netherlands, in 1834 due to a number of concerns, such as increasing theological liberalism and modernism within the NHK; the reorganization of church governance by King William I of the Netherlands in 1816, which resulted in a hierarchical church polity and the NHK being regulated by a state Department of Religion; the mandatory use of the Evangelische Gezangen, the state-endorsed hymnbook, in worship; and a concern for the erosion of loyalty to the Reformed confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort).32 Those within the CGK were intensely loyal to the Reformed confessions, sought to adhere to classical Reformed orthodox theology and polity,

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31 In this thesis, ‘modern/modernity’ will generally be used to refer broadly to developments in post-Enlightenment theology up do the mid-twentieth century. This is important to note as ‘modern theology’ had a very specific referent within the Dutch theological context of the nineteenth century.

32 See Wood, Going Dutch, 6-15 and Bratt, Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, 3-10.
and sought to cultivate a deep spiritual piety.\textsuperscript{33} After seceding from the \textit{NHK}, the \textit{CGK} became increasingly sectarian in outlook.\textsuperscript{34}

Through his participation in the ecclesial life of the \textit{CGK} as well as his parent’s embodiment of the \textit{CGK}’s core commitments, Bavinck’s early life and understanding of Christianity were shaped by the Reformed theology and deep, reformational spirituality of the secessionist movement.\textsuperscript{35} Bavinck would remain committed to the theological tradition of the Reformed Christianity in which he was raised, even as he entered into an honest and thorough engagement with modern theology. However, he was not uncritical of the church and the theological tradition in which he was raised and later served as a pastor and professor. The world-denying, separatist piety and tendency towards intellectual world-flight within the \textit{CGK} dissatisfied Bavinck. This dissatisfaction served as a, although not the only, catalyst for two of the theological questions Bavinck grappled with throughout his career. What is the relationship between Christianity and culture? And, similarly, how can one be a faithful bearer of the Reformed, theological tradition within modernity?\textsuperscript{36}

\subsection*{2.2 Education: From Kampen to Leiden}

Although Bavinck grew up within the secessionist community, his university education brought him into direct engagement with modern, academic theology in the Netherlands.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} The piety of the \textit{CGK} was influenced by English Puritanism and German Pietism.
\item \textsuperscript{34} See Bolt, “Introduction,” \textit{RD} I.12; II.13; III. 12; IV.18.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Gleason, \textit{Bavinck}, 34-5.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Bavinck's critique of those within his tradition is evident in his address "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," given at the Theological University in Kampen in 1888. While he critiques several Christian traditions in the address, towards the end he addresses his own tradition claiming that their world-denying approach is rooted in a truncated understanding of Christianity: "Public life is ignored and rejected — often as intrinsically "worldly" — while no effort is made to reform it according to the demands of God's Word. Satisfied with the ability to worship God in their own houses of worship, or to engage in evangelism, many left nation, state and society, art and science to their own devices. Many withdrew completely from life, literally separated themselves from everything, and, in some cases, what was even worse, shipped off to America, abandoning the Fatherland as lost to unbelief. It needs to be noted that while this orientation has much about it that is Christian, it is missing the full truth of Christianity. It is a denial of the truth that God loves the world.” Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” in \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 27 (1992), 246.
\end{itemize}
Throughout Bavinck’s youth, he excelled as a student, attending the Hasselman Institute, a renowned private school, and the Gymnasium in Zwolle. After finishing his education in Zwolle, Bavinck enrolled at the Theological School in Kampen, the CGK’s theological seminary. However, after completing a year at Kampen (1873-1874), Bavinck decided to complete his theological training at the University of Leiden (1874-1880). Leiden’s theological faculty was renowned for its aggressively modernist, scientific approach to theology. Yet, it was the more scientific approach to theology that drew Bavinck to Leiden, alongside of the high quality of its internationally known professors,\(^{37}\) such as theologian Johannes Scholten, an anti-supernaturalist, who developed a monistic doctrine of God and understood the purest expression of the Reformed faith to be materialist, theistic determinism as expressed in the doctrine of predestination;\(^{38}\) biblical scholar Abraham Kuenen, an influential higher critic and Hegelian who reconstructed Old Testament history in accord with Hegel’s philosophy of history;\(^{39}\) and theologian Cornelis Tiele, who introduced the science of comparative religions to the Netherlands, seeking to make it the foundation of all religious science.\(^{40}\) Bavinck also studied under L.W. E. Rauwenhoff, Matthias de Vries, and J.P.N. Land.

Bavinck excelled at Leiden, but he also went through a period of intellectual and spiritual crises as he went from the Reformed, secessionist world of his youth to the radical modernism of Leiden. Friend and eulogist, Henry Dosker, whom Bavinck meet at Gymnasium, wrote in his eulogy of Bavinck: “What an environment for a son of the Churches of the Separation!...he had many a bitter struggle at Leiden…I remember his letters of that period, his description of serious doubts and questionings and battles.”\(^{41}\) Yet, Dosker also notes that “…all these struggles only

\(^{37}\) Gleason, \textit{Bavinck}, 44.
\(^{38}\) Eglinton, \textit{Trinity and Organism}, 13-18
\(^{40}\) Mackay, \textit{Religious Thought in Holland}, 165-7.
tested and purified his faith.”

Bavinck himself, reflecting on his education at Leiden a year after he completed his education, wrote in a letter to friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: “I learned much in Leiden, but I have unlearned much too…the time in which the convictions of our youth were thrown into the crucible of critique is now over. What matters at this moment is to be faithful to the convictions we now have and to defend them with the weapons that are at our disposal.”

Bavinck was deeply shaped during his time at Leiden. Although the resolution to his intellectual and spiritual crises led him to reject many of the underlying principles he was taught at Leiden, he maintained a deep respect for its scientific approach to theology and an openness to engaging the questions of modern theology and philosophy. Learning firsthand the questions and challenges of modern philosophy and theology at Leiden, Bavinck also developed the conviction that the historic, Reformed tradition in which he was raised offered the best hope for answering modernity and needed to be further articulated in dialogue with modernity’s questions.

2.3 Neo-Calvinism and Nineteenth-Century Dutch Protestant Theology

Shaped by the secessionist movement and his education at Leiden, Bavinck spent the majority of his productive period as an active participant in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist movement. Lead by Abraham Kuyper, who had also been trained at the University of Leiden (1855-1862), Neo-Calvinism was a movement that grew out of the anti-Revolutionary political movement in the Netherlands and sought to develop a comprehensive Christian world-and-life view. Finding in Calvinism a creation-wide vision that included every aspect of life, Kuyper, Bavinck, and others utilized and developed it to address pressing political, ecclesiastical theological, and societal issues within the Netherlands. Although he was involved in a variety of ways, Bavinck was the

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42 Dosker, “Herman Bavinck,” 15.
43 Herman Bavinck, as quoted in Eglinton, Trinity and Organism, 48-9.
movement’s dogmatic theologian *par excellence*. As a leader within the Neo-Calvinist movement, Bavinck’s social and ecclesial context later in life was shaped by his involvement with the movement. Furthermore, his theological output shaped the intellectual life of the movement and, at times, was directed by the movement’s needs. Thus, it is helpful to deviate slightly from Bavinck’s biography and briefly outline Neo-Calvinism and the historical, theological context in which it arose.

While Neo-Calvinism originally grew out of the anti-Revolutionary movement in the Netherlands, which was led by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer as a response to the French Revolution, it was also rooted in a particular theological tradition and took on a specific theological outlook. And it is to this theological character that this brief treatment now turns. Theologically, the Neo-Calvinist movement was a new wave of confessional, Dutch Calvinism influenced by a variety of academic, social, and ecclesial developments in the Netherlands. First, it was influenced by the academic revival of Calvin studies in the Netherlands. Second, it was impacted by the confessional Calvinism that drew its confessional identity from the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort, and Belgic Confession and dominated rural, lower-class areas in the Netherlands. Finally, it was influenced by the *Réveil*, an early nineteenth-century Calvinist revival movement among artists, poets, and aristocrats who sought to re-appropriate Calvinism within their urban, modern settings. Building on confessional Calvinism and the *Réveil* and drawing from the revitalization of Calvin studies, the Neo-Calvinist movement sought to develop a trinitarian worldview that was consciously rooted in Reformed theology. The goal was to forge an alternative, theological

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44 There is neither time nor space to delve into the complex relationship between Kuyper and Bavinck. For a more thorough investigation of the relationship between Kuyper and Bavinck see John Bolt, *Imitatio Christi*, esp. Chapter 1.

45 It is beyond the purpose of this brief treatment to examine the relationship between the anti-Revolutionary party and Neo-Calvinism.
worldview between asceticism and worldliness that accounted for the whole of human life and encouraged principled, Christian engagement in every arena of culture. Theologically, the Neo-Calvinist movement presented itself as the true bearer of Reformed theology over against the two major strands of nineteenth-century, post-Enlightenment Protestant theology that had arisen in the Netherlands, which also claimed to be true bearers of Reformed theology. The first strand was the Groninger School, which sought to reconstruct theology Christocentrically through re-appropriating the resources of historic, non-Calvinistic, Dutch theology. Fully developed, the Groninger School proposed a recommitment to pre-Nicene Christology and taught that Christ had one nature that was simultaneously human and divine. They argued that Christ was the revelation of God; Christ is the One in whom God is revealed and through whom humanity is shown its true ideal. The second strand Neo-Calvinism responded to was the Leiden School, which was developed primarily by Scholten at the University of Leiden in response to the Groninger School. Scholten sought to revitalize Dutch theology through a re-appropriation and re-articulation of Calvinism. He did this by developing what he identified as the formal and material principles of Calvinism: Scripture (formal) and the sovereignty of God

46 See Berkhof, Two Hundred Years of Theology, 112.
47 The theological landscape in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century is more complex than will be treated here. For the sake of space, the two major strands of Protestant theology that informed Neo-Calvinism (confessional Calvinism and the Réveil) as well as the two strands Neo-Calvinism most specifically formed in opposition to will be treated (the Groninger School and Leiden School). A fuller treatment would need to include the so-called Ethical School and pre-Groninger theology.
48 The Groninger School was developed in the mid-nineteenth century at the Universities of Groningen and Utrecht by Hofstede de Groot, Louis Gerlach Pareau, Johan Frederik van Oordt, and William Muurling who were all influenced by Phillip Willem van Huesde, one of the first Dutch advocates of Schleiermacher. Although influenced by Schleiermacher, the Groninger School desired to look to the resources of historic Dutch theology and self-consciously rooted itself in the Brethren of Common Life, a fourteenth-century sect in the Netherlands. It could be argued that although the Groninger School sought to root itself within Dutch theology, it was more influenced by Schleiermacher's theology than it acknowledged. This, for example, is Hendrikus Berkhof's argument. He notes that the Groninger School was influenced by Schleiermacher and that its Christology was typical of many post-Enlightenment theologies: "The Christology is typical: Jesus was a person who, by virtue of his preexistence, had an advantage over us all and was therefore able to become our example." Berkhof, Two-Hundred Years, 99.
49 The role of Christ in the Groninger School is to “…make us over by his personal influence, to make humanity ever more conformed to the likeness of God. This, and not a satisfaction of Divine justice, is the work of Christ.” Van Oordt as quoted in Eglinton, Trinity and Organism, 9
Fully developed, the Leiden School proposed a deterministic, monistic, anti-supernaturalistic theology that had little need for the doctrine of the Trinity.

Drawing from and utilizing its theology, Neo-Calvinism developed a distinctive approach to Christian engagement in culture and political life. It encouraged Christians to develop societal institutions and to participate in culture based on Christian principles. Thus, while Neo-Calvinism cannot nor should not be defined as only a theological movement, its theology shaped and formed its vision.

2.4 Theologian, Philosopher, and Statesman: The Neo-Calvinist between Two Worlds

Upon completion of his education at Leiden, Bavinck sought ordination in the CGK and became a pastor of the congregation in Franeker in 1881. During his time in Franeker, Bavinck produced one of his first theological works, a new Latin edition of the seventeenth-century Reformed theology handbook, the Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (1881). Bavinck’s pastorate in Franeker was short, as one year later he accepted a post to teach theology at the Theological School in Kampen (1883-1901). During his time in Kampen, Bavinck wrote the first edition of the Reformed Dogmatics and facilitated a church merger that took place in 1892 between the CGK and the group of churches that Kuyper had led out of the NHK in 1886, known as the Doleantie (Sorrow/Grief). In 1902, Bavinck accepted a post at the Vrije Universiteit, the university started by Kuyper. At the Vrije Universiteit, Bavinck succeeded Kuyper as the chair of theology after Kuyper became prime minister of the Netherlands in 1901. Bavinck's time at the Vrije Universiteit was marked by an increasing interest in philosophical, political, pedagogical, and sociological concerns. After completing a revised and expanded edition of the Reformed Dogmatics in 1911,

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50 Berkhof, Two-Hundred Years, 98-103.
51 The newly formed united church was named Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands).
Bavinck began to focus on these broader issues in his writings. Additionally, Bavinck entered into the political arena, becoming a member of the Upper House of Parliament as a representative of the Anti-Revolutionary Party from 1911 until his death in 1921.

This shift in Bavinck’s writings, alongside the selling of some of the theological books in his library, led Valentine Hepp, one of Bavinck’s earlier biographers, to postulate that Bavinck broke with the theological concerns of his early career. However, recent research has begun to show that even though Bavinck shifted his focus to broader issues, he did not leave his interests in theology behind. One such example, which this thesis will address again later, is the notations found in Bavinck’s own copy of the second edition of the *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* indicating the changes he planned to make to the second volume in his (never completed) third edition. Thus, a better interpretation of this shift is that Bavinck turned from his theological articulation of a world and life view to the outworking of that world and life view within other spheres such as politics and education. Thus, it could be said that Bavinck shifts his focus but not that he deserts theology entirely. However, given that almost all of Bavinck’s theological reflections and dogmatic work after 1911 remain unpublished, more archival work needs to be done to determine whether or not there was a shift in (not from) his theology and dogmatic interests.

Avoiding the danger of overly psychologizing, Bavinck’s life and education do warrant describing Bavinck as a man formed and shaped by two worlds: the secessionist community and the University of Leiden. Although these two influences may seem mutually exclusive, Bavinck

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53 These notes were found by George Harinck and reported in his article “Eén uur lang is het hier brandend licht en warm geweest. Bavinck en Kampen.” In the article, Harinck uses the notes as an example of Bavinck’s ongoing dogmatic interest. He does not, however, report the changes that Bavinck planned to make. These still need to be examined in Bavinck scholarship. See George Harinck, “Eén uur lang is het hier brandend licht en warm geweest. Bavinck en Kampen,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. by George Harinck and Gerrit Neven (Ad Chartasreeks 9. Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006): 107-110.
54 While this thesis will hopefully encourage such exploration and future lines of inquiry, it will not engage in this archival task.
sought to bring them together. At times this resulted in tensions or duality within his work. However, as one of Bavinck’s contemporaries noted, “in that duality is found Bavinck’s significance.”\(^{55}\) In the productive period of Bavinck’s career, starting during his pastorate in Franeker and ending with his death in 1921, Bavinck sought to bring his Reformed theological heritage into the modern world through open dialogue and engagement.\(^{56}\) And, as this thesis will show, a key element to Bavinck’s engagement with modernity was the doctrine of the Trinity—a doctrine that shaped, normed, and formed his systematic theology as well as served an apologetic role.

3. Current State of Bavinck Scholarship: Two Bavincks and The Doctrine of God (\textit{Status Quaestionis})

Having situated Bavinck within his historical context, it is important to situate this thesis within the landscape of contemporary scholarship on Bavinck. As we already noted in this introduction, reprioritization of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially within his context, is almost universally acknowledged within Bavinck scholarship but remains under-examined.\(^{57}\) Some of this deficiency can be attributed to Bavinck’s relative obscurity until the translation of his \textit{Reformed Dogmatics} into English (completed in 2007), which has sparked a revival in Bavinck scholarship in the anglophone world.\(^{58}\) However, a closer examination of the secondary literature reveals a tendency

\(^{55}\) A.Anema as quoted in Bolt, "Editor's Introduction," \textit{RD}, I.13; II.14; III.13; IV.19.

\(^{56}\) One of the goals of this thesis is to highlight the framework by which Bavinck engaged apologetically and appreciatively with modern theology and philosophy. In other words, although he remained open to engagement, Bavinck was also not afraid to critique philosophical presuppositions he found problematic to the development of doctrine.


\(^{58}\) Given that Bavinck primarily wrote in Dutch, many of his works remained inaccessible to those outside the Dutch-speaking world. Until 2007, few dissertations had been written Dutch that specifically focused on Bavinck’s theology and only seven dissertations on Bavinck’s theology had been written in English. In the first chapter of \textit{Imitatio Christi}, John Bolt laments the relative lack of interest in Bavinck in Dutch and English in the first half of the twentieth century, but he also notes the growth in Bavinck scholarship since the mid-twentieth century. See Bolt, \textit{Imitatio Christi}, chapter 1. Two of the major works on Bavinck’s theology written in Dutch were R.H. Bremmer, \textit{Bavinck als dogmaticus}
to detach the identification of Bavinck as trinitarian and his treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity from his doctrine of God proper, making the divine economy a primary focus of engagement. Furthermore, Bavinck’s trinitarian thought is often identified in contrast to or in tension with Idealistic or scholastic elements within his theology, which often results in a severed link between De Deo Uno and De Deo Trino. R.H. Bremmer, Syndey Hielema, E.P. Heideman, Jan Veenhof, for example, identify irreconcilable elements within Bavinck’s doctrine of God and suggest that his trinitarian line of thinking stands in contrast with Idealistic or scholastic elements. Bremmer suggests that Bavinck’s treatment of the divine attributes is influenced by scholastic theology, particularly Bavinck’s archetype-ectype schema and utilization of Augustine’s doctrine of divine
ideas whereas his doctrine of the Trinity is free from philosophical speculation.  

This assessment leads Bremmer to criticize the former and praise the later. Heideman and Veenhof identify grace restores nature as Bavinck’s fundamentally scriptural, trinitarian idea. This scriptural, trinitarian idea is seen as contradictory to his Idealistic lines of thinking, namely, the organic motif (Veenhof), the distinction between the broad and narrow sense of the image of God (Heideman), the doctrine of Common Grace (Heideman), and the understanding of human destiny (Heideman).  

Hielema contrasts what he identifies as Bavinck’s Christocentric, relational, trinitarian doctrine of God with the “abstract speculation concerning the nature of God,” thereby proposing a dichotomy within Bavinck’s doctrine of God proper and suggesting that one should follow the Christocentric, relational, trinitarian line over against the speculative, rationalistic line.

These treatments utilize the identification of Bavinck as a trinitarian theologian as the means to contrast and reject other aspects within his theology perceived to be Idealist, scholastic, or aridly philosophical, including his treatment of the divine essence and attributes. This tendency to choose Bavinck’s trinitarian line of thinking over against other themes and motifs has stunted constructive and in-depth treatments of his doctrine of God proper (especially studies linking De De Uno and De De Trino) as well as studies concerning the unifying nature of the Trinity within Bavinck’s theology. The Trinity cannot be a unifying, fecund doctrine in these treatments because

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59 This thesis will show how Bavinck develops the archetype-ectype schema and doctrine of ideas along trinitarian lines. It will do this Chapters 2-4 by highlighting the theme of communicability in a way that Bremmer did not in his identification of Bavinck as trinitarian. This is not to say that the communicability of the divine essence in Bavinck has not been noted in secondary scholarship, but it is to say that this thesis will highlight this aspect in relation to Bavinck’s trinitarian theology in a way that makes it far more prevalent and central to his development of a trinitarian theology. See Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 196-98 and 208-213.

60 See Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 196: “…Bavincks beschrijving van de eigenschappen Gods interessant en boeiend blijft vanwege de mengeling van bijbelse noties en wijsgerige, meest thomistische motieven…Het is opmerkelijk, hoe Bavinck zich in dit onderdeel der dogmatiek vrij heft weten te houden van philosophische invloeden.”

61 Heideman, Reason and Revelation, 170-85 and Veenhof, Revelatie en Inspiratie, 250-69. John Bolt’s engagement with Heideman sufficiently critique’s Heideman’s reading of Bavinck and shows how Bavinck’s doctrines of the image of God, Common Grace, and final end are thoroughly trinitarian. Eglinton and others have offered critiques of Veenhof’s reading of Bavinck’s organic motif, which will be identified in the proceeding exposition.

62 Hielema, “Restored to our Destiny,” 104.

63 Hielema, “Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 104.
even though the Trinity is integral to his doctrinal project, it stands in contrast to foreign, unwanted, or problematic elements within his system. Thus, rather than seeking to understand the internal logic of the doctrine and its coinherence with other loci, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes the catalyst for identifying the ‘true’ Bavinck and the grounds from which to criticize ‘false’ or unwanted elements within Bavinck’s thought. While not universal, this approach has stunted positive, constructive studies of the doctrine of God as well as treatments that seek to understand his own statement concerning the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for the whole of systematic theology rather than merely specific doctrines or certain lines of thought.64

Notwithstanding the way these approaches have hindered Bavinck studies, Adam Eitel’s short article, “Trinity and History: Bavinck, Hegel, and 19th Century Doctrines of God,” presents a strikingly alternative claim: Bavinck’s trinitarian line of thinking drew significantly from the speculative trinitarianism of Hegel.65 Specifically, according to Eitel, Bavinck’s methodological commitment to explaining the essence of Christianity in terms of a trinitarian history betrays a Hegelian influence as “the trinitarian structure of the divine being is the pattern and archetype for God’s acts in history.”66 God’s action in history is a repetition of God’s own being in space and time. Instead of contrasting Bavinck’s trinitarian line with his Idealistic Eitel claims that the trinitarian line is actually shaped by the themes and tropes of Hegel’s speculative Idealism.

Within the article itself, Eitel merely seeks to examine an unexplored connection between Bavinck and Hegel’s speculative trinitarianism. Yet, Eitel’s article also stands in stark contrast to any interpretation of Bavinck that seeks to identify and utilize trinitarian lines of thinking as a means to critique Idealistic tropes and themes. If Bavinck’s trinitarian line is Idealistic, then it

64 John Bolt, for example, treats Bavinck’s De Deo Uno and De Deo Trino as integral and claims that Bavinck’s trinitarian theology is what classifies him as a Neo-Calvinist. See Bolt, Imitatio Christ, chapter 4 and
cannot be the grounds for rejecting other Idealistic elements. However, even as it contrasts previous interpretations, Eitel’s article also implies that Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity can be abstracted from his treatment of the divine attributes as well as subtly advancing a core idea of Bremmer, Heideman, Hielema, and Veenhof: there are competing lines of thinking within Bavinck which are in tension with one another.

While unfortunate, the search for and identification of irreconcilable themes is not novel within Bavinck scholarship. This trend within the doctrine of God is merely one instantiation of the persistent hypothesis that was noted at the beginning of the introduction has shaped Bavinck scholarship: there is not one, but ‘two Bavincks,’ the orthodox and the modern. The ‘two Bavincks Hypothesis,’ as James Eglinton characterizes it, presents Bavinck as a “Jekyll and Hyde theologian who vacillates between moments of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘modernity’ without ever resolving his own basic crisis of theological identity. The habit has been to speak of ‘two’ Herman Bavincks.”67 Often bolstered by a particular interpretation of his biography, wherein the son of a secessionist preacher could never conceptually reconcile the pietistic, Reformed faith of his youth with the modern, academic, scientific theology he encountered while studying at the University of Leiden, the ‘two Bavincks’ Hypothesis goes beyond recognizing modern and orthodox elements in Bavinck and suggests that there is a division and bipolarity to Bavinck’s thought.68

Ranging from reluctant acceptance of the hypothesis in the early writings of John Bolt to the enthusiastic defense in Malcolm Yarnell and Henk Vroom, interpreters such as Jan Veenhof, R.H. Bremmer, David VanDrunen, Scott Oliphint, Cornelius VanTil, Syndey Hielema, Eduardo J. Echivera, Eugene Heideman, Adam Eitel, and Hendrikus Berkhof all approach Bavinck as a

thinker with competing lines of thought.\textsuperscript{69} As John Bolt describes, in his article “Grand Rapids between Kampen and Amsterdam,” each interpreter within this approach chooses one of the Bavincks (orthodox or modern) to follow as the real one and allows that Bavinck “to sit in judgment on the other Bavinck.”\textsuperscript{70}

This hermeneutical approach made more complex by variegated definitions of orthodox and modern,\textsuperscript{71} has hindered constructive readings as a whole (and not just in the doctrine of God)


\textsuperscript{70}Bolt, “Grand Rapids between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 270. It should be noted that John Bolt’s position regarding the ‘two Bavincks’ has shifted from reluctant acceptance to a rejection of it via Eglinton and Brian Mattson’s work, which will be highlighted in this section. Bolt still argues that one can identify dualities in Bavinck’s thought (as does Eglinton), but he heartily endorses the new unified readings of Bavinck. See John Bolt, review of \textit{Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics}, by Brain Mattson, and \textit{Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif}, by James Eglinton in \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 48 no. 1 (November 2013): 171-175. See also recent discussions published online via the Bavinck Society which specifically focused on Bavinck’s understanding of the two kingdoms, but also included an important retranslation of a quote from G.C. Berkhouwer concerning Bavinck’s theology as a whole. Bolt had previously translated G.C. Berkhouwer’s claim that Bavinck’s theology contains many onweersprekelijke motieven, as “irreconcilable themes.” However, Nelson Kloosterman, offered an alternative translation of onweersprekelijke motieven to be “undeniable themes.” The discussion resulted in Bolt's acceptance of the new translation by Kloosterman, and more significantly, concluded in a critique of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis by Kloosterman and Bolt. In the discussion Bolt concludes: "In summary, although one can identify various ‘tensions’ within the thought of Herman Bavinck (as one can do for every theologian, including John Calvin!), this is an inadequate warrant for the claim that there existed ‘two Bavinck's, i.e., two irreconcilable strands of thought within Bavinck's theology." See John Bolt, "Bavinck Society Discussion # 1: The VanDrunen-Kloosterman Debate on ‘Natural Law’ and ‘Two Kingdoms' in the Theology of Herman Bavinck" (published online via the Bavinck Institute: https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Discussion_1_VanDrunen-Kloosterman_debate.pdf)

\textsuperscript{71}There are, in my estimation, at least two versions of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis. The first pits the modern, Christocentric, biblical, truly reformed Bavinck over against the orthodox, sceptical, and scholastic Bavinck. In other words, orthodox refers to Bavinck’s reliance on the Reformed Scholastic tradition, and the line in Bavinck one follows depends on which theological tradition one wishes to develop. The second version pits the modern, Idealistic, philosophical Bavinck over against the orthodox, traditional, biblical Bavinck. The second version often builds on the first as it too usually adheres to some form of a split between the biblical, Christocentric Bavinck and the orthodox,
because it necessarily assigns any significant findings to one of the ‘two Bavincks’ and creates in-group disagreements over the ‘true’ Bavinck. Furthermore, it tends towards hermeneutical subjectivism and decreases the possibility of classifying Bavinck as an irenic theologian who drew from eclectic sources to formulate a truly Reformed theology in and for modernity.\footnote{An argument could be made that the ‘Bavinck’ for which one argues is most often related to one’s own theological agenda. Which is an understandable inclination, but a dire one if Bavinck scholarship is to flourish.} While dominant, George Harinck, Nelson Kloosterman, Henk van den Belt, and especially two recent studies by James Eglinton and Brian Mattson have challenged the presuppositions on which the ‘two Bavincks’ rests.\footnote{George Harinck, “‘Something that Must, Remain if the Truth is to be Sweet and Precious to Us’: The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck,” in \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 38 (2003): 248-62; Nelson Kloosterman, “A Response to ‘The Kingdom of God is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen,” in \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 45 (April 2010): 174-5; Henk van den Belt, \textit{Autopistia}, chapter 6; Eglinton, \textit{Trinity and Organism}, esp. chapter 3; and Mattson, \textit{Restored to Our Destiny}, 9-18.} Eglinton has challenged the hypothesis on the basis of a new reading of the organic motif in Bavinck (previously identified as belonging to the ‘Modern Bavinck’) as the unitive agent in his theology.\footnote{In \textit{Revelatie en Inspiratie}, Veenhof spends a significant amount of time identifying Bavinck’s organic motif as rooted in nineteenth-century Idealism philosophy and therefore belonging to the ‘modern’ Bavinck. Veenhof’s thesis impacted the reception of Bavinck’s organic motif in subsequent scholarship. Thus, Bavinck’s organic motif had often been acknowledged by never considered as essential to the logic of Bavinck’s own thought. Eglinton’s thesis, then, is a significant re-reading of this motif.} In his work, Eglinton not only dismantles the ‘two Bavincks’ approach through an analysis of Bavinck’s own work but also presents a positive proposal: Bavinck’s trinitarian, organic motif serves as a unitive agent within his theology. Mattson challenges the hypothesis by unmasking the role that negative caricatures of scholasticism have played in promulgating a dualistic reading of Bavinck, especially the equation of scholasticism with Neo-Thomism and intellectualism in twentieth-century Dutch theology and philosophy.\footnote{See Mattson, \textit{Restored to our Destiny}, 9-18. Dutch Reformed theology and philosophy in the twentieth century often equated scholasticism with intellectualism rooted in a nature-grace dualism. Tracing the complex history of this interpretation and approach within twentieth-century Dutch theology and philosophy as well as Bavinck’s contribution to the analysis of neo-Thomism as promulgating a nature-grace dualism is beyond the current discussion. However, one can observe it in many of the theologians and philosophers following after Bavinck. See for example, Herman}
Mattson’s work successfully shows that the nearly universal aversion to any type of scholasticism (placed in contrast to the biblical, Christocentric Reformers) in twentieth-century Dutch theology and philosophy does not match the conception of scholasticism found in Bavinck. On the contrary, Mattson argues that Bavinck did not see a dichotomy between ‘biblical’ and ‘scholastic’ but rather “sought to articulate a scriptural theology in the context of, and with recourse to the categories of, Reformed orthodoxy.” This renewed interpretation of Bavinck’s reception of Reformed orthodoxy as the context within which he formulated his dogmatics opens up new avenues of investigation for Bavinck scholarship beyond the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis. Instead of approaching Bavinck with a predetermined polarity between

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Bavinck’s view of scholasticism is more nuanced than the caricatured version. He does critique what he considers overly speculative or rationalistic approaches to dogmatics and dogmatic content. However, his own appreciation and use of the Reformed orthodox tradition is unmistakable. Cf. *RD*, 1. 83-84, 144ff. Furthermore, two pieces of evidence from his work editing the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (the theological textbook in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century) illuminate Bavinck’s own indebtedness to and reception of the Reformed orthodox tradition. First, in a letter to friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje upon completion of editing the *Synopsis*, Bavinck writes: “Some time ago I accepted the responsibility for the sixth edition of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* of Walaeus and his colleagues that was recently published by Donner. I did this to study Reformed theology a bit at the same time. I am better versed in it now than before. And it has had quite an influence on my own theological perspective. In my view a positive one. Perhaps you are of a different opinion. I see clearer than before that between (let me use terms that are familiar to me) Reformation and Revolution on every domain in both principle and method, in the view of God, humankind, world, etc. every mediation (*Vermittelung*) or reconciliation is impossible. If I do anything, I think about this issue now. I am considering the principles (*Prinzipienlehre*) of theology. I have to get this somewhat settled first. Before I ever perform some publication of my own, I have to know what I want and where I stand. Previously I did not know that, and I did not learn that in Leiden either. It is really time for me to realize this.” Second, in the introduction to the *Synopsis*, Bavinck writes: “The Synopsis itself is a clear example and a bright mirror for us of the orthodox doctrine that was preferred at the Synod of Dort. The fact that this doctrine has ruled, and was able to rule, for half a century, won’t be a surprise to anybody, who will have read and thought over this Synopsis. It was not replaced by any other manual at that time, thanks to its acuteness and its subtle way of arguing, and it shines very often by its excellent insight. It is also very conscious of and versed in the truth of the Holy Scripture and the Reformed confession, however free from dry, useless and dull scholastic discourse and hallucinations.” Both quotes from “Herman Bavinck, Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* with Introduction by Henk van den Belt,” trans. Mathilde de Vries-van Uden, *Bavinck Journal* 8 (2018).

Mattson, *Restored to our Destiny*, 18.
‘orthodox’ and ‘modern,’ interpreters can now seek to understand his reception of Reformed orthodoxy, his engagement with modernity from the context of Reformed theology, and the way he articulates the relationship between Scripture and dogmatic theology.

Even though Mattson’s convincing interpretation creates fertile ground for renewed examinations Bavinck’s relationship to Reformed orthodoxy as a whole, Eglinton’s reassessment of the organic motif has altered the discipline in a way that is especially significant for understanding Bavinck’s doctrine of God and its relationship to other theological loci. Eglinton argues that far from being a tangential, Idealistic strain, Bavinck theologically appropriates the organic motif as a unifying agent and situates it within his theocentric, Trinitarian theology. For Eglinton, the organic motif is what Bavinck appeals to in his trinitarian appropriation of reality to describe the cosmos as “unity in diversity, whereby unity precedes diversity, and wherein the parts cooperate towards a shared ideal culminating in a non-reductionistic *eschaton.*”78 Furthermore, this cosmology of organism is not inconsequential but flows from Bavinck’s reprioritization of the doctrine of the Trinity. As the triune God is archetypal unity in diversity *ad intra,* so the world he creates corresponds to his being. It too is unity-in-diversity. As Eglinton writes: “Trinity *ad intra* leads to a cosmology of organism *ad extra.*”79

According to Eglinton, then, unity-in-diversity is paradigmatic and shapes both Bavinck’s doctrine of God and his account of the cosmos. The unity-in-diversity of the creation corresponds to the unity-in-diversity of its creator. A paradigmatic correspondence, however, does not mean a univocal relationship between God and the world, and Eglinton establishes Bavinck’s doctrines of analogical predication and the radical anthropomorphic character of theological language, his conception of the *vestigia trinitatis,* his ontological distinction between being and becoming, and

78 Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism,* 72.
79 Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism,* 96, 41.
his commitment to the idea that “although God is unlike anything else, all else is nonetheless like him” as essential elements within Bavinck’s theology that allow him to formulate an analogous correspondence but not univocal equivalence between God and the world.\(^{80}\) God remains ontologically distinct from the world as its creator, but he creates it in such a way that it analogically and anthropomorphically reveals what he is like. In other words, descriptions of the cosmos as an organic unity-in-diversity are revelatory of what God is like but not who God is.\(^ {81}\)

Given the centrality of the organic motif in Bavinck and Eglinton’s assessment that Bavinck defines the motif in light of his trinitarian theology,\(^ {82}\) Eglinton’s thesis has advanced scholarship by going beyond the mere affirmation of the trinitarian character of Bavinck’s theology. Eglinton shows how Bavinck’s doctrine of God shapes his entire doctrinal project, especially his development of a trinitarian worldview. Thus, in many ways, Eglinton’s project does more justice to Bavinck’s own claim that “the Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all existence is referred back to the triune God”\(^ {83}\) than those that identify a trinitarian line of thinking and then contrast it to another line of thought within Bavinck. Furthermore, by rooting the organic motif in the doctrine of God, Eglinton makes the following constructive and corresponding claims: the doctrine of God in Bavinck gives “reality its basic coherence and thus positions the Christian

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\(^{80}\) Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 112.

\(^{81}\) Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 106.

\(^{82}\) In light of previous assessments of Bavinck’s organic motif, the significance of Eglinton’s thesis should be seen as showing how Bavinck’s organic motif flows from his trinitarian theology and is not at odds with it. Defining the organic motif from within Bavinck’s theology, Eglinton shows that Bavinck’s appropriation cannot be assessed simply through the lens of its development and utilization within the history of theology and philosophy. To do so would be to commit a methodological error by which the usage of a particular motif or concept is assumed to be similar in every instantiation and judged in particular cases based on its general historical development and usage. However, that does not mean that one cannot notice similarities between Bavinck’s use of the organic motif and his nineteenth-century interlocutors. Bavinck’s choice of the organic motif does reveal his nineteenth-century context. As such, it does show how Bavinck was willing to take contemporary ideas, redefine them, and utilize them for his own purposes. In appropriating the organic motif and defining it from within the theological tradition in light of the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck offered his own, positive response to an issue that he perceived to be particularly pressing in his day, namely, the relationship of unity and diversity. As he noted in his 1911 rectorial address at the Vrij Universiteit, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” “Now, the relationship of unity and diversity is a problem that has always been on the agenda…but in practical terms it has never been as significant as it is in our days.” Herman Bavinck, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” trans. Bruce R. Pass, *Bavinck Review* 7 (2016): 106.

\(^{83}\) *RD*, II. 288. Emphasis added.
theist to gather the whole of life together under the doctrine of God.”

The whole of Bavinck’s theology, then, is structurally trinitarian and is aimed at a fully trinitarian appropriation of reality. And, the organic motif is used to describe that which is like the triune God in the cosmos. While the organic motif is a unifying agent, it is only a unifying agent insofar as it is placed within and subsumed under the doctrine of God. However, insofar as it is rooted in the doctrine of God, the organic motif is an essential agent that Bavinck utilizes to developing his trinitarian account of reality.

Despite Eglinton’s perceptive analysis of Bavinck’s structural trinitarianism, he does not examine the fullness of his insight in-depth. Eglinton focuses on the organic motif as it relates to the doctrine of God, but as Bruce Pass has rightly observed: “it is pertinent to note that at the center of Bavinck’s theology lies a dogma, not a motif. In Bavinck, motifs function as the philosophical apparatus that is put at the service of erecting a system of dogmatics.”

Eglinton rightly connects Bavinck’s organic motif to the doctrine of God, but the organic remains a motif in service of the systematic project. Thus, there is still room for new studies that articulate the systematic relationship between Bavinck’s doctrine of God proper and the rest of his theological loci as well as root the relationship in a more thorough examination of Bavinck’s systematic categories. While Eglinton rightly identifies the organic motif as rooted in the doctrine of God and essential to the Dutch Neo-Calvinist’s attempts to develop a world-and-life view, the thesis that the Trinity ad intra leads to cosmology of organism ad extra occasionally misses some of the key systematic categories that Bavinck himself employs to relate God’s internal relations and external creation. These categories include, but are not limited to, the doctrine of divine decrees and the

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84 Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 130.
communicability of the divine essence.\textsuperscript{86} How Bavinck \textit{systematically} develops the relationship between God’s being, his works, and how those works are revelatory of his being remains largely unexamined in Eglinton because of his nearly exclusive focus on the conception of worldview. Furthermore, while one must be careful of criticisms that focus on what an author did not do, Eglinton’s work could have been fortified by a more thorough analysis of Bavinck’s use and appeal to Reformed orthodox categories. This is not to suggest a resurrection of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis but to propose that Mattson’s reassessment of Bavinck’s relationship to Reformed scholasticism is something that must be heeded, lest Bavinck be considered only or primarily Reformed insofar as he is related to Calvin or other early reformers.\textsuperscript{87}

Within the field of Bavinck studies, Eglinton’s thesis has shown the potential benefits of reading Bavinck through the lens of a unified hermeneutic that methodologically approaches Bavinck’s theology on its own terms rather than applying categories from without. Furthermore, it suggests that approaching Bavinck on his own terms requires starting where he does: the doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{88} Taken together with Mattson and other recent critiques of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypotheses, this thesis is planted in the fertile ground that has been created for new, constructive approaches to his theology, especially those that seek to analyze and understand Bavinck’s doctrine of God and its relationship to other theological loci. This thesis does this by offering a framework from within Bavinck to understand the systematic relationship of the doctrine of God to other theological loci, thereby showing how Bavinck is a thoroughly trinitarian theologian whose

\textsuperscript{86} One significant issue in Eglinton’s presentation is that he does not adequately connect Bavinck’s treatment of general revelation in the first volume of the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics} with his loci on creation in the second volume. He rightly relates Bavinck’s work in the \textit{Philosophy of Revelation} to his statements on general revelation in \textit{Christelijke wereldbeschouwing}. However, a more adequate consideration of Bavinck’s statements in his loci on the doctrine of Creation and on the communicability of the divine essence as the ground for his revelation \textit{ad extra} would have provided a clearer conception of the relationship that Bavinck seeks to establish between God’s being and his (revelatory) works.

\textsuperscript{87} Eglinton’s treatment primarily identifies Bavinck’s relationship to Calvin. It does not examine Bavinck’s relationship to any Reformed orthodox thinkers in-depth. Bavinck does claim to be within the tradition of Calvin, but an examination of his footnotes reveals that the Reformed tradition he drew from extended far beyond Calvin.

\textsuperscript{88} Eglinton, \textit{Trinity and Organism}, 130.
doctrine of the Trinity shapes, norms, and forms his dogmatics as well as functions apologetically within his context.

4. Methodology

4.1 Method and Sources: Chapters 1-4

The method of this thesis is best understood as an historical, constructive, conceptual analysis of Bavinck’s thought utilizing the distinction he makes between the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. Methodologically, this means that the focus will be on expositing primary texts in order to understand Bavinck’s theology from within. As such, it can be understood as a work of historical theology because the majority of the thesis does not make reference to contemporary systematic questions or debates. Furthermore, through a close reading and exposition of Bavinck, the thesis does seek to articulate the historical context within which Bavinck wrote as Bavinck himself assesses it. Thus, it seeks to frame Bavinck’s analysis of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century theology and philosophy from within Bavinck’s own writings. Although a work of historical theology, the thesis is creative in the way it utilizes Bavinck’s own statement as the key to understanding the positive and negative role of the doctrine of the Trinity in his systematic theology.

Primarily expositional in nature and constructive in analysis, the current work draws almost exclusively from Bavinck’s own writings, especially the Reformed Dogmatics and Magnalia Dei (translated as Our Reasonable Faith) as well as applicable sections of The Philosophy of Revelation, and Christelijke wereldbeschouwing. Relevant journal entries, addresses, and articles will also be referenced when appropriate. While the Reformed Dogmatics is Bavinck’s most

89 Bavinck’s Reformed Ethics are forthcoming and based on a recently discovered manuscript of Bavinck. Availability of this text is currently limited, but it is expected to be published in late Spring 2019. Herman Bavinck, Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, Forthcoming May 2019).
complete and thorough presentation of his systematic theology, *Our Reasonable Faith* represents Bavinck’s popular level, abridged dogmatics and is therefore useful as a comparative text with his *Reformed Dogmatics*, especially regarding the positive, formative role of the doctrine of the Trinity. The *Philosophy of Revelation*, an outworking of the ideas in *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, is his most sophisticated philosophical work. In *The Philosophy of Revelation*, Bavinck develops a Christian philosophy of revelation. Although his focus in *Reformed Dogmatics* (systematic, dogmatic construction) and *The Philosophy of Revelation* (philosophical engagement and development) differ, *The Philosophy of Revelation* contains his most sustained engagement with modern philosophy. Therefore, his analysis of his philosophical and dogmatic context at the turn of the twentieth century would remain incomplete without some engagement with his work in *The Philosophy of Revelation*.

Drawing from these sources, but primarily from the *Reformed Dogmatics* as it is his most developed work of systematic theology, this thesis will expoit key elements within Bavinck’s systematic theology and philosophy in order to argue that Bavinck’s theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another. Secondary interpretations of Bavinck will be utilized in order to identify points at which this thesis diverges and converges with

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90 Bavinck wrote and published *Magnalia Dei* during the same time period as he revised the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Thus, it serves as an excellent comparative text to the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1909). The title was changed in the English translation to *Our Reasonable Faith*. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

91 The first edition of *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* was printed in 1904. A second revised edition was published in 1913, which was reprinted posthumously in 1929. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1908-1909). *The Philosophy of Revelation* includes the content of the Stone Lectures Bavinck gave at Princeton during the 1908-1909 academic year along with the other lectures Bavinck prepared but did not deliver at Princeton. See Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck*, 96. See Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck*, 96.

92 The first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* was written and published between 1895-1901. Bavinck revised and expanded second edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* was completed from 1906-1911. He wrote and delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton in the 1908-1909 academic year. Thus, while the two works differ in method, it will be assumed that there is a consistency in his adjudication of modern theology and philosophy within both works.
contemporary scholarship. However, engagement with secondary sources, especially in Chapters 2-4, will be kept to a minimum within the body of the text and often placed in footnotes.

4.2 Limitations and the Question of Periodization

Utilizing Bavinck’s published works, focusing on the *Reformed Dogmatics*, and limiting secondary source engagement within the main argument of the thesis represent a methodological approach that has many benefits as well as a few limitations that must be recognized. The first benefit is that it allows Bavinck’s own insistence on the nature of the systematic task as one that seeks unity to come to the foreground. While incorporating pertinent readings, rooting the expository sections primarily in the *Reformed Dogmatics* allows this thesis to track the unity (and nuance) within Bavinck’s thought *systematically*. The *Reformed Dogmatics* is Bavinck’s most developed treatment of systematic theology, and they display his most developed and conscious prioritization and integration of the doctrine of the Trinity. The *Reformed Dogmatics*, therefore, give an adequate account of the way that Bavinck himself sought to relate and reprioritize the doctrine of the Trinity within his theological project. Second, focusing on the *Reformed Dogmatics* while integrating other sources when applicable gives this thesis, with the potential to spin off in every direction, clarity and coherence.93 Third, this approach lets Bavinck “speak on his own terms” without too much incursion of the extant secondary literature (save for the footnotes). In so doing, this thesis allows for some elements of Bavinck’s thought rise to the surface in fresh or refreshed ways, especially his articulation of God’s absoluteness and personality and the relationship he draws between his triniform account of the communicability of the divine essence and the divine decrees (Chapters 2-4). Finally, this methodological approach also avoids

93 See also the argument for this approach at the beginning of Chapter 2, 83-5.
the types of questions that arise in relation to unpublished manuscripts and sources, particularly questions concerning the finality of the views contained within them.

While acknowledging the benefits of the methodological approach of this thesis, it is important to address at least one major limitation that arises from it. This thesis does leave open the question of the applicability of this thesis to Bavinck’s works after 1911. As noted in the biographical section, Bavinck’s works shift focus following 1911. Thus, the bulk of his theological writings following 1911 remain unpublished, archival sources. Meaning that even though there has been sufficient work showing that Bavinck did not shift from his interest in theology even if his publications did start to focus on different issues, one can (rightly) identify the period following 1911 as distinct from the period proceeding it.\[94\] Given this, further work needs to be done to determine the nature and shape of Bavinck’s dogmatic thought following 1911. It is just this kind of continued inquiry that this thesis hopes to inspire as well as offer a framework from which to examine Bavinck. As this thesis will show that Bavinck’s theology can be understood as his development of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions, this lens could also serve as a helpful tool to examine the archival material, particularly the material pertaining to the period following 1911, in the future. Of particular interest for this thesis are the potential lines of future inquiry that could be opened up for exploring Bavinck’s notes in his copy of the second edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* as well as his manuscripts “Kosmologie” and “Kosmologie: De leer van God den vader een onze schepping.”\[95\] Again, these lines of future inquire are ones that can and should be pursued, and they are ones that the author is planning to pursue. However, they are questions left (consciously) open in order to give the current thesis focus and clarity.

\[94\] There are some differences within Bavinck scholarship concerning periodization. However, there is a general acknowledgement that 1911 represents a significant shift in Bavinck and therefore can be labelled as a new period within his productive career. See Bolt, *Imitatio Christi*, 16-17.

\[95\] It is important to note that these manuscripts do not have an official date. However, there are leaflets and pages inserted with dates after 1911, likely indicating that Bavinck at least worked on the ideas within these manuscripts after 1911.
4.3 Method and Sources: Chapter 5

The method in the concluding chapter (Chapter 5) utilizes Bavinck’s framework for a constructive, cursory, and primarily suggestive engagement with contemporary issues related to the doctrine of the Trinity. Given the historical distance and issues that have arisen from reading Bavinck through the lens of contemporary questions, this section carefully articulates how he can serve as a conversation partner with reference to contemporary theological questions. The goal of this section is not repristinating or to treat Bavinck’s theology as above reproach (it is not). It is, however, to suggest a constructive dialogue in order to further contemporary theological discourse about the doctrine of the Trinity and its role in shaping and norming dogmatics. This section, then, identifies key issues within contemporary debates concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly in relation to the so-called ‘Trinitarian revival.’

5. Structure

Chapter 1 provides an extended defense of using the dimensions as a way to read Bavinck’s whole systematic project. Given the issues inherent in the ‘two Bavincks’ approach, an extended defense of utilizing a solitary statement in Bavinck as a hermeneutical tool to understand his theological project as rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity is imperative. Thus, Chapter 1 examines

96 Bavinck’s positive approach to Reformed orthodoxy and critical appropriation of the tradition in order to articulate a truly Reformed theology in modernity make him a worthwhile conversation partner as we seek to think about the doctrine of God in the life of the church. Second, and in conjunction with his positive assessment of Reformed scholasticism, Bavinck’s rejection of the Hellenization Thesis marks him as a unique figure within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theology. Furthermore, in certain respects, Bavinck appraised the various theological proposals of his day as alternatives being drugged up uncritically from ancient philosophy. Thus, in seeking to articulate a Reformed, orthodox theology in modernity, Bavinck sought to critically appropriate the tradition he had received rather than rewrite it. Thus, his method opens up the possibility of retrieving and reviving insights from the past rather than closing down conversation by taking primarily a critical posture. Finally, even though Bavinck valued Reformed orthodoxy, including its scholastic categories and methodology, and the insights of the broader Western Christian tradition (including Thomas Aquinas and particularly Augustine), Bavinck’s appropriation of the tradition was a critical appropriation done in conversation with the metaphysical and epistemological questions at the turn of the twentieth century. Bavinck did not want to simply parrot or repristinate the tradition but vitally appropriate it. He was not uncritical and was willing to incorporate contemporary insights. In considering the doctrine of the Trinity, this section will rest on the assumption that Bavinck serves both as a conversation partner but also a good model of what it might look like to head contemporary concerns with a mind shaped by ancient insights.
the relationship between Bavinck’s articulation of the nature and task of dogmatic theology and his reprioritization of the doctrine of the Trinity in order to defend the validity of utilizing the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions. To do this, Chapter 1 surveys a constellation of matters within Bavinck’s theological prolegomena and examines the constructive role he articulates for the doctrine of the Trinity within dogmatic theology in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Our Reasonable Faith*.

Having defended the validity of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological framework, Chapters 2-4 will seek to articulate each dimension, showing how Bavinck develops each one, distinguishes them, and accounts for their relationships. The result of this analysis will be to present Bavinck’s trinitarian vision and highlight the positive and negative role of the doctrine of the Trinity in his dogmatics. To avoid a complete restatement of Bavinck’s theology, these chapters focus on defining each dimension by expositing key elements within his theology, examining the alternatives with which Bavinck engages, and articulating the systematic relationship between each dimension. Each chapter begins with exposition and concludes with summary and critical analysis.

Chapter 2 focuses on the ontological dimension and shows that according to Bavinck the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity establishes the fullness of the divine life apart from the world while also grounding the possibility of creation. For Bavinck, this is essential because the ontological dimension establishes the foundation for triune action in the world.\(^\text{97}\)

Furthermore, it also examines the non-trinitarian alternatives Bavinck identifies in his *De Deo Uno*

\[^{97}\text{Epistemologically, God’s divine life is known through revelation, and therefore the human knowledge of the divine life is limited, finite, and always analogical. However, for Bavinck, it is the ontological Trinity that is the ground of divine economic action. God’s action in the divine economy is the epistemological ground by which the ontological is known.}\]
and *De Deo Trino* and shows how, according to Bavinck, they creep into trinitarian theology if the cosmological and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine are collapsed into the ontological.

Chapter 3 examines the cosmological dimension and argues that the cosmological dimension of the Trinity is Bavinck’s application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship. As such, the cosmological dimension is grounded in the ontological dimension, and it is the means by which one can observe the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck. For, according to Bavinck, the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity is a creational ontology that is neither devoid of the divine (Deism) nor divinized (pantheism).

Chapter 4 defines and articulates the soteriological dimension by showing its relation not only to the ontological dimension but also the cosmological. For Bavinck, the soteriological dimension is the most significant because it is the foundation of Christianity itself. Resting on the ontological and cosmological dimensions, the soteriological dimension is the application of the doctrine of the Trinity to re-creation and redemption. In this chapter, then, I also identify how the relationship between the cosmological and soteriological is the foundation for the ‘grace restores nature’ motif in Bavinck.

Chapter 5 turns from expositing Bavinck to offering a brief, constructive conversation between Bavinck and contemporary theologians concerning the systematic role of the doctrine of the Trinity and the constructive development of doctrine. The main interlocutors in this chapter will be theologians associated with the twentieth-century trinitarian revival, such as Barth, Jenson, Jüngel, LaCugna, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Rahner, Volf, and Zizioulas. The goal of this chapter is to be exploratory and constructive and to suggest further lines of inquiry.
1. Introduction

This thesis argues that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another. The value of this approach is that it can hold together the positive (structuring, norming, and informing) and negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity within Bavinck’s theology. While a significant portion of this thesis (Chapters 2-4) is dedicated to articulating each dimension and their relationships with one another, it is important to provide an extended defense of the framework itself, especially due to the tendency within Bavinck scholarship to impose external hermeneutical frameworks onto his theology. Even though this framework is drawn from within Bavinck, it is necessary to show its congruence with Bavinck’s understanding of the nature and task of theology and its fittingness to his dogmatic project. Thus, this chapter will examine Bavinck’s definition of dogmatics as a science whose object determines its content, method, and organization in order to reveal how Bavinck’s theological prolegomena methodologically establishes his dogmatics as thoroughly theocentric. In other words, it will show how Bavinck sees the knowledge of God as the “beginning, middle, and end” of the dogmatic task.\(^1\) Similarly, it will also survey his identification of the knowledge of God as the central dogma of theology in order to illuminate how, according to Bavinck, all theology is functionally the doctrine of God. Then, turning to Bavinck’s locus on the Trinity, this chapter will show how the dimensions are implicitly present throughout his evaluation of the historical development of the doctrine (negative role) as well as his identification of the

\(^1\) RD, I. 112.
constructive role of Trinity within theology (positive role). The chapter will conclude by drawing together the methodological and constructive claims within Bavinck’s theological prolegomena and treatment of the Trinity in order to show that the creative usage of the dimensions of the Trinity in this thesis fits the internal logic of his systematic project.

2. Bavinck’s Theological Prolegomena

2.1 Bavinck’s Theological Prolegomena in Historical Context

Like many theologians following in the wake of Kant, issues of theological prolegomena were an abiding concern for Bavinck. Throughout his writings, he observed but did not lament the necessity of defending the possibility and nature of dogmatics, which was a necessity he felt more intensely due to an ongoing dispute within the Netherlands concerning the place of theology in the academy. Following years of debate, the Dutch Parliament passed the Higher Education Act in 1876. This legislation required theology professors in universities to teach ‘neutral theology’—theology from a purely rational, scientific, and objective perspective. Confessional, dogmatic theology and practical, ecclesiastical training were seen as the sole responsibility of the church. According to Bavinck, the legislation effectively replaced dogmatic theology with religious studies even though the name ‘theology’ was retained within university faculties. For Bavinck, the legislation needed to be contested. This was not because Bavinck was opposed to the idea of

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2 See RD, II. 292, 331-33.
3 See RD, I. 108: “The organization of dogmatics in general and particular not only became necessary in the face of fundamental opposition to the dogmatic enterprise but is in itself useful and good” (emphasis added).
5 Groen, University Education, viii.
6 Clerical professors could teach at the university, but they were essentially private chairs funded by the church. See Groen, University Education, viii.
dogmatics for the sake of the church done from within the community of faith. Instead, he opposed the removal of dogmatics from university faculties because it represented a pernicious idea following from the neo-Kantian methodological bifurcation of faith and knowledge. God cannot be known and therefore cannot be the object of a truly scientific discipline. For Bavinck, the Higher Education Act (1876) had dire practical and theoretical consequences, such as radically breaking the “link between science and life” to the detriment of both.

Aware of the impact of Kant and neo-Kantianism, many of Bavinck’s theological articles and the entire first volume of *Reformed Dogmatics* address issues of theological prolegomena in order to articulate theology as a scientific discipline whose object is known by revelation and whose content is appropriated and organized by believing (faithful) reason. To do so, he did not merely

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8 In his treatment of dogmatic method, Bavinck emphasises the importance of the church. Remaining true to his Reformed roots, he identifies Scripture as the sole source of theology, but he identifies the church as pedagogically prior to Scripture. The theologian, like all believers, comes to know Scripture in and through the community of faith. The community’s confession remains subservient to Scripture, but the church is the pedagogical context within which Scripture is encountered and known. Similarly, the church is the natural ground for theological reflection. Bavinck did not desire to bifurcate academic and the church. Instead, he sought to articulate how theology as a particular and specific scientific discipline belonged in the university for the sake of the believing community. Furthermore, Bavinck for Bavinck theology belonged in the university for the sake of truth, which he saw as the purpose of the university. See Bavinck, *RD*, I. 84-9.


11 *RD*, I.51. “However, when the science of religions and theology are placed side by side, one in the department of theology and the other in a seminary, this link between science and life is radically broken, to the detriment of both, Professors in the science of religion may then easily imagine that they need not concern themselves with life, practice, or the church…and the latter [seminary professors], oppressed by a sense of their inferiority, can hardly feel enthusiasm for a task based on nothing but an arrangement that is untrue to life and must despair of engendering in the minds of their students, beside the personal, and ecclesiastical conviction as well.” Compare also, “Godgeleerdheid en godsdienstwetenschap,” 225. Cf. “Theology and Religious Studies,” 60.

repristinate the Reformed orthodox tradition of his confessional community but sought to develop it in and through his engagement with the critical, scientific questions of modernity, such as the subject-object relationship, the possibility and nature of revelation, and the material and formal principles of theology. Ever the irenic theologian, Bavinck never shied away from engaging modernity’s questions or incorporating its insights, but he did so only insofar as they aided his theological project to develop a dogmatic, scientific, Reformed theology in and for modernity where faith and knowledge were no longer rent asunder.

For purposes of this chapter, it is important to turn to a few specific issues that Bavinck takes up in his theological prolegomena in order to show how the trinitarian framework proposed by this thesis fits Bavinck’s own account of the nature and task of dogmatic theology. The first issue is his defense of theology as a systematic study of the knowledge of God wherein he establishes the irreducibly theocentric nature of dogmatics. The second is his identification of the material principle of theology and its central dogma. The third, which is related to the first and second, is his short, but vital, discussion concerning the structuring of dogmatic content wherein he draws a connection between formal and material parts of dogmatics.

2.2 Irreducibly Theocentric: Dogmatics as the “Scientific System of the Knowledge of God”

Rejecting the common post-Kantian classification of theology as a study of the content of faith (pistology), Bavinck defines dogmatics as “the system of the knowledge of God.” The knowledge that theology seeks is nothing less than the knowledge of God as he has revealed himself in his “Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him.” And, as a science, it aims for the systematic unity of its knowledge. Thus, the task of the theologian is

13 RD, I. 38.
14 RD, I. 58.
15 RD, I. 38.
“to think God’s thoughts after him and to trace their unity.”\textsuperscript{16} The theologian does not impose his or her own system onto the content of revelation but “rationally reproduce[s] the content of revelation that relates to the knowledge of God.”\textsuperscript{17} Dogmatics, then, is a rational and reflective academic and scientific discipline, which seeks to reproduce the “unity that is present in the thoughts of God and has been recorded for the eye of faith in Scripture.”\textsuperscript{18}

Yet, as Bavinck knew, defining dogmatics as the science of the knowledge of God known via his revelation was one thing, articulating it within the philosophical and theological context of modernity was another. It required a thorough investigation into the nature of knowledge itself and a corresponding revitalisation of the conception of science within modernity.

2.3 Bavinck’s Epistemological Typology: Rationalism & Empiricism\textsuperscript{19}

Investigating the fundamental principles (principia) of science in the Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck identifies two issues at the core of modern epistemology and conceptions of science: the subject-object relationship and the search for epistemic certainty. Understanding that an adequate

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{RD}, I. 44. This statement is the basis of this chapter’s subtitle.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{RD}, I. 45. Compare also, Herman Bavinck, “The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System,” \textit{The Bavinck Review} 5 (2014), 93.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{RD} I. 45.
conception of science in general and theology in particular required engaging these issues, Bavinck surveys the various approaches to the subject-object problem and epistemic certainty in modernity and develops an epistemological typology based on the “logical relation between the subject and object.” Based on the subject-object relationship, Bavinck identifies two basic schools of thought: rationalism and empiricism, each of which with its own (inadequate) conception of science and (deficient) understanding of certainty.

According to Bavinck, rationalism, in all its different forms, places the origin and source of knowledge in the subject, thereby rendering the intellect primary over the senses and creating a conception of science whereby thinking “creates and constructs the entire world.” The foundation and origin of knowledge are from within the subject. “Thinking yields truth.” Epistemic certainty in rationalism is not automatic but derived through reflective process; it is “drawn from a process of reasoning.”

Diametrically opposite, Bavinck describes empiricism as any theory of knowledge that starts from the “principle that sense perception alone is the source of our knowledge.” The origin and source of knowledge are external. The only thing the human knower contributes to the process is the “faculty of perception;” his or her mind is a blank slate upon which the external, objective world writes. As Bavinck observes, in empiricism true knowledge is limited to the realm of

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20 RD I, 214. His goal is not a full systematic exposition of all philosophical theories of knowledge but to identify two recurrent tendencies in philosophy and how these tendencies, in their contemporary forms, themselves point toward the necessity for a (re)newed conception of science in modernity. For a fuller treatment of Bavinck’s epistemological typology, see David Sytsma, “Thomistic Epistemology,” 1-56.
21 RD, 1. 215. Bavinck identifies Plato, the Eleatic school (Parmenides), and the Neo-Platonists as the ancient schools of rationalism with Descartes as the father of its modern form. Although manifested in different forms, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel exemplify modern rationalism according to Bavinck.
22 RD I, 215.
23 RD, 1. 224.
24 RD, 1. 219.
25 RD, 1. 219.
observable phenomena and only the exact sciences are considered valid. Sciences cannot truly investigate the nature of things: “Knowledge is limited to the that and the how; the what and the why remain hidden. The cause and the end, the origin and the destiny of things, lie outside our reach.” In empiricism one cannot have true knowledge of anything that remains beyond the senses. Thus, epistemic certainty is limited to what can be known through the senses and takes the form of scientific, demonstrative proofs.

Important to highlight is that for Bavinck rationalism and empiricism lead to two contrasting conceptions of science, each with its own approach to the origin and source of knowledge based on a particular relationship between the object and the subject. In each, sense perception and the intellect occupy different relationships within the process of acquiring knowledge and assessing its certainty. Furthermore, in Bavinck’s estimation, both are deeply inadequate and cannot provide a satisfactory conception of science in general or theology in particular. In closing his typology, he writes: “Does not the whole of modern philosophy, in its Cartesian [rationalist] as well as in its Baconian [empiricist] expression need revision? Are there not other and better principles of science…?” Why are they inadequate? First, for Bavinck, both approaches fail because they are ultimately reductionistic and create a duality between the subject and the object that cannot be overcome logically. Rationalism denies the objectivity of the external world, roots its knowledge in the subject, and results in illusionism and Idealism; Empiricism denies the active subjectivity of the human knower, roots its knowledge in the object, and results in materialism. Rationalism, in its most absolute form, denies any knowledge a posteriori; Empiricism denies a priori knowledge even though, as Bavinck observes, it necessarily proceeds from certain un-provable and assumed

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26 RD, I. 219-22. Bavinck identifies this tendency in the ancient Greek atomists and the medieval nominalists, and he claims Francis Bacon as empiricism’s modern father. He classifies Hume, the French encyclopaedists, A. Compte, J. Stuart Mill, H. Spencer, Buchner, Czolbe, and Molschott as modern empiricists.
27 RD, I. 2.19.
28 RD I, 222.
29 RD, I. 222.
presuppositions. In sum, neither actually solves the subject-object problem. In Bavinck’s estimation, each epistemological approach simply opts for one over the other. As such, neither produces an adequate foundation for the sciences. Second, each approach fails to capture the everyday, ordinary process by which human beings come to know and the world and trust their knowledge of it. Thus, neither approach does justice to the natural certainty humans have of the relationship between the knower (subject) and the known (object).

2.4 Bavinck’s Epistemology & The Scientific Principia

In response, Bavinck articulates a different conception of science. One that he thinks logically connects the subject and the object, and one that can not only reinvigorate the sciences as a whole but also incorporate theology as a particular science, the science of the knowledge God.

Developing his epistemology, Bavinck notes that any adequate theory of knowledge must begin with “the universal and natural certainty of human beings concerning the objectivity and truth of their knowledge.” Beginning from the observation that humans naturally accept the reality of the external world and trust their knowledge of it, Bavinck develops his epistemology as a type of realism. Citing Aquinas and Aristotle, Bavinck argues, similarly to Thomas and the scholastics, for the priority of the senses in human knowledge. The senses provide information

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30 *RD*, I. 220.
31 *RD*, I. 223: “After all, it is not philosophy that creates the cognitive faculty and cognition. Philosophy only finds it and then attempts to explain it. Any solution that does not explain the cognitive faculty but instead destroys it and, failing to understand cognition, turns it not an illusion, is judged by that fact. Only a theory of knowledge such that on the one hand it never leaves the ground of experience and on the other penetrates the very depths of the problem has a chance to succeed.”
32 *RD*, I. 223.
33 *RD*, I. 223: “Every human, after all, accepts the reliability of the senses and the external world, not by a logical inference from the effect, in this case the representation in his consciousness, to the cause outside of himself, nor by reasoning from the resistance of his will encounters to an objective reality that generates this resistance. Prior to all reflection and reasoning, everyone is in fact fully assured of the existence of the world.”
to the human consciousness. The conscious, then, actively formulates a perceptual image that is a “faithful, real, reproduction of the object outside of the conscious.” According to Bavinck, the perceptual image is a trustworthy and faithful representation because the same mind that perceives the object via the information of the senses is the same mind that actively forms the representation.

Establishing the link between the object and the conscious’s representation of it as faithful, Bavinck articulates the epistemic certainty of knowledge by utilizing but augmenting an argument of the Protestant scholastic Voetius. Bavinck argues that faith is not a separate faculty apart from reason; it is a natural orientation by which human beings arrive at certainty. Bavinck classifies this natural certainty as the faith of immediate certainty (het geloof als onmiddellijke zekerheid). According to Bavinck, the faith of immediate certainty is natural and arises from the immediate certainty of human self-consciousness, an idea that he develops most clearly in The Philosophy of Revelation. Turning from Voetius to Augustine and Schleiermacher, Bavinck articulates his point by grounding the faith of immediate certainty in the intuitive immediacy of human self-consciousness, at the core of which is the feeling (intuition) of dependence on external realities (God and the world). Self-consciousness, then, is a source of knowledge because in it the knower immediately intuits his or her own existence and dependence on God and the world. The

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35 *RD*, I. 228.

36 There have been many comparisons between Bavinck and Scottish Common-Sense Realism. While there are some similarities, Bavinck does accept a gap between mental representations and their objects. For a good treatment of Bavinck’s epistemology and its relationship to Common Sense Realism, see Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God.” *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (Jan 2018): 115-134.

37 *RD*, I. 616. I am indebted to David Sytsma for the observation concerning Bavinck’s utilization of Voetius. Bavinck refers to the following text of Voetius in this section: G. Voetius, *Select Disp.*, I.3

38 *RD*, I. 558.

39 See *Philosophy of Revelation*, Lecture 3: “Revelation and Philosophy.”

subjectivity of the knower is integral to the process of attaining knowledge and assures the certainty of knowledge. Thus, Bavinck argues that humans arrive “at knowledge and certainty” immediately and intuitively not primarily by way of reflection or via logical, or mathematical proofs.\textsuperscript{41} Even as his treatment of certainty focuses on the self-conscious subjectivity of the human knower, true to his scholastic influences, Bavinck does not give up the priority of the senses. Instead, he links together his scholastic and contemporary insights in order to resolve the subject-object dilemma and articulate epistemic certainty.\textsuperscript{42} Because of the givenness of human self-consciousness and immediate, intuitive faith, the knower trusts his or her knowledge of the world, which comes via the senses. Thus, there is an integral, or organic, relationship between the subject and the object, and a natural, undeniable relationship between faith and knowledge. The faith of immediate certainty is what binds the subject and object together in the natural process of trusting and coming to know the external world through the senses.

For Bavinck, this has immediate consequences for how science is understood. As Bavinck articulates in \textit{The Philosophy of Revelation}, the immediacy of self-consciousness means that “life preced[es] thought; faith, knowledge; self-consciousness, reflection; experience, science.”\textsuperscript{43} Science is a secondary, reflexive, and rational discipline whereby that which is known in and through life and experience becomes an object of reflection itself. Science, then, remains rooted

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{RD}, I. 223. Cf. \textit{PR}, 54, 65-9. According to Bavinck, consciousness is not the soul, its powers, or its habits. Consciousness is a mysterious property of the soul. It is not a phenomena to be observed but a noumena. It is a reality, immediately given before all reasoning and inference. Thus, it is known by itself, shines by its own light, a law known through itself (\textit{principium per se notum}). Self-consciousness has two elements. First, the subject’s awareness regarding phenomena that occur within by which we come to know all sorts of things is a part of our consciousness. Second, immediate awareness of knowledge through immediate experience. Bavinck finds resonance in this concept with Kant’s inner sense as well as Augustine and the scholastic’s \textit{sensus interior}. However, he primarily draws from Schleiermacher as he describes the immediacy and intuitive nature of consciousness. For Bavinck, Schleiermacher rightly understood that consciousness is, at its root, aware that it is dependent and free. It is a definite mode of being that is dependent on an infinite power and others. Yet, at the same time, it posits the independence and freedom of humans from the world.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{RD}, I. 227.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{PR}, 55.
\end{footnotesize}
reality as it is tied to the real world, but it is an act of the intellect. It contemplates and draws connections between that which the intellect knows. Science begins in the midst of life, but its knowledge is not produced by the senses but through rational reflection on what the consciousness has received and actively produced. Here, Bavinck identifies himself to be in line with Augustine, whom he describes as binding the human mind to reality while allowing it the freedom to “soar to the world of the ideal.”

Building on his epistemology, Bavinck creatively appropriates the Reformed scholastic idea of the *principia* of science in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and develops them along trinitarian lines as a means to fully address the subject-object problem in science and relate his general conception of science to theology. According to Bavinck, “…every science…” has “three fundamental principles.” *Principia*, in line with Reformed scholasticism and rooted in Aristotle, are “that whence something is or becomes known.” These are: (1) the *principium essendi* (essential principle), which is the source or ontological foundation of science, (2) the *principium cognoscendi*...
(3) the principium cognoscendi internum (internal principle of knowledge), which is the internal foundation of knowledge. In sum, the principium essendi is the ontological origin or source of knowledge, and the principia cognoscendi externum and internum are the epistemological principles by which knowledge is attained.

Defining them along trinitarian lines, Bavinck establishes that there is only one principium essendi: God. All knowledge finds its ontological source in God. However, while there is only one ontological source, there are three different species of knowledge, which are determined by their principium cognoscendi externum and principium cognoscendi internum. The first species of knowledge is knowledge of the world, which is the foundation of all science. For natural knowledge of the world, the principium cognoscendi externum is the created world, and the principium cognoscendi internum is reason as illuminated by the Logos (the second Person of the Trinity). The second species of knowledge is the knowledge of God known through general revelation. In general revelation, the principium cognoscendi externum is creation, and the principium cognoscendi internum is reason illuminated by the Logos, aided by the Spirit. The final species of knowledge is the knowledge of God known through special revelation, which is the foundation of dogmatic theology. In special revelation the principium cognoscendi externum is Scripture, and the principium cognoscendi internum is the Holy Spirit.

Carefully distinguishing between the ontological source and epistemological principles of science, Bavinck emphasises the distinction by connecting the principia to the Reformed orthodox

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48 RD, I. 233.
49 For an in-depth treatment of Bavinck’s utilization of the principia as a bridge between his conception of theology and science, see van Belt, The Authority of Scripture, 257-259.
50 RD, I. 210-4, 233.
51 RD, I. 233.
52 RD, I. 279
53 RD, I. 233, 279.
distinction between God’s archetypal knowledge and human ectypal knowledge. God is the ontological principle of all knowing, because “present in his mind are the ideas of all things; all things are based on thoughts and are created by the word.” Thus, in creating the world, God reproduces “in human beings… an ectypal knowledge that reflects this archetypal knowledge in his own divine mind.” Following Augustine and Thomas and appealing to the Belgic Confession for support, Bavinck presents creation as the embodiment of the ideas of God and therefore grounded in his knowledge of himself. Thus, God’s archetypal knowledge is ectypally, objectively revealed in creation (principium cognoscendi externum of science and general revelation) and Scripture (principium cognoscendi externum of theology).

Moreover, as the principium cognoscendi externum comes from God’s revelatory activity, the principium cognoscendi internum are not abstracted from the triune God’s providential and creational activity in the world. Even natural knowledge of the world rests on reason as it is

54 Although Bavinck takes these terms from Reformed theology, he does use them and develop them towards his own ends. Even though Bavinck is appropriating these terms, he is doing so creatively for the sake of responding to contemporary challenges and issues. For a detailed account of how Bavinck utilizes these Reformed orthodox categories for his own ends, see van den Belt, Autopistia, 266-270.
55 RD, I. 233.
56 RD, I. 233.
57 RD, I. 232-3. Bavinck appeals to Thomas and Augustine’s metaphor of God being the sun or light of human minds by which all things become intelligible. Noting the potential to develop this metaphor in a Neo-Platonic direction, Bavinck specifically highlights Thomas’s doctrine of divine participation and describes it as follows: “Reason in us is that divine light; it is not the divine logos, but it participates in it. To be (esse), to live (vivere), and to understand (intelligere) is the prerogative of God in respect to his being, ours in respect of participation (per participationem).” RD, I.232. Bavinck cites Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis VIII, 25, idem, Soliloquies, 1,8,13; idem, De Trinitate; Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, Q. 8, A. 2, Ad. 5; I, Q. 79, A. 4; I, Q. 88, A. 3, Ad. 1; II, Q. 109, A. 1-2; idem, Summa Contra Gentiles, III, 47.
58 Bavinck is not trying to argue that the knowledge of the general sciences is equivalent to general revelation. His description of creation as revelation can be confusing in this regard. However, it important to note that for Bavinck, creation itself is the result of God’s communication ad extra. Thus, in a very real sense, its very existence is dependent on God’s revelation. However, what Bavinck is trying to do here is to identify how all knowledge has its ontological ground in God. As he does, he grounds the knowledge of creation and the knowledge of God gained through creation in God, and he identifies their external principles as arising from God’s movement into the divine economy. But that does not mean that every science treats God as its object. As we will see, especially in Chapter 3, the sciences seek to know the things that God has created whereas theology (and to some extent philosophy) seeks to know the God who has created all things.
illumined by the Logos.\textsuperscript{59} This does not mean that humans come to know because God implants knowledge at birth (Plato) or grants human access to the ideas in his being (Malebranche).\textsuperscript{60} Instead, as human knowledge arises solely from revelation, its subjective acquisition is dependent on the creating and sustaining work of the triune God.\textsuperscript{61} In so doing, Bavinck suggests a particular solution to the subject-object problem. The necessary relationship between the external and internal principles of knowledge finds its root in a particular metaphysical, creational ontology. All knowledge rests on revelation, which is the ectypal, objective revelation of God’s archetypal knowledge. Human beings are created with the capacity to know the world in which they exist. Human knowledge itself, then, is dependent on God’s revelation as well as his ongoing action in the world by the Logos, through whom everything was created, illuminates human consciousness.\textsuperscript{62}

Having developed his epistemology, Bavinck is well aware that it rests on one foundational presupposition: God speaks/reveals himself (\textit{Deus dixit}).\textsuperscript{63} The fact that God can reveal himself rests on a metaphysical argument concerning the communicability of the divine essence, which Bavinck develops in subsequent volumes of the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}. Within his treatment on scientific foundations, Bavinck assumes his later argument so that the immediate effect of relating the \textit{principia} with archetypal and ectypal knowledge is to ground his epistemological claims

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{RD} I. 232-3: “It is he who causes this light [the light of reason] to arise in us and constantly maintains it…There just has to be a correspondence or kinship between object and subject. The Logos who the light of reason, the intellect, which, itself originating in the Logos, discovers and recognizes the Logos in things.”

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{RD}, I. 233.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Cf. RD}, I. 233. On this point, Bavinck appeals to Thomas again and notes that “just as knowledge within us is the imprint of things upon our souls, so, in turn, forms do not exist except by a kind of imprint of the divine knowledge of things.” He cites Liberatore, \textit{Die Erkenntnis-theorie}, 148.

\textsuperscript{62} Scott Oliphint criticizes Bavinck and claims that his identification of the Logos as the internal and external principle of scientific, or philosophical knowledge is incompatible with cognitive realism. Laurence O’Donnell, however, shows how Oliphint’s reading of Bavinck is rooted in the anti-scholasticism that plagued Neo-Calvinist theology and philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century. As such, O’Donnell shows how Oliphint is really reprising an old criticism made by Van Til and does not stand. See Oliphint, “Logos Principle” and O’Donnell, “Bavinck’s Bug.”

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Cf. RD}, 578-582
metaphysically. Human knowledge and divine knowledge are related to one another but not collapsed into one another. All human knowledge is dependent on God’s ectypal revelation of his archetypal knowledge. There is no knowledge outside of God’s revelation, not even mathematical or logical knowledge—a point Bavinck explores in detail in his Philosophy of Revelation.65 Furthermore, all human knowledge is limited and finite. It cannot transcend beyond what God has revealed in creation and revelation. Human beings cannot ascend to archetypal knowledge. Thus, the sciences are bound to their cognitive principles. And finally, as the triune God is one, the sciences seek to reflect their ontological source by finding unity amidst the diversity of the world.66 The ectype reflects the archetype.

It is important to note, however, that identifying God as the ontological source of all knowledge does not mean that every academic discipline treats God as its object. Bavinck does not confuse metaphysical and epistemological categories even as he relates them. The external principle of knowing for the sciences rests in the created world. Therefore, God’s knowledge of himself is the metaphysical ground of the possibility of science and the ontological reason that science seeks unity amidst diversity in creation, but the sciences are guided by the object that they study. For every discipline except theology, the external principle of knowledge is the created world. Again, even though science is a discipline whose knowledge arises from rational contemplation, it remains bound to its external principle: the world that God created and sustains.

2.5 Theology as a Science

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64 The order of being comes before and grounds the order of knowing.
65 Cf. Philosophy of Revelation, 24 where Bavinck makes this point particularly explicitly: “The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation (grondslag), the secret (geheim) of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly will it discover that revelation underlies all created being.”
66 RD, I. 618: “System is the supreme desideratum in all science.”
Turning to theology, then, Bavinck develops its scientific character by appropriating Reformed orthodox categories within modernity’s subject-object schema. Theology, he argues, is a science, and just like every other academic science, it finds its ontological principle in God (principium essendi), has external and internal cognitive principles (principia cognoscendi externum and internum), and includes faith. Similarly, just like every science, theology is bound to its object and pursues unity. Yet, for all its similarities, Bavinck considers theology a distinct science.

First, instead of proceeding from the faith of immediate certainty (het geloof als onmiddellijke zekerheid), theology proceeds from faith in the religious sense (het geloof in godsdiestigen zin). Religious faith is saving faith: it is a gift whose object is “the grace of God in Christ,” which is known by and bound to Scripture.67 Significantly, then, saving faith is what links the believing subject to his or her object and is theology’s unique mode of certainty. The theologian proceeds as a believer, connected by faith to his or her object of contemplation: God, in Christ, as revealed by Scripture.

Second, in distinction from the other sciences, theology differs because of its object (God) and source of knowledge (special revelation). Theology alone seeks to “think God’s thoughts after him and trace their unity.”68 Theology alone finds its external cognitive principle, or principle of knowing in special revelation, particularly Scripture.69 For Bavinck, Scripture is not only theology’s principium cognoscendi externum but also its sole foundation.70 The theologian, by faith, acquires knowledge from Scripture via the internal principle of the Holy Spirit and applies believing reason to evaluate, compare, sum up, and infer its truths in order to gather it into a

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67 For a more in-depth treatment of Bavinck’s emphasis that general revelation is about God, see John Bolt, “Getting the ‘Two Books’ Straight: with a Little Help from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin,” Calvin Theological Journal 46, no. 2 (Nov 2011), 315-332.
68 RD, I. 44.
69 Cf. RD, I. esp. Chapter 12, “Revelation in Nature and Holy Scripture.” For Bavinck, special revelation extended beyond Scripture. However, Scripture was the only access we had to our knowledge of Christ or any other historical events wherein God revealed himself.
70 RD, I. 89, 617.
system. Yet, this does not negate that which can be known by believing reason from God’s revelation in creation. Here theology is distinct as well. Theology alone applies believing reason, through the lens of Scripture, to creation for the purpose of learning about God. Theology seeks to know the Creator who has redeemed the world when it looks at creation. And, it does so to understand the unity of the God who created and redeemed the world. Moreover, theology alone seeks to unpack the knowledge of saving faith, a knowledge whose effect is “nothing less than eternal life.”

While it is distinct, Bavinck also identifies parallels between the task of theology and the task of the other sciences. Just like every science, it rests on sure and certain knowledge. As it is the scientist’s task to rationally reflect and organize its subject into a unified system, so too it is the theologian’s specific task to organize the knowledge of God made known in Christ through Scripture into a scientific, systematic unity utilizing (believing) reason. Just like every science, theology objectivizes its object in order to understand it more fully and trace its unity. Thus, the theologian’s task is distinct from that of all believers because the theologian aims towards systematic unity. In this task dogmatic theology differs from catechetical or practical theology, not in object, but in method and order, which are both derived from its object of contemplation and

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71 RD, I. 618.
72 General revelation should not be confused with the facts obtained in other sciences. The knowledge of history and nature is, according to Bavinck, due to the revelation of God, but it should not be equated with it. General revelation is about God. For a helpful discussion on this topic see John Bolt, “Getting the Two Books Straight: With a Little Help from John Calvin and Herman Bavinck,” Calvin Theological Journal 46 (2011): 315-332.
73 Bavinck describes general and special revelation as both forms of supernatural revelation which are integrally linked. Scripture, however, is the sole foundation of theology.
74 Our Reasonable Faith, 30.
75 RD, I. 278-9: “Corresponding to the objective revelation of God, therefore, there is in human beings a certain faculty or natural aptitude for perceiving the divine. God does not do half the job…Religion exists because God is God and wants to be served as God by his rational creatures. To that end he reveals himself to human beings in word and deed (the external principle of knowing) and makes the subjectively fit to know and love God by that revelation (the internal principle of knowing.).”
76 See RD, I.616-618.
scientific task. The theologian, then, applies believing reason to revelation in order to “inquire into the why and the how” of faith and develop a systematic theology. Furthermore, just like every science, its knowledge is true but limited and finite. It is bound by its cognitive principle (special revelation as recorded in Scripture), and it cannot know anything but what has been revealed. Finally, because theology is a work of believing reason, the theologian can utilize the knowledge of the other sciences in its task. While theology differs in object, source, and effect, it remains a science. It does not float above the other sciences; instead, as a discipline of believing reason, theology serves them as their queen.

2.6 Provisional Conclusions

At this point, it is possible to make some provisional conclusions concerning Bavinck’s own understanding of the nature and task of systematic theology and the fittingness of the framework proposed by this thesis. First, as Bavinck seeks to establish the foundations of science in general and theology in particular, he argues that theology is a particular science which seeks nothing less than to know God as he has revealed himself. Even though he claims that all knowledge is in some sense grounded in God’s self-revelation, theology is the science that treats God himself as its object who is known primarily through special revelation. From beginning to end, theology is about God. As he writes: “Dogmatics…describes for us God, always God from beginning to end—God in his...
beginning, God in his creation, God against sin, God in Christ, God breaking down all resistance through the Holy Spirit and guiding the whole creation back to the objective he decreed for it: the glory of his name.” The nature of theology, then, is irreducibly theocentric. Dogmatics is about God, the triune God, from beginning to end. Functionally, this means that dogmatic theology is solely the doctrine of God.

Second, because theology is a science, it seeks to “gather up and recapitulate” its knowledge of God into one system. Dogmatics “does not rest until it has discovered the unity underlying revelation.” Theology does not simply reproduce the content of revelation but draws it together to identify its underlying unity—a unity that is ultimately rooted in God and known through revelation. The unity theology seeks is one that it discovers because it is a creaturely ectype of the divine archetype. Theology does not impose a predetermined metaphysical system but seeks to reflect the unity already present within and underlying revelation. Theology’s task, then, like its nature, is irreducibly theocentric. Its task is to trace and find the underlying unity of God’s self-revelation.

And third, Bavinck’s epistemology and account of science depend on a particular metaphysical ontology. His description and definition of that ontology are Trinitarian. The Logos through whom God creates is the same Logos who provides illumination to human reason, and the Spirit is the one who not only upholds and sustains creation but also illuminates Scripture. Thus, Bavinck’s account of science in general and theology in particular not only highlights the irreducibly theocentric nature and task of theology but also rests on a particular understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Already here, we can begin to see the fecundity of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck.

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80 RD. I. 112.
81 RD. I. 618.
Provisionally, then, we can see that any treatment of Bavinck’s theology that takes his own statements about the nature and task of theology seriously must be similarly theocentric. If the whole of theology is about knowing God from beginning to end, then Bavinck’s theology must be read in this light. Furthermore, we can observe that any treatment of the internal logic of Bavinck’s theology must be able to articulate the way that he traces the unity of God’s revelation in his theology. Reading Bavinck’s theology through the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological framework proposed by this thesis fit with these requirements. This hermeneutic approaches Bavinck’s systematic theology as irreducibly theocentric and provides a way to see how he traces the unity of who God is and what God does. It fits the way Bavinck describes dogmatic theology, and it presents itself as a way to see the underlying unity and structure of Bavinck’s theology in a way that fits its irreducibly theocentric nature. Bavinck’s theology is nothing less than the doctrine of the Trinity understood in its ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions.

3. Bavinck and the Question of a Central Dogma

From the exposition above, it is clear that Bavinck’s sees theology as beginning and ending with God as he has revealed himself. The knowledge of the triune God is the content of theology, and it seeks a scientific, unified system. To emphasize the centrality of the knowledge of God in dogmatics, Bavinck not only creatively appropriates Reformed orthodoxy’s principia and archetype-ectype distinction but also constructively utilizes the common nineteenth-century historical-theological discussion concerning the formal and material principles of dogmatic systems, including the concept of a central dogma.82

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82 As we will see in section 3.1 the concept of a central dogma arose primarily from the works of August Twesten and Alexander Schweizer. In the nineteenth century, it was common to utilize the language and seek to identify theological systems by their central dogma. Bavinck picks up on this language and engages with the concept. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the central dogma thesis has been an issue of debate. Theologians such as T.F. Torrance have utilized it to emphasize the difference between the early Reformers and the Reformed Scholastics. Recent scholarship, however, has challenged the central dogma thesis, especially in relation to Reformed Scholasticism. This thesis does not engage in this debate directly, but it has utilized some of the contemporary debate alongside of nineteenth-century
It is worth a brief examination of Bavinck’s engagement with and utilization of these nineteenth-century categories for two reasons. First, it will illuminate the proceeding discussion concerning the systematic organization of dogmatic content. Second, it will show how Bavinck’s theology, at least up until 1911, maintained the doctrine of God as the conceptual and functional centre of his dogmatic theology. This is important to note given that Bruce R. Pass has suggested that Bavinck gives clues during this time that he wanted to shift the conceptual and functional center of his dogmatic system to Christology, even if he never worked it out.83

3.1 The Central Dogma Thesis

Influenced by two students of Schleiermacher, August Twesten and Alexander Schweizer, distinguishing between the material (fundamental principle or central teaching) and the formal (authoritative source) principles of theology was commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century.84 Methodologically, this approach often treated doctrinal systems as primarily deductive and metaphysical, resting on their one fundamental or material principle—a principle that was doctrinally articulated in a system’s central dogma. Historical theologian Richard A. Muller summarizes this approach as the tendency “to identify a central doctrinal motif as the principium on which all the system would rest and according to which all other doctrines would necessarily be conceived and interpreted.”85 Applying this principle to the history of doctrine, Schweizer

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84 See, for example, August Twesten, Vorlesungen über die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. (Hamberg: Perthes, 1826) and Alexander Schweizer, Die Glaubenslehre der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche, vol. 1 (Zürich Orell, Füssli u. Co., 1844).
(along with Schleiermacher) identified absolute dependence as the material principle of Reformed theology, which coalesced around predestination as its central dogma. Lutheran theology, on the other hand, had a different material principle: justification.

Within the Netherlands, Johannes Scholten utilized this methodological approach, identifying Scripture as the formal principle and absolute divine sovereignty as the material principle of Reformed theology. And, just like Schweizer, Scholten identified the justification as the material principle of Lutheranism. In the first volume of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck utilizes the distinction made by his former teacher, and claims that the key distinction between Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics is a difference in principle: one is theological, “not resting until [it] has traced all things…to the divine decree, tracking down the ‘wherefore’ of things,” whereas the other is anthropological, “content with the ‘that and enjoys the salvation in which [it] is…a participant.’” But, while Bavinck incorporates some of the historical-theological insights from these discussions, he does not utilize the material principle or conception of a central dogma to establish a deductive or metaphysical system. Rather, he appropriates them alongside of a focus on theology’s starting point (*uitgangspunt*) to articulate and emphasize the irreducibly theocentric nature and reflexive task of scientific theology alongside of its grounding in Scripture.

### 3.2 Bavinck, the Knowledge of God, and the Centre of Dogmatic Theology

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86 See Richard Muller, *Christ and the Degree*, introduction. In this book, Muller convincingly argues against the nineteenth-century idea that the Reformed orthodox utilized predestination as a metaphysical or deductive principle.
88 *RD*, I.117.
In his 1891 article tracing the relationship between confession and dogmatics, “Confessie en Dogmatiek,” Bavinck notes the lack of agreement concerning the material content of dogmatic theology and attributes the diversity to diverging fundamental or material principles. He writes:

And what is the material content of dogma? About this is great disagreement. And no wonder, for it is at the same time the question of the first principle (grondbeginsel), the material principle (materieele principe) of the whole of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. One searches for it in the person of Christ, a second in men, a third in the contrast between sin and redemption, a fourth in the church or the kingdom of God.  

Rejecting these, Bavinck appeals to the fundamental principle that he identifies in the Reformed tradition: the knowledge of God. As its fundamental principle, the knowledge of God is theology’s starting point (uitgangspunt) and organic, unifying principle. Thus, theology as a discipline relates everything to the knowledge of God, which for Bavinck is revealed by God in nature and Scripture.

Affirming the knowledge of God as theology’s starting point, Bavinck was also highly critical of contemporary attempts to make Christ the starting point or unifying principle of dogmatic theology. In his 1884 article engaging James Orr, “Eene belangrijke apologie van de Christelijke wereldbeschouwing,” Bavinck observes: “The person of Christ is surely the mid-point (middelpunt) of Christianity… Of course, there is not the slightest objection to calling Christ the center of Christianity. But, if He is the mid-point (middelpunt), He is therefore precisely not the principle (beginsel) and starting point (uitgangspunt).” Similarly, in the Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck writes: “…Although Christ is quite certainly the central focus and main content of Holy Scripture, precisely because he is the midpoint (middelpunt) he cannot be its starting point (uitgangspunt).”

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90 Bavinck, “Confessie en Dogmatiek,” Theologische studiën 9 (1891), 273: “En wat is dan de materieele inhoud van het dogma? Hierover is groot verschil. En geen wonder, want het is tegelijk de vraag naar het grondbeginsel, het materieele principe van heel de leer der H. Schrift. De een zoekt dit in den persoon van Christus, een tweede in den mensch, een derde in de tegenstelling van zonde en genade, een vierde in de kerk of het koninkrijk Gods enz.”

91 Bavinck, “Eene belangrijke apologie,” 144-5: “De persoon van Christus toch is het middelpunt van het Christendom…Natuurlijk is er niet het minste bezwaar tegen, om Christus het centrum des Christendoms te noemen. Maar indien Hij het middelpunt is, is Hij daardoor juist niet het beginsel en het uitgangspunt.”
In both of these writings, Bavinck clearly identifies the centrality of Christ in Christianity. However, he cautions against making Christ the starting-point of dogmatics. Why? Because as Bavinck explains in both sources, making Christ the starting point of dogmatics “often rests on the false assumption that…” the person of Christ rather than Scripture is the “…foundation and epistemic source of dogmatics.” For Bavinck, Christ cannot be the *principium cognoscendi externum* of theology, that belongs to Scripture alone. Scripture, as the sole foundation of theology, does reveal Christ as the centre of Christianity, but its content does not stop at Christ. Scripture is the *triune* God’s self-revelation in servant form, and therefore the content of theology must be the knowledge of God. It starts with the knowledge of God (in Scripture) and unpacks its content.

Therefore, in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck expands the earlier definition he gave in “Confessie en Dogmatiek,” to include the centrality of Christ and the importance of the Word. He describes the content of “dogmatics as the knowledge of God *as he has revealed it in Christ* and through his Word” and identifies the knowledge of God as the starting point (*uitgangspunt*) of theology. As theology’s starting point, the knowledge of God is also the whole of its content. For Bavinck, this guarantees that theology will seek its foundation and epistemic principle in Scripture alone. It also means that there is really only “one dogma, one that is rooted in Scripture.” The central dogma of theology is the knowledge of the *triune* God. It provides theology with its organic principle of unity: all other dogmas are subsumed under it and related to it.

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93 Bavinck recognizes and accepts the modern distinction between divine revelation and Scripture. However, as he identifies Scripture as God’s word by describing Inspiration as an “element in revelation” itself. It is …a last act in which the Revelation of God in Christ is concluded for this dispensation. Hence it is in that sense the end, the crown, the making permanent, and the publication of revelation, the means by which immediate revelation is made mediate and recounted in books.” Because of this, Bavinck can affirm that even though God’s acts of revelation in history should be distinguished from Scripture, “Scripture is complete; it is the perfected Word of God.” *RD*, I. 382-4. See also Chapter 4.1, 199-201.

94 *RD*, I. 110-111 (emphasis added).

95 *RD*, I. 94.

96 *RD*, I. 112; *RD*, II. 29.
It is important to note, however, that for Bavinck the knowledge of God in Scripture is Christologically mediated, which is why he identifies Christ as the center of Christianity and the mid-point of dogmatics.\footnote{Bavinck, \textit{RD}, I, 110: Cf. \textit{PR}, 24: “Revelation, while having its center in the person of Christ, in its periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation.”} Keenly aware of and appreciative of the nineteenth-century emphasis on history, Bavinck connects his concept of the knowledge of God with the reality of historically-mediated revelation.\footnote{According to Bavinck, all revelation is mediated. Human begins never receive direct revelation; it is always mediated through creation, history, and human consciousness. He criticized older conceptions of revelation for being too mechanistic. See \textit{RD}, I. chapters 10-12.} Because Christ stands at the organic centre of historical revelation, he is also the mid-point of dogmatics.\footnote{\textit{RD}, III. 274, Cf. \textit{PR}, 24.} Here Bavinck stands within the Christological emphasis of Reformed tradition but develops it in light of the nineteenth century’s emphasis on history. Bavinck also saw Christianity as irreducibly connected to the person and work of Christ, and he wanted to articulate the relationship between the knowledge of God and Christology. As a mid-point, “all other dogmas either prepare for…or are inferred from…” the doctrine of Christ.\footnote{\textit{RD}, III. 274.} The knowledge of God is a knowledge that comes in Christ through faith. Receiving Christ as the centre of scriptural revelation, the thinking mind does not stop there but seeks to understand the origin and goal of Christ’s work. For Bavinck, this leads to knowing the \textit{triune God} (Father, Son, and Spirit).

Here it is especially important to point out two important points in Bavinck. First, for Bavinck, the central dogma of theology arises from its sole source: Scripture (which arises from and is the revelation of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit). Situated within Bavinck’s conception of theology as a science, this link becomes even more evident. Theology starts with the knowledge of God because that is what it receives in revelation,\footnote{Revelation is objectively given and subjectively appropriated.} and revelation has within it its own internal principle of unity, ontologically rooted in God. Theology receives its material principle and central
dogma organically not through mechanical repetition or metaphysical speculation. Second, the knowledge of God which theology describes is trinitarian in nature. It is a knowledge of the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, it is here that Pass suggests Bavinck shifts later in life. Noting Bavinck’s description of Jesus as “the content of the whole of the Christian faith…the central dogma of all truths of salvation, the center from which all rays of the knowledge of God proceed” in *The Sacrifice of Praise* and his statement in “The Essence of Christianity,” that “in Christ…we have the starting point (uitgangspunt) and midpoint of Christianity,” Pass suggests that “Bavinck arrives at a position whereby Christology functions as the central dogma of a dogmatic system.” If this is the case, then there is a significant shift—from theocentric to Christocentric—in Bavinck concerning the central dogma, task, and nature of theology and what it objectively encounters and subjectively appropriates in revelation.

Pass does recognize the difficulties inherent in claiming this shift in Bavinck, one of which is rather significant: Bavinck’s second, revised edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and his shorter, less academic text *Magnalia Dei (Our Reasonable Faith)* both maintain the knowledge of God as the material starting point and central dogma theology, and they were written at the same time or after the aforementioned texts. While Pass does mention Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Magnalia Dei*, he fails to mention that Bavinck reiterates his understanding of the centrality of the Trinity in other works from the same period. One of these is his 1911 rectorial address, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” in which Bavinck describes the Trinity as the Christian dogma par

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102 *RD*, I. 89.
104 Bavinck’s *Sacrifice of Praise* and “The Essence of Christianity” as cited by Pass, “Question of Central Dogma,” 47-6.
106 This is not to say that a theology that begins from a Christological starting point could not be theocentric.
excellence and concludes with a thoroughly trinitarian articulation of God’s reign in the world.\textsuperscript{107} However, Pass maintains that later in life Bavinck shifted his understanding of theology’s central dogma to Christology, even if he did not develop it.

While Pass’s article does contain some excellent insights, his article does not definitively show that Bavinck’s fundamental approach to theology was shifting. Certainly, Pass does highlight that Bavinck uses the term ‘starting point (\textit{uitgangspunt})’ less precisely than he could have. However, in the first instance Pass cites, Bavinck’s statements concerning the centrality of Christ is made in relation to the question of the central dogma of salvation not necessarily the material principle or central dogma of dogmatic theology. One could argue that Christology is the organizing principle or unifying principle of Bavinck’s soteriology, even in the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}. As such, his statements in \textit{A Sacrifice of Praise} are not problematic. More problematic, however, are Bavinck’s comments in “The Essence of Christianity” wherein he identifies Christ as the starting point (\textit{uitgangspunt}) and midpoint of Christianity and articulates what a dogmatic system rooted in Christ as the starting point would require. However, there are a few mitigating aspects that make it possible to assess Bavinck as maintaining his earlier position. First, Bavinck explicitly states that Christ “is neither its [the gospel’s] origin nor its final destination.”\textsuperscript{108} Even when Bavinck makes some provisional comments at the end of this essay concerning “dogmatics that takes its point of departure (\textit{uitgangspunt}) in Christology,” he clearly denotes that it cannot stop at Christology but must “stride from here to the unfolding of the rich content that God has granted to his congregation.

\textsuperscript{107} See Bavinck, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” 103, 107: “For the world is not one in the monistic sense. On the contrary it is infinitely diverse, diverse in creatures, in gifts, in forces, in laws, in operations. In the rich, multifaceted world special revelation occupies a place of honor, for it bears its own character, has an independent content, is ruled by its own law, and forms the basis and content of the Christian religion, which is ruled by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ who sets us free from the law of sin and death. Everything is held together by the almighty, wise and holy, merciful and gracious will of him who is our Father in heaven—in heaven, in order that we may not think of his heavenly majesty in an earthly way, and yet our Father in order that we should trust at all times with childlike fear and reliance on him.”

\textsuperscript{108} Bavinck, “The Essence of Christianity,” 47.
in his Word.”109 Why? Because according to Bavinck “Christianity is no less than the real, supreme work of the triune God, in which the Father reconciles his created but fallen world through the death of his Son and re-creates it through his Spirit into the kingdom of God.”110 The essence of Christianity is not simply Christological; it is theological. Similarly, then, dogmatic theology unfolds the knowledge of the triune God. Certainly, this knowledge is Christologically mediated and grounded in Scripture. But, the nature, task, and central dogma of theology remain irreducibly theocentric in Bavinck.

Second, it is also possible that Bavinck is not actually suggesting that he thinks dogmatic theology should have Christ as its starting point but that those that do cannot stop with Christ but must seek to unfold and work out Christ’s place in relation to the “Divine Being, to creation, to the world, to humanity, to the church, and to all things.”111 Given that Bavinck’s primary focus in this essay is to determine the essence of Christianity in and through conversation with modern theologians like Schleiermacher and Harnack, it is possible that he is trying to show that even those who take a Christological point of departure must unfold its full content.112 If this is the case, then one could identify a shift in Bavinck in terms of softening to the possibility of a Christological starting point, but it would not be a shift in the methodological starting point he articulates and defends in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Theology remains theocentric for Bavinck, especially in his published works up to 1911. For Bavinck, theology has not completed its task until it comes to know the triune God. And thus, any approach that seeks to understand Bavinck’s distinctive

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110 Bavinck, “The Essence of Christianity,” 47.
111 Bavinck, “The Essence of Christianity,” 47.
112 One piece of evidence pointing to this as a possible reading is that in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck’s engagement with nineteenth-century Christological debates immediately precedes his statement that “the doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics.” Furthermore, it is his discussion of nineteenth-century Christological debates that lead him to identify the incarnation as a trinitarian doctrine in the section immediately following his statement about Christ as the mid-point. See *RD*, III. 259-277.
theological works, especially those up to his speech on “Modernism and Orthodoxy” must do so from a distinctly theological lens.

One should note, however, that the question Pass raises concerning a shift does remain open to investigation. Given Bavinck’s statements in “Modernism and Orthodoxy” as well as his thoroughly theocentric development of theology in *Magnalia Dei* and the second edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, however, there is some evidence that a full shift in Bavinck’s thought or systematic approach would be surprising, although not impossible. However, further investigation does need to be done to definitively determine the tenability of Pass’s thesis. What can be said, definitively, however, is that upon further investigation all Bavinck’s published works that deal with theology, including “The Essence of Christianity” and *The Sacrifice of Praise*, indicate the centrality and importance of the doctrine of God.

3.3 Provisional Conclusions

From this brief treatment on Bavinck’s understanding of the material principle, starting point, and central dogma it is possible to make a few more provisional conclusions. First of all, we can see that any hermeneutical framework must be able to account for what Bavinck identifies as the central dogma of theology in his published works: the knowledge of God. If all other dogmas stand in relation to the knowledge of God and are subsumed under it, then Bavinck’s entire systematic theology is functionally the doctrine of God. Reading Bavinck’s systematic theology as his outworking of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity treats Bavinck’s dogmatics as the doctrine of God.

Furthermore, utilizing this framework also allows one to see the way Bavinck connects various theological loci to the doctrine of God. As Bavinck argues, the content of theology arises organically from Scripture and comes with an underlying unity rooted in God. Thus, theology does not rest until it traces the unity of its knowledge. How do creation and redemption connect to the
knowledge of God? How is the church subsumed under the central doctrine of dogmatics? These are questions that the dimensions allow one to explore because they situate Bavinck’s doctrine of God, which is specifically trinitarian, at the center of his entire dogmatic project and seek to understand how the Trinity structures and norms his theology.

Finally, Bavinck’s understanding of Christologically mediated revelation alongside of his insistence that the essence of Christianity is trinitarian points towards the necessity of a hermeneutical framework for reading Bavinck that is trinitarian in nature. This is a condition that the proposed framework fulfills.

4. The Organization of Dogmatic Content

It is now important to briefly examine the link Bavinck draws between theology’s starting point (the knowledge of God) and the ordering of theology’s material content. In our expositions above, we observed that Bavinck opposed the imposition of external systems onto theology. Instead, he argued that theology’s unity is derived from within; theology’s task is to trace the unity that is already present in its object.113 Thus, for Bavinck, the ordering of dogmatic content is not arbitrary. It comes from and is directed by its material starting point.

4.1 The Trinitarian Method

For Bavinck, this means that there are only “two different methods of division that commend themselves” both of which express the content of the Christian faith as “the knowledge of God in his being and in his works.”114 Discussing both methods in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, he labels one method the trinitarian method and links it closely with the type of organization offered in the Apostles’ Creed wherein each person of the Trinity is treated in relation to the works attributed to that person within the divine economy. According to Bavinck, there is much to commend in this

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113 *RD*, I. 44-5, 618.
114 *RD*, I. 111.
method. He writes approvingly: “It commends itself by its purely theological character: God is beginning and end, alpha and omega… all things are from God and unto God…” and it “…guards against a barren uniformity and guarantees life, development, process.” However, Bavinck also criticizes the trinitarian method on three grounds. First, it cannot naturally “accommodate a treatment of the Trinity itself.” There is no natural place to treat the Trinity itself in this method because it methodologically organizes dogmatic content by relating a work within the divine economy to a person of the Trinity. Second, it can perpetuate the idea that God’s actions ad extra are divisible and not the work of one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Finally, because of these two weaknesses, Bavinck claims that this method is prone to metaphysical speculation wherein the dogmatic system is sacrificed to the history of the divine economy. According to Bavinck, this means cosmogony is incorporated into the life of God; theology becomes a record of God becoming God. In other words, a metaphysical scheme is imposed onto theology from without.

4.2 The Theological, Historical-Genetic Method

Given the problems he observes within the trinitarian method, Bavinck offers an alternative, which he calls “an order that is theological and at the same time historical-genetic” and links closely with “other confessions.” In the Reformed Dogmatics, he leaves these ‘other confessions’ unnamed. But, the confessions or (specific) confession that he has in mind is clarified in Magnalia Dei (Our Reasonable Faith) where he identifies the Belgic Confession as the confession that mirrors this method of organization. For Bavinck, this method also takes its departure in God, but it is to be preferred because it “proceeds from God…to his works…in order

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115 RD, I. 111.
117 RD, I. 112.
118 RD, I. 111-12.
119 Our Reasonable Faith, 129. Bavinck describes the confession he has in mind as the Reformed Confession of Faith. This is an obvious reference to the Belgic Confession as it is the confession of faith within the three forms of unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Canons of Dordt).
through them to ascend to and end in him.” In so doing, it clearly distinguishes God and his works while relating all things to God. It is a method of organization that guards against drawing God into the process of history while simultaneously taking the historical character of his works seriously. Bavinck observes an order in the Belgic Confession that begins with God and then traces his works in creation and re-creation. For Bavinck, this method adequately distinguishes between God’s being and his works and allows theology to fulfill its ultimate doxological goal: the glory of God’s name. Thus, because this method guards against the downfalls of the trinitarian method without sacrificing any of its positive aspects, it is the organizational method he utilizes in the Reformed Dogmatics and Magnalia Dei (Our Reasonable Faith).

4.3 Bavinck’s Structural Theology: The Apostles’ Creed or The Belgic Confession

At this point, it is important to note that recent suggestion by James Eglinton in Trinity and Organism that “the structural theology of Reformed Dogmatics (after the Prolegomena) follows the Trinitarian pattern of the Apostles’ Creed,” needs revision. It is easy to confuse Bavinck’s structural trinitarianism as reflecting the Apostles’ Creed because he does adhere to the traditional doctrine of appropriations, and he follows an historical ordering (much like the Apostles’ Creed). However, Bavinck’s structural theology follows a different Trinitarian pattern whereby all things are treated as from God, through God and to God, a type of exitus-reditus structure. Thus, even as Bavinck follows the doctrine of appropriations, he also tries to structure his content to simultaneously affirm and identify that opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt. Both his treatments on creation and the incarnation contain sections identifying these as trinitarian acts. Moreover,

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120 RD, I. 112.
121 RD, I. 112.
122 Eglinton, Trinity and Organism, 206. Notably, Bremmer highlights Bavinck choice of method and appeal to the Belgic Confession. While it is well known that Bavinck uses the historical-genetic method, his appeal to the Belgic Confession is less discussed in Bavinck scholarship. See Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 154-5.
a brief comparison between Bavinck’s systematic theology and the *Belgic Confession*, show remarkable similarity in structure and order, including issues of theological prolegomena.\(^{124}\) While Bavinck’s theology does not exactly follow the Belgic Confession, it would be much more accurate to say that structurally his theology matches the style and organization of the Belgic Confession but expands on it in more thorough and explicitly trinitarian manner.

### 4.4 Provisional Conclusions

Bavinck’s rejection of the trinitarian method of organization means that any theology that seeks to understand the positive (norming and structuring) and negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity within his theology *cannot do so* by appealing to the structure of Apostles’ Creed. Similarly, it must take seriously his description of theology’s content subsuming all things under God while simultaneously distinguishing between God’s being and his works. It is here that one can observe the fittingness of reading Bavinck’s theology as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. First, it maintains and prioritizes a treatment of the being of God (the ontological). Second, it explores how he develops and connects the works of God (cosmological and soteriological) to his being without collapsing them into his being. Third, it treats all of his theology as knowledge of the triune God. The works of creation and salvation are approached through a truly trinitarian lens. The cosmological and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity are dimensions of the one, *triune* God. Utilizing them means that this framework can adequately articulate Bavinck’s treatment of the doctrine of

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\(^{124}\) A full examination of the similarities and differences are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, one significant difference is notable in that the first article of the Belgic Confession is about God. Bavinck’s dogmatics begin with his discussion of the nature and task of dogmatics as well as long treatment of epistemological concerns. However, it is clear that Bavinck sees these issues of theological prolegomena as a part of his dogmatics. They are not pre-dogmatic nor proto-dogmatic (see *RD*, I. 109). The reality of God underlies and informs issues of prolegomena; they too are dogmatic. Furthermore, as Belgic Confession deals with the means by which we know God in Articles 2-7 prior to its treatment of the Trinity (Articles 8-11), Bavinck’s ordering does follow this logic. Furthermore, the Belgic Confession’s approach of articulating epistemological issues and the doctrine of God proper before moving onto God’s action in the divine economy is one that Bavinck echoes in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Magnalia Dei*. 
appropriations as well as the unity of the divine works ad extra, and it can give a true account of the trinitarian structure of his theology.

5. Ontological, Cosmological, & Soteriological: Bavinck’s Trinitarian Theology

Having identified how the framework proposed by this thesis fits Bavinck’s own articulation of the nature and task of theology, an examination of Bavinck’s locus on the doctrine of the Trinity not only shows the fittingness of this thesis but also reveals how it matches the inner logic of Bavinck’s thought. In his section on the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck clearly identifies the positive (structuring, norming) role and the negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity. And, as he does, it is possible to see how Bavinck’s dogmatics can be read as his outworking of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity.

5.1 Bavinck and the Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

First, Bavinck highlights the negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity as he traces the historical development of the doctrine. According to Bavinck, the early church developed its trinitarian doctrine in response to two (persistent) schools of thought: Arianism and Sabellianism. Similar to his epistemological typology, Bavinck presents a typology whereby all opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity can be categorized as either Arian or Sabellian. According to Bavinck, both schools of opposition seek to secure divine unity but in diametrically opposite ways. Arianism seeks to maintain divine unity by affirming the divinity of the Father and denying the full divinity and equality of the Son with the Father. And, as it does, Bavinck sees Arianism as making Christ's mediatorial role as creator and saviour ontologically determinative of the Father-Son relationship. The effect is to deny the full immanence of God in the world because the distance
between God (the Father) “and the world is infinite.”\textsuperscript{125} Against Arianism, then, the early church’s doctrine of the Trinity maintained the substantial unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity apart from creation.\textsuperscript{126} According to Bavinck, this freed the doctrine of the Trinity from cosmological and soteriological speculation whereby Christ is a mediator between God and the world but not equal with the Father.\textsuperscript{127}

While Arianism seeks to maintain divine unity by denying the substantial unity of the Father and the Son, Sabellianism attempts to secure divine oneness by absorbing the Son and Spirit into the divine being such “that all distinctions among the three persons melt away.”\textsuperscript{128} As it does so, Bavinck claims, it simultaneously opens the door for tri-theism because “when these personal properties are denied, the three persons are separated from one another, and tritheism makes its appearance.”\textsuperscript{129} Against Sabellianism, the early church's doctrine of the Trinity maintained the personal distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit, denying that the persons were the result of an inter-divine process of emanation that progressively manifested itself within the divine being and creation.\textsuperscript{130} The effect, for Bavinck, is that God’s cosmological and soteriological actions were no longer seen as determinative of the divine being. God’s actions in creation and redemption are not a part of a cosmogenic process. Furthermore, it guarded against tri-theism. The early church’s key insight was to free the divine being from being determined by its actions in the divine economy without removing divine action in creation and redemption.

\textsuperscript{125} RD, II. 291.
\textsuperscript{126} Bavinck observes modern forms of Arianism in the post-Enlightenment Deist conceptions of the divine, especially in Ritschl and Kant. See RD, II. 291.
\textsuperscript{127} RD, II. 292.
\textsuperscript{128} RD, II. 292.
\textsuperscript{129} RD, II. 292. For Bavinck, Sabellianism does not always result in tri-theism. While Bavinck certainly opposes tri-theism, he is much more concerned with what he identifies as modalistic Monarchianism. According to Bavinck, modalistic Monarchianism is a form of Sabellianism wherein the three persons are modes of self-revelation of the same being. This can lead to tri-theism if the modes are detached from one another and are each given a consciousness and will of their own. However, Bavinck does not often engage with those whom he describes as full-blown tri-theists but those espouse a type of modalistic Monarchianism.
\textsuperscript{130} According to Bavinck, Hegel, Schelling, Böhme, Zinzendorf, and Swedenborg were all contemporary Sabellians. There are also, according to Bavinck, pantheists. See RD, II. 292-296.
Within his *locus* on the Trinity, Bavinck identifies and utilizes the dimensions within his section on the doctrine’s historical development as a tool to specifically evaluate Tertullian's contribution.\(^{131}\) However, expanded to his whole section on historical development, Bavinck's identification of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions can be seen as a summary of the key insight of the early church: it freed the doctrine of the Trinity from philosophical and metaphysical speculation. According to Bavinck, the early church did this by freeing the divine being from being determined by its actions in creation and redemption. Creation and redemption were considered self-revelatory manifestations of God, not a necessary part of his cosmogenic process.

In sum, although only mentioned in relation to Tertullian, Bavinck clearly sees the proper distinction between the ontological, cosmological and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity as the key to maintaining a scriptural doctrine amidst Arian and Sabellian alternatives. The crucial development of the first four centuries of dogmatic reflection was to free the Trinity from philosophical speculation related to the divine being by establishing the fullness of God's eternal life in such a way that his actions in creation and salvation were not determinative of his being but manifestations of who he was from all eternity.\(^{132}\)

The distinction between the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological, also demonstrates the apologetic role of the doctrine of the Trinity. The distinctions guard against certain philosophical and theological articulations of the divine being. However, this apologetic role also points to the positive and norming role of the doctrine of the Trinity. For Bavinck, as the early church freed the doctrine of the Trinity from philosophical speculation, it also carefully endorsed the use of extra-biblical, philosophical terminology in doctrinal formulation and

\(^{131}\) *RD*, II, 284.  
\(^{132}\) *RD*, II. 318-9.
articulated the positive relationship between God, creation, and redemption. There is nothing contradictory, according to Bavinck, in using philosophical terminology and concepts while rejecting certain metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions. Thus, while the doctrine of the Trinity guards against the adoption of any philosophical presuppositions that collapse the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions, it also guides the use of philosophy’s tools and concepts for theological development.\footnote{RD, II. 296-298.}

Thus, following the early church, Bavinck affirms the usefulness of philosophy, ancient and modern.\footnote{RD. I. 607-610, 616-621.} According to Bavinck, one could not reject post-Enlightenment philosophy and theology without serious engagement nor dismiss its helpful concepts and tools.\footnote{See RD, I. 608-609. Cf. Bavinck, “Eene belangrijke apologie,” 144: “Wel staat het Christendom tegenover al die nieuwere stelsels van wijsbegeerte niet uitsluitend negatief; het erkent integendeel gaarne en ten volle de elementen van waarheid, die ook in die systemen aanwezig zijn.” (Christianity, however, is not purely negative towards all newer systems of philosophy; on the contrary, it readily and fully recognizes the elements of truth, that are also present in those systems.)} However, one could not incorporate any philosophical presuppositions that reiterated Arianism or Sabellianism. Against these, the early church’s distinctions and definitions must be maintained if a truly Christian conception of God is to be developed in modernity. For Bavinck, this did not mean forsaking genuine insights garnered within modern conceptions of God. Just as the early church utilized philosophical terminology, modern theologians must be willing to adopt and augment the conceptual apparatus, insights and terms of post-Enlightenment philosophy in order to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against misunderstanding and opposition as well as positively expressing the truth of the doctrine.\footnote{RD II. 296.} And, in doing so, one should never dismiss the early church’s basic trinitarian insight that freed God from cosmic speculation thereby confirming the one, triune God’s action in creation and salvation but excluding that action from attributing becoming to the divine being.
In sum, while Bavinck only mentions the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity in passing while describing Tertullian's contribution to the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, the dimensions play a limiting role in guarding against the trinitarian errors of Arianism and Sabellianism and they guide the utilization of philosophical concepts and constructs.

5.2 The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity

While a crucial element of Bavinck’s treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, the limiting role of the dimensions in guarding against theological error, is accompanied by a statement of the doctrine’s positive role in the formulation of Christian doctrine. Concluding his chapter, Bavinck sets forth the constructive role of the doctrine of the Trinity in which he implicitly appeals to the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is here that one can observe the outworking of the dimensions within the material content of his dogmatics.

According to Bavinck, the primary significance of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it “makes God known to us as the truly living God.” Because “only by the Trinity do we begin to understand that God as he is in himself—hence also, apart from the world—is the independent, eternal, omniscient, and all-benevolent One, love, holiness, and glory.” Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity establishes the fullness of the divine life apart from the world. This is the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity for Bavinck. Aligning his treatment with historical descriptions of the ontological or immanent Trinity, Bavinck denies this doctrine as depicting an abstract and lifeless God apart from the world. Instead, appealing to his earlier descriptions of Arianism and Sabellianism, Bavinck identifies the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as the only

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137 RD, II. 331.
138 RD, II. 331.
139 Bavinck describes God as living and active. See RD, II. 176-177.
option that does not diminish some aspect of the divine being by sinking one or two persons “to the level of creatures.”

The ontological dimension of the Trinity, a full description of the divine life, including a treatment of the attributes, essence, and persons of the Trinity, is one that resists making divine temporal action in the world constitutive of the divine being. For Bavinck, this is essential because the ontological dimension establishes the ontological foundation for triune action in the world. Thus, the ontological dimension, while affirming the fullness of God’s divine life apart from the world does not abstract God from the world but grounds his movements ad extra. According to Bavinck: “The diversity of the subjects who act side by side in divine revelation, in creation and re-creation, arises from the diversity that exists among the three persons in the divine being. There could be no distinction ad extra in the unity of the divine being, if there were no distinction ad intra.” Thus, a primary task for theology is to establish the ontological dimension of the divine life, defining and describing the unity and distinction of the divine being. This, for Bavinck, is not done through rationalistic a priori speculation on the divine being, which he identifies as the methodological approach of Arianism and Sabellianism, but through a posteriori reflection on Scripture utilizing believing reason from within the community of faith.

While the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity properly maintains God’s divinity, Bavinck’s second point emphasizes the relationship of God to his non-divine creation. He writes: “Second, the doctrine of the Trinity is of the greatest importance for the doctrine of creation. The latter alone can be maintained only on the basis of the confession triune God. It alone makes possible—against Deism on the one hand—the connection between God and the world,

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140 RD, II. 332.
141 Epistemologically, God’s divine life is known through revelation, and therefore the human knowledge of the divine life is limited, finite, and always analogical. However, for Bavinck, it is the ontological trinity that is the ground of divine economic action. God’s action in the divine economy is the epistemological ground by which the ontological is known.
142 RD, II. 332.
and—against pantheism on the other—the difference between God and the world…The dogma of the Trinity…tells us that God can reveal himself in an absolute sense to the Son and the Spirit, and hence, in a relative sense also to the world.” Here, Bavinck explicitly describes the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity and in so doing indicates his definition of the cosmological dimension of the doctrine. Rooted in the ontological dimension, the cosmological dimension is the description of God’s movement into the divine economy whereby he reveals himself in a relative sense to the world. In creation, the divine persons freely reveal themselves relatively to the world echoing their absolute communication within the divine life. Rooting his perspective historically, Bavinck appeals to Augustine in support: “For, as Augustine teaches us, the self-communication that takes place within the divine being is archetypal for God’s work in creation.” In the one act of creation, the Father, Son, and Spirit, are attributed works within creation that reflect or echo their relations in the divine life.

For Bavinck, the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity is a creational ontology that is neither devoid of the divine (Deism) nor divinized (pantheism). The cosmological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity articulates the relationship between the immanent acts of God, "which make possible his outward works of creation and revelation" and his outward actions. This includes, again drawing on Augustine, examining the particular role of each person of the Trinity in the one work of creation, not so as to develop a threefold cause of creation but to fully examine the trinitarian lines of creational reality, which Bavinck ultimately describes utilizing the organic motif.

Finally, Bavinck concludes by highlighting the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian religion. “Our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with

143 RD, II. 332.
144 RD, II. 333.
145 RD, II. 333.
the doctrine of the Trinity…” The doctrine of the Trinity, for Bavinck, ultimately has soteriological significance. The work of the triune God is the foundation of Christianity itself: “From God, through God, and in God are all things. Re-creation is one divine work from beginning to end, yet it can be described in terms of three agents.” The soteriological dimension is the most significant because it is the foundation of Christianity itself. Resting on the ontological and cosmological dimensions, the soteriological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity is the articulation of the divine work of re-creation and redemption. Again, not to be read as constitutive of the divine being, the triune God’s action in redemption is grounded, ontologically, in the being of God. Thus, the soteriological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity explicates how the same God who created the world works for its redemption.

According to Bavinck, affirming dimensions within the doctrine should not bifurcate the divine being from his action in the world nor create a wedge between creation and redemption but should “uncover and preserve the connectedness between nature and grace, between creation and re-creation.” As he unpacks the positive significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for dogmatics, Bavinck argues that akin to the unity in diversity of the Godhead, the unity in diversity of the dimensions properly ground the connectedness of divine action in the world while affirming the diverse ways that God works. Significantly, his identification of the dimensions of the Trinity within the historical development of the doctrine is implicitly evident in his examination of the doctrine's importance. The ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of Trinity are diverse dimensions of the one doctrine of the knowledge of the triune God. Theology's task is to unpack these dimensions and trace their unity. While unified, the blurring or collapsing of these dimensions diminish the doctrine, producing a deficient doctrine of the Trinity, resulting in an

146 RD, II. 334.
147 RD, II. 334.
148 RD, II. 330.
inadequately trinitarian theology, and ultimately leading to a deficiently Christian worldview. Thus, the dimensions serve a negative role, guiding apologetic engagement with alternative formulations, but they also serve a positive role, granting a framework within which to articulate the triune God's being and actions in and for the world.

Before moving onto this chapter’s conclusions, it is important to note and differentiate the way that this chapter develops and treats Bavinck’s articulation of the historical development of the doctrine and dogmatic importance of the doctrine from Bremmer’s treatment. Why Bremmer? As previously noted in this chapter, the trinitarian nature of Bavinck’s theology has been recognized by almost every interpreter of Bavinck, but these interpreters usually focus on the economic action of the Trinity and investigations of Bavinck’s treatment of the historical development of the doctrine remain scant. Bremmer, however, does engage Bavinck’s treatment of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity and he is one of the few—if not only—interpreters that highlights Bavinck’s identification of doctrinal importance of the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of his locus De Deo Trino in his work Bavinck als dogmaticus. Thus, it is important to differentiate the insights of this thesis from Bremmer’s work.

First, like this thesis, Bremmer points out the pivotal role that Bavinck gives to Tertullian in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Citing a passage from Bavinck, Bremmer highlights how Bavinck praises Tertullian for freeing the doctrine of the Trinity from cosmological speculation by replacing Logos speculation with the doctrine of filiation. In pointing out the centrality of Tertullian in Bavinck’s account, Bremmer is certainly correct. However, he does not continue his engagement with Bavinck’s treatment of Tertullian beyond this point. Thus, Bremmer

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149 This is generally but not always the case.
150 Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 198.
151 Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 196-7: “In de historische ontwikkeling van het dogma komen drie mannen naar voren, die ieder een belangrijke bijdrage tot de opbouw ervan hebben geleverd. Irenaeus… Tertullianus… Origenes…”
152 Bremmer, Bavinck als dogmaticus, 197.
does not point out Bavinck’s critical engagement with Tertullian using the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, this thesis differentiates itself from Bremmer by identifying Bavinck’s treatment and engagement with Tertullian not drawn out by Bremmer.153

Second, because Bremmer does not continue his engagement with Bavinck’s account of Tertullian, he does not connect Bavinck’s statement concerning the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions with the three-fold use of the doctrine of the Trinity for dogmatics at the end of Bavinck’s locus *De Deo Trino*. Thus, even though Bremmer identifies the way Bavinck closes his locus, this thesis makes a unique contribution by connecting the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions with the way Bavinck closes his treatment of the Trinity in both the *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Magnalia Dei*. Alongside articulating Bavinck’s definition of dogmatics as a science whose object determines its content, method, and organization, this introductory chapter argued for the validity of the dimensions by connecting them to the three-fold dogmatic importance of the Trinity that Bavinck identifies at the end of his locus *De Deo Trino*. Thus, while this thesis notices the same element within Bavinck’s dogmatic theology, it makes use of it to different ends and, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters, investigates it more fully.

Furthermore, one of the benefits of utilizing the dimensions as a lens is their capacity to show how previous treatments of Bavinck that identified the trinitarian nature of specific doctrines can be drawn into a larger unified whole. Thus, while this thesis focuses on exposition and engages secondary scholarship primarily in the footnotes in Chapters 2-4, it does so with the intent that previous treatments of Bavinck can be situated within a larger whole. This does not mean that

153 It should be noted that Cornelius VanTil does cite Bavinck on this point, but he also does not examine it as fully as he could have. He also develops Bavinck’s engagement in this section in a thoroughly apologetic (negative manner). See VanTil, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 355.
every interpretation of Bavinck is correct or immune from critique, especially with regard to those treatments that adhere to the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis. However, it does mean that when there are overlaps or similarities between the observation of this thesis and others, one should always look to seeing how they are being situated within the broader framework of the dimensions. Therefore, as Bremmer and others like Eglinton, Bolt, Mattson, Brock, Sutanto, and others point to the importance of the Trinity within Bavinck and identify various aspects of his theological vision, this thesis seeks to build on what is good and true in those interpretations and situate them within the broader framework of the dimensions.

6. Conclusions

This chapter has shown the fittingness of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological framework. By examining Bavinck’s definition of dogmatics as the science whose object determines its content, method, and organization as well as Bavinck’s identification of the knowledge of God as the central dogma of his theology, this chapter showed how the doctrine of God functions at the centre of Bavinck’s theological project. As the doctrine that all other doctrines are related to and subsumed under, reading Bavinck’s entire systematic project as an outworking of the doctrine of the Trinity is fitting. Furthermore, as this chapter identified how essential systematic unity was for Bavinck, it pointed towards how the hermeneutical framework of this thesis is a way to trace the unity of Bavinck’s systematic project. One could argue, then, that this thesis not only utilizes Bavinck’s own identification of the dimensions as a means to read him but also applies his scientific approach. Using the dimensions, this thesis thinks Bavinck’s thoughts after him and seeks to trace their unity. In sum, the dimensions are fitting to the way Bavinck describes the nature and task of theology. Moving from issues of theological prolegomena to Bavinck’s locus on the doctrine of the Trinity, this chapter showed how the dimensions are not only fitting to Bavinck’s description of the nature and task of theology but also apply to his
development of its content. This chapter examined how Bavinck’s locus on the Trinity gives a clear indication that Bavinck’s systematic project can be understood as the unpacking of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. The whole of his systematic theology is the doctrine of God from beginning to end, examined in its different dimensions.
Chapter 2: The Ontological Dimension

The Truly Living, Absolutely Personal, Triune God

1. Introduction

Having defended the fittingness and validity of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological framework in Chapter 1, it is now possible to turn to unpack Bavinck’s development of each dimension (Chapters 2-4). However, as we move into these chapters, it is important to acknowledge the complexities and temptations inherent in identifying, presenting, and analyzing each dimension and their relationships to one another. First, if all theology is functionally and structurally the doctrine of God in Bavinck, then the scope of the dimensions is nothing less than the sum total of his entire theology, including every major and minor point of doctrine. As such, a complete and comprehensive treatment of Bavinck’s use and development of the dimensions would be equal to an analysis of his entire dogmatic theology wherein he considers all things ‘in light of God, subsumes everything under him, and traces back everything to him as a starting point.’

Thus, there is an inherent complexity in seeking to identify and define the dimensions, namely, because every part of his dogmatics can be considered legitimate source material. Second, as the scope of the dimensions extends to Bavinck’s entire dogmatic project, it could be easy to succumb to the temptation to lapse into mere reproduction or parroting of Bavinck’s systematics wherein the fecundity of the doctrine of the Trinity and internal coherency of his systematic project are lost in a sea of exposition. The goal of this thesis, however, is not an exhaustive retelling or parroting of Bavinck’s systematic project but the presentation of a creative and constructive approach to his systematic theology that not only identifies the truly trinitarian nature of Bavinck’s theology and highlights the fecundity of the doctrine of God, but also provides a unified

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1 Paraphrase of RD, II. 29: “All things are considered in light of God, subsumed under him, traced back to him as the starting point.”
hermeneutical framework for future readings of Bavinck. Thus, Chapters 2-4 do not utilize every aspect of Bavinck’s systematic project nor do they touch on every instance of the fecundity of the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, each chapter seeks to present the vital aspects of each dimension as well as examine the relationship between the dimensions. As Chapters 2-4 define and present vital aspects of each dimension, they will not only identify Bavinck’s theology as trinitarian but also illuminate how Bavinck reprioritizes the doctrine of the Trinity.

To do this, each chapter will use Bavinck’s articulation of the constructive role of the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of his *De Deo Trino* as a starting point for our examination. As we identified in Chapter 1, Bavinck implicitly appeals to and starts to define the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions at the close of his development of the doctrine of the Trinity. From this starting point, each chapter will present a close conceptual analysis rooted primarily in the *Reformed Dogmatics* to identify how Bavinck develops and relates each dimension. This will allow each chapter to root itself within Bavinck’s own analysis as well as focus on the key systematic importance of each dimension while avoiding the many of the complexities and temptations inherent in identifying and articulating the dimensions.

This chapter focuses on the ontological dimension. As we identified in our examination of Bavinck’s understanding of the constructive role of the doctrine in the previous chapter, the doctrine of the Trinity in its ontological dimension is that which “makes God known to us as the truly living God.” According to Bavinck, it establishes the fullness of the divine life *ad intra*, and it only arises when the doctrine of the Trinity is correctly freed from cosmological and soteriological speculation. The ontological dimension, then, considers God in himself. The dogmatic importance of the ontological dimension is that it establishes a clear, essential,
ontological distinction between God’s life and the world while simultaneously grounding the possibility (but not necessity) of God’s movement to the world *ad extra.*

Taking this as our basic definition, this chapter explores Bavinck’s doctrine of God proper in order to reveal Bavinck’s systematic development of God as the triune God who has a “blessed life of his own” apart from the world. To do so, this chapter will focus on a few aspects of Bavinck’s doctrine of God. First, it will examine a previously underexplored yet important aspect of Bavinck’s doctrine of God: Bavinck’s systematic reconciliation of divine absoluteness and personality. Bavinck’s creative appropriation of the nineteenth-century concepts of absoluteness and personality in his locus *de Deo* not only informs his articulation of the divine attributes and provides a theological grammar within his doctrine of the Trinity, but it also provides a window into Bavinck’s development and understanding of the ontological dimension of the Trinity.

Second, this chapter will briefly present two key elements within Bavinck’s trinitarian metaphysics: the communicability of the divine essence and divine unity-in-diversity. Importantly for this thesis, these aspects within Bavinck’s doctrine of God will allow Bavinck’s trinitarian line of thinking to become more evident, making it possible not only to define the ontological

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4 See *RD*, II. 331.
5 *RD*, II. 331.
6 While absoluteness and personality are concepts Bavinck utilizes throughout his doctrine of God, his treatment of them remains an underexplored theme in Bavinck’s doctrine of God. While there are many avenues that remain unexplored in Bavinck’s doctrine of God, it is surprising that his treatment of absoluteness and personality has been so neglected. This is especially the case given Bavinck’s somewhat surprising description of the divine as absolute divine personality. In a redacted version of Nathaniel Gray Sutanto’s dissertation, he notes: “If there is a potential and modest point of uniqueness in Bavinck’s treatment of theology proper (outside of the organic motif and characterization of reality in light of God’s triune being), it is Bavinck’s predication of the divine being as the ‘absolute personality’ in response to modern theology’s emphasis on the psychological depth that attends talks of personality.” Given that this could be a point of uniqueness, it is worth exploring in order to understand the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity. Besides Sutanto, one other writer has mentioned Bavinck’s treatment of absoluteness and personality in a significant way: Henry Jansen. In his book, *Relationality and the Concept of God*, Jansen notes that Bavinck talks about God “as Absolute and as personal.” He goes on to claim that Bavinck is never really able to reconcile these two concepts. One of the arguments that will be put forward in this chapter is that Bavinck does reconcile the two concepts but does so in a way that does not collapse them into one another. See Sutanto, “Organic Knowing,” 45 and Jansen, *Relationality and the Concept of God*, 48.
dimension more specifically but also to identify its shape, structure, and function (positive and negative) in Bavinck’s dogmatics.

2. Bavinck’s Reconciliation of Absoluteness and Personality

2.1 Absolute Personality in Context

Just like attentiveness to epistemological issues demonstrates Bavinck’s post-Kantian context, his engagement with issues of divine absoluteness and personality show his keen awareness of pressing nineteenth-century theological and philosophical issues. Within nineteenth-century theology and philosophy, a significant debate concerning the relationship between divine absoluteness and personality had arisen. Rooted in several complex developments reaching back to Descartes’s utilization of the idea of infinity in the human mind to argue for the existence of God, philosophical treatments of the divine had increasingly conceptualized God as Absolute and Infinite in contrast to that which is conditioned, finite and limited. Coinciding with this, philosophical and psychological conceptions of personhood and personality shifted such that personality was seen as a mode of finite existence, simultaneously including notions of self-consciousness, self-determination, and dependence. Given these developments, the relationship between divine absoluteness and personality within philosophical conceptions of God became increasingly strained, especially following J.G. Fichte’s argument that absoluteness and

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7 See Chapter 1.
8 For an excellent treatment of how this debate impacted the development of the doctrine of God in nineteenth-century German theology see Samuel M. Powell, The Trinity in German Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Chapter 5 “Liberal Theology.”
personality were ultimately irreconcilable. According to Fichte, since the absolute is the unconditioned source of all that exists and all determination is a type of negation and limitation, personhood is incompatible with absoluteness. In sum, ascribing personality to the absolute would indicate a condition or limitation and deny absoluteness. Recognizing the ontic and noetic implications of Fichte’s dichotomy between absoluteness and personality, theologians and philosophers following him urgently sought to find a conceptually defensible relationship between the two.

Within this theological and philosophical matrix, Bavinck systematically reconciles divine absoluteness and personality by appealing to the theological tradition and attending to the noetic and ontic issues inherent within the contemporary debate. Opening his doctrine of God in the *Reformed Dogmatics* with an extended treatment on ‘Knowing God,’ Bavinck begins his reconciliation of divine absoluteness and personality epistemologically. However, his systematic reconciliation of the two continues throughout his locus *de Deo* and attends to the ontic issues he perceived within the contemporary debates as well. While his specific treatment and engagement with the debate occur within particular sections, the systematic conclusions he draws undergirds his positive development of the divine essence, attributes, and persons.

### 2.2 Scriptural Logic, Theology, and Divine Absoluteness and Personality

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13 Philip Clayton, in his book *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*, describes the impact of Fichte’s as serious and pervasive: “Let me put it bluntly: after Fichte it can no longer be presupposed that the traditional philosophical/theological doctrine of an infinite personal God represents a defensible conceptual position. (Of course, that there are difficulties with the idea of an infinite personal God does not prove that no solution can ever be found.)” Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 447. Emphasis original.

14 The second volume of the *Reformed Dogmatics* is separated into six parts. The first part is ‘Knowing God.’

15 For Bavinck epistemology and metaphysics were inextricably linked together because they could not be abstracted from one’s view of the world. See PR, 70: “God, the world, and humanity are the three realities with which all science and all philosophy occupy themselves. The concept 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 (wereld-en-levensbeschouwing), the content of our religion, science and morality.”
Bavinck’s begins his locus de Deo with a two-fold epistemological affirmation that he roots in Scripture: God is incomprehensible yet knowable. According to Bavinck, Scripture attests to the distance between God and creation and affirms the mysterious and ineffable nature of God, but “it nevertheless sets forth a doctrine of God that upholds his knowability.” Scripture does not seek to prove God’s existence, “but simply presupposes it.” It presents God as “a personal being, self-existent, with a life, consciousness, and will of his own, not confined to nature but highly exalted above it, the Creator of heaven and earth” who can and does “manifest himself” on earth, is personally involved in creation, reveals himself, and can be truly known. God is transcendent and immanent. He is an ineffable, incomprehensible, “adorable mystery,” but he is knowable. After affirming this duality and tracing it through Scripture, Bavinck makes a striking claim. Translated into modern theological grammar, the duality present in Scripture is nothing less than God’s absoluteness and personality. For Bavinck then, reconciling divine absoluteness and personality is no mere intellectual exercise instigated by contemporary philosophical debate, but it is necessary and possible because Scripture itself testifies to the reality of divine absoluteness and personality. Therefore, to leave the two rent asunder would have devastating results not only for theology but for Christian life and practice.

2.3 Absoluteness and Personality Rent Asunder

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16 RD, II. 30.
17 RD, II. 30.
18 RD, II. 30.
19 RD, II. 49. Mystery is an important motif in Bavinck’s work. As Bruce R. Pass’s recent article has pointed out, Bavinck utilizes mystery throughout his corpus in three different ways. First, utilizing the NT sense of the term, Bavinck often defines mystery as that which was hidden by God but now made known to believers. Thus, something mysterious is that which was previously hidden but has now been made known. Second, Bavinck uses the term mystery to denote things that are presently unknown. Bavinck uses this sense to highlight the limits of scientific knowledge. Third, he uses mystery to denote that which can be apprehended by human reason but remain indemonstrable to human reason. As Pass articulates, these three uses of reason are important and prominent in Bavinck’s treatment and are fitting to the epistemological treatment of divine absoluteness and personality found in this chapter. See Bruce R. Pass, “Revelation and Reason in Herman Bavinck,” in Westminster Theological Journal 80 (2018): 250-51.
20 RD, II. 34.
21 RD, II. 47.
In fact, for Bavinck, scriptural revelation is the only thing that can hold the two (absoluteness in personality) together. Outside of scriptural revelation, the unity of divine absoluteness and personality cannot be maintained. Thus, the contemporary debate for Bavinck is not novel but a new manifestation of an enduring problem wherein the divine is conceived of as either Absolute, direct knowledge of whom is unattainable, or the divine is made personal, knowledge of whom is equated with human cognition or self-consciousness. God is either conceived of as Absolute and unconscious but not personal or personal and self-conscious but not absolute. One leads to agnosticism concerning the divine, and the other leads to rationalism. According to Bavinck, these are not just noetic positions but rest in certain ontological commitments that have religious implications. Assessing them, Bavinck identifies each position as the outworking of either deism or pantheism. To assume that God is unknowable is to simultaneously claim that the world is devoid of the divine (Deism), and to assume that God is nothing more than an enlarged human person is to claim that the world is divinized (pantheism).

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22 RD, II. 34: “The moment we step outside the domain of this special revelation in Scripture, we find that in all religious and philosophical systems the unity of the personality and absoluteness of God is broken.”

23 Bavinck describes pantheism and deism as two different sides of the same monistic coin. As he writes: “…there are only two options available here: either one explains matter from mind or mind from matter. Pantheism and materialism (Deism) are not pure opposites; rather, they are two sides of the same coin; they constantly merge into each other and only differ in that they address the same problem from opposite directions. Thus, both run into the same objections.”

24 RD, II. 34-35. Bavinck somewhat surprisingly engages Islam and Buddhism in this section. While he does often mention religion and trace alternative conceptions of various doctrines, he has often been criticized for failing to engage seriously with other religious. On many occasions, this critique is warranted, especially with regard to Bavinck’s development of worldview and epistemological typologies. However, this is a rare and delightful example of his knowledge of and engagement with other religious traditions. See Mattson, Restored to Our Destiny, 43.

25 There is an overlap here between Bavinck’s assessment of divine absoluteness and personality and his later discussion on Arianism and Sabellianism. Fitting with his assessment that every error in doctrine is at its core an error in the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck’s articulation of the inability to reconcile divine absoluteness and personality bears striking similarities to his assessment of Arian and Sabellian approaches to the Trinity. See RD, II. 291-296.

26 Bavinck’s use of the pantheism needs to be nuanced. Occasionally, he will use pantheism to refer to understandings of the world in which there is no differentiation between God and the world. However, he also uses the term pantheism to describe to what is more commonly referred to now as panentheism wherein God and the world are distinct but are part of one, God-world complex. Bavinck will often categorize panentheistic theologians and philosophers as fundamentally agnostic with regard to the divine. What he is not doing in these cases is arguing that they represent deistic philosophical conceptions. He is, however, trying to show how agnosticism collapses into and often ends up articulating a pantheistic or, in modern terms, panentheistic view of God and the world. For a more thorough treatment and definition of various types of panentheism see John Cooper, Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).
However, even though Bavinck sees agnosticism and rationalism as the noetic correlates of deism and pantheism, he is quick to point out that they are really two sides of the same coin. Neither can maintain immanence and transcendence, divine incomprehensibility and knowability, absoluteness and personality. And, because neither can hold together what Scripture presents as unified, they constantly merge and collapse into one another. Bavinck is particularly interested in the way agnosticism collapses into and ends up “justifying a pantheistic God-concept.”

In making the world mundane, agnosticism quickly tries to re-divinize the world by claiming that symbolic or representational knowledge of the Absolute is possible. However, it still denies personal consciousness and purposive intent to the Absolute. The absolute remains unknown, incapable of revelation, even as it turns to a fairly well-defined God-concept. Thinly veiled here is Bavinck’s criticism of approaches that deny objective knowledge of the divine and treat theology’s knowledge as merely symbolic. As agnosticism and rationalism, deism and pantheism develop and merge together in the history of philosophy and religion, they present God as either a “cold abstraction that freezes religion and destroys the religion of the heart,” or as “is nothing but an enlarged version of a human person.”

2.4 Truth admixed with Errors: Philosophical Treatments of Personality and Absoluteness

Although philosophy and religion rend asunder what Scripture holds together, Bavinck does not simply discard them. Ever the irenic theologian and seeking to engage with the issues facing God-concepts in modernity thoroughly, Bavinck aims to affirm the truths inherent in agnosticism

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27 RD, II. 52.
28 RD, II. 52. It is clear throughout this section that Bavinck is far less concerned with the traditional, modernist deists like Descartes, Locke, and Hume. He is much more concerned with the late-modern agnosticism of the Absolute that still claimed to have arrived at some type of God-concept. In this concern, Bavinck is in accord with Kuyper. See Abraham Kuyper, Pantheism’s Destruction of Boundaries, trans. J. Hendrick de Vries (n.p.: 1893).
29 RD, II. 47.
and rationalism, deism and pantheism while simultaneously identifying and rejecting their errors.\textsuperscript{30}

First, and most strikingly, given his concern with agnostic conceptions of God, Bavinck appreciates the return of philosophical agnosticism in Kant and Fichte as a helpful corrective to overly rationalistic theological discourse.\textsuperscript{31} Why? Because Bavinck affirms that God, the Absolute, is incomprehensible. Theology that is faithful to Scripture cannot abandon the incomprehensibility of God. Thus, Bavinck actually lauds the return of epistemological agnosticism through Kant's subjective examination of the limitations of the human faculty of knowledge for reminding theology of its epistemic limits.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, he agrees with Kant that human cognition is bound to human experience.

However, while appreciative, Bavinck not only develops his epistemology differently than Kant but also rejects the pernicious ideas that accompanied Kant's epistemological corrective: God, or the Absolute, “is not accessible to human knowledge,” not even analogically and anthropomorphically.\textsuperscript{33} If God only serves as a regulative idea, as a postulate of moral reason (Kant),\textsuperscript{34} or if the Absolute unconditioned totality of all conditions can only be reflected in symbols and images, not as an object of knowledge but as “the content of the feeling of absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher),\textsuperscript{35} then God becomes abstract and impersonal.\textsuperscript{36} God is not merely incomprehensible; he is unknowable. The Absolute (or God) is impersonal and unconscious. Even if philosophy is seen as capable of knowing the Absolute through stripping religious representation of its symbolism (Hegel),\textsuperscript{37} it still seeks to arrive at a God-concept by stripping the divine of the

\textsuperscript{30} Language taken from \textit{RD}, II. 331.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{RD}, II. 41.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{RD}, II. 43. Cf. \textit{PR}, 166.
\textsuperscript{34} Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 103ff.
\textsuperscript{35} Friedrich Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian faith} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), §4, 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Throughout his \textit{Prolegomena}, Bavinck opposes the romantic idea that theological knowledge is merely symbolic or poetic. See for example \textit{RD}, I. 195, 501, 517. See also, \textit{RD} II. 108.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{RD}, II. 43.
ideals of personality to arrive at the Idea, the Concept, the Absolute. Thus, while Bavinck appreciates philosophical agnosticism for restoring some epistemological humility to theology by reminding it that it cannot transcend human finitude, he rejects the corresponding claims that God (or the Absolute) remains completely behind the epistemological veil. The problem: in all of these agnostic accounts, God is not only unknowable but also incapable of true self-revelation.

Second, agreeing with Kant on the limits of human knowledge, Bavinck also affirms Fichte’s claims concerning the limitations of all God-concepts. Engaging with Fichte, Bavinck heartily confirms: "Personality is a concept borrowed from the human realm and hence, when applied to God, always to some extent falls short." In other words, personality, cannot provide a “fully adequate description of the divine being.” According to Bavinck, treating personality as a means to describe the divine being adequately is the failure of the theistic philosophers who sought to reconcile absoluteness and personality by applying the new philosophical and psychological conceptions of person and personality to God. Utilizing the modern conception of person as the primary ontological category, theistic philosophers conceptualized God as absolute personality or the supreme Person. In other words, God is the one in possession of personality absolutely and

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38 Bavinck differentiates between those who followed along these Hegelian lines. First, he identifies those who sought to deepen and purify the concepts in an “attempt to get closer to transcendent reality.” Among this group, he notably includes his former teacher J.H. Scholten as well as the philosopher Edward von Hartmann, a philosopher with whom Bavinck often engaged on concept of consciousness. On the other side, Bavinck identifies those who held to the position that the absolute, or the idea of God, could never be freed from sense-representation and thereby ended up postulating that human conceptions of the divine were nothing more than the deification of humanity. The prime example of this approach for Bavinck is Feuerbach. See RD, II. 43-44.

39 RD, II. 50. Emphasis added.

40 RD, II. 49.

41 Theistic personalism represented a wide-spread and varied nineteenth-century movement to reconcile divine absoluteness and personality. It has also been widely influential in twentieth-century dialogues concerning the nature of the divine. Brian Davies in his book Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion identifies theistic personalism in contrast to classical theism and defines them as the two different approaches to God. While Davies primarily focuses on theistic personalism in analytic philosophy, the contrast between theistic personalism and classical theism is one helpful way to map the landscape of contemporary theological and philosophical dialogues concerning the divine. See Brian Davies, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 1 “The Concept of God.” For a standard treatment of philosophical personalism, particularly theistic personalism and its worldview see Keith Yandell, “Personalism,” in Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward Craig (Taylor and Francis), accessed February 19, 2019, https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/personalism/v-1.
completely. He is absolutely self-determined (volitional) and self-conscious (intelligent). But, even as Bavinck appreciates the work of the theistic personalists and applauds their efforts in combating pantheism by affirming the self-consciousness of the divine, he faults them for *removing* the epistemic veil too much.\textsuperscript{42} The incomprehensibility of the divine being fades into the background. Fichte, in a sense, was right. Personality cannot provide an adequate God-concept. And, according to Bavinck, the error of the theistic personalists is that they apply the concept of personality to the divine being in a univocal rather than analogical sense. The problem: God ends up as nothing more than an enlarged human person who is fully known but not a being worthy of worship.

However, critiquing the theistic personalists and agreeing with Fichte concerning the limitations of human language does not mean one must return to the idea of an impersonal, unknowable Absolute. Instead, it points to what (in Bavinck’s mind) Fichte should have affirmed in and through his treatment of absoluteness and personality, namely, the radically anthropomorphic and analogical nature of every God-concept. Tracing Fichte’s argument, Bavinck shows how Fichte focused on the anthropomorphic representation of the divine in religion and viewed human conceptions of God as solely subjectively important. To do so, Fichte objectively “pointed out the self-contradiction to which every God-concept is subject” by applying Spinoza’s philosophical premise that “all determination is negation” to the concept of personality, thereby concluding that personality necessarily implies limitation and finitude.\textsuperscript{43} The more determined a thing or concept becomes, the more limited and finite that concept is as it “ceases to be what other

\textsuperscript{42} RD, II, 49
\textsuperscript{43} RD, II, 46.
things are.” Applied to God, then, personality likens the divine to a “finite, limited, human being,” undermining any conception of divine absoluteness.

However, for Bavinck, Fichte was not consistent in his application of Spinoza’s philosophical premise. Bavinck writes: “if all determination is negation, then God may not be called the One, Existent One, or Absolute either.” In other words, the One, Existent One, and Absolute are also concepts that Bavinck sees as borrowed from the human realm. If one accepts Spinoza’s philosophical premise concerning concept formation and applies it to human conceptions of the divine, then “all speech about God is prohibited.” The same contradiction arises in applying personality to God as does applying concepts such as Absolute, One, Existent, etc. They are all limiting concepts. Bavinck appropriates Fichte’s approach and takes it to its logical end in order to point out how every God-concept is anthropomorphic. Thus, the real issue at hand for Bavinck is not whether God is absolute or personal but whether or not human beings can speak about the divine at all. And, that depends, according to Bavinck on one question: has God “willed and found a way to reveal himself in the domain of creatures?” Has God willed himself to be known? If he has revealed himself, then it is not unreasonable to assume that some limited, finite knowledge of the divine is possible. And if that is the case, the question is not if God is absolute or personal but how the conceptions of absoluteness and personality can be utilized to articulate truths about the divine being relatively and analogically.

2.5 The Scriptural Logic of Absoluteness and Personality

44 RD, II. 46.
45 RD, II. 46. Bavinck takes his understanding of this philosophical premise from B. Spinoza Epist. 50; Ethics, I. prop. 14, 15. Epistle (epistolae) 50 is the standard reference to Spinoza’s dictum determinatio negation est.
46 RD, II. 50.
47 RD, II. 50.
48 As will be shown later in this chapter, Bavinck adopts the anthropomorphic nature of revelation as axiomatic in his doctrine of God. Even as he utilizes Fichte in this section, Bavinck roots his axiomatic claim primarily in the tradition of Augustine, Calvin, and Reformed scholasticism.
49 RD, II. 50.
50 RD, II. 50.
Having appreciated agnosticism’s affirmation of incomprehensibility and ineffability as well as the attribution of consciousness to the divine in theistic personalism, Bavinck also criticizes each for its conception of the God-world relationship and failing to understand the nature of human knowledge of the divine properly. Then, using but radicalizing Fichte’s argument, Bavinck turns to the only place he sees as capable of upholding but not collapsing divine absoluteness and personality: Scripture and the theological tradition. According to Bavinck, theology (reflecting on Scripture) has always recognized the unity and distinction of divine absoluteness and personality. It is none other than “that which in Christian theology has always felt and expressed in none other than negative and positive (apophatic and cataphatic theology).”\textsuperscript{51} Christian theology has, in its affirmation of apophatic theology, always recognized the incomprehensibility or Absoluteness of God and heartily defended the unknowability of his essence.\textsuperscript{52} As such, absolute, univocal knowledge of God was denied. Why? Because God is highly exalted and transcendent above the world and human beings are bound “to sense perception.”\textsuperscript{53} Therefore, humans do not have access to the ineffable, unseen being of God. Theology is agnostic when it comes to the divine essence. However, theology has also affirmed that limited and relative, yet true knowledge of God is possible. Positive statements can be made about the divine being. Why? Because God is not only exalted above the world but immanently active in it. Thus, God can be known because he has, in Augustinian and Calvinistic terms, condescended to the world and revealed himself analogically and anthropomorphically. God’s absoluteness, then, is not a reference to his impersonal nature nor an affirmation of divine unconsciousness. It is an affirmation that God’s being is an "adorable

\textsuperscript{51} RD, II. 46.
\textsuperscript{52} RD, II. 37.
\textsuperscript{53} Bavinck here agrees with Kant that human knowledge does not “extend further than our experiences.” However, following that point of agreement, Bavinck’s epistemology differs significantly. See RD, I. “Scientific Foundations; II. 50. Cf. PR, 67-69. See also brief discussion of Bavinck’s epistemology in the Introduction to this thesis. Introduction, 2.3-4. 42-52.
mystery” which no human concept can fully encompass. Furthermore, his personality is not a reference to finitude, limitedness, or even his complete likeness to human persons. Instead, it is an affirmation of the possibility of attributing positive characteristics to the divine being, relatively, analogically, and anthropomorphically on the basis of the self-conscious, purposive revelation of the divine being.

But Bavinck is not content with merely defining divine absoluteness as the affirmation of divine incomprehensibility and divine personality as the affirmation of divine knowability. He continues to appropriate these terms following the internal logic of scriptural witness, guided by theological reflection, and conditioned by his later trinitarian metaphysics. As he does, Bavinck redefines divine absoluteness as divine independence (aseity) and divine personality as the reality attested by Scripture that “God is…a conscious and freely willing being, not confined to the world but exalted high above it.” Divine absoluteness is not defined via abstraction and negation; it is not divine boundlessness, lifelessness or infinite expression in all directions, as in Fichte and other Idealist philosophers. It is the fullness of the triune life itself apart from creation. It is an analogical and anthropomorphic description of the fullness of the divine being who is beyond comprehension, or in scriptural language, ‘dwells in inaccessible light.’ Divine absoluteness and incomprehensibility go hand in hand. God is transcendent above creation. But God is not just absolute; he is also personal. Personality for Bavinck is not that God is an enlarged human person but refers to “the eternal synthesis of himself with himself, infinite self-knowledge and self-

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54 According to Bavinck, one of the primary failures of pantheism is that it makes mystery and self-contradiction synonymous such that anything mysterious is simultaneously self-contradictory. Christian theology, in contrast, affirms mystery but does not find in it a self-contradiction. How God can reveal himself is one of these mysteries. Here one can see one of the three ways that Bavinck utilizes mystery within his systematic theology. Revelation is a mystery that can be apprehended but not fully explained. Bavinck will affirm later that the metaphysical possibility of revelation rests in the communicability of the divine essence. But, for Bavinck, this affirmation is not an explanation of the mystery. See RD, II. 49.
55 RD, II. 49.
56 RD, II. 30.
57 RD, II. 34.
determination, and therefore not dependent on a nonself.”58 Personality, then, is not just the relatability and knowability of God but the ontological ground that makes knowing and relating to God possible. Key here for Bavinck is the notion that divine, infinite self-knowledge and self-determination are not something God achieves but are eternally and infinitely present in the divine being. God does not become a personality; personality is a description of the absolute Being of God.59 Divine personality, then, is not incompatible with divine absoluteness but an affirmation that “God’s self-consciousness is equally as deep and rich, equally as infinite as his being.”60 God is not an unconscious absolute. He is the infinitely conscious one who is aware of and delights in himself. His life is full and rich. Thus, in his revelation, he is able to make himself known and relate to his creatures. He is immanent in creation. Understood in this way, Bavinck claims, God is both absolute and personal, incomprehensible and knowable, transcendent and immanent.

Leaving behind his more philosophically oriented treatment in Part I (Knowing God), Bavinck begins the second section of his locus De Deo in Part II (The Living God) by grounding the affirmations he made in Part I within a specifically Reformed, theological context. As he does, his systematic reconciliation of absoluteness and personality becomes clearer even as he turns to more traditional theological concepts and motifs. However, from Part I to Part II there are structural and theological similarities. In Part II, Bavinck again denies direct epistemic access to the divine essence via the divine names and attributes.61 God is, in a sense, nameless. However, he affirms a true, non-arbitrary knowledge of God because “God himself came down to the level of his

58 RD, II. 50.
59 RD, II. 49.
60 RD, II. 49.
61 Bavinck’s initial discussion of the divine names in Scripture follows the traditional Reformational trend of utilizing the divine names as an entry point into discussions of the divine essence. The Reformer’s commitment to the principle of sola scriptura provided a theological rationale for methodologically incorporating more Scripture into the locus de Deo. Thus, by the time of the second-generation codifiers such as Bullinger, Vermigli, Calvin, Musculus, and others the divine names were the primary entry point into the doctrine of God. The divine names were not seen in contradiction to the divine attributes but were treated as a way to ground the discussion of the divine essence and attributes more firmly in Scripture. See Richard A. Muller, PRRD, III. 246-270.
creatures and revealed his name in and through creatures. Thus, the nameless God has many names. Drawing on Augustine and particularly Calvin, Bavinck perceives the world as a theatre that displays the glory of God in which he communicates a true, yet non-comprehensive nor fully comprehensible knowledge of himself. The names are true distinguishing marks of the Creator God's character and being anthropomorphically communicated through an act of divine condescension.

Explicitly linking the archetypal and ectypal distinction of Reformed orthodoxy with his notions of divine accommodation and anthropomorphic language, Bavinck writes: “God's self-consciousness is archetypal; our knowledge of God, drawn from his Word, is ectypal.” Human knowledge of the divine is derivative and received. The divine names and attributes are neither univocal nor symbolic, but they are true, ectypal knowledge gained on the basis of God’s objective

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62 RD, II. 104. Bavinck affirms a hierarchy of being within the created order. He argues that because everything in creation finds its origin in God, everything is “to a greater or lesser extent related to him, and so also have the capacity to display his perfections before the eyes of his creatures. Because the universe is God’s creation, it is also his revelation and self-manifestation. There is not an atom of the world that does not reflect his deity…” However, post-lapse creaturely knowledge of God based on the hierarchy of being must be viewed through the lens of Scripture in order to be properly understood. See RD, II. 109.


64 RD, II. 97.

65 RD, II. 109. The epistemological distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge is rooted in the metaphysical distinction between creator and creature. Bavinck also affirms a hierarchy of being within the created order. He argues that because everything in creation finds its origin in God, everything is “to a greater or lesser extent related to him, and so also have the capacity to display his perfections before the eyes of his creatures. Because the universe is God’s creation, it is also his revelation and self-manifestation. There is not an atom of the world that does not reflect his deity…” However, post-lapse creaturely knowledge of God based on the hierarchy of being must be viewed through the lens of Scripture in order to be properly understood.

revelation mediated through created reality (nature, history, and consciousness), drawn from and oriented by the Word.67

For Bavinck, the ontological ground of human ectypal knowledge is God’s archetypal self-knowledge. Because God is the transcendent one who dwells in inaccessible light, his archetypal self-knowledge is inaccessible to finite human creatures, but God does truly reveal himself and his character within and through creaturely reality.68 All of creation, then, is the manifestation of God’s ectypal self-revelation and knowable by human beings. How God can reveal himself to another remains a mystery. However, that he has revealed himself is not a mystery nor is the content of his revelation mysterious. Or to put it differently, the archetype remains incomprehensible and absolutely inaccessible to human knowledge, but the ectype is knowable. What is known about God is analogical and anthropomorphic, rooted in a likeness between God and his creation but expresses an even greater dissimilarity between God and creation.69 To name the divine, then, is to speak in analogies using the language that God has placed on human lips.70 Because absoluteness and personality are concepts with the human realm they too are reflective of truths about the divine, it is possible to predicate absoluteness and personality to God, as long as they are defined within the bounds of revelation.

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68 According to Bavinck, one can call characteristics attributed to God divine names or divine attributes when they are not referring to a name that specifically addresses God as a personal being. Thus, in a broad sense whereby an attribute is descriptive of a characteristic of God, name or attribute can be used interchangeably. In a restricted sense, whereby a name is used in addressing God, they cannot be used interchangeably.
69 RD, II. 128. Bavinck’s use of analogy presupposes the distinction and difference between the creator and the creature even as it grounds the possibility of divine predication. The analogy is grounded in God’s action of creation by which he communicates himself. However, even as creatures imitate the divine and articulate truths about him by echoing his divine speech in creation, they remain radically different. There is an infinite gulf between the divine and creation, Infinite and finite, eternity and time in Bavinck. The analogy is derived from God’s divine initiative, his self-communication in creation. Bavinck uses the concept of God placing the words on human lips as a way to articulate the truth that no knowledge of God is possible unless he has revealed himself. Furthermore, according to Bavinck, even though God remains distinctly different than anything in the world, everything in the world is like him. Therefore, creaturely language is a divinely given gift by which human beings come to know God analogically and anthropomorphically. This metaphor, however, should not be equated with Barth’s articulation of the analogia fidei. Bavinck is not presenting a view in which God seizes language by revelation and ascribes meaning to it ‘from without.’
70 RD, II. 99.
3. Absolute and Personal: The Divine Essence, Attributes, and Persons

Having defended the possibility of attributing absoluteness and personality to the divine being in Part I ‘Knowing God,’ Bavinck’s positive development of the divine essence, attributes, and persons in Part II, ‘The Living God’ shows how he creatively appropriates and applies absoluteness and personality. Following a traditional, Reformed orthodox ordering, Bavinck begins ‘The Living God’ with a treatment of the divine essence and attributes (*De Deo Uno*). While following the traditional ordering, Bavinck’s treatment again reveals his keen awareness of the proliferation of alternative conceptions of the divine essence in post-enlightenment theology and philosophy. Surveying the alternatives, Bavinck appreciates but rejects the concepts of the divine essence that he observes in Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Hegel, and (especially) Ritschl because they result in agnosticism and rationalism, noetically, and in Deism or pantheism, ontically. Given Bavinck’s earlier affirmation of divine absoluteness and personality, one might expect him to define the divine essence as ‘absolute personality.’ However, Bavinck also rejects this option not only because he sees it as problematic in relation to the treatment of the persons but also because it easily leads to thinking God is ‘unipersonal’ rather than ‘tripersonal.’ Furthermore, and echoing an earlier critique, Bavinck argues that describing the divine essence primarily as ‘absolute personality’ often leads to collapsing the analogical interval between God and humanity.

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71 Bavinck’s theological method is far from the Reformed Scholastic tradition that he draws from throughout his *Reformed Dogmatics*. However, he does follow the traditional scholastic ordering, which incorporated reformational principles into the traditional investigation of God in western theology in the doctrine of God along the lines of whether it is (*an sit*), what it is (*quid sit*), what sort it is (*qualis sit*). This meant starting with *De Deo Uno* and proceeding to *De Deo Trino*. See Muller, *PRRD*, III. 157.

72 Bavinck’s judgement here is correct. Many nineteenth-century theistic personalists utilized the concept of personality to develop distinctly non-trinitarian accounts of God. See Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought*, 166-171.

73 *RD*, II. 122.
What then does Bavinck see as the most satisfactory description of the divine essence? Not ‘absolute personality’ but ‘absolute Being.’

Appealing to the language of divine absoluteness, Bavinck appropriates it for use within his description of the divine being from within the theological tradition. Here Bavinck situates, reiterates, and clarifies his earlier affirmations about divine absoluteness. Turning to the Reformers, whom Bavinck identifies as following Augustine and Thomas, Bavinck again defines absolute as divine aseity or independence. In reference to the divine essence, therefore, absoluteness refers to God’s ontological independence. He is self-existent, dependent on nothing other than himself. However, for Bavinck, God is not just absolute: He is ‘absolute Being.’ Turning again to the theological tradition, especially Augustine, Bavinck argues that being is not a bare concept whereby God’s essence is described “apart from his attributes, but the total fullness of God’s being as it exists and is revealed in his attributes. Hence the being of God [is] not an abstraction but a living, infinitely rich, and concrete Being.” Being, according to Bavinck, is a unifying ontological concept able to encapsulate the “sum total of all

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74 RD, II. 123.
75 In seeking to ‘think Bavinck’s thoughts after him and trace their unity,’ this thesis seeks to identify the theological well that Bavinck saw himself as drawing from. Thus, he does cite and engage with the Reformed orthodox, Thomas, and Augustine in this section. However, Bavinck’s references and utilization to these thinkers should not be thought of in an ahistorical way. Bavinck was influenced by the nineteenth-century reception and understanding of these thinkers. This is evidenced by his appeal to some important nineteenth-century interpreters of Augustine such as Theodor Ganguaf, a German, Roman Catholic theologian who followed the philosophy of Anton Günther. In his description of God’s being as living and infinitely rich, Bavinck cites Ganguaf’s interpretation of Augustine. Ganguaf himself interpreted Augustine along Idealistic lines and conceived of the Trinity in Augustine as divine self-consciousness. The similarities in their accounts should not be overplayed nor should recognizing that Bavinck lived and worked within the scholarly atmosphere of the nineteenth century be seen as an attempt to resurrect the ‘two-Bavincks’ hypothesis. Bavinck rejected Ganguaf, Günther, and other’s approach to construct the Trinity rationally utilizing the structure of self-consciousness. Instead, Bavinck utilized self-consciousness as an analogy for understanding God’s revelation of himself as triune. Bavinck most often cites historical theologians without reference to any contemporary interpreters. However, his occasional references should remind us that Bavinck is working in a particular context wherein there are ongoing discussions about how to interpret Augustine and others. Within this context, it is possible to say that Bavinck, while drawing from nineteenth-century scholarship, also sought to present his own understanding of how the tradition should be received and interpreted. This is an avenue in need of further research. See, for example, Bavinck’s reference to Ganguaf within his treatment of divine simplicity as well as his rejection of the approach to prove the Trinity from the structure of self-consciousness in RD, II. 174, 378.
76 RD, II. 113.
77 RD, II. 120. While Bavinck attributes Augustine with this utilization of the concept of being, he does not cite Augustine in this section. Instead, he cites Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 38 and John of Damascus, The Orthodox Faith, 1, 9.
being, the ‘purest and simplest actuality.’” Furthermore, being also guards against concepts of the divine that attribute ‘becoming’ to the divine essence. And, according to Bavinck one of the primary distinctions between God and creation is that God is being while creation becomes. Becoming is a mode of creaturely existence. Absolute, then, does not just communicate divine independence but also the manner in which all the attributes exist in God: absolutely, fully, and completely. Thus, “God is the real, the true being, the fullness of being, the sum total of all reality and perfection, the totality of being, from which all other being owes its existence.” According to Bavinck, describing God as absolute Being allows all of the other attributes (fatherhood, personality, love, wisdom, goodness, etc.) to be encompassed because they are seen (anthropologically and analogously) as belonging to God’s being in an absolute sense. As such, Bavinck sees ‘absolute Being’ as being able to do justice to the rich and manifold self-revelation in Scripture of God more than ‘absolute personality.’ And, as we will see, it is this definition of

78 RD, II. 121. While shaped by the tradition of Reformed Scholasticism, Bavinck certainly seeks to root his doctrine of God historically by appealing to the Church Fathers. This is fitting as Reformed Scholastics also appealed to the Church Fathers. Yet, it is also important to point out as some see Bavinck as merely reworking Calvin. He is not. He is drawing from much broader theological and historical wells.

79 For a more thorough discussion on the relationship between being and becoming in Bavinck see, James Eglinton, “To Be or To Become: Locating the Actualistic in Bavinck’s Ontology” in The Kuyper Center Review, vol. 2 Revelation and Common Grace, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 105-125.

80 RD, II. 152: “God is exclusively from himself, not in the sense of being self-caused but being from eternity to eternity who he is, being not becoming. God is absolute Being, the fullness of being, and therefore also eternally and absolutely independent in his existence, in his perfections, in all his works, the first and last, the sole cause and final goal of all things.”

81 RD, II. 123.

82 RD, II. 123.

83 Bavinck’s description of the divine essence has several overlaps with Thomas’s account of the divine as actus purus, pure act. Bavinck does utilize this definition of the divine being in a few places. But, his appeal to this definition is one way that he articulates the divine essence in his writing. Yet, it is not the only way he conceptualizes the divine essence. In this section, he purposively utilizes absolute Being as his description of the divine life to articulate the fullness and richness of the one divine Being. In fact, in this section, Bavinck articulates God as the one in whom being and living coincide. Thus, while Bavinck does show an affinity for Thomas’s account of God as actus purus, he does not articulate or develop it in the same manner. Bavinck’s affinity with Thomas here is not surprising as many of the Reformed Scholastics drew on Thomas’s Aristotelian metaphysics in their doctrines of God. Bavinck’s description of the divine life shows his historical rootedness within the Reformed orthodoxy but also his willingness to appropriate it in and for modernity. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1948), I, Q.ii.A.3; Idem Summa Contra Gentiles, trans. Anton C. Pegis et al., ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P. (New York: Hanover House, 1955-57), I, c. 17. See also Synopsis Purioris Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, vol. 1 Disputations I-23, eds. Dolf te Velde et al., trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2014), Disputation 1. For a good treatment of Reformed orthodoxy’s relationship to
God as absolute being in his *De Deo Uno* that undergirds Bavinck’s affirmation of the triune God as the truly living God in his *De Deo Trino.*”

### 3.1 The Divine Essence and Attributes

Affirming that all of God’s attributes belong to his essence absolutely, Bavinck turns to the doctrine of Divine Simplicity to articulate his understanding of the relationship between the divine essence and attributes. Simplicity, according to Bavinck, means that God “is what he processes.” Each attribute predicates the infinitely full divine life from a particular angle rooted in God’s self-revelation. Because the infinite fullness of the divine life is incomprehensible to finite creatures, God reveals “himself to finite creatures by many names.” The attributes, then, do not introduce metaphysical distinctions within the divine essence or connotate any becoming in the divine essence but allow finite creatures to describe anthropomorphically and discursively (ectypal) what in God’s essence is simultaneous, absolute and perfect (archetype). Far from abandoning personality in favour of absoluteness, then, Bavinck’s treatment of the divine essence and doctrine of simplicity reiterates his earlier systematic reconciliation of the two and emphasizes the fullness of the divine life.

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84 *RD*, II. 331.

85 *RD*, II. 118. Cf. *RD*, II.173: “…on account of its absolute perfection, every attribute of God is identical with his essence.”

86 *RD* II. 127.

87 Divine simplicity does not imply a nominal and subjective approach to the divine attributes for Bavinck. Instead, Bavinck relying on Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine argues that each attribute is not interchangeable with another. "The diversity of attributes, moreover, does not clash with God's simplicity...The divine essence is so infinitely and profusely rich that no creature can grasp it all at once. Just as a child cannot picture the worth of a coin of great value but only gains some sense of it when it is counted out in a number of smaller coins, so we too cannot possibly for a picture of the infinite fullness of God's essence unless it is displayed to us now in one relationship, then in another, and now from one angle, then from another." The difference in divine attributes is rooted in God's effects on his creatures, known in and through revelation. Thus, they are objectively received not subjectively defined. *RD*, II. 126-127. Cf. *Our Reasonable Faith*, 135.

88 Because God is absolute Being, his attributes of personality (self-consciousness and self-determination) are what he possesses infinitely, fully, and completely.
According to Bavinck, while the doctrine of Divine Simplicity guards the unity and harmony of the divine essence, it does not preclude the predication and classification of multiple attributes to the divine essence. Taking up the question of classifying of the attributes, however, Bavinck recognizes a problem inherent in the traditional classification schemas which, while distinct, generally seem to “divide God’s being into two halves. They all seem to treat God’s absoluteness first, then his personality; first God’s being as such, then God in relation to his creatures. They all seem to imply that the first group of terms is obtained apart from the creation, and the second from God’s creatures, and that, consequently there is no unity of concord among God’s perfections.” Bavinck’s solution to this tendency is to systematically reconcile the categories within the bounds of the scriptural logic of divine transcendence and immanence.

Thus, as Bavinck chooses to categorize the divine attributes using the categories of incommunicable and communicable, he applies his earlier affirmations concerning archetypal and ectypal knowledge, anthropomorphic and analogical language, and the incomprehensibility but knowability of God. For Bavinck, then, all of God’s attributes are both incommunicable and communicable, absolute and relative. The incommunicable attributes, or names attributed to the divine that do not pertain to creatures, are still creaturely, limited, and relative descriptions of the divine being that contain positive content. The incommunicable attributes are not incommunicable because they are unknowable or unnamable; they communicate the way that everything exists in God. The communicable attributes, or names attributed to the divine being that are adopted and

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89 RD, II. 133.
90 RD, II. 107. Bavinck utilizes the old scholastic distinction between ratio ratiocinans and ratio ratiocinata to emphasize the objective nature of the divine names. The names of God are not a product of human subjective rationality (ratio ratiocinans) but objective reason (ratio ratiocinata). The divine names are received. It is God’s act of revelation that gives human creatures the right to name God at all.
91 Bavinck identifies these as specifically Reformed divisions. RD, II. 134.
92 RD, II. 135: “Discernable in every one of God’s perfections is both his absolute superiority over and his kinship with his creatures. Hence, in one sense each of his attributes is incommunicable and in another communicable.”
derived “from the image and likeness according to which humans have been created,”93 “…pertain to God in a different way than they do to created beings. That is, in God these perfections are independent, eternal, omnipresent, and simple.”94 The communicable attributes are not communicable because they are univocally applied to God and creation; they are communicable because they give content to the divine Being in relation to created beings analogically and anthropomorphically.

This means that far from dividing the divine being in two, Bavinck sees the incommunicable/communicable division as upholding the scriptural dynamic of divine transcendence and immanence, absoluteness and relatedness.95 Positively, this division serves as a means to theologically articulate the one truly living God whose life is full and rich apart from creation.96 God is infinitely exalted above creation; he is absolutely distinct and unknowable in his essence. Yet because of revelation, it can be known that “his life is not a process of becoming, not an evolution, not a process of desiring and striving…but an uninterrupted rest, eternal peace…Through his intellect God is fully aware of his own perfection, and through his will he supremely loves it, that is, rests purposefully in it, and from this repose springs joy, the joy with

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93 RD, II. 136. Cf. Our Reasonable Faith, 137.
94 RD, II. 136.
95 In his discussion of the incommunicable and communicable attributes, Bavinck relates but does not collapse the categories. The distinction between them and the role each plays in the predication of attributes to the divine are important for Bavinck in terms of maintaining divine transcendence and immanence. The attributes are both absolute and relative. This reconciliation of the categories, but not equation of the two, shows that previous readings of Bavinck’s De Deo Uno, such as Berkhof’s, that present it as dualistic and burdened by the philosophical legacy of Reformed Scholasticism must be rejected. Similarly, however, even Hielema who notes the resolution of Bavinck’s philosophical scholastic categories within a relational matrix must be qualified. Bavinck does not see a tension between the philosophical and relational categories in his De Deo Uno. He does not present one set as more philosophical and the other more biblical and relational. Instead, the attributes arise through theological reflection on Scripture and take on various philosophical and theological grammar in order to articulate scriptural logic. Separating Bavinck’s attributes into “philosophical” and “relational” and reading them off of each other is exactly what Bavinck is fighting against. See Berkhof, Two Hundred Years, 114, Hielema, “Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 108-109; and Jenson, Relationality and the Concept of God, 48.
96 RD, II. 136: Bavinck identifies four incommunicable attributes (independence, immutability, infinity [with respect to time, eternity, with respect to space, omnipresence], and unity). And he further subdivides the communicable attributes into attributes of self-consciousness (knowledge, wisdom, trustworthiness), ethical attributes (goodness, holiness, righteousness), attributes of sovereignty (will, freedom, and omnipotence), and attributes that reveals God’s absolute blessedness (perfection, beatitude, and glory).
which God delights in himself as the supreme good.”⁹⁷ Every attribute predicated of the divine gives a fuller picture of the infinite, absolute being of God. However, Bavinck also utilizes the incommunicable/communicable attributes negatively (apologetically) as a means to guard against deistic and pantheistic augmentations of the divine being. Having already rejected the God-concepts of agnosticism and rationalism (gross realism) earlier, Bavinck turns to show how eliminating the divine from the world (deism) or equating God with the world impacts the predication of individual attributes.⁹⁸ Thus, as Bavinck positively develops each attribute, he also identifies how the various attributes are either augmented or discarded within pantheistic and deistic systems. Whenever the God-world relationship is augmented so too are the attributes that are predicated of the divine life. And, for Bavinck any conception of the divine that denies that he “the sum total of all virtues, the supreme being, the supreme good, the supreme truth (etc.),” must be rejected.⁹⁹ Similarly, any conception of the divine that denies the conscious self-revelation of God and the possibility of knowing him on that basis must be discarded.¹⁰⁰

In sum, in his treatment of the divine essence and attributes Bavinck seeks to articulate the infinite fullness of the divine life apart from creation. As he does, he appropriates the concept of the absolute and uses it in his definition of God essence as ‘absolute Being,’ but he does not deny God’s being consciousness or will. He also appropriates the distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes and utilizes them positively and apologetically. However, Bavinck’s treatment of the divine essence in attributes (De Deo Uno) is only a part of his locus de Deo and

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⁹⁷ RD, II. 251. Bavinck defines blessedness as the attribute that expresses God’s absolute perfection, God’s knowledge and delight in his absolute perfection, and God’s absolute rest and delight in himself. God’s blessedness is the ground of his outward glory.

⁹⁸ Bavinck’s treatment of the divine attributes is unique in terms of his sustained engagement with Deism and pantheism throughout.

⁹⁹ RD, II. 251.

¹⁰⁰ While Bavinck sees the incommunicable attributes as primarily guarding against pantheism and the communicable attributes as primarily guarding against Deism, he does not limit his engagement with Deism to the communicable attributes and pantheism to the incommunicable in his Reformed Dogmatics. This is another evidence of how Bavinck sees Deism and pantheism as two sides of the same coin.
one aspect of his articulation of who God has revealed himself to be. The whole aim of his locus
*De Deo Uno* is oriented to the *triune God* as the living God of Scripture. As such, his treatment of
the divine attributes serves a specific purpose. He writes:

In the doctrine of the attributes of God the tradition includes the treatment of the divine
to as it is revealed to us in Scripture, is confessed by the Christian faith, and exists—
as will be evident in the locus of the Trinity—in a threefold manner. In order for us to
understand the locus of the Trinity that of Father, Son and Spirit share the same divine
nature, it is necessary for us to know what that divine nature comprises and in what ways
it differs from every created nature.¹⁰¹

The absolute Being is who is revealed in Scripture is unfolded in the persons of the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit. Thus, although metaphysically one and non-composite, the living God is *triune.*
Triunity belongs to the very essence of the living, absolutely personal God. And, it is in the context
of the Trinity that each attribute ‘takes on its most profound meaning.’¹⁰²

3.2 The Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit

As he appropriated the language of absoluteness in his definition of the divine essence, Bavinck
creatively appropriates the modern grammar of personality within a specifically Augustinian
account of the relationship between the divine essence and persons. As previously noted, Bavinck
was keenly aware of the consequences of applying modern philosophical and psychological
conceptions of personality univocally to theological articulations of the divine life. Thus, Bavinck
appropriates the language of personality in his *De Deo Trino* carefully. Furthermore, he does so
within the context of his constant appeals to the broad consensus concerning the doctrine of the
Trinity across ecclesiastical traditions. His goal is not novelty; his goal is to communicate the
deeply historic, broadly catholic doctrine of the Trinity.

¹⁰¹ *RD*, II.150. Cf. *Our Reasonable Faith*, 143: “It is in this holy Trinity that each attribute of His Being comes into
its own, so to speak, gets its fullest content, and takes on its profoundest meaning. It is only when we contemplate this
Trinity that we know who and what God is.”

¹⁰² *RD*, II. 303.
First, Bavinck does not dismiss his earlier usage of personality and affirmation of divine self-consciousness and self-determination. Because God’s intellect and volition are as deep and as rich as his being, it is possible to describe God as personal. Thereby, to some extent, Bavinck sees no real opposition between classical being language and more contemporary language which utilizes selfhood in reference to divine knowledge and determination.\(^{103}\) However, Bavinck also recognizes the problem that contemporary language (even his own) possess to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Therefore, and secondarily, even as he allows for the language of self-knowledge and self-determination, Bavinck strongly opposes the predication of distinct self-knowledge and self-determination to the Father, Son, and Spirit. The persons are not separate personalities who each have distinct self-knowledge and self-volition. Such, according to Bavinck, leads to tri-theism.\(^{104}\) The predication of intellect and volition belongs to the divine essence, not to the persons. However, he also opposes conceptualizing the persons as mere revelational ‘modes’ of the one divine personality whereby the Father, Son, and Spirit are mere names for the same divine personality. This, according to Bavinck, would lead to Sabellianism.\(^{105}\) Given these challenges, one might expect Bavinck to reject the term person in the doctrine of the Trinity altogether. However, he suggests that person is still the best term theology has in relation to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Appealing to Augustine, Bavinck argues that theology uses the term person “not to express what that is only not to be silent.”\(^{106}\) And, because Scripture reveals God to us as Father, Son, and Holy

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\(^{103}\) RD, II. 302. Bavinck also takes issue with the application of nominalistic conceptions of personality to the divine being. Given his epistemology and understanding of revelation, Bavinck’s rejection of nominalism is not surprising.

\(^{104}\) Had Bavinck been writing today, he would have likely identified this position as social trinitarianism at best and tri-theism at worst.

\(^{105}\) See RD, II. 294.

\(^{106}\) RD, II. 302. This is a direct citation from Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 9; VI, 10. See also, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 158.
Spirit, theology cannot be silent but must acknowledge the three-fold nature of the divine being. And, Bavinck can find no better term than person for such a task.

According to Bavinck, then, the term person is used within trinitarian dogma “simply [to] mean that the three persons in the divine being are not ‘modes’ but have a distinct existence of their own…” Person does not refer to the individual self-consciousness or self-determination of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Instead, it refers to the distinct existence of each person as they subsist within the absolute Being of God, who is absolutely personal. Drawing from Richard of St. Victor, Bavinck affirms each person as an “incommunicable existence of the divine nature” in relation to their personal properties.

Third, Bavinck sees within contemporary notions of personality two helpful analogies to aid in human, analogical understanding of the divine personality. Thus, far from succumbing to the univocal application of personality to the divine being he has so vigorously opposed, Bavinck follows what he perceives as Augustinian logic and finds faint analogies of the divine life within the structure of human self-consciousness. He writes: “Personality in humans arises only because they are subjects who confront themselves as an object and unite the two (subject and object) in an act of self-consciousness. Hence, three moments (constituents) constitute the essence of human personality.” Similarly, the absolute divine personality arises out of and by means of the unfolding of the three persons. Yet, unlike human personality, divine personality arises simultaneously and completely. Furthermore, human personality, Bavinck argues is far too rich to be embodied “in a single individual.” Humanity, according to Bavinck, unfolds the riches of

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107 RD, II. 302 According to Bavinck, this is the truth that both Boethius and Richard of St. Victor were trying to communicate. He situates his definition closer to Richard of St. Victor, but more significantly he sees any further definition of person within trinitarian dogma as ultimately expressing the simple truth that the persons do not introduce substantive differences within the divine being but that are modes of existence within the divine being.


109 RD, II. 303.

110 RD, II. 303.
human personality collectively and communally. Each person is a diverse manifestation of what it means to be human, and therefore the unity of human personality only comes in and through the unity of the whole. In God, however, “the unfolding of his being into personality coincides with that of his being unfolded into three persons. The three persons are the one divine personality brought to complete self-unfolding, a self-unfolding arising out of, by the agency of, and within the divine being.” Thus, personality and the structure of self-consciousness are faint analogies of the divine life. Cleared of an admixture of errors and applied to the divine life analogously, Bavinck describes the trinitarian being of God as tripersonal and absolute divine personality.

This contemporary analogy, according to Bavinck, aids theology in its attempt to conceptualize scriptural truths and articulate the relationship between the divine essence and persons. They do not prove the existence of the Trinity rationally from creation. According to Bavinck the analogy from the structure of self-consciousness helps illuminate how there is no essence existing apart from the three persons. “It belongs to God’s very essence to be triune.” Unlike human personality, God is eternally and fully triune.

Moving from the analogy of self-consciousness and personality, Bavinck draws on Augustine again to develop a systematic account of the relationships between the persons. Along with Augustine, Bavinck argues that the divine essence is not derived from the person of the Father but

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111 RD, II. 303.
112 RD, II. 303.
113 RD, II. 302.
114 Bavinck opposes the use of trinitarian analogies to prove the existence of the Trinity rationally. He is also opposed to theosophical analogies that see the unfolding of the divine being as a process of becoming. Thus, even though there are some similarities between Bavinck and Schelling, Böhme, and Baader in terms of utilizing the structure of self-consciousness in relation to the divine being, there are also some significant differences. According to Bavinck, Schelling, Böhme, and Baader attribute three elements to the concept of God which the divine becomes in and through a process of self-differentiation and manifestation. For Bavinck, the components of self-consciousness do not complete the concept of God. Instead, they provide theology a useful analogy. In other words, the Trinity cannot be derived from the structure of self-consciousness. At best, it provides a reflective tool to try to articulate a truth that can be apprehended but not comprehended. See RD, II. 327-8.
115 RD, II. 303-304. “The difference did not consist in any substance but only in the relations, but this distinction is grounded in revelation and therefore objective and real. The difference really exists, namely in the mode of existence. The persons are modes of existence within the being…”
from the unity of the divine essence, which unfolds tri-personally as one, divine, triune being.\textsuperscript{116} The difference between the persons is not in essence but in their mutual relations to one another, meaning the distinctions between the persons arise from personal properties known through their mutual relations.\textsuperscript{117} Summing this up in modern theological grammar, Bavinck writes: “The divine being is tripersonal precisely because it is the absolute divine personality.”\textsuperscript{118}

3.3 Conclusion: Absolute and Personal

Bavinck's systematic reconciliation of divine personality and absoluteness is not arbitrary but serves to situate his doctrine of God over-against the two alternatives he observes in the history of philosophical and theological reflection on knowledge of the divine: agnosticism and rationalism. The God attested to in Scripture is both highly exalted above the world and capable of self-disclosure (revelation) primarily because he is not an abstract, unbound, unknowable entity. God’s self-determination and self-knowledge are as infinite as his being. God knows, delights, loves, and rests in his perfections apart from creation. He is absolute and personal. God’s being itself remains a mystery, and how he reveals himself remains mysterious. But, the content of revelation is not a mystery because it is what the absolutely personal, triune God has made known. Epistemologically, then, Bavinck’s affirmation of divine absoluteness and personality means that our knowledge of the divine being is true but analogical and finite resting on God's self-revelation. It is the ectype of the divine archetype. Theologically, Bavinck’s affirmation of divine incomprehensibility is the epistemological correlate of divine independence (absoluteness/aseity), and the affirmation of divine knowability is the epistemological correlate to the doctrine of creation

\textsuperscript{116} RD, II. 305. Unfolding should not be equated with becoming here. Instead, Bavinck utilizes unfolding as a dynamic term to indicate the fullness of the divine life, which is a fullness that exists in three persons eternally.

\textsuperscript{117} RD, II. 305: Bavinck describes the personal properties in classical trinitarian language: paternity (unbegotteness, active generation, active spiration), filiation or sonship (passive generation, active spiration), and procession or passive spiration. None of the mutual relations add anything substantially to the divine essence.

\textsuperscript{118} RD, II. 302.
whereby God chooses to reveal himself personally. God's absoluteness, his independence, and transcendence are not contradictory to his personality nor his relationship with creation and knowability. Furthermore, Bavinck utilizes the concepts of absolute and personality as a theological grammar for understanding the divine essence, attributes, and persons. The outcome of his usage: a theologically rich and philosophically attuned articulation of the God of Scripture as the living, absolutely personal, triune God whose life is full and rich apart from creation.


Bavinck’s systematic reconciliation and appropriation of divine absoluteness and personality are important within his doctrine of God proper, but they are not the only aspects of his doctrine of God. There are two others worth mentioning in this chapter that are central to his articulation of the divine life: God’s unity-in-diversity and the communicability of the divine essence. While each of these themes will be explored in later chapters, particularly as they pertain to Bavinck’s creational ontology and creation and the incarnation as acts of divine self-communication, it is important to briefly mention them in relation to Bavinck’s doctrine of God.

First, Bavinck makes a rather sticking claim at the end of his *De Deo Trino*: “in God…” there is “…absolute unity as well as absolute diversity.” What Bavinck means by this must be qualified by his understanding of absoluteness, lest he be accused of denying the simplicity he affirmed earlier or supporting tri-theism or social trinitarianism. Bavinck is not denying the

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119 For Bavinck divine trinitarian communication *ad intra* is the ground of possibility for divine communication *ad extra.*
120 *RD*, II. 332. See also, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 158.
121 A more traditional articulation would be to say that the divine life is one of absolute unity and relative diversity. However, Bavinck is not referring to the relationships between the persons, which he does describe as rooted in their relations to one another. One might wish that Bavinck had used different language other than absolute to avoid confusion or lead to a social trinitarian conclusion. However, it does highlight his theme of divine unity-in-diversity as well as the one-way analogy between God and creation. Furthermore, it should be noted that Bavinck does also utilize the term absolute to refer to complete or whole in contrast to that which is relative. That is not his usage here.
unity of the divine essence and suggesting that somehow the relations between the persons constitute substantive metaphysical distinctions within the divine being. He is, however, arguing that the unity and diversity in creation is an analogue to what exists in the divine life perfectly, distinctly, and (in Bavinck’s terms) absolutely. God’s unity is not obtained but eternally present in and through the self-unfolding of the divine essence into three persons, and God’s diversity does not diminish or subtract from his unity but is the way the divine unity subsists eternally. The divine life is perfect unity-in-diversity. According to Bavinck, this is the “glory of the confession of the Trinity.” As he writes: “…the Trinity consists above all in the fact that that unity, however absolute, does not exclude but includes diversity. God’s being is not an abstract unity or concept, but a fullness of being, an infinite abundance of life, whose diversity, so far from diminishing the unity, unfolds it to its fullest extent.” The divine is absolute unity-in-diversity. And, unity-in-diversity of the divine life, as James Eglinton has pointed out, is what grounds Bavinck’s organic motif. What Eglinton does not point out is how that just as Bavinck takes the organic motif and appropriates it for his own dogmatic purposes, he also takes up the language of unity-in-diversity.

122 Bavinck will utilize his concept of God’s unity-in-diversity to articulate his cosmology of organism. His attentiveness to the issues of unity and diversity and desire to articulate the relationship between them shows how attentive he was to the intellectual issues of his day. The search for a unifying principle in the midst of the diversity of the world was an abiding concern for many nineteenth-century thinkers, particularly romantics. See for example Michael Löwry and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). And, Bavinck is not the only theologian who describes God’s being as unity-in-diversity and connects an organic cosmology to the concept of God’s tri-unity as a means to address the issue of unity-in-diversity in the world. Another theologian who does so, albeit in a drastically different way, was Isaak Dorner. See Jonathan Northgate, *Isaak A. Dorner: The Triune God and the Gospel of Salvation* (London: T&T: Clark, 2009), Chapter 1, “The Doctrine of God.” However, even as Bavinck takes up modern theological grammar and insights to address the intellectual issues of his day, one must always be attentive to how he does so. Bavinck rarely takes up a contemporary insight without seeking to ground it somewhere within the history of theology. That does not mean that Bavinck rejects new insights from his context, but he most often appropriates them as fresh and renewed insights in line with the historic, Christian faith. This is the case, for example, in his appropriation of the organic as well as his appropriation of Schleiermacher’s notion of self-consciousness. Thus, while he does see them as new and fresh, he rarely sees them as appearing out of thin air with no rooting in the history of theology. Therefore, it is important in treating Bavinck to look at who he appeals to and how he grounds his incorporation of modern theological grammar and insights. Often, he does so by creatively appropriating the categories of Reformed orthodoxy, but he also commonly appeals to Augustine and other Church Fathers.

123 RD, II. 300.
124 RD, II. 300.
125 Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 81.
and uses it for his dogmatics. To do so, he appeals to the tradition, but as he does, he seeks to speak to the intellectual currents and concerns of his own day, which were often focused on understanding the relationship between unity and diversity in the world. Trinity *ad intra* leads to organic cosmology *ad extra.*

To describe this Bavinck takes up the language of archetype and ectype again, but this time he articulates it in a profoundly triniform way. Bavinck’s usage of the archetype/ectype distinction here is an example of how he sought to adhere to but develop the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy. Although variously articulated in Reformed Scholasticism, archetypal theology was generally articulated as God’s infinite self-knowledge of all things residing in and essential to him whereas ectypal theology was the wisdom of divine things that are formulated by God in order to communicate his glories *ad extra.* Here Bavinck develops the archetype/ectype distinction in a particularly trinitarian direction. The “processions in his being [that] simultaneously bring about in God his absolute personality, his trinitarian character, and his immanent relations. They are the absolute archetypes of all those processions by which human nature achieves its full development…” As we will see in Chapter 3, Bavinck utilizes Augustine to make this argument and extends the archetype/ectype relationship to all of creation. Thus, the divine life is unlike everything in all of creation even though everything in all of creation is a faint echo of it: the creaturely ectype of the divine archetype. The unity-in-diversity of the world is an echo of the absolute unity-in-diversity of the divine life.

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126 The theme of divine unity in diversity has been treated in Bavinck scholarship. Excellent treatments of this topic can be found in Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 102-114, 243. Bolt, *Imitatio Christi*, 212-216.
127 While utilized in a few publications prior to *Trinity and Organism*, Eglinton introduced the term ‘triniform’ to the discussion of Bavinck’s theology. This work is indebted to him for the word ‘triniform,’ especially its applicability to Bavinck’s theology.
128 RD, II. 306.
129 Bavinck qualifies this in his treatment of the relationship between God and creation. We will examine this in Chapter 3.
Second, Bavinck also establishes the communicability of the divine essence in his discussion on the Trinity. According to Bavinck, while the personal properties are incommunicable, the divine essence is communicable. Starting with the Father, the three persons communicate the divine essence to one another as is fitting to their personal relations. This aspect of the divine life, according to Bavinck is the precondition for the possibility of communicating the divine life ad extra. For Bavinck, there would be no possibility of communicating the divine life ad extra if there was no communication of the divine life ad intra.

However, as he explains in his section connecting the ontological and economic Trinity, the communicability of the divine essence ad intra does not mean that his communication ad extra should be seen as encapsulating every aspect of the divine life. The economic Trinity is a mirror of the divine life ad intra. Thus, as God is one, so too do all his works ad extra have a single Author (principium). Yet, they “come through the cooperation of the three persons, each of whom plays a specific role and fulfills a specific task” which is fitting their personal relations ad intra. The Father (the unbegotten) is the one from whom all things come, the Son (the firstborn, eternally begotten) is the one through whom all things are accomplished, and the Spirit (the one who eternally proceeds, spirated) is the one in whom all things are applied. Following classical theology on this account, Bavinck affirms both the doctrine of divine appropriations and that all opera ad extra indivisio sunt. Furthermore, situated within his firm commitment to God’s absolute

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130 RD, II. 420.
131 RD, II. 318. Even though Bavinck does not agree with approaches that derive the divine essence from the Father, he does treat the Father first in his systematic ordering. Bavinck’s argument for this is scriptural. As Scripture reveals the Father first, theology should follow the order of scriptural revelation even as it draws scriptural content into a unified system. See also RD, II. 271-279.
132 RD, II. 318: And, in God’s movement ad extra the “immanent relations of the three persons in the divine…manifest themselves outwardly.” Bavinck identifies a close relationship between the divine processions and missions. The missions mirror the processions.
133 RD, II. 319.
134 RD, II. 319.
transcendence and relationship with creation as well as his affirmation of the archetype/ectype distinction, Bavinck affirms that the ontological trinity is in but not exhausted by the economic.\textsuperscript{136}

5. The Ontological Dimension

Bavinck develops a Reformed doctrine of God that is deeply catholic and historically rooted yet creative in its appropriation of historic and modern categories. While some Bavinck scholars, such as Hielema, have described Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity as “certainly not remarkable or unusual in any way,”\textsuperscript{137} Eglinton’s recent proposal concerning the relationship between the organic motif and the Trinity has shown that Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity may be more creative than previously identified.\textsuperscript{138} Certainly, Bavinck’s treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity shows his desire to remain within the bounds of historic, creedal trinitarianism,\textsuperscript{139} but his treatment of the doctrine also shows his desire to communicate a deeply catholic, historically rooted, Reformed doctrine of God in and for modernity. This can be seen not only in Bavinck’s use of the organic motif and description of the divine life as unity-in-diversity but also in his appropriation and systematic reconciliation of the concepts of absoluteness and personality such that he describes God, in a remarkably nineteenth-century language, as absolute divine personality.

Within the context of Bavinck's locus \textit{de Deo}, his reconciliation of absoluteness and personality serves several systematic purposes, and as it does, it also illuminates several aspects of Bavinck’s trinitarian theology that can aid us in understanding and identifying the shape, structure,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} RD, II. 304-14; 318-22.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Hielema, “Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 112.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Eglinton, \textit{Trinity and Organism}, Chapter 4.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Within the context of the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, Bavinck’s treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity is unique. Unlike other sections in the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics} in which Bavinck analyzes and assesses the Reformed approach to a particular doctrine over and against Catholic, Lutheran, and other alternatives, his development of the doctrine of the Trinity, with the exception of his discussion of the \textit{filioque}, contains no such comparison with other Christian traditions. Instead, it consists of an examination of Scripture, the historical development of the doctrine in the church over and against the perennial challenges of Sabellianism and Arianism, a definition of key terms, and an analysis of the importance of the doctrine.
\end{itemize}
and function of the *doctrine of the Trinity in its ontological dimension*. Even before Bavinck’s treatment of the divine names, attributes, and triunity, Bavinck’s epistemological treatment of divine absoluteness and personality structures, norms, and informs that which has preceded and that which will follow. First, it shows Bavinck’s articulation of the relationship between the order of being and the order of knowing. For Bavinck, the order of being is present and active in the order of knowing such that even though human knowledge cannot transcend its limits, it can know truly (anthropomorphically and relatively) what God has chosen to disclose of his infinite self-knowledge in his divine act of condescension. Pointing back to the *principium* Bavinck established in his prolegomena, his dual affirmation of divine absoluteness and personality is one of many aspects within his doctrine of God that shows that the material within his prolegomena was neither proto-dogmatic nor pre-dogmatic but thoroughly dogmatic: The *principium essendi* (essential principle) or ontological foundation, of theology is absolute, independent, ultimately incomprehensible, but personal and triune and therefore knowable in and through divine self-revelation (*principium cognoscendi*).

Looking forward to his development of God’s being and acts, Bavinck’s dual affirmation provides the foundation from which theology can move from God’s acts to making metaphysical claims about God’s divine life *in se*. Assuming the order of being is present to and active within the order of knowing as its ground, theology can affirm and describe God’s life *ad intra* but only insofar as it recognizes the mysterious and ineffable nature of the divine being and rests content in its ectypal knowledge of the divine life. As such, his affirmation of divine absoluteness and personality serves to guard against *either* seeking to transcend the ectype *or* assuming the ectype exhausts the archetype.\(^{140}\) Thus, while the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity

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affirms and describes the fullness of God’s life in se, it is ectypal knowledge, derived from reasoned reflection on divine self-revelation, and guided and normed by Scripture. As such, for Bavinck, the axiomatic principle of divine predication is analogy. The ontological dimension while affirming the independence and fullness of the divine life is not theology’s transcendence above finite human knowledge even as it the acknowledgment of the mysterious, full, divine life that is given via God’s accommodating, anthropomorphic self-revelation. These principles inform and structure the relationship between the ontological, cosmological and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity.141

Establishing the relationship between the order of knowing and the order of being and affirming the possibility of predicing truths about the divine life in se, Bavinck’s systematic reconciliation of absoluteness and personality also reveals how Bavinck thinks the ontological dimension should be distinguished and developed. First, as Bavinck defines the divine essence as absolute Being, he denies any notion of becoming within the divine essence. The divine attributes belong to the divine essence fully, completely, infinitely, and absolutely. God does not become in and through his actions ad extra even as he is known through his actions ad extra. Bavinck is clear on this accord. A divine relationship with the world does not mean divine inter-dependence on the world. Thus, while a theological treatment of the divine essence and attributes is not bound to a particular theological or philosophical grammar, it is bound by a particular metaphysical principle. It cannot transgress the absolute ontological distinction between God (creator) and creation. According to Bavinck, while scriptural logic is not bound to a particular theological or philosophical vocabulary, it does present certain metaphysical judgements that cannot be transgressed. According to Bavinck, the reason theology must articulate the unity of God’s absoluteness and personality is that scriptural revelation holds them together. Scripture’s

141 This will be demonstrated more thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4.
affirmation of divine transcendence and immanence—its presentation of God as a “personal being, self-existent, with a life, consciousness and will of his own, not confined to nature but exalted high above it”\(^{142}\)—means that theology must articulate the systematic relationship between the two. And, as long as the scriptural truths are maintained, theology’s articulation of the relationship can utilize classical or modern philosophical and theological motifs and vocabulary. Utilizing the grammar of absoluteness and personality as well as traditional theological grammar, Bavinck predicates a variety of attributes (incommunicable and communicable) to God in order to describe the divine life apart from creation as rich and full. God is not a bare monad or being in need of actualization for Bavinck, but the living, absolutely personal triune God whose life is full and complete.

This is significant to note within Bavinck’s dogmatic theology, especially in light of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis and its impact on treatments of his doctrine of God. According to Bavinck classical and modern theological grammar need not be at odds with one another. In fact, they can both be appropriated in and for systematic development. This does not mean that their appropriation will not always be free from tension or duality, but it does mean that one cannot assume a dualism between classical and modern categories. Thus, it is imperative to identify the principles by which Bavinck appropriates and utilizes theology and philosophy. He is far more creative in his appropriation than the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis has allowed. For example, Bavinck notes the tensions that have been created in the doctrine of the Trinity in light of alternative conceptions of personality and personhood. However, rather than choosing to reject the classical conception of person and adopt the modern concept or vice versa, Bavinck seeks to maintain the term person to describe the Father, Son, and Spirit while incorporating but augmenting contemporary notions of personality such that God is tri-personal because he is the

\(^{142}\) RD, II. 33.
absolute divine personality. At times, one wishes that Bavinck would have articulated what he meant by absolute divine personality in more detail. However, his attempts to appropriate modern theological and philosophical insights within his systematic theology are important to highlight in terms of this thesis. It would be easy to utilize the dimensions in an exclusively apologetic manner and to present Bavinck as merely parroting the tradition, especially over against modern conceptions. While Bavinck’s identification of the dimensions comes in the midst of his assessment of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, it would be incorrect to assume that his stance towards modern theology is solely negative, critical and apologetic. What Bavinck maintains in the ontological dimension is the metaphysical distinction between God and creation. And, as this chapter has shown and the following chapters will show, he often criticizes modern and ancient philosophy for failing to account for the God-world relationship properly. However, Bavinck is not as quick to criticize contemporary issues as some have assumed.143 This can be seen in and through his careful utilization of absoluteness and personality in the doctrine of the Trinity.

As Bavinck appropriates absoluteness and personality within his locus de Deo, he affirms the truths present in alternative conceptions but also acknowledges their errors. This, according to Bavinck is something that theology has always done. Thus, he rejects other conceptions of the divine being that either deny the fullness of God’s life apart from creation or make creation constitutive of the divine life. He rejects pantheism, which in collapsing God and the world and dragging the divine into the realm of becoming, confuses the notion of analogical predication thereby leaving one with a far too creaturely, rationalistic conception of the divine. Similarly, he rejects Deism, which in hopelessly separating God from the world makes descriptions of the divine

143 A primary example of this can be seen in the apologetic work of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til appropriates Bavinck’s theology and utilizes it transcendentally within his apologetic work. See Cornelius Van Til, Introduction to Systematic Theology, esp. Chapters 13-18.
impossible thereby resulting in a cold, lifeless, and disconnected deity. Even as Bavinck appreciates certain elements within contemporary philosophical and theological treatments of the divine life, he critically engages any that ascribe becoming to the divine essence or do not affirm divine independence. Over and against these conceptions, Bavinck positively argues that only a doctrine of God that is rooted in Scripture can simultaneously maintain God’s transcendence and immanence and attest to the ontological dimension, the fullness of the divine life.

Furthermore, Bavinck’s appropriation of absoluteness and personality points towards the ultimate systematic unity of his locus *De Deo Uno et Trino*. As Bavinck describes and defines the fullness of the divine life in and through his identification of God as absolute Being, his ultimate goal is to show the irreducibly Trinitarian nature of the divine being. God *is* triune. The attributes define the nature of the divine life, but the Father, Son, and Spirit tell us who and what God is. Bavinck’s description of God as absolute divine personality is one of the ways that he seeks to articulate the triunity of God. Bavinck sees the ontological dimension as attending to all the aspects of the divine life and pointing to the unity-in-diversity of God. Thus, while he distinguishes his treatment of the divine essence, attributes, and persons, he does so for the sake of systematic clarity. Finally, as Bavinck develops his doctrine of the Trinity in its ontological dimension, he gives a description of the divine life *ad intra*. For Bavinck, the God of Scripture is the One living, absolutely personal, triune God whose life is full and complete apart from creation.
Chapter 3: The Cosmological Dimension

The Trinity and Creation

1. Introduction

Using Bavinck’s reconciliation of absoluteness and personality, description of God’s triunity as unity-in-diversity, and affirmations concerning the communicability of the divine essence as a window into his doctrine of God, Chapter 2 identified the shape, structure, and function of the doctrine of the Trinity in its ontological dimension. God is the living, absolutely personal, triune God whose life is full and complete apart from creation. As the ontological dimension articulates the divine life \( ad \ intra \), it affirms divine aseity and properly maintains God’s divinity. However, while affirming the absolute being of God apart from the world, we also observed how Bavinck roots his articulation of the divine being in divine self-revelation.\(^1\) Thus, even though the divine life \( a \ se \) is what the ontological dimension affirms and describes, it does so on the presupposition that God has revealed himself \( ad \ extra \). What this means is that already in his articulation of the ontological dimension, Bavinck presupposes and begins to describe and articulate the relationship between God’s being and his acts and the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. As such, Chapter 2 pointed forward to the next two chapters in which the doctrine Trinity in its cosmological (Chapter 3) and soteriological (Chapter 4) dimensions are distinguished and developed.

As we seek to trace Bavinck’s trinitarian thoughts after him and trace their unity by utilizing the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions as a hermeneutical lens, Chapter 3 focuses on the Trinity in its cosmological dimension. At the end of Chapter 1, we briefly defined

\(^1\) See \textit{RD}, II. 341-2: “Until now we have discussed God’s being as such—not, of course, in the sense that we thought and spoke about God apart from his revelation in nature and Scripture. The truth is, we cannot speak of God except on the basis of his self-revelation.” Cf. \textit{Our Reasonable Faith}, 162: “We do not learn to know and to glorify God in independence from His work, but rather in and through His works in nature and grace.”
the cosmological dimension as “rooted in the ontological dimension” and Bavinck’s “description of the God-world relationship wherein God reveals himself in a relative sense to the world.”

This is necessary, according to Bavinck, because the doctrine of the Trinity alone can maintain a doctrine of creation “that is neither devoid of the divine (Deism) nor divinized (pantheism)” and “explains why all the works of God ad extra are only adequately known when their trinitarian existence is recognized.” As such, the cosmological dimension represents Bavinck’s dogmatic application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the God-world relationship. Thus, within the context of his structural trinitarianism, the cosmological dimension is Bavinck’s understanding of how the God-world relationship is an outworking of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Utilizing this basic definition, this chapter will explore Bavinck’s application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship. The goal will be to show how Bavinck’s doctrine of the Trinity positively (structures, norms, and informs) and negatively (apologetically) shapes his account of the God-world relationship. As with Chapter 2, it will not be possible to examine every aspect of Bavinck’s theology. However, it is possible to highlight how Bavinck utilizes the doctrine of the Trinity to establish the non-necessity but possibility of creation, to account for the nature and telos of creation, and to ground his claims that “the Christian mind remains unsatisfied…until the confession of God’s Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life.”

To do this, we will examine a few aspects of Bavinck’s articulation of the God-world relationship. First, we will examine how Bavinck utilizes the concept of communicability within an account of the divine decrees to articulate the non-necessity of creation as well as the relationship between God’s being and his external work in creation. As we do, we will see how the self-communicative relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit we have identified in the

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2 Chapter 1, 76.
3 RD, II. 333. See also Chapter 1, 77.
4 RD, II. 330.
previous chapters not only orders the movement of the divine persons into the divine economy but also how it informs and norms his account of creation’s nature, structure, and telos. Then, we will look at how Bavinck utilizes his doctrine of God in the formulation of a Christian worldview. Treating these aspects will allow us to see how Bavinck develops the cosmological dimension as he creatively appropriates traditional and modern theological categories to develop a triniform account of creation.

2. The Communicability of the Divine Essence and A Triniform Account of Creation

Having described God as the living, absolutely personal, triune God in his locus de Deo, Bavinck turns to the fecundity and communicability of the divine life as that which simultaneously maintains the non-necessity yet possibility of creation. According to Bavinck, it is the fecundity and communicability of the divine life that is able to show how creation has “its foundation in God…” but is not “a phase in the process of his inner life.” The doctrine of the Trinity establishes God as the fullness of absolute being, whose triune life is rich, full and complete. As such, “God does not need the world for his own perfection. He does not need the work of creation and preservation in order not to be unemployed. He is absolute activity within himself.” Creation cannot be necessary for God because God is an “infinite fullness of blessed life” whose triune being from all eternity is full, complete, and fecund within itself from all eternity.

But, at the same time, creation is possible because of the communicability and fecundity of the divine life. Drawing from Athanasius to articulate the relationship between divine fecundity and creation, Bavinck writes: “If the divine being were not productive and could not communicate

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5 *RD*, II. 333.
6 *RD*, II. 332-422.
7 *RD*, II. 332.
8 *RD*, II. 342.
9 *RD*, II. 308.
himself inwardly (ad intra), then neither could there be any revelation of God ad extra, that is, any communication of God in and to his creatures.”

In other words, creation is possible because the divine being is communicative ad intra.

To explain what this means, Bavinck turns to Augustine’s account of the relationship between God’s self-communication ad intra and creation and develops it for his own purposes. Careful to qualify the relationship by vehemently denying any notion of creation’s necessary existence, Bavinck identifies the eternal generation as an act of divine communication and boldly connects it to the possibility of creation over against pantheism and Deism. He writes:

Gnosticism [pantheism] knows no creation but only emanation and therefore makes the world into the Son, wisdom, the image of God in an antiquated sense. Arianism [Deism], on the other hand, knows nothing of emanation but only of creation and therefore makes the son into a creature… Christian theology, knows both emanation and creation, a twofold communication of God—one within and the other outside the divine being; one to the Son who was in the beginning with God and was himself God, and the other to creatures who originated in time; one from the being and another by the will of God. The former is called generation; the later creation…without generation, creation would not be possible. If, in an absolute sense, God could not communicate himself to the Son, he would be even less able, in a relative sense to communicate himself to the creature. If God were not triune, creation would not be possible.

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10 RD, II. 332. Bavinck does not cite Athanasius here, but in his locus on Creation discussing a similar point he cites Against the Arians, II.

11 RD, II. 420. Bavinck’s statement here is indeed bold. In it he moves beyond mere description to prescription. The Trinity is the precondition for the possibility of creation. For Bavinck, this statement is based on his observations in creation, but it can sound like a sudden flight into metaphysical speculation. To understand why Bavinck sees these types of statements as within the purview of his theology, it is important to remember the nature and task of theology that we examined in Chapter 1. Added to this, as we will see in the current chapter, as God’s self-revelation is an anthropomorphic and analogical, self-consciously willed disclosure of God’s divine perfections for his glory, the correct response to God is to view all of reality in light of the triune God and reflect this in theological reasoning. Thus, Bavinck does not see his statement concerning the Trinity and the possibility of creation as a flight into metaphysical fantasy or speculation. He sees it as a proper, reasoned response to God’s revelation. As such, he moves from the order of knowing to the order of being and makes an argument for the creation of the world over-against Deism and pantheism. Yet, even if one understands Bavinck’s argument, it does not mean that it is immune to criticism. While concerned with the development of ectypal theology as an echo of God’s archetypal self-knowledge, Bavinck does not always justify his movement as thoroughly as one would like. Furthermore, read in abstraction, Bavinck’s statements can sound speculative and a priori as well as primarily antithetical. For a similar assessment see, Mattson, Restored to our Destiny, 37-39.
In the eternal generation of the Son, the Father communicates the divine being to the Son fully, completely, and eternally.\textsuperscript{12} This act of eternal generation \textit{is not} an act of creation whereby the divine being comes into existence or causes itself. The deity of the Son is not dependent on nor derivative from the Father. God does not cause himself to be.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, eternal generation is the eternal, full, and complete communication of the essence by which the Father gives the Son “to have life in himself.”\textsuperscript{14} So too, the procession of the Spirit is the full and complete communication of the divine essence from the Father and the Son.\textsuperscript{15} The eternal communication of God is fecund and productive. Far from introducing metaphysical distinctions or becoming within the divine life, generation and procession are eternal communicative acts that distinguish and define the persons and their relationships \textit{ad intra}.\textsuperscript{16}

Drawing again on Athanasius and Augustine and but creatively utilizing a triniform account of the archetype/ectype distinction, Bavinck identifies God’s inner self-communication (generation and procession) as the archetype for his communication \textit{ad extra}.\textsuperscript{17} God’s absolute communication

\textsuperscript{12}In Bavinck’s theological articulation of the person of the Son in his \textit{locus De Deo Trino}, Bavinck already highlights how the Father’s generation of the Son is cosmologically significant. “God is no abstract, fixed monadic solitary substance, but a plenitude of life. It is his nature (\textit{ouσìa}) to be generative (\textit{γεννυτικη}) and fruitful (\textit{καρπογονος}). It is capable of expansion, unfolding, and communication. Those who deny this fecund productivity fail to take seriously the fact that God is an infinite fullness of blessed life…Apart from the Trinity even the act of creation becomes inconceivable. For if God cannot communicate himself, he is a darkened light, a dry spring, unable to exert himself outward and to communicate himself to creatures.” \textit{RD}, II. 308-309.

\textsuperscript{13} This, as James Eglinton has highlighted, is a point of significant difference between Bavinck and Barth. See Eglinton, \textit{Trinity and Organism}, 120. This difference will become more apparent later in this chapter and in Chapter 4’s treatment of the doctrine of Election in Bavinck. It is sufficient to point out here that Bavinck opposes the idea that God wills himself to be, and he carefully guards against that idea by distinguishing the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological in the doctrine of the Trinity.

\textsuperscript{14} The eternal generation of the Son does not make him subordinate to the Father in any way. Again, even though Bavinck establishes an order between the persons, he does not derive the divine essence from the Father. The very essence of God is to be triune, and therefore eternal generation is necessarily eternal and unchanging, which is “at once always complete and eternally ongoing.” \textit{RD}, II. 308-310.

\textsuperscript{15} The Spirit is not generated because this would result in divine boundlessness. Thus, the Spirit proceeds “from the Father and the Son, as given by both, not as born from both.” See \textit{RD}, II. 313. Emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{16} It does, however, provide an account of the interrelationship between the three persons. They are really and truly distinct as they are incommunicable relations within the divine being. However, they fully and completely communicate the divine essence to one another. Communication here should not be equated with the notion of individual self-consciousness.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{RD}, II. 333. Bavinck does not provide a citation for Augustine or Athanasius here. However, he does cite the following texts when making a similar point in his locus on Creation: Augustine, \textit{Sermon} 117; \textit{Freedom of the Will}, III, 16-17; \textit{On the Trinity}, XI, 10; XV, 14.
ad intra is the archetype and ground for his relative communication,18 and it is the eternal communication of the Father, Son, and Spirit that accounts for the possibility of creation.19 According to Bavinck, if God can communicate his being fully and completely ad intra, it is possible for him to communicate himself truly and relatively ad extra.

Affirming creation as not strictly speaking necessary but rooted in the divine life is important for Bavinck because it distinguishes the Christian doctrine of Creation from its religious alternatives: pantheism and materialism. Pantheism, rejecting the absolute nature of God’s life ad intra, makes creation a necessary correlate to the divine and collapses the creator/creature distinction.20 Materialism, in presupposing a deistic God (at best) and atheism (at worst), posits no real connection between God and creation. Yet, according to Bavinck, the truths inherent in both must be maintained. The world cannot be the All (Spinoza) or the manifestation of the Absolute.

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18 Interestingly, even though Bavinck focuses heavily on the communicability of the divine essence, there also seems to be an implicit utilization of his understanding of the persons as incommunicable existences within the divine nature. While the essence is fully communicated between the Father, Son, and Spirit, the personal properties of unbegotteness, generation, and procession are incommunicable. Bavinck briefly identifies the use of communicability and incommunicability in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity within his discussion on the divine attributes. See RD, II, 131: “This led to the division between communicable and incommunicable attributes. Earlier these expressions were already employed in the doctrine of the Trinity. For, as it was put, God’s essence or deity is communicable (communicated to by the Father to the Son in the generation of the Son), but the persons and the personal properties (say, fatherhood) are incommunicable.” This implicit emphasis becomes explicit when Bavinck turns to articulate the relationship between the Trinity and the incarnation. This will be evident in Chapter 4, 193-207.

19 In the passage cited, Bavinck only focuses on the Father-Son relationship. However, in another passage, he includes generation and procession. See RD, II.333: “Generation and procession in the divine being are the immanent acts of God, which make possible the outward works of creation and revelation.”

20 At the beginning of his chapter on Creation in the Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck identifies ancient and modern pantheists. Surprisingly, Bavinck identifies Gnosticism as a form of pantheism. Bavinck’s identification of Gnosticism as a form of pantheism requires a short explanation, especially because Gnosticism posits a distinction between God and the world that sounds much more like Deism than pantheism. However, throughout his Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck seems to equate Gnosticism with forms of Neo-Platonism that developed a series of intermediaries between God and the world. Thus, the distinction between God and the world is not absolute but a continuum in Gnosticism. As Brian Mattson has highlighted on this point, it would seem that this is an example of how Bavinck saw Deism and pantheism as constantly merging and collapsing into one another. I am indebted to a footnote in Brain Mattson’s work for pointing this out. See, Brain Mattson, Restored to Our Destiny, 23, n. 18. What is substantial is that in equating Gnosticism with Neo-Platonism with pantheism and claiming that contemporary pantheists make the same error, Bavinck identifies contemporary pantheists as drawing on, yet historicizing, Neo-Platonic concepts. In this, Bavinck’s analysis could be compared to others, especially Arthur Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: The History of a Concept (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1936).
Spirit (Hegel). But, it also cannot be unrelated to God (Deism). This is why even though Bavinck strongly opposed pantheistic articulations of the God-world relationship in philosophy and theology, he often appreciated various elements within pantheism. At times, he even credited the Idealistic philosophers and theologians, not orthodox theologians, for bringing “trinitarian dogma [back] into favor” in the wake of Deism. For Bavinck, Hegel and Schelling’s utilization of the Trinity to articulate the logic of reality was something to take seriously. For in their accounts, the events of history and structure of nature itself found its deepest ground in the three-fold actualization of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unlike Deism, the Absolute of pantheistic Idealism does not stand far off or extrinsic to creation; it is its very ground. The Absolute is the logic of reality. However, Bavinck argued that because the Absolute was so integrated with the world, in the hands of many speculative Idealists, history was sacrificed to the system and cosmogony was brought into the very life of God. The result: theology turns into theogony. For this reason, Bavinck perceived pantheism to be a far greater problem than Deism, even though it proved to be a more interesting interlocutor. He knew that developing a positive account of the God-world relationship in response to pantheism could not simply posit an ontological distinction between God and the world without also articulating the relationship between God and the world. To do the former and refuse to do the latter would result in a return to Deism wherein the world is not really grounded in the divine nor does the divine actively participate in the world.

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21 According to Bavinck, Spinoza is the Father of modern pantheism. Following Spinoza, Bavinck identifies a series of philosophical and theological pantheists including but not limited to Schelling, Baader, Böhme, Schleiermacher, Strauss, Biedermann, and Schweizer. See RD, II. 411.
22 See RD, I. 111-112 and RD, II. 328.
23 See RD, II. 327-329.
24 On this account Eitel’s assessment in “Trinity and History” concerning Bavinck is correct. However, the critique offered of Eitel in the Introduction still stands. Eitel does not take Bavinck’s harsh criticisms of pantheism, particularly Hegel, seriously enough as he seeks to understand how Bavinck engaged his context. See Eitel, “Trinity and History.”
Thus, Bavinck turns to articulate the relationship between God and creation in a typically Reformed way, by an appeal to the divine decrees.\textsuperscript{25} Within the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, the doctrine of Decrees is what Bavinck uses to “establish a connection between the immanent works of the divine being and the external works of creation and re-creation.”\textsuperscript{26} Why? First, because even if divine fecundity and the communicative nature of the triune God makes creation possible, the creation of the world cannot be attributed to mere possibility nor be an account of an overflow of the divine life.\textsuperscript{27} Second, Bavinck found within the Reformed doctrine of Decrees a way to

\textsuperscript{25} In “Trinity and History,” Eitel claims that by appealing to the divine decrees, Bavinck typifies the strain of “nineteenth-century thought by rooting his claims in the divine counsel.” Eitel, “Trinity and History,” 123. This raises a question concerning whether or not Bavinck follows nineteenth-century thinkers like Schweizer, Baur, and others who utilized the divine counsel as a means through which to develop and employ a predestinarian metaphysic, often with recourse to Hegel. Eitel is correct that in the nineteenth century the doctrine of God’s eternal counsel was often identified as the central dogma of Reformed thought and utilized to develop contemporary, deductive, metaphysical systems rooted in God’s absolute decree. And certainly, Bavinck took up some of the insights he observed within the historiographical and theological developments of the nineteenth-century, such as the distinction between Lutheran (soteriological) and Reformed theology (theological) as well as the feeling of absolute dependency within human self-consciousness. However, Bavinck’s development of the doctrine of God’s eternal counsel is more nuanced than Eitel presents. Its use and development in theology reach much further back in Reformed tradition than the nineteenth-century, and Bavinck’s articulation of God’s eternal counsel depends on a number of important distinctions made within Reformed orthodoxy between God’s free and necessary knowledge and will. Furthermore, within the Reformed orthodox tradition, the description of God’s eternal counsel, especially the \textit{pactum salutis}, was a means to carefully relate the works of God \textit{ad intra} and \textit{ad extra}. Bavinck did not see himself as deducing his concept of the eternal counsel from a deterministic, philosophical concept of God but an attempt to articulate the objective truths revealed in Scripture systematic form. In doing so, he appropriates and develops the Reformed tradition in order to articulate the close relationship, but necessary distinction, between God’s communication \textit{ad intra} and his communication \textit{ad extra}, highlighting the historical nature of the latter while defending the eternal and unchanging nature of the former.\textsuperscript{26} RD, II. 342.

\textsuperscript{26} RD, II. 342.

\textsuperscript{27} Bavinck argues for the use of the divine decrees in theology by an appeal to Scripture as well as ordinary human experience. First, in his treatment of the divine counsel in the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, Bavinck states that “Scripture as such does not offer us an abstract description of the decrees; instead they are made visible to us in the progress of history itself. God is Lord of the entire earth and demonstrates his lordship from day to day in the creation, preservation, and governance of all things.” As God creates, upholds, and preserves the universe, time itself contains the heartbeats of eternity. Although nothing is God, it all displays God and his eternal plan. Thus, it is possible to come to know it in a human way and articulate it theologically. Second, Bavinck also appeals to Scripture to build a case for his theological development of the divine decrees. According to Bavinck, the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that everything that exists has its origin and essence in the mind of God. While Scripture does not articulate this truth in an abstract manner, it does affirm it. Thus, everything in all of creation is bound in eternity, including but not limited to the eternal state of rational creatures. For Bavinck, the doctrine of Decrees is a way to theologically reflect on the truths given in Scriptural revelation, which then aid in understanding his revelation in his God’s lordship over creation (in nature, providence, and governance). See, \textit{RD} II. 343-355. Finally, although not an aspect of his treatment of the divine decrees, it is important to note that Bavinck develops his philosophical account of God’s will and human contingency in and through a creative appropriation of Augustine and Schleiermacher to develop a particular account of human self-consciousness wherein human beings are immediately (intuitively) aware of their contingency and dependency on God and the world. As Cory Brock has recently shown, Bavinck critically appropriates Schleiermacher’s concepts of self-consciousness, absolute dependence, and feeling to articulate the unity of thinking and being and the grammar of objective and subjective religion. An avenue of further research would be to develop
integrate his desire to take history and the nature of God’s revelation seriously without sacrificing history to the system. As such, the doctrine of Divine Decrees serves as the pivot point between the inward and outward actions of God and an account of the relationship between God’s being and his acts in creation.

Most succinctly, Bavinck defines the divine decrees as a divine work *ad intra* as they relate “to the creatures who will exist outside of his being.”\(^{28}\) The decrees still belong to the works of God *ad intra*, but they establish the connection to God’s works *ad extra*. The eternal plan of God, which is not “equated with God’s being” but is closely connected with it, is that which will be worked out in time by the same God.\(^{29}\) Following a classical distinction between God’s purely immanent works and the works *ad intra* directed towards creatures, Bavinck still closely relates the decrees—the works of God *ad intra* directed toward creatures and the essence of God—without collapsing the two.\(^{30}\) First, all the decrees are “derived from the fullness of knowledge that is eternally present in God,” but they do not exhaust God’s wisdom and knowledge.\(^{31}\) Second, they are the result of his eternal free choice. Because God is the living, triune, absolute God, creation is not absolutely necessary for the divine being. “God does not need the world for his own perfection…He is absolute activity within himself.”\(^{32}\) However, as God freely, eternally chooses to create, his absolute sovereignty and self-sufficiency mean he will create. In this sense, creation is necessary

\(^{28}\) *RD*, II. 342.

\(^{29}\) *RD*, II. 373.


\(^{31}\) *RD*, II. 342.

\(^{32}\) *RD*, II. 342.
given God’s free choice to create from all eternity.33 “It is his decree that makes the creation and preservation of the world necessary.”34 While carefully and logically distinguished from the absolute activity that belongs to the life of the triune persons, the decrees cannot be abstracted from God’s eternal life as they are the eternal, full, and complete counsel of God concerning the whole plan of the whole universe, which is then executed in time.35 As they encompass all that will exist and happen, the decrees or counsel of God, “is a master concept…it covers all things without exception.”36 And, because the triune God has one self-consciousness and one will, which are deep and as rich as his being, the counsel of God, is not many but one. It is “one single conception.”37 Finally, the ultimate goal of the divine counsel is the glory of God.

Even as the eternal counsel (consilium dei) of God is “designed for realization outside the divine being,”38 it remains an eternal work of God ad intra.39 Yet, given Bavinck’s earlier

33 Bavinck not only builds on Reformed orthodox distinction between God’s necessary knowledge (scientia necessaria) as it relates to himself and his voluntary knowledge as it relates to creatures (scientia voluntaria) but also the distinction between different types of necessity. In Reformed orthodoxy, among many distinctions, they distinguished absolute necessity, whereby something is simply necessary, necessity of the consequent, which follows from absolute necessity and cannot be other than what it is, necessity of the consequence, by which something is necessary due to a set of circumstances. See Muller, “God as Absolute and Relative,” 57-8; idem, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 199-200.
34 RD, II. 343.
35 Fittingly Bavinck spends a significant amount of time engaging the debate between infra- and supralapsariansim. However, he refuses to collapse the divine counsel into an account of predestination alone. It is, for Bavinck, a counsel concerning everything in all of creation. Thus, this chapter has chosen to avoid the topic of predestination because it wants to highlight the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for things pertaining to creation in Bavinck. His engagement with infra- and supralapsarianism will be taken up in Chapter 4.
36 RD, II. 392. In defining the decrees as God’s eternal counsel pertaining to everything that has happened and will happen in time, Bavinck expands his treatment of the decrees beyond the eternal state of rational creatures. They pertain to everything in the created universe and certainly include election and reprobation, but God’s eternal counsel is more expansive than predestination alone. See RD, II: 392: “Predestination, however, concerns the eternal state of rational creatures and the steps of means leading to it, but it cannot include among those means everything that exists and occurs in the world.” Bavinck emphasizes this by treating providence and predestination/reprobation separately in his development of the decrees. To be sure Bavinck sees God’s eternal, divine counsel as one, unified, whole, but he does distinguish between the various effects of God’s decree as they are realized in time. Distinguishing between the effects is not only necessary because human beings experience and perceive the realization of God’s decrees in time through history but also because it helps highlight the theological relationship between the various effects. This will become more significant in our exploration of Bavinck’s treatment of infra- and supralapsarianism in Chapter 4.
37 RD, II. 392
38 RD, II. 342.
39 RD, II. 342.
affirmations concerning self-sufficiency of the absolute triune God, the divine counsel cannot be a work of God that is necessary or constitutive of the divine being. To equate the divine counsel with God’s triune being would make creation necessary for God, which for Bavinck violates the scriptural affirmation that the life of God is full and complete from everlasting to everlasting. However, completely detaching the divine counsel from God’s eternal life not only presents God as bound by time and indecisive but also violates the scriptural affirmation that God is the efficient and exemplary cause of all things. So in order to explain how the divine counsel arises from the divine life but is not constitutive of it, Bavinck turns once again to the communicability and fecundity of the divine essence and to explain how the divine counsel arises from God’s self-knowledge. According to Bavinck, the idea and willing of the world are in the communication of the essence from the Father to the Son in the Spirit. As Bavinck again draws on the communicability and fecundity of the divine essence from all eternity to articulate the relationship between the doctrines of God and Creation, he utilizes his description of God’s personality in terms of self-consciousness and self-determination.

Recognizing the danger of equating the Son with the Greek philosophical conception of the Logos or rational pattern of the universe, Bavinck uses Augustine to argue against Logos speculation whereby creation is more a work of the Father than the Son. To engage in Logos speculation not only undercuts the doctrine of Creation but also (as Bavinck has previously argued) fails to properly distinguish between the ontological and cosmological in the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, as the Father, who is the initiating cause of creation and the first, unbegotten, person of the Trinity, imparts, expresses all that he is and has to the Son, he contemplates and envisions the idea of the world in and through the Son. As Bavinck writes: “The Father

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40 See RD, II. 373.
41 RD, II. 373.
42 See RD, II. 283-285.
contemplates the idea of the world itself, not as though it were identical with the Son, but so that he envisions and meets the Son in whom his fullness dwells.” The idea, pattern, principle of the world is contained in the communication of the Father to the Son. The idea of the world is not constitutive or equivalent to the communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son but an eternal aspect of it. As Bavinck summarizes in an extended passage worth quoting in full:

The idea that the Father pronounces in the Son is a seminal word, a fundamental form of the world itself. For that reason, the Son is called the beginning (archē) and firstborn (prōtotokos), the origin of creation, the firstborn who sustains the creation, for whom it arises as its cause and example, and in whom it rests. Therefore, the word that the Father utters at creation and by which he calls the things out of nothingness into being, is also effective, for it is spoken in and through the Son. And finally, the Son in a sense is also the final cause (causa finalis) of the world. Because in him it has its foundation and model, it is also created for him, not as its ultimate goal, but still as the head, the Lord and heir of all things (Col. 1:16; Heb 1:2). Summed up in the Son, gathered under him as head, all creatures again return to the Father, from whom all things originate. Thus the world finds its idea, its principle (archē) and its final goal (telos) in the triune being of God.

The Son is not the idea of the world, but the idea of the world finds its fundamental form and ultimate goal in the Father’s communication to the Son. In other words, the idea of the world neither constitutes nor exhausts the Father-Son relationship. Connected to the divine self-consciousness or knowledge, which belongs to the divine essence, the idea of the world is derived from divine wisdom but does not exhaust it, and the idea of the world unfolds eternally in and through the communication of the Father to the Son.

To clarify the relationship of the idea of the world to the divine being Bavinck compares it to the relationship between God’s self-consciousness and world-consciousness. For Bavinck God’s
self-consciousness is akin to what older theologians described as his natural or necessary knowledge. It is God’s “knowledge of simple intelligence.”47 God’s world-consciousness, then, refers to God’s free or contingent knowledge, “the knowledge of vision.”48 However, even as Bavinck appeals to the traditional language, he seeks to connect God’s self-consciousness and world-consciousness more closely than they have been in the past. To do so, he uses his organic motif and argues that “out of the infinite fullness of ideas present in his absolute self-consciousness, God did not arbitrarily select a few for the purpose of realizing them outwardly. In this section he was guided, rather, by the purpose of revealing himself, all his attributes and perfections, in the universe.”49 God’s natural knowledge and free knowledge are related to one another as an archetype is related to the ectype. Thus, there is an integral, organic relationship between the two.50 Just as God’s self-knowledge is not exhausted by creation and is infinitely deeper and richer than creation, so too the idea of the world does not exhaust God’s being, diminish his power, or constitute the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. The eternal, archetypal, perfect communication of the Father to the Son, contains within it all the knowledge of the ways that the divine essence can be communicated in a finite, limited, and ectypal way and thereby gives rise to the idea of the world itself.51

While Bavinck primarily discusses the communication between the Father and Son in relation to the idea or pattern of creation, he does not ignore the role of the Spirit. According to Bavinck,

47 RD, II. 195.
48 RD, II. 195.
49 RD, II. 195.
50 Bavinck carefully qualifies his statement here because he does not want his reader to confuse God’s free knowledge, or world-consciousness, with human knowledge of God’s revelation. God’s world-consciousness, unlike human knowledge, is comprehensive and contains within it everything that will happen in time (past, present, and future). Furthermore, God’s knowledge of the world is not derived from observation but arises in and of himself. Human knowledge comes through observing; God’s knowledge does not. This account of God’s knowledge is important in Bavinck’s consideration of the unity of the eternal counsel. God’s knowledge of all that will happen in time to display is attributes is not discursive but eternal and immediate. See RD, II. 195-196.
51 RD, II. 373. According to Bavinck, the relationship between God’s self-consciousness and world-consciousness is an organic one and should be more closely related than theologians have related them in the past. God’s world-consciousness or free knowledge is not arbitrary but guided by the purpose of revealing himself. See RD, II. 195.
the Spirit contains “within itself the willing of that world, the idea of which is comprehended within the divine wisdom.”\textsuperscript{52} Thus, the willing of the world itself is contained in the idea of the world, which is communicated from the Father and the Son to the Spirit.\textsuperscript{53} The willing of the world, which is related to God’s divine self-determination, is similarly related to the divine will as the idea of the world is related to the divine wisdom. The willing of the world neither constitutes nor exhausts God’s eternal, full will which is as deep and rich as his eternal life.\textsuperscript{54} Giving a triniform account of the willing of the world, Bavinck describes it as contained within but not constitutive of the communication from the Father to the Son in the Spirit.\textsuperscript{55}

In sum, the triniform counsel of God, which for Bavinck includes “all things that exist and will occur in time, in short, the whole plan, [the blueprint of] the ‘intelligible universe,’” is closely connected to God’s being but not equated with it.\textsuperscript{56} Appealing to the communication and fecundity of the divine essence, Bavinck articulates how the world can have its foundation in God. God’s eternal communication is fecund; it gives rise to the idea of the world in and through the

\textsuperscript{52} RD, II. 426.
\textsuperscript{53} See RD, II. 314. Here Bavinck does seem to be drawing on the tradition that he attributes to Thomas and subsequent scholastics (Reformed and Catholic) that the generation of the Son occurred in the manner of (by way of) the intellect and the procession of the Spirit occurred in the manner (by way of) the will. Bavinck assesses this tradition favourably in his \textit{De Deo Trino}. While Bavinck places the idea of the world in the communication from the Father to the Son and the willing of the world in the communication from the Father and the Son to the Spirit, he does not engage extensively with the tradition that describes generation as taking place ‘in the manner of the intellect’ and spiration as taking place ‘in the manner of the will.’ He notes the need for caution and modesty with this distinction, but he does not reject it. He is, however, hesitant to engage in too much speculation concerning the distinction. For a good treatment of the development of this in Medieval and Scholastic theology see Russel L. Friedman, \textit{Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{54} Like God’s knowledge, Bavinck distinguishes between God’s necessary and free will. In relation to creation, he writes: “But just as God’s ‘free’ knowledge does not make him dependent on creatures but is known to him from within himself, so also the will of God that is aimed at his creatures must not be dualistically set side by side to the will whose object is his own being… The creation, accordingly, is not to be conceived as an object existing outside of or over against him, which he lacks and strives to possess, or as something he hopes to gain, which he does not possess…He wills creatures, not for something they are or that is in them, but for his own sake. He remains his own goal.” \textit{RD}, II. 232-233.
\textsuperscript{55} For Bavinck, creation is attributed to God’s absolute divine sovereignty but not in the sense of God’s will overrides everything like in Descartes. See \textit{RD}, II. 157.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{RD}, II. 373.
communication of the persons. But, it does not in any way constitute the essential communication of the three persons.

To fully guard against any notion that creation’s foundation in the eternal counsel (consilium dei) of God must be realized to fulfil any lack or need in God, Bavinck appeals to the will of God as the only and ultimate cause of creation. Utilizing Augustine to articulate his point as he discusses creation’s ultimate cause in the Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck writes: “To the question of why things exist and are as they are, there is no other and deeper answer than that God willed it. If someone should then ask Why did God will it? ‘he is asking for something that is greater than the will of God, but nothing greater can be found.’”57 To seek an answer for creation beyond God’s will is to try to transgress the boundary line and seek to comprehend the incomprehensible mystery of God’s hidden motivations. Seeking to find a deeper ground beyond God’s will is one of the main errors of pantheism. According to Bavinck, pantheism does this in one of two ways. It either presents God’s being as so “superabundantly rich that the creation of the world automatically flows from it… or it attempts to explain the world from God’s poverty (penia tou Theou) not from his wealth. God is so needy and unblessed that he needs the world for his own development.”58 For Bavinck, however, Scripture presents a different picture. Creation is a gift that owes its existence to the free and sovereign choice of God. Connected to Bavinck’s articulation of the doctrine of Decrees, it is possible to see one of the key functions they have in Bavinck. They give a theological account of what he sees as a deeply scriptural idea: the creation of the world is due to God’s free, purposive will alone.59

57 RD, II. 430. Bavinck cites Augustine, De Gen, contra Manich., I.2. in this citation. He also cites Augustine, City of God, XXI, 8 in this section.
58 RD, II. 431.
Yet, even though the ultimate cause for all that exists is God’s will, creation’s goal and structure are not arbitrary and unknowable. The triune God’s self-consciousness informs and norms creation, and there is an organic and integral relationship between God’s self-consciousness and his world-consciousness. Turning to Scripture, the Reformed tradition, and (once again) Augustine, Bavinck makes a careful and nuanced argument that builds his previous theological account of divine life, communicability, and the God’s eternal counsel to articulate how creation is a self-consciously willed revelation of the divine life meant to display and manifest his perfections.

According to Bavinck, God’s glory and God’s glory alone is the ultimate goal of creation. Well aware of the objection that this makes God ‘self-centered, self-seeking, devaluing creatures, specifically humans’ Bavinck argues that it is the only scripturally faithful account of creation’s goal. Appealing to his previous affirmations concerning God as the absolute, triune Being, Bavinck argues that “God can rest in nothing other than himself and cannot be satisfied in anything less than himself.” For Bavinck, God’s glory is the only goal that takes God’s goodness and plenitude seriously. As he describes in his locus de Deo, in a strikingly classical way: “God absolutely delights in himself, he absolutely rests in himself, and is absolutely self-sufficient. His life is not a process of becoming… not a process of desiring and striving…but an uninterrupted rest, eternal peace. God’s delight in his creatures is part and parcel of his delight in himself ‘God is his own blessedness.’”

In relation to creation, this means that God does not find his fulfillment in creation, but creatures find their fulfilment in him. This cannot be conceptualized as divine narcissism. God’s glory is the goal of creation because he is the supreme good and perfection itself. From the side of creation, that means that all of creation not only comes from God but finds its end and rest.

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60 RD, II. 251.
in God. Creation flows from God to return to God (*exitus-reditus*), as it does it fulfils its
doxological purpose of bringing glory and honor to God.\(^6^1\)

Bavinck also vehemently argues that this goal does not somehow make creation necessary for
God. Having already argued against the necessity of creation for God, Bavinck once again appeals
to the nature of the divine being to ward off this critique. Because God is absolute being and life
itself, he cannot “seek out a creature as if that creature were able to give him something that he
lacks or could take from him something he already possesses.”\(^6^2\) Applying his criticism of
pantheism to the goal of creation, Bavinck reiterates that the world cannot arise out of a lack in
God that he must fulfil. Again, Bavinck articulates this in strikingly classical theological terms:
“His striving is always—also in and through his creatures—total self-enjoyment.”\(^6^3\)

What this means for Bavinck is that because God cannot seek anything other than himself, he
cannot be dependent on anything other than himself. He is, as Bavinck has argued, absolute.
Therefore, as the living, absolutely personal, triune God seeks his own glory in creation, its form
and structure cannot be derived from anything outside of his being nor can its goal be anything but
himself. As we saw in our investigation of the eternal counsel, Bavinck, following Augustinian
logic, argues that the foundation, the idea of the world itself, rests in God. The whole world in all
its parts owes its origin *and* its form to God. While Bavinck carefully guards against speculation
concerning the reason for creation beyond the divine will, he is clear that creation—its origin and
structure—are due to God alone and rest in God’s divine wisdom and intellect. And, as he does so
he also carefully connects the structure and the form of the world to God’s desire to manifest his
perfections.

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\(^6^2\) *RD*, II. 435.
\(^6^3\) *RD*, II. 435.
In sum, Bavinck applies his doctrine of the Trinity to develop a triniform account of divine communicability and the eternal counsel. As he does, he shows how God’s communication ad intra is the condition that makes ad extra communication possible and informs and norms it so that the world is a self-consciously willed manifestation of his perfections. The idea of the world that is contained in the eternal communication from the Father to the Son is not a bare idea detached from the divine essence. It intimately connected to the divine essence without being determinative or exhaustive of it. As the Father creates the world through the Son in the Spirit, the triune God seeks to glorify himself in and through the creation of the world. God creates a world that will communicate his perfections and glory. In sum, creation is an “instrument, fashioned by…himself, to reveal his glory and by it to make himself known to human beings.”

Moreover, the trinitarian doctrine of the Divine Decrees allows for a purposive account of divine creation whereby God freely chooses to create a world whose plan is rooted and grounded in God without being divine. It also firmly establishes creation as a work of the triune God in space and time. As such, it presents a positive alternative to pantheism and Deism while affirming the truths inherent within them. Creation is a conscious and purposive (willful) act rooted in the eternal communication of the Father to the Son in the Spirit. It is not a result of unconscious emanation or lack in God (pantheism) nor is it devoid of the divine (Deism). Rather, it does manifest something about the divine (pantheism) even as the divine cannot be equated with the world (Deism).

64 RD, 1. 297.
65 While our investigation of Bavinck’s utilization of divine communicability and the doctrine of Decrees has focused on his appropriation of a variety of classical theological categories and motifs, it should be acknowledged that he recognizes various truths within modern pantheistic and deistic accounts of the God-world relationship. He even seeks to develop a more integral account of the relationship between God’s self-consciousness and world-consciousness through utilizing his organic motif. And, as we will see in our subsequent treatment of God’s revelation as self-revelation, he utilizes a common nineteenth-century category to describe revelation. However, amidst his appreciative engagement, and especially in his doctrine of God proper, Bavinck criticizes pantheistic and deistic conceptions heavily. In his positive theological development in the doctrine of God proper, Bavinck most often turns to Augustine, Thomas, and a variety of Reformed theologians to articulate his understanding of God’s essence and attributes.
world itself is the realization of the divine decree wherein the eternal decree is executed in time and space by the one, triune God.

3. The Divine Processions and the Temporal Effect of the Divine Will

While belonging to the life of God *ad intra*, the realization of the eternal counsel begins with the divine act of creation. Creation is God’s first ‘movement’ *ad extra*. The work of God in creation is a manifestation of the eternal counsel of the triune God and, as such, cannot incur any change to the divine being. God is and remains the living, absolutely personal, triune One. He is already the fullness of being; creation cannot add to his fullness nor subtract from it. Thus, creation is not the result of a divine movement from potentiality to actuality, from non-Creator to Creator, but an effect of the eternal divine will finding its terminus in time. What this means for Bavinck is that the movement of God into the divine economy is a movement within which the eternal processions add temporal effects. While there is no change in God, the terminus of the eternal processions in time result in the creation, preservation, and governance of the spiritual and physical world. Thus, even though God’s decree is eternal and atemporal, the realization of the decree is

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66 *RD*, II. 407.
67 *RD*, II. 429.
68 Bavinck utilizes the immanent (*ad intra*)/economic (*ad extra*) distinction in his locus on the Trinity. However, he also briefly mentions the term missions in relation to the sending of the divine persons into the economy. Here Bavinck appeals to an older tradition of distinguishing between the divine processions and missions, wherein the missions were the processions with the addition of time. The procession/mission distinction was meant to articulate a close relationship, but necessary distinction, between God’s eternal processions and his movement into the divine economy. The addition of a temporal term to the eternal processions in no way meant to be an incorporation of time into the divine life. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 194: “a sending forth or mission; specifically, the mission Spiritus Sancti, the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, distinct from, and not to be confused with, the procession (q.v.). The mission of the Spirit is the activity of the Spirit, according to the modus agendi of the persons in the opera dei essentialia (q.v.), by which and through which the Father and the Son act in the world, both in general and in the special economy of salvation.” See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1948), 1a, q.44, art.ii, ad. 3: “Mission signifies not only the procession from the principle, but also determines the temporal term of the procession. Or we may say that includes the eternal procession, with the addition.” The benefit of this distinction over immanent/economic is that it relates the works of God much more closely. There is not a hidden or different God behind his works in the divine economy. For Bavinck’s brief engagement with this distinction, see *RD*, II. 320-321.
69 *RD*, II. 429: “All change, then occurs in it, not in God. The world is subject to time, and that is, to change…Now these two, God and the world, eternity and time, are related in such a way that the world is sustained in all its parts by
accomplished in space and time. Bavinck describes this relationship using a myriad of different theological categories, but one of the most significant is his description that God as absolute Being posits becoming (the cosmos). Contra Hegel, Schelling, and others Bavinck’s God is the absolute triune Being. Thus, God does not change but can create and engage with a world that becomes.

For Bavinck, just as the eternal council cannot be detached from God’s being, so too the movement of God into the divine economy is not detached from his eternal, perfect life ad intra. In relation to creation, as the divine being is One, creation only has one Author (principium). As God is one, the outward works of God (opera ad extra) are also one. Yet, each person of the Trinity “performs a task of his own in that one work of creation...All things originate simultaneously from the Father through the Son in the Spirit.”70 The task of each person is fitting to their eternal procession within the Godhead. The Father, as unbegotten, is fittingly the one from whom “the initiative of creation proceeds.”71 As such, even though the work of creation is the work of the entire Trinity, it is properly appropriated to the Father. The Son, as eternally generated, is fittingly the one through whom God creates. He is not an instrument but the personal wisdom, Logos, and goal of creation.72 As such, he stands in relation to the world as its mediator, the one for whom and through whom all things have been created and under whom all things are gathered up.73 The Spirit, as the one who proceeds, is fittingly the “personal immanent cause by which all things live and move and have their being.”74 As such, the Spirit stands in relation to the world as its sustainer God’s omnipresent power...To the limited eye of the creature it successively unfolds its infinite content in the breadth of space and the length of time, so that a creature might understand something of the unsearchable greatness of God. But for all that, eternity and time remain distinct. All we wish to confess is that God’s eternal willing can and does, without ceasing to be eternal, produce effects in time, just as his eternal thought can have temporal objects as its content.”

70 RD, II. 423. In the course of his argument in this section Bavinck draws from Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, IV, 20; Augustine; Enchiridion, 10; On the Trinity; VI, 10; City of God, XI, 24; Confessions XIII, 11; Athanasius, Against the Arians, II, 2; Ad Serap., III, 5.
71 RD, II. 425.
72 RD, II. 423, 425
73 RD, II. 423.
74 RD, II. 423. The simultaneity of divine action means that the work of the three persons in creation cannot be diminished to the action of three separate efficient causes or considered in subordination to one another. Drawing on
and internal principle. Creation proceeds freely from the Father, through the Son in the Spirit, “in order that, in the Spirit and through the Son, it may return to the Father.” They are not three efficient causes, but “just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity.” Here we see again what Bavinck affirmed in his locus _de Deo_, God’s outward actions (_opera ad extra_) mirror the divine life _ad intra_.

4. Creation as Revelation

Given Bavinck’s appeal to divine communication as that which gives rise to the possibility and plan of creation, it is not surprising that Bavinck describes creation itself in radically communicatory language: as revelation. As he writes in the _Reformed Dogmatics_: “Creation is the initial act and foundation of all divine revelation, and therefore the foundation of all religious and ethical life as well.” Reaffirming and expanding this claim in his philosophically oriented work, the _Philosophy of Revelation_ Bavinck boldly claims:

The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation (_grondslag_), the secret (_geheim_) of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly will it discover that revelation underlies all created being. In every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with the omnipresence of God; the finite is supported by the infinite, all becoming is rooted in being.

Every aspect of the created world, including the progress of time itself (history), rests on God’s divine revelation (communication) of himself to the world.

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Irenaeus, Bavinck argues that the Son and the Spirit are not alien instruments that the Father uses to create. If they were, the Son and Spirit would be creatures (Arianism) and God the Father would be completely separated from the word.  
75 _RD_, II. 426.  
76 _RD_, II. 422.  
77 See Chapter 2, 115-6.  
78 See also, _RD_, I. 307: “That work of God outward began with the creation. The creation of is the first revelation of God, the beginning and foundation of all subsequent revelation…Creation, sustaining, and governing together form one single mighty ongoing revelation of God.”  
79 _RD_, II. 407.  
80 _PR_, 24.
Given Bavinck’s ongoing challenge to the Kantian claim that God cannot be known, and emphasis on divine communicability his description of creation in communicative terms is fitting. What is initially surprising, however, is Bavinck’s appropriation the modern theological grammar of self-revelation (zelfopenbaring). Conjoined with the idea of creation as an act of revelation, it sounds like Bavinck is describing the world in pantheistic terms. However, Bavinck is acutely aware of the potential pitfalls of describing creation as self-revelation (zelfopenbaring), namely that it can easily lead to thinking revelation is identical to creation and nature. But he is also keenly aware of the benefits of seeing creation as God’s self-revelation, namely that true, objective, yet relative knowledge of God himself is possible. Furthermore, it allows him to articulate how the whole world, including nature and history, can be conceptualized as a manifestation of God’s divine perfections. In volume one of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck articulates how Hegel, the early Schelling, and other Idealistic philosophers, seeking to overcome Kant’s antinomy between God and the world, also present “…the entire world [is] the self-revelation (zelfopenbaring) of God.” According to Bavinck, the problem with Hegel, Schelling, and others is that as they sought to resolve Kant’s antinomy, they collapsed God and the world together. In Schelling, “nature is visible spirit, spirit is visible nature,” and in Hegel, religion and revelation are two sides of the same coin within which “God’s self-consciousness in human beings coincides with humanity’s consciousness of God.”

Therefore, in a line of argumentation similar to the ones we have previously identified, Bavinck claims that the problem is not with conceptualizing creation as revelation or even the term self-revelation (zelfopenbaring) but with the God-world relationship within which it is articulated and

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81 See Chapters 1-2 of this thesis.
82 In Bavinck’s description of creation as divine self-revelation, one can see an aspect of Bavinck’s thought in which he is orthodox yet modern. He places the modern conception of revelation as divine self-revelation within his own theological framework and utilizes it to his own ends.
84 *RD*, I. 292.
the way revelation itself is understood and developed.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, creation is revelation not because it is the actual history of God’s self-consciousness (as in pantheism), but \textit{it is} revelation because the absolute, personal triune God self-consciously willed creation to be an instrument by which he ‘makes himself known.’\textsuperscript{86} Thus, creation is the result of the triune God’s self-conscious, eternal, decision to communicate himself relatively \textit{ad extra}. It is not God; it is a means, instrument, and medium through which God communicates. It is both a result of his communication and a non-divine theatre of his glory. What we can see here is that conditioned and defined by his previous affirmations concerning God’s personality, divine communication, and the God-world relationship, Bavinck appropriates the contemporary grammar of creation as self-revelation in order to articulate what he perceives as a deeply scriptural truth: While the world \textit{is not} God, everything in all creation reveals (communicates) something about God.

Distinguishing his understanding of self-revelation from Schelling, Hegel, and other contemporary philosophers, Bavinck utilizes what he perceives to be a central Christian idea within them. Revelation, while including revelation to the inner life and soul, ‘extends to the uttermost of creation’ and comes to pass in nature and history.\textsuperscript{87} Thus, Bavinck appropriates the idea of God’s self-revelation to his own ends. First, it serves as a fresh and renewed way to articulate Calvin’s idea that the world is a theatre of divine glory. Second, he sees it as profitable for developing a more satisfactory account of history as a medium within which God’s revelation occurs. Within his own context, Bavinck observed a shift away from seeing the whole world as a theatre of divine revelation. Swayed by rationalism or convinced by modern science many theologians and philosophers, following the neo-Kantian split between faith and knowledge, had begun to confine revelation to the inner soul or to the person of Christ alone, and had started to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{RD, I. 292-294.}\footnote{RD, I. 297.}\footnote{PR, 24.}
\end{footnotes}
conceptualized revelation as disconnected words and facts. But for Bavinck, Scripture does not present revelation this way. “…Revelation…does not consist in a number of disconnected words and isolated facts but is one single historical and organic whole, a mighty world-controlling and world renewing system of testimonies and acts of God.”

Describing creation as an instrument of divine self-revelation provided Bavinck with a theological grammar to articulate what he perceives as a scripturally informed and historically rooted account of revelation that also connects to his previous theological arguments and affirmations. First, it connects his articulation of the fecundity and self-communication within the divine essence to God’s action in creation. In both, God communicates. As God absolutely communicates (reveals) himself in the Son and the Spirit, so he communicates (reveals) himself relatively to the world. Second, unlike his ad intra communication, God’s relative communication occurs within time and space as the eternal processions within the divine life find their terminus in time. Rooting the decision to create in the divine will, Bavinck guards God’s self-revelation ad extra from being necessary. However, as the decree is realized in time, there is, necessarily, an historical element to God’s external self-communication. Thus, Bavinck seeks to draw together various threads as he articulates creation as an instrument of divine self-revelation, especially how an eternal and unchanging God can create a contingent world in which nature and history have significance. As such, it allows Bavinck to articulate a concept of revelation wherein the whole world, while not being God, is a manifestation of his perfections and glory in space and time. Third, it provides Bavinck with a contemporary theological grammar to articulate God’s revelation in creation as real and objective over against Kant and contemporary subjectivist notions of revelation. God’s revelation of himself in creation is real and objective. Finally, it also allowed

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88 PR, 22.
89 RD, I. 340.
90 RD, II. 333.
Bavinck to criticize overly mechanistic or mechanical approaches to God’s revelation, particularly in reference to the inspiration of Scripture, which he observed in the theological tradition.\(^9\)

Developing this in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and especially in his *Philosophy of Revelation*, Bavinck incorporates nature, historical development, and the idea of human self-consciousness into his theological and philosophical account of revelation.\(^2\) God’s *ad extra* communication calls the world into existence, and the world is a God-given instrument through which his glories are displayed and made known. Every aspect of creation is a relative communication of the absolute, personal, triune God.

### 4.1 Creation as Revelation: Distinct but Dependent

However, having articulated creation as the means and result of the self-revelation of God, which comes into existence when the eternal decree of God is realized in time, Bavinck turns to the participatory language of Augustine and various Scholastics to articulate creation’s utter dependence on yet ontological distinction from God. Within the context of his triniform account of the God-world relationship, Bavinck’s utilization of participatory language is not an attempt to explain *how* the non-divine can reveal the divine but a reasoned reflection that affirms what Scripture reveals: Everything, although distinct from God, is dependent on God for its existence and reveals the one who created and sustains it.\(^3\) Furthermore, he appeals to his concepts of

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\(^9\) See *RD*, I. 428-429.

\(^2\) This incorporation of nature, history, and self-consciousness into his theology and philosophy of revelation shows Bavinck’s appreciation for and engagement with nineteenth-century philosophy. As we have indicated, Bavinck took the nineteenth century’s emphasis on the importance of history seriously. However, he also sought to incorporate the insights concerning the historical nature of reality into his theology in a way that did not read time or history back into the divine being. As with his utilization of other contemporary themes, he does so with recourse to the tradition. While Bavinck may have been motivated to appeal to the tradition as he incorporated new insights due to his ecclesial context, it is more likely that he desired to connect contemporary insights to the tradition to show that while they may be new, they are not novel. This is even more likely the case because of how Bavinck roots his methodology for incorporating philosophical motifs and concepts in the work of the Church Fathers. In this way, Bavinck’s theology and philosophy of history can be seen as an example of his attempt to follow the Church Fathers in appreciating the truths within various strands of philosophical Idealism while rejecting its errors.

\(^3\) *RD*, II. 49: “It is completely incomprehensible to us how God can reveal himself and to some extent make himself known in created time: eternity in time, immensity in space, infinity in the finite, immutability in change, being in
revelation and consciousness in order to articulate how human beings come to know God as he reveals himself in his non-divine creation.

First, in his locus on God, Bavinck appropriates the Christian, Neo-Platonic participatory tradition and articulates creation as having its being by participation while God has his being by way of essence. Even though creation is distinct, it does not exist on its own. Its existence is a gift of God that comes by way of participation in the ideas of God. This does not mean that creation is part of the essence of God but that it wholly and completely depends on him and reflects his glories analogously. Second, in his loci Revelation, God, and Creation, he turns to Augustine’s utilization of the hierarchy of being and claims that a creature reveals God to the degree that it partakes of the divine being. This does not mean that creation partakes or partakes of God’s essence and therefore is a mode of the divine being. Rather, creation is a gift of ‘grace’ whose being depends on God and receives its form and structure from him. To articulate how God can be known in a creation that is not a mode of the divine being, Bavinck utilizes the idea that the primary cause (God) remains in the effect (creation) such that it can be observed and known. Turning to how human beings come to know God, Bavinck appeals to his development of self-consciousness. Bavinck sees self-consciousness as a gift in which human beings are immediately aware of their

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94 Although Bavinck strongly critiques Neo-Platonism for its pantheistic conception of the universe, he does not shy away from appropriating various elements of it. This is especially the case in terms of the early church’s utilization of Neo-Platonic categories and concepts to develop a Christian account of creation. Bavinck’s agreement with various elements within the doctrine of Creation as developed by the Church Fathers is an example of his general assessment that they engaged with pantheism and Deism in order to affirm their truths and eliminate their errors. See RD, II. 107: “All perfections are first in God, then in creatures. He possesses them because they belong to his essence; we possess them only by participation.” To articulate this point Bavinck draws on John of Damascus, The Orthodox Faith, I, 9; Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, qu. 3, art. 2; I, qu. 13, arts. 3 and 6; Bonaventure, Sent. I. dist. 22, art. 1, qu. 3; J. Zanchius, Op. theol., II, col. 11-14. See also, RD, II. 419: “…God is a self-subsisting necessary being (ens per essentiam), but the creature is existent by participation (ens per participationem). Creatures indeed have a being of their own, but this being has its efficient and exemplary cause in the being of God.” Here Bavinck appeals to Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, qu. 45, art. 1 and J. Kleutgen Philosophy der Vorzeit, II, 828ff., 899f. I am indebted to Wolter Huttinga’s 2014 dissertation for pointing out Bavinck’s careful utilization of the participatory tradition. See Huttinga, “Participation and Communicability,” Chapters 3, 5.
dependence. God’s general revelation in creation gives rise to the humanity’s God-consciousness in which human beings immediately, but indirectly, are aware of God and their dependence on him through his ongoing and continual general revelation (communication) in creation.95 Careful to maintain the distinction between God’s objective general revelation, which is mediated through created reality, and the subjective appropriation of that revelation, Bavinck nonetheless closely connects them. The effect is an account of how human beings can observe God’s revelation and come to know him truly, yet relatively and anthropomorphically.

As everything in creation is radically dependent on God for its origin and continued existence, it all displays forth his perfections and glory. “Nothing is excluded from his revelation,” but not everything is equally as revelatory of the divine perfections or divine life.96 The closer a being in the universe is to the divine, the more clearly it manifests the triunity of the divine life. As he writes:

The entire universe is a revelation of God. There is no part of the universe in which something of his perfections does not shine forth. Yet among his creatures there are distinctions: not all

95 This notion becomes integral to Bavinck’s account of religion. For Bavinck, religion is the human response to God’s revelation. Revelation is “religion’s external principle of knowing.” And, corresponding to this external principle is an a natural aptitude for perceiving the divine, which is the internal principle of knowing. As with his principia of knowledge, he connects these to the doctrine of the Trinity: “There is no religion apart from God making himself known to human beings both objectively and subjectively. And also in religion these three principles again have their foundation in the trinitarian being of God. It is the Father who reveals himself in the Son and by the Spirit.” Much like many nineteenth-century philosophies of religion, Bavinck links human religion to God’s self-consciousness and self-revelation in the world. However, he also develops the notion from within his own theological articulation of the God-world relationship and with recourse various elements within the theological tradition. For Bavinck, non-Christian religions are not developmental stages of God’s own self-consciousness, but fragmented and corrupted responses to God due to sin. Thus, as he will articulate in his account of God’s special revelation, the form that revelation takes is distinct in order to draw fallen humanity back to himself. In God’s special revelation, God comes to human beings objectively in Christ through the Spirit in order to make himself known “to those human beings who live in the light of this special revelation in order that they may accept the grace of God by faith in Christ...” But, in both general and special revelation, religion and revelation remain integrally linked. Religion is a response to revelation. Bavinck’s nephew J.H. Bavinck takes this articulation of religion and expands it within his theology of religion wherein he describes religious consciousness as structured around five magnetic points. See RD, I. 276-279, 350. See also J.H. Bavinck, Religieus Besef en Christelijk Geloof (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1949), Hoofdstuk 1.

96 Bavinck strongly connects God’s omnipresence and sovereignty in his argument. As God upholds everything, his God presence is everywhere in creation. See RD, I. 341: “Since nothing has durability except in and through God, nothing is excluded from his revelation. Materially it coincides with God’s maintenance of and rule over all things. But not all things are equally revelatory: the finger of God can be more readily perceived in one event than in another. Special persons and events more clearly exhibit God’s leading than those that are swallowed up in the stream of time. But ultimately nothing is excluded from general revelation; if our ‘eyes’ were good, we would see God’s attributes shine in all that is and all that happens.”
of them proclaim all God’s perfections, and not all these creatures proclaim them with the same clarity. There is order and gradation: all creatures display vestiges of God, but only human beings are God’s image and likeness…Thus God, the source of all being and archetypically related to humans, is himself all that which belongs to his creatures in the way of being, life, and spirit, in knowledge, holiness, and righteousness. In all creatures but especially in humanity there is something analogous to the divine being. But all the perfections found in creatures exist in God in a wholly unique and original way.97

The whole universe proclaims God’s perfections. Thus, the whole universe, from the greatest to the least, reveals the being of God anthropomorphically and analogically. Everything in all of creation is like God. As beings created in the image of God, human beings shine forth God’s perfections with the greatest clarity. It is no wonder, then, that Bavinck sees human personality as a faint and distant, yet helpful, analogue to the divine life.98 As created in the divine image, human beings display the glories of the triune God most clearly and distinctly. Therefore, the structure of self-consciousness can serve as a helpful tool within theology’s attempts to describe the Trinity, even though it cannot serve as a basis from which to rationally prove or derive the Trinity.

Finally, in his development of the doctrine of Providence, Bavinck distinguishes between God’s creation and providence. “By creation God called into being a world that simultaneously deserves to be called a ‘cosmos’ (kosmos) an age (aiōn), and which in both time and space is ‘a most brilliant mirror of the divine glory.’”99 In providence, the triune God “take[s] the world from its beginning…and lead[s] it to its final goal; it goes into effect immediately after the creation and brings to development all that was given in creation.”100 It is here that the role of the Spirit becomes particularly important within Bavinck’s account. As the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, creates

97 RD, II. 135.
98 Bavinck describes the whole person, body and soul as created in the image and likeness of God. As he does, he makes an interesting but enlightening comment about how the human body is analogous to creation. He claims: “Just as God, though he is spirit…, is nevertheless the Creator of a material world that may be termed his revelation and manifestation, with this revelation coming to its climax in the incarnation, so also the spirit of man is designed for the body as its manifestation.” While Bavinck is certainly not making a panentheistic argument that the world is God’s body, his account nevertheless gives a faith analogy to affirm that God can reveal himself in and through the material world. It is also important to note that his account of the image of God is important in his articulation of the incarnation. See RD, II. 560.
99 RD, II. 609.
100 RD, II. 609.
the world, the Spirit is the one who upholds and guides creation to its intended end, wherein creation returns through the Son to the Father. Thus, it is impossible to understand Bavinck’s account of divine providence apart from the work of the Spirit. Utilizing the distinction between primary and secondary causality, Bavinck argues that God sustains and guides creation in a non-coercive manner. For Bavinck, neither Deism nor pantheism can uphold this teaching. Deism denies God’s providence, detaching the world from its communion with God. Pantheism, on the other hand, affirms God’s communion with the world but, in the end, collapses God and the world together. For Bavinck, even though “pantheism may present itself in ever so beautiful and seductive form[s], it actually takes its adherents back into the embrace of pagan fate.”

The triune God, whose ‘movement’ into the economy establishes and founds creation is the same God who upholds it and allows creatures to develop towards their God-ordained ends. God’s being is what posits creation, and creation is not static. As God is, he posits a creation that becomes; he providentially upholds it so that he can also draw and govern it to its final goal. Within the structure of creation are the principles of its development. As God reveals himself in creation, he also reveals himself in providence. The realization of the divine counsel may begin with creation, but it does not end there. The revelatory communication of the triune God through the medium of

101 Once again, Bavinck presents Deism and pantheism as incapable of the doctrine of Concurrence. See RD, 613: “In neither pantheism nor Deism can this doctrine come into its own. In the former there are no longer and causes, and the later no secondary causes…Scripture, however, tells us both that God works in all things so that the creature is only an instrument in his hand…and that providence is distinct from creation and presupposes the existence and self-activity of creatures.”

102 RD, II. 600.

103 RD, II. 599.

104 Engaging with evolutionary monism in an article on creation or development, Bavinck argues that the Christian tradition affirms both. God creates the world out of nothing; the world’s origin rests in God alone. However, according to Bavinck, creation contains within it the principles of development that will lead it to its ultimate telos: God. One does not need to choose between creation or development. Christians can affirm both creation and development. Importantly, this helps Bavinck engage with the developments in contemporary science as an opening up and unfolding of the principles within creation. His critique of evolutionary monism is not its recognition of development but the metaphysical structure within which it articulates development. See Bavinck, “Creation or Development.” Methodist Review 61 (November 1901): 849–74.
creation continues as God guides, directs, and brings creation, through history, to its end: God’s glory.

Even though creation is ontologically distinct from God, it owes its origin and continued existence to God. As such, it communicates its creator and sustainer. As the decrees of God find their effect in time and, the world manifests the divine perfections. Thus, history and the structure of creation itself are important aspects of divine revelation. They are objective mediums within which God makes himself known. This is not to discount human self-consciousness, which is also a medium of divine revelation and must subjectively appropriate the objective content of revelation. However, while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore what this means fully, it does mean that—as we have noted previously—Bavinck articulates revelation, even special revelation, in radically historical and temporal terms. According to Bavinck, while the divine communication ad intra is eternal, non-hierarchical and simultaneous, the order of divine communication manifests itself historically ad extra. This, for Bavinck, does not negate the unity of divine action in his opera ad extra, but it does mean that the three-fold nature of the one God is known more clearly through history as God’s eternal processions ‘move outward’ and add to their processions an effect in time.

While the doctrine of Decrees, divine communicability, and the classical language of participation give theological and philosophical articulation to the scriptural witness of the reality of revelation, they cannot explain the mystery of revelation itself. For this reason, Bavinck claims

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105 *RD*, II. 426-430. Time and space are creaturely modes within which God reveals himself.

106 Here one can see the effect of the historicizing nature of the nineteenth century on Bavinck. According to Bavinck, previous accounts of God’s revelation did not adequately account for history as a medium of God’s revelation. Certainly, he would acknowledge that previous accounts of God’s revelation posited God revelation as happening in history, but Bavinck sees history itself as a medium of God’s revelation. It reveals discursively and temporally what is in God simultaneously and eternally. See, for example, *RD*, I. 343: “…Scripture clearly teaches that this revelation bears a historical character and unfolds its content only gradually over the course of many centuries.” See also, *PR*, Lecture 5 “Revelation and History.”
that all revelation is supernatural.\textsuperscript{107} There is nothing creaturely or natural about divine revelation. Creation itself is a supernatural act whereby God brings something out of nothing. Put into the language of divine communicability, God’s communication \textit{ad extra} is supernatural. The work of creation is a supernatural act whereby God creates something out of nothing.\textsuperscript{108} So too, the continual revelation of God through the mediums of nature, history, and self-consciousness is supernatural. The manifestation of God’s perfections, his communication of himself to creatures via the non-divine is always, for Bavinck, a supernatural act. Revelation is always a communicative gift; it is a condescension of God to communicate in a manner that creatures can understand.\textsuperscript{109}

\section*{5. A Triniform World-and-Life View}

Having examined Bavinck’s theological application of the doctrine of the Trinity to his understanding of the God-world relationship in and through his account of divine communicability, the divine decrees, participation, and revelation, it is important to turn to how his theological account of the God-world relationship informs his development of a Christian world-and-life view. Bavinck, like Kuyper and other Neo-Calvinists, focused on the formulation of a comprehensive Christian world-and-life view (German: \textit{Weltanschauung}, Dutch: \textit{wereld—en levenbeschouwing}) wherein the human response to the triune God’s sovereign rule is applied to every aspect of life (religion, art, politics, science). For Bavinck, Kuyper, and other Neo-Calvinists, Calvinism offered the most comprehensive Christian worldview because it presented

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{107} Bavinck does differentiate between general revelation and special revelation; however, he does not equate this distinction with natural and supernatural revelation. According to Bavinck, all revelation is supernatural. See \textit{RD}, I. 307: “…According to Scripture, all revelation, also that in nature, is supernatural.” See also, Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. Ray VanLeeuwen, \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 24, no. 1 (1989): 35–65.

\textsuperscript{108} Bavinck affirms the teaching of creation \textit{ex nihilo}. See \textit{RD}, II. 416-420.

\textsuperscript{109} As a communicative gift, revelation occurs prior to the fall. Therefore, even though Bavinck distinguishes between pre- and post-lapsarian grace, there are times when his description of creation itself and God’s (general) revelation in it can take on the language of grace. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.
\end{footnotesize}
the cosmological significance of Christianity, not just the soteriological. In his Lectures on Calvinism, Kuyper claims that Calvinism’s “dominating principle was not, soteriologically, justification by faith, but, in the widest sense cosmologically, the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.” Similarly, in a speech given in Toronto in 1892 at the Fifth General Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System, on the moral influence of Calvinism, Bavinck placed the “sovereignty of God…” as “…foremost.” He described Calvinism “as active and aggressive, [hating] all false conservatism. The family and the school, the Church and Church government, the State and society, art and science, all are fields in which he has to work and to develop for the glory of God. The Swiss Reformation bore thus not only a religious, but also an ethical social and political character.” Bavinck’s cosmological assessment of Calvinism matched Kuyper. For both, Calvinism presented a doctrine of the Trinity that is cosmologically and not just soteriologically significant. The whole world is God’s creation, and therefore it is an ‘enigma that could only be solved in God.’ Thus, for both, it is not just the heart that finds rest in God in Calvinism but also the mind as everything is considered in light of the Trinity.

110 Bavinck and Kuyper drew both drew their assessment of the differences between Lutheran and Reformed Worldviews from Scholten who was influenced by Schweizer. See Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 22: “…Luther took it up from its subjective, anthropological side, and not from its objective, cosmological side as Calvin did. Luther’s starting point was the special-soteriological principle of a justifying faith; while Calvin’s extending far wider, lay in the general cosmological principle of the sovereignty of God.”
111 Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, 79 (Emphasis original).
114 Our Reasonable Faith, 23.
115 See Bavinck, “Influence of the Reformation,” 49: “The Calvinist found no rest for his thinking, nor more than for his heart, until he rested in God, the eternal and unchangeable. He penetrated into the holiest of holies of the temple, to the final ground of things…” and Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, 12: “In Calvinism my heart has found rest, From Calvinism I have drawn the inspiration firmly and resolutely to take my stank in the thick of this conflict of
It is here that Eglinton’s thesis is both helpful and in need of nuance. His convincing argument that “Bavinck’s theology of Creator as Trinity necessitates the conceptualization of creation as organism: Trinity ad intra leads to organism ad extra” helps illuminate how the organic motif functions in Bavinck’s theology.¹¹⁶ Bavinck utilizes the organic motif as a conceptual apparatus to articulate the way creation analogously reveals its triune Creator. As creation is a self-consciously willed communicative act, it is a form of divine self-revelation. As God is one, so too the creation is marked by a profound unity. There is just one cosmos. As the absolute, living being of God is eternally unfolded into Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so his creation displays a rich diversity. As it partakes in the divine being, creation discursively, successively, and analogically communicates what in God is simultaneous, eternal, and absolute. Thus, the whole of creation displays the divine unity-in-diversity of the divine life. Eglinton’s thesis rightly shows how Bavinck utilizes the organic motif to describe the creation as a glorious unity-in-diversity.

Despite Eglinton’s excellent contribution, there remain gaps in his account. Some of these gaps are due to the limitations present in any work. One simply cannot say everything and must necessarily exclude some things, which is why arguments from silence can be particularly dangerous.¹¹⁷ However, as noted in the introductory chapter, the center of Bavinck’s theology is not a motif but a doctrine. Thus, while Bavinck may utilize the organic motif to articulate his account of creation, more work needs to be done in terms of the trinitarian theology undergirding it. The doctrine of Decrees, the nature of divine communicability, and the exitus-reditus structure of Bavinck’s theology are essential to Bavinck triniform theological account of God and creation.

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¹¹⁶ Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 81.
¹¹⁷ I am particularly aware of the danger of arguments from silence or seeking to criticize an author based on what he or she did not say. This thesis has been necessarily selective and could be particularly susceptible to these types of arguments. However, it is the hope of this thesis that the hermeneutic lens argued for will enable others to read and observe aspects within Bavinck’s thought that are not covered in detail within this thesis.
Without these theological underpinnings, one does wonder if Eglinton’s emphases on analogy and divine aseity are strong enough to guard against collapsing the divine will into the divine being.

Furthermore, turning to the development of a Christian world-and-life view Eglinton rightly notes the importance of organic thinking within Bavinck. Rooted in the doctrine of God, Bavinck’s worldview is simultaneously trinitarian and organic. In Bavinck, creation itself is a vestige of the Trinity and therefore finds its origin and coherence in God. Thus, as Eglinton writes, “…the doctrine of God is the foundation of a coherent worldview.” However, while Eglinton’s analysis is illuminating, it is important to highlight how Bavinck closely relates but also differentiates between the theological and philosophical task and why (on the basis of his trinitarian theology) Bavinck refuses to apply the soteriological category of regeneration to the distinction between scientific truth and falsehood. Without this, Bavinck sounds too Kuyperian (or perhaps Neo-Kuyperian), and the small but important distinctions between the two disappear.

First, Bavinck closely relates but differentiates the theological and philosophical tasks. In his *Philosophy of Revelation* he writes “…built on the foundation of revelation, theology undertakes a glorious task—the task of unfolding the science of the revelation of God and our knowledge concerning him…But side by side…there is room also for a philosophy of revelation which will trace the idea of revelation, both in its form and in its content, and correlate it with the rest of life.” Tracing the idea of revelation, its form and its content, the philosophy [and not theology] of revelation seeks to “correlate the wisdom which it finds in revelation with that which is furnished by the world at large.” Both theology and philosophy grapple with revelation and seek

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118 Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 129.
120 PR, 22.
121 While the subject matter itself reveals Bavinck’s ongoing conviction that Christianity in modernity needed to seriously attend to the concept of revelation itself not just articulate its content, his treatment of revelation contains a
to articulate its content. 122 Both rely, according to Bavinck, on an integral relationship between general and special revelation.123 As such, both theology and philosophy are reflexive disciplines that arise in the midst of life in response to God’s [objective] revelation.124 However, it is the philosophy of revelation that seeks to relate the content of revelation—God’s communication mediated through the Logos in every aspect of creation—to every aspect of human life and knowledge.

It is here that Bavinck’s articulation of the relationship between God and creation and description of creation as non-divine medium and instrument of revelation is significant. First, because creation is not divine but is a divine gift, it has received a meaning and existence that remains meaningful even when the giver is bracketed out and when the Creator-creature relationship is not fully acknowledged. In other words, various elements within creation can be known and appreciated because they are gifts, given in creation. They can be viewed and understood as if they were autonomous, even though they depend on God’s sustaining work at every moment. Because God upholds and grounds all things in creation, there is an order and structure of the world that is objectively given and can be perceived. It is here that the account of science we unpacked in Chapter 1 becomes even more clear. The sciences can and must have their own objects that are not God even as God is the one who sustains and makes every object of science what it is.125 Thus, history, nature, and the human consciousness can be objects of scientific foundational development of a threefold worldview typology that Bavinck utilizes as he grapples with post-Enlightenment metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. See PR, 24.

122 See PR, 22: “Belief in such a special revelation is the starting-point and the foundation-stone of Christian theology. As science never precedes life, but always follows from it, so the science of the knowledge of God rests on the reality of his revelation. If God does not exist, or if he has not revealed himself, and hence is unknowable, then all religion is an illusion, and all theology is a phantasm.”
123 Bavinck’s understanding of the relationship between general and special revelation will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.
124 PR, 22-24.
125 RD, II. 341: “But since the creation’s existence is distinct from God, and nature and history can be studied by themselves and for their own sake, knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge. But the moment creatures are related to God
study. In other words, one does not need to know that God is the essential foundation \((principium essendi)\) to really know an object in the created world.\(^{127}\) God’s creation of a non-divine world means that the created world is really \(principium cognoscendi externum\) of natural knowledge.\(^{128}\)

However, because creation is an instrument of revelation whose very foundation rests on God’s self-consciously willed act of communication, the objects of science do not occupy an autonomous realm. God’s revelation presses on and within every aspect of creation, including human self-consciousness. According to Bavinck, this leads every science to pursue its foundations and to seek the final or last ground of all things and build a worldview on that ground.\(^{129}\) Because the world is the realization of God’s divine idea and is created, led, and brought to its end by his divine guidance,\(^{130}\) the only intellectually satisfying worldview is one that is theologically informed. Only a theologically informed worldview can hold together the unity and diversity of the world, the relationship between thought and being, being and becoming, and becoming and acting.\(^{131}\) Why? Because it is rooted in and flows from the Christian confession of the Trinity. To articulate what kind of worldview flows from the affirmation of the Trinity, Bavinck utilizes the organic motif.

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\(^{126}\) PR, 179.

\(^{127}\) As the one in whom God knows the idea of creation and the one through whom creation is mediated, Bavinck does identify the Logos as the \(principium cognoscendi internum\) of natural knowledge. What Bavinck means by this, however, is not that one must acknowledge the Logos as the Son of the triune God in order to know. He means that the principle that relates the subject and the object together assures us that we can trust the normal operation of our small l logos to come to know the order and pattern of the world.

\(^{128}\) See Chapter 1, 48-9.

\(^{129}\) CW, 32: “Wijzheid is op wetenschap gegrond, maar blijft bij haar niet staan. Ze streeft boven de wetenschap uit en zoekt tot de \(prima principia\) door te dringen.” Cf. PR, 85.

\(^{130}\) CW, 57.

\(^{131}\) Bavinck identifies the relationship between thinking and being, being and becoming, and becoming and acting as the three perennial problems that face humans. He relates these to dialectics (logic), physics, and ethics in Greek philosophy. Besides for his introductory chapter and short conclusion, these are the main chapters in Bavinck’s Christelijke wereldbeschouwing. See CW, 14.
However, affirming this does not mean that the sole mark of a Christian is a perfect, clear concept of the world and God rather than "faith in the living and true God." Grace does restore the believer’s capacity to see and apprehend the revelation of God in creation and re-creation. The believer can, trusting his or her capacities, reflect on God’s revelation aright and learn who God is, what the world is, and his or her place in the world. However, worldview, just like philosophical epistemology, according to Bavinck “cannot compensate for the loss of faith” nor guarantee the acquisition of scientific truths. As theology is faith seeking understanding, worldview is life seeking wisdom. It remains the Christian’s humble and ongoing task to relate all things back to the God who created and redeemed the world.

In tracing God’s revelation, or in Bavinck’s words “thinking God’s thoughts after him,” the formulation of a Christian worldview is a positive task. However, in Bavinck, Kuyper, and other Neo-Calvinists, it also serves an antithetical or apologetic role. In utilizing worldview antithetically and apologetically, there are some significant differences between Kuyper and Bavinck. This is especially the case in their engagement with non-Christian worldviews. For both, the concept of worldview did serve as a tool with which to engage non-Christian alternatives, particularly the modernist worldview rooted in the Enlightenment. But Bavinck took a much more irenic stance towards non-Christian worldviews and readily admitted that they contained

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132 CW, 90: “…geloof aan den levendenden en waarachtigen God…”
133 RD, I. 503.
134 In his article, “On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy,” Albert M. Wolters identifies five different ways to understand the relationship between the concept of worldview and philosophy: worldview repels philosophy, worldview crowns philosophy, worldview flanks philosophy, worldview yields philosophy, and worldview equals philosophy. In his assessment, Wolters notes that both Kuyper and Bavinck tend to use worldview rather vaguely in their writings and can often use it as a synonym for philosophy. According to Wolters, this is especially the case in Bavinck’s earlier Christelijke wereldbeschouwing in which his worldview is a formulation of a Christian philosophy in the vein of Augustine and Aquinas. Wolters sees Kuyper and Bavinck moving towards a model in which worldview yields philosophy, especially in Bavinck’s Philosophy of Revelation. However, while this thesis agrees with the former assessment, it does not agree with the latter. It sees Bavinck as continuing to use worldview more vaguely in relation to philosophy, especially because of Bavinck’s understanding of revelation itself. See Albert M. Wolters, “On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy,” in Stained Glass Worldviews and Social Science, ed. P. Marshall, et al. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989): 14-25.
truths within them even as they were (always) admixed with errors. Kuyper, on the other hand, took a much more antithetical stance towards alternative worldviews. Part of the reason for this was Kuyper’s insistence that the epistemological consequence of the fall was to create ‘two kinds of people’ and therefore ‘two kinds of science.’ As he wrote in *Principles of Sacred Theology*: “We speak none too emphatically, therefore, when we speak of two kinds of people. Both are human, but one is inwardly different from the other…thus they face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses.”¹³⁶ The difference, according to Kuyper: regeneration (*palingenesis*).¹³⁷ Worldview, then, is ultimately a religious matter, and the conflict between worldviews is a fundamentally religious one. Developing this idea, Kuyper describes the conflict with Modernity’s worldview militaristically: “If the battle is to be fought with honor and with a hope of victory, then *principle* must be arrayed against *principle*.”¹³⁸ The principles at war according to Kuyper were the “No God, No Master” (*Ni Dieu, Ni Maître!* ) emancipatory principle of the Enlightenment and the Calvinistic principle of the triune God’s sovereignty over the whole cosmos.¹³⁹ Often utilized rhetorically (and at times hyperbolically) to gain support for his political and social programs, Kuyper softened and nuanced this stringent dichotomy with his conception of common grace, whereby God upholds, maintains, and even positively directs the world after the fall. However, his application of regeneration to science effectively rendered the distinction between truth and falsehood a soteriological distinction.

While Bavinck engaged in worldview analysis and critiqued other worldviews on religious grounds, he did not adhere to Kuyper’s ‘two kinds of people, two kinds of science.’ He refused to collapse scientific truth and falsehood with regeneration and claimed Kuyper committed a logical

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¹³⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 160: “And, ‘if...palingenesis occasions one group of men to exist differently from the other, every effort to understand each other will be futile in those points of the investigation in which this difference comes into play; and it will be impossible to settle the difference of insight.’”
¹³⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11-12, 40.
fallacy in doing so. The problem with this view is that it can lead to a view of science whereby true knowledge of the world depends on regeneration because one must presuppose the existence of the triune God to know and truly make sense of the world. This, according to Bavinck, is speculative and a priori approach that collapses soteriological and epistemological categories.

For Bavinck, after the fall, God’s revelation in nature, history, and human consciousness does not change, but human rebellion affects the ability to apprehend God’s revelation as the creator and ruler of the world. Therefore, special revelation is required to discern the truth of God’s revelation creation from an admixture of errors. But, for Bavinck, this does not mean that saving faith brings with it an implantation of a new pre-cognitive principle or worldview. Saving faith is, ultimately, the restoration of one’s right relationship with God. Yet, receiving the gift of re-creation, believers can apprehend creation as revelation and reflect on its content. As they do, they come to know and rest in the wisdom of God. They also, according to Bavinck, learn to engage other worldviews in an irenic yet critical manner as they see all human beings confronted by the same questions because they live within the same God-created reality.

In Christelijke wereldbeschouwing, Bavinck identifies three perennial questions that face human beings living in the world, which are “what is the relationship between thinking and being, of being and becoming, of becoming and acting…” or “…who am I, what is the world, and what

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140 Bavinck’s criticisms of Kuyper on this point are found in a set of student notes. I am indebted John Bolt for pointing this out. See John Bolt, Bavinck on the Christian Life (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 134.
141 For an introduction to how various Neo-Calvinists developed Kuyper’s approach to worldview in a variety of directions, see Doornbos, “Modern Reformational Philosophies,” 326-355.
142 See R.H. Bremmer’s account of Bavinck’s criticisms of Kuyper’s Encyclopedaie in Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus, 45.
143 Integral to Bavinck’s assessment is his theological image of God as broad and narrow, which are organically connected. In the fall, human beings lose the narrow image of God in the fall but retain the broad image, which includes “…the body, soul faculties, powers, intellect, will and so on.” Having lost the narrow image, which pertains to the religious-ethical relationship of human beings to God, the broad image remains but is affected. It is polluted by sin and directed in the wrong religious direction. The broad and narrow image are organically related. Loss of the one implies the pollution and misdirection of the other. Thus, as the human faculties remain operative, they willfully blinded to God’s revelation in creation and re-creation, and they will true knowledge of the world towards sinful ends. Bavinck not only draws on the Reformed orthodox tradition for this point but explicitly cites Belgic Confession Article 14. See RD, III. 174
is my place and task in the world?” And, at the beginning of his fourth lecture in *Philosophy of Revelation*, “Revelation and Nature,” Bavinck identifies three rudimentary categories of existence, asserting: "God, the 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.” As beings existing within the world, there are not only three basic questions that humans face, but three basic realities with which humans must grapple. Defining them and relating them to one another is the inescapable task of worldview formation and in and through defining and relating them one arrives at an answer to the three basic questions of human existence.

From these rudimentary categories of existence, Bavinck develops a threefold typology of basic worldviews that have cycled in “rhythmic waves” throughout the history of thought, each defined by the reality deemed to be axiomatic: as theistic, naturalistic (in its deistic or pantheistic forms), or humanistic. His goal, philosophically, is not a full exposition of all worldviews but an identification of recurrent tendencies to assess them, both in their contemporary and ancient forms. At its core, Bavinck’s Ecclesiastes-like claim that there is “nothing new under the sun” rests on his firm commitment to God's creational activity whereby the one who comes to humanity in Christ is the same one who creates by and through the Word. Thus, there can be nothing truly

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144 *CW*, 14: “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 mijn plaats en mijn taak?”
145 *PR*, 70.
146 *PR*, 30-31: “They rather recur in rhythmic waves, more or less intermingle, and subsist side by side. Thus Greek philosophy was born out of the Orphic theology, passed over into the naturalism of the old nature-philosophy, and became humanistic in the Sophists and the wisdom-philosophy of Socrates. Plato in his doctrine of ideas went back to the old theology and to Pythagoras; but, after Aristotle, his philosophy gave way to the naturalistic systems of Epicurus and the Stoics; and these, in turn, by way of reaction, gave birth to the teachings of the sceptical and mystical schools. Christianity gave theism the ascendancy for many centuries; but modern philosophy, which began with Descartes and Bacon, assumed in ever increasing measure a naturalistic character till Kant and Fichte in the ego once more took their starting point from man. After a brief period of the supremacy of the theistic philosophy in the nineteenth century, naturalism in its materialistic or pantheistic form resumed its sway, only to induce during these recent years a new return to Kant and the principles of humanism.”
“new under the sun” because there are only three categories of existence and three basic questions that confront everyone. There are only three starting points for worldview formation. Behind the content of one’s religion, science, and morality rest an even more fundamental conception of God, the world, and humanity and a determination of which basic category is primary from which the other categories are defined and understood. But at the same time, Bavinck does not deny the possibility of new insights derived from nature and history. While there are only three rudimentary categories of existence, God’s revelation in nature, history, and self-consciousness is communicated in time and space and has a particular telos. Thus, while there are only three rudimentary worldviews that reoccur like waves through the history of the world, it is possible for them to develop. Creation is not static but telic and therefore historical. Therefore, while nothing is novel, things can be new. For Bavinck, the intended end of this identification is not purely intellectual but also religious and practical. A worldview is no mere rational construction. As life seeking wisdom, it seeks to “satisfy both the requirements of the intellect and the needs of the heart.”

This worldview categorization serves Bavinck’s immediate philosophical project in the Stone Lectures in several ways, which also align with his theological project in the Reformed Dogmatics. First, his threefold typology serves as a means for Bavinck to distinguish a Christian, theistic, trinitarian worldview from naturalistic and humanistic alternatives without denying the possibility of overlapping insights and themes. Despite treating humanity or the world as axiomatic, alternative worldviews are still grappling with God's created reality, which is revelatory of its creator. Thus, Bavinck's typology is both antithetical concept and a tool for complex engagement, allowing him to appreciate aspects within alternative worldviews that have an irreducibly different

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147 PR, 45. Bavinck uses this phrase, which he adopts from Paulson, throughout the Philosophy of Revelation. Furthermore, Bavinck argues through his work that Christianity alone can provide a worldview that satisfies the needs of the head and the heart.
starting point. Secondly, Bavinck's rudimentary categorization of God, humanity, and the world as the three basic components of reality with which everyone must grapple results in a broad vision concerning the scope of worldviews: they incorporate nothing less than the entirety of created reality. As every worldview is comprehensive in scope, a Christian worldview must also develop a conception of God and reality that extends to every area of creation and human life. The result within the immediate context of the Stone Lectures is an assessment of how a Christian philosophy of revelation, rooted in a supernaturalistic understanding of God's revelatory activity, is just as thorough and more intellectually and existentially satisfying than monistic, mechanistic conceptions of revelation with regard to concepts like historical development, creaturely becoming, and eschatological hope. Third, and most significant for Bavinck's theological project is his adjudication of worldviews as both cyclical and teleological. Bavinck situates his own theistic worldview as an instantiation of a historical, Christian worldview, which justifies his theological appropriation of theologians from various parts of church history. At the same time, Bavinck’s appreciation of God’s revelation in nature and history means he does not idolize the past or seek to repristinate it. As he wrote in the forward to the first edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*: “To cherish the ancient simply because it is ancient is neither Reformed nor Christian.” Learning from the past, Christian philosophers and theologians must address the issues of their own day. This includes appropriating the past but also being willing to critique it and incorporate genuinely new insights so long as they aid in articulating scriptural truths.

6. The Cosmological Dimension

Returning to the basic definition at the beginning of this chapter, we identified the cosmological dimension as “rooted in the ontological dimension,” and Bavinck’s “description of the God-world...
relationship wherein God reveals himself in a relative sense to the world.”\textsuperscript{149} This is necessary, according to Bavinck, because the doctrine of the Trinity alone can maintain a doctrine of Creation “that is neither devoid of the divine (Deism) nor divinized (pantheism)” and “explains why all the works of God ad extra are only adequately known when their trinitarian existence is recognized.”\textsuperscript{150} Returning to the argument of this thesis that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another, we can observe how the cosmological dimension is Bavinck’s application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship. As such, all the doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship are subsumed under the knowledge of God; they all teach us about the triune God who created, sustains, and governs the world.

First, in the treatment above, we can observe that Bavinck sees a close relationship but necessary distinction between the ontological and cosmological dimensions of the Trinity. As we described in Chapter 1, the ontological dimension affirms and articulates the fullness of the divine life in itself apart from creation. Closely associated with Bavinck’s development of his doctrine of God proper, the ontological dimension presents God as the living, absolutely personal, triune God. He is not a bare monad, but rich, full, and triune. Because God is ‘truly living,’ God needs nothing. However, even though God needs nothing, the possibility of creation rests in God’s eternal, full, triune life. To articulate this, Bavinck appeals to the absolute communicability of the divine essence. God’s absolute communication is what makes a relative communication (creation) possible. In fact, Bavinck even boldly claims that “if God were not triune, creation would not be possible.”\textsuperscript{151} However, even though God’s triunity makes creation possible, the creation of the

\textsuperscript{149} Chapter 1, 76.
\textsuperscript{150} RD, II. 333.
\textsuperscript{151} RD, II. 420.
world cannot be attributed to mere metaphysical possibility. But it also cannot be constitutive of
the divine life, because that would effectively make creation necessary for God.

Thus, Bavinck turns to develop his understanding of how creation can be contingent and rooted
in God. Turning to the doctrine of the Divine Decrees and appropriating his notion of the
communicability of the divine essence, Bavinck carefully grounds the idea and the willing of
creation in God without making the idea and willing of the world essential to the divine essence.
It is within his articulation of the relationship between God’s being and the eternal counsel
concerning creation that the close relationship but necessary distinction between the ontological
and cosmological in the doctrine of the Trinity becomes even clearer in Bavinck. According to
Bavinck, the idea and willing of the world arises from but does not exhaust the absolute, eternal
communication between the persons. Instead, the idea and willing of the world arise from God’s
being in eternity in a way that it does not exhaust or diminish God’s being, self-sufficiency, self-
consciousness, or power. Yet, as an eternal act of the Trinity directed towards creatures, its
realization begins at creation. While creation does not introduce any change into the divine life, it
does bring about a change in that which God creates. Creation is an effect of the eternal divine will
that is realized in time and space. For Bavinck, the cosmological in the doctrine of the Trinity
describes and defines the works of the triune God eternally decrees creation, which is then realized
in time by the Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, for Bavinck, the cosmological dimension is primarily
concerned with the cosmic dimensions of God’s work, specifically the establishment and
providential governance of creation. The relationship between the divine decrees and salvation,
particularly Bavinck’s treatment of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism, will be discussed in
Chapter 4.

As the doctrine of Decrees serves as a hinge between the inward and outward actions of God,
it serves an important role in the relationship between the ontological and cosmological dimensions
of the doctrine of the Trinity. The ontological and cosmological dimensions are integrally related but necessarily distinct. God’s plan to create and work *ad extra* remain attached to their metaphysical foundation: They are one divine action accomplished by the three persons of the triune God. The Trinity in its cosmological dimension is not a different Trinity than the Trinity in its ontological dimension, but it is a description of the divine acts *ad extra* as they terminate in time and space. As such, the cosmological dimension is a self-conscious and self-willed manifestation of the living triune God. It makes the triune God known. What this means is that the Trinity in its cosmological dimension is not constative of the divine being but revelatory of the divine being. Thus, rather than the two dimensions bifurcating the being of God, the cosmological dimension of God’s work is always founded on who God is from all eternity. The ontological or immanent Trinity (*ad intra*) is the metaphysical foundation of the work of God *ad extra*. Conversely, the cosmological dimension of the doctrine is the articulation of God’s work *ad extra* in creation, its establishment and governance, and the means by which God makes himself known.

This is an essential element in Bavinck’s understanding of the relationship between the cosmological and the ontological in the doctrine of the Trinity. While the ontological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity maintains the aseity and absoluteness of God, the cosmological dimension establishes the relationship between God and creation. However, the cosmological dimension cannot collapse into the ontological. Thus, as the cosmological dimension articulates the relationship between God and creation, it also maintains the absolute ontological distinction between God and the world. To do this, Bavinck appropriates a variety of classical ideas and modern ones to describe creation itself as God’s self-revelation. As such, the communicative work of God in creation is revelatory, in an anthropological and analogical way, of God’s life *ad intra*. Every aspect of the world, including nature, history, and self-consciousness is revelatory of the divine in some way.
What our exposition reveals is that the way in which Bavinck thinks the cosmological dimension should be developed. It must be a systematic reflection on who God is as he has revealed himself in the world. As we noted in our investigation of Bavinck’s understanding of the sciences, this systematic reflection post-lapse is done through the lens of Scripture via faithful reason. However, for Bavinck, the Christian mind seeks to trace all things back to God and contemplate everything in light of the doctrine of God. Everything in all creation must be somehow related to God. Therefore, the cosmological dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity articulates how the world is related to and finds its origin, purpose, and end in God alone while remaining ontologically distinct from God.

For Bavinck, this means developing an orderly account between God’s essential operations (opera ad intra) and his opera ad extra. Here Bavinck remains rooted in the Reformed orthodoxy’s approach to the doctrine of God, which roots God’s temporal actions in time in a stable, eternal foundation. However, the way that he articulates God’s temporal action using the modern grammar of self-communication and emphasis on history shows that Bavinck was not afraid of incorporating fresh articulations of how creation relates to God. For Bavinck, following the Reformed orthodox approach does not shut down the possibility of incorporating new insights. Indeed, for Bavinck as long as the cosmological dimension of the Trinity is not collapsed into the ontological, various concepts and apparatus can be utilized to relate God and creation systematically.

Describing creation as revelation, Bavinck again carefully relates but necessarily distinguishes between the cosmological and ontological in the doctrine of the Trinity. In both the ontological and cosmological dimensions, God is communicative. In the former, God’s communication is absolute, essential to his being. In the later, God’s communication is relative, but it is still a self-communication. It is a relative, free communication willed by the divine being towards those outside of himself. The first type of communication belongs to Gods being, the second to his will.
The divine communication *ad intra* is the archetype for God’s communication *ad extra*. This means that the creation does truly, although mysteriously, display truths about God. And it means that while there is only one Author and Governor of creation, that Creator and Governor is the triune God. This means that no aspect of creation’s origin or governance can be fully understood until its triune nature is recognized. For Bavinck, this means that one can appropriate various works to the persons. God’s work in creation is truly self-revelation. However, while God’s operations in creation and providence communicate truths about who God is, his *ad extra* communication cannot be equated with his perfect *ad intra* communication.

As a communicative act of God, grounded in but not equated with God’s archetypal communication *ad intra*, Bavinck gives a theological account of why theology is thinking God’s ‘thoughts after him and tracing their unity.’ As God makes himself known in and through creation, every aspect of creation (nature, history, self-consciousness) displays forth and reveals his glory. Creation radiantly reflects its creator. It is all a vestige of the One who created and sustains it. Therefore, it is part of the task of Christians to relate everything in all of creation to the triune God. Bavinck undertakes this task by showing how the unity-in-diversity of the world is reflective of its triune creator and creatively appropriates the organic motif in order to develop an organic cosmology of the universe. Within his systematic and philosophical work, the organic motif serves as a means to apply and relate the doctrine of the Trinity to every aspect of the cosmos. Thus, while this chapter did not cover every doctrine within Bavinck pertaining to the doctrine of Creation, it did highlight the underlying theological structures and philosophical apparatus Bavinck utilizes to develop his thoroughly trinitarian systematic theology and triniform worldview.

And, it is here that one can observe a key feature that we identified in the previous chapter concerning Bavinck’s understanding of the relationship between the ontological and cosmological dimensions: the work of God *ad extra* in creation and providence invites and compels reasoned,
theological reflection on the God who reveals himself. It is part of the task of systematic,
theological reflection to articulate who the agent of this revelation is. Thus, for Bavinck, systematic
reflection cannot stop a mere repetition of the biblical text nor remain content with restating the
events of the divine economy. Rather, it can and should engage in discourse about the being and
nature of God. As we noted in Chapter 1, this does not mean transcending the limits of human
finitude but resting in them in order to articulate the reality triune God who is at once immanent
and transcendent, absolute and personal, incomprehensible and knowable. For Bavinck, the work
of God in creation and providence encourages careful theological reflection on the One from whom
these actions flow as a gift. However, even as God’s actions in the divine economy compels
reasoned, Scriptural reflection on who God is, it also means systematic reflection on his actions in
creation. Developing the cosmological dimension, then, means allowing all of the theological loci
that pertain to the God-world relationship to be treated in light of their theological significance.

Turning from Bavinck’s positive use of the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck’s bold claim that
creation is only possible because God is triune also reveals his apologetic use of the Trinity. Any
approach that denies the ontological dimension of the divine life, and so denies God’s antecedent
existence, makes creation a necessary correlate to God (pantheism). For Bavinck, any account of
trinitarian doctrine that reads the cosmological back into the ontological engages in cosmological
speculation and therefore turns cosmogony into theogony (pantheism). However, to separate the
cosmological from the ontological completely is to deny that creation’s ground and form rests in
God (Deism). For Bavinck, the truth inherent in pantheism (both in its ancient and modern forms)
is that God’s creation reflects something of his being, and the truth inherent in Deism (both in its
ancient and modern forms) is that God is ontologically distinct and separate from his creation. It
is the historic, catholic doctrine of the Trinity alone, according to Bavinck, that can affirm both
the cosmological and ontological and relate them without collapsing them. As such, creation is not
theogony or unconscious emanation nor is it devoid of the divine. The world is radically dependent on God as it is rooted in his eternal counsel. It is grounded in his being. Furthermore, as the eternal counsel is realized in time through the operation of the three persons, God actively sustains and maintains the world through his divine providence and governance. The cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity extends beyond God’s work in creation to his work of preservation and governance. For Bavinck, the ability to affirm creation and providence is rooted in his understanding of the Trinity. According to him, neither pantheism nor Deism can affirm both. Deism knows creation but not providence, and pantheism knows providence but not creation. Thus, even as Bavinck is able to appreciate the focus on divine immanence (pantheism) and acknowledge the emphasis on divine transcendence (Deism) in alternative conceptions of the God-world relationship, he ultimately rejects their errors in light of his doctrine of the Trinity.

As he rejects of the errors of Deism and pantheism, Bavinck’s development of a Christian world-and-life view also reveals his positive and apologetic use of the doctrine of the Trinity. While distinct from his systematic project, Bavinck’s development of a theological, triniform worldview relies on his theological understanding of the relationship between the ontological and cosmological dimensions of the Trinity. Without its metaphysical ground, the cosmological would reveal nothing about God at all. But, without the careful articulation of God’s revelation and establishment of creation as creation due to a self-consciously willed action of God, creation would be nothing more than an emanation of the divine. Thus, it is possible to know God through the medium of creation. Furthermore, because God’s revelation impinges on everyone through everything, worldview develops as a gift of revelation as human beings seek to know and understand the wisdom and energy that forms, guides, and sustains the world. But, Bavinck’s articulation of the relationship between God and creation also allows him to account for and complexly engage with alternative worldviews.
In conclusion, this chapter contributes to showing how utilizing the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity as a hermeneutic through which to read Bavinck is fitting and helpful. In this chapter, which focused on the cosmological, observed the way Bavinck applied the doctrine of the Trinity to the God-world relationship as well as the way that Bavinck carefully distinguishes yet necessarily relates the full, complete and rich life of God ad intra to his works ad extra. In this, the ontological and the cosmological dimensions are helpful as they provide a lens through which to see the way Bavinck distinguishes, develops, and subsumes every aspect of his theology under the knowledge of God. Looking forward to the next chapter, the cosmological dimension will become important as we look at the soteriological dimension and the way Bavinck articulates the relationship between creation and re-creation (nature and grace). In many ways, the cosmological dimension serves as a preparation for Bavinck’s articulation of God’s work in re-creation. However, it also establishes the importance of creation itself, allowing Bavinck’s trinitarian theology to incorporate the cosmological and soteriological in such a way that both are related to one another but not collapsed into each other.
Chapter 4: The Soteriological Dimension

Trinitarian Salvation as Re-Creation

1. Introduction

Having utilized various aspects within Bavinck to highlight the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity within his systematic project, the previous two chapters have identified, articulated, and examined the relationship of the ontological and cosmological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. At the end of Chapter 3, we observed how the ontological and cosmological dimensions are integrally related but necessarily distinct. To collapse the two blurs the impassible boundary between the creator and the creature, but to dissociate the two rips the world away from its true foundation and turns the world from a theatre of divine glory into a muddled spectacle of unconscious fate.¹ Relating the two utilizing the concept of divine communicability and the doctrine of the Decrees, we observed how Bavinck uses the doctrine of the Trinity to uphold and maintain the God-world relationship. While nothing is God, every aspect of creation is revelatory of its creator.

Within Bavinck’s systematic project, applying the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship results in a thoroughly triniform account of God’s establishment and governance of creation. It also undergirds his development of a Christian worldview. Furthermore, Bavinck’s development of the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity through his account of the ontological and cosmological dimensions establishes creation (its establishment and governance) as theologically significant. In other words, creation has an inherent value and worth of its own. It reveals and manifests the perfections of the triune God.

¹ See RD, II, 435.
But, as already indicated in Chapter 3 and Chapter 1, Bavinck’s trinitarianism, whereby every major and minor point of doctrine are considered “in light of God, subsumed under him, [and] traced back to him as their starting point,” is incomplete without the soteriological dimension. At the end of Chapter 1, we defined the soteriological dimension as Bavinck’s triniform account the divine work of redemption or re-creation. Connected to the ontological and cosmological, the soteriological dimension is the most significant for Bavinck because it is the foundation of Christianity itself. As he states: “Our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity…” According to Bavinck, the work of the triune God is the foundation of Christianity itself: “From God, through God, and in God are all things. Re-creation is one divine work from beginning to end, yet it can be described in terms of three agents,” the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Using this as our basic definition, this chapter will explore Bavinck’s application of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to salvation. The goal will be to show how Bavinck’s account of the Trinity shapes his account of redemption, particularly his identification of salvation as a work of trinitarian re-creation. Thus, a crucial aspect of this chapter will be illuminating the relationship between the cosmological and soteriological dimensions. To do this, we will utilize the methodology we have been employing in the last two chapters and highlight key aspects of Bavinck’s theology that illuminate his triniform account of salvation as re-creation. First, this chapter will return to two aspects of Bavinck’s theology that we examined in Chapter 3: Bavinck’s doctrine of the Eternal Counsel (consilium dei) and his articulation of divine communicability. As both are crucial elements within Bavinck’s ordered account of the systematic relationship between God’s opera ad intra and his opera ad extra, neither is complete until the soteriological dimension

2 RD, II. 29.
3 RD, II. 334.
4 RD, II. 334.
of God’s work is considered. Therefore, exploring them helps illuminate how Bavinck applies the
doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to salvation. Furthermore, returning to divine
communicability and the eternal counsel helps illuminate the ways that Bavinck relates God’s
works of creation and re-creation, thereby providing a lens into the relationship between the
cosmological and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity. Second, having examined Bavinck’s
foundation of re-creation in eternity, this chapter will briefly examine Bavinck’s triniform account
of the *ordo salutis* and *imago dei* in order to highlight the way he articulates the relationship
between time and eternity and to see how trinitarian salvation as re-creation must be understood
as both *restoration and elevation*.5

2. Communication, Self-Revelation, the Fall & Re-Creation

Having established creation as an instrument of God’s self-revelation in the second volume of
his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck begins his third volume with a statement on the incursion of sin
into God’s good creation: “When God had completed his work of creation, he looked down with
delight on the work of his hands, for it was all very good…But that world did not long continue to
exist in its original goodness. It had scarcely been created before sin crept into it…Sin ruined the
entire creation, converting its righteousness into guilt, its holiness into impurity, its glory into
shame, its blessedness into misery, its harmony into disorder, its light into darkness.”6 Following

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5 On this account, Hielema was correct to identify that one must recognize the importance of eschatology within
Bavinck’s articulation of redemption. He was also correct to identify Bavinck’s account as distinctive from subsequent
Neo-Calvinists like Albert Wolters and Gordon Spykman who present exclusively creational accounts of redemption.
However, while an engaging and significant contribution, Hielema sees Bavinck’s eschatology as exclusively
Christocentric rather than theocentric. Brian Mattson, who similarly appreciates but critiques Hielema’s work, also
identifies the importance of eschatology in relation to Bavinck’s understanding of the image of God. Thus, it is
important to note that even as this thesis accepts the theme of grace restoring nature as central within Bavinck, it does
see nature’s restoration as eschatologically oriented and qualified. Bavinck’s articulation of redemption is not
exclusively creational as has been developed within certain strands of Neo-Calvinism. See Albert M. Wolters,
*Creation Regained: Basics of a Biblical Worldview, 2nd* Ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), esp. Chapter 3,
“Redemption” and Gordan J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, esp. Chapter 5 “Prolegomena: New Directions in
Dogmatics” for typical representatives of creational accounts of redemption. See Hielema, “Eschatological
Understanding of Redemption” and Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, for accounts that seek to unpack Bavinck’s
theme of redemption as eschatological elevation.

6 *RD*, III. 28-29.
this statement with a theological exegesis of Genesis 2-3, Bavinck firmly grounds the origin of sin in the voluntary and deliberate rebellion of humanity (in Adam) and identifies it as an event that took place in history.\(^7\) As an historical event,\(^8\) the fall initiates God’s historical work of redemption, wherein “…the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and re-created by the Holy Spirit into the Kingdom of God.”\(^9\) The restoration of creation by God is the divine work *par excellence* in which God makes himself known in and through Christ as the triune God. Therefore, just as with God’s revelation in creation, redemption is also “God’s self-revelation, but now [it is] the self-revelation of the God who is not only just and holy but also gracious and merciful, who not only speaks to us through the law but also through the gospel, and who therefore centrally explains to us his name and essence in Christ and becomes known to us as

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\(^7\) Given the focus of this thesis, there is not enough space to articulate Bavinck’s full account of the headship of Adam. However, it should be noted that Bavinck utilizes the organic motif to articulate Adam’s headship over humanity. For a helpful article on Bavinck’s utilization of the organic motif in relation to the image of God and Adam’s headship see Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 2 (April 2016): 174-190.

\(^8\) The fall is not a symbolic event for Bavinck. It is an historical event with catastrophic consequences for everything in creation. Claiming that Genesis 2-3 presents an historical account of the fall, raises a question in terms of Bavinck’s engagement with nineteenth-century biblical criticism. It is not possible to articulate the complex relationship Bavinck had with nineteenth-century biblical criticism in this thesis. Bavinck did take up many insights from biblical criticism, especially through his Old Testament professor at Leiden, Abraham Kuenen. However, just like many of the other insights, motifs, and themes he appropriated from his context he did so carefully for his own systematic purposes. One of the ways he did was to develop his theory of organic inspiration by which “the Holy Spirit, in the inscripturation of the word of God, did not spurn anything human to serve as an organ of the divine. The revelation of God is not abstractly supernatural but has entered into the human fabric, into persons and states of beings, into forms and usages, into history and life. It does not fly high above us but descends into our situation; it has become flesh and blood, like us in all things except sin…The human has become an instrument of the divine; the natural has become a revelation of the supernatural…” Using this organic understanding of inspiration, Bavinck did not eliminate every mystery or question in relation to revelation and inspiration, but he did see it as capable of taking the historical context and personality of the human authors of Scripture seriously alongside an affirmation of objective, divine revelation. Bavinck disagreed with the overly mechanistic views of inspiration he perceived within the theological tradition, but he also critized contemporary conceptions of inspiration that removed a sense of divine authorship. See *RD*, I. Chapter 13 “The Inspiration of Scripture,” esp. 414-448.

the Triune God…”10 Beginning immediately after the fall, God’s work of redemption culminates in Christ, whose incarnation is the “highest richest and most perfect act of self-revelation.”11

While a profound theological account of the devastating consequences of sin and the redemptive work of the triune God, Bavinck’s articulation also integrally connects God’s work of redemption to his work of creation through the language of self-revelation. As we previously identified, Bavinck appropriates the concept of self-revelation (selfopenbaring) from his nineteenth-century context in order to articulate God’s self-consciously willed revelation in creation and highlight the historical nature of revelation itself.12 But in describing Christ as the crown and climax of God’s self-revelation, Bavinck also—in a remarkably nineteenth-century way—describes Christ’s incarnation as a particular and exemplary instance of God’s communication/self-revelation in general. As he notes in his dogmatics, Christ’s incarnation is “the crown, climax, and completion” of God’s self-revelation; it is what “all revelation tends towards and groups itself around.”13 As the climax and crown of God’s self-revelation, Christ’s incarnation is also the middle “point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either prepare for it or are inferred from it.”14

But what does this mean, and how does he develop it within his dogmatic project? Does Bavinck consider creation insufficient to manifest God’s perfections, especially his triunity? If the incarnation is the crown and climax of God’s self-revelation, does that make it necessary even apart from sin? If so, how does Bavinck maintain his claims that re-creation is a contingent

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10 RD, I. 343. Although Bavinck identifies Christ’s incarnation as the highest and most perfect act of God’s self-revelation, he also identifies many different forms or modes of God’s self-revelation in re-creation such as theophanies, prophesy, and miracles. Bavinck classifies Scripture as written prophetic word which is divinely inspired and often bears witness to God’s revelation in history. See RD, I. 328-339, 428-448.
11 RD, III. 278.
12 As we have noted throughout this thesis, while careful to distinguish his account of God’s self-revelation from pantheistic alternatives, Bavinck does not shy away from incorporating what he perceives to be true and helpful within their accounts.
13 RD, III. 278.
14 RD, III. 274.
response to human rebellion and primarily soteriological in nature? What about the fall? Is the fall a necessary aspect of God’s self-revelation so that he can reveal himself in re-creation? Considered through the lens of God’s relative self-revelation/communication, what is the relationship between creation, the fall, and re-creation? Are they necessary correlates? And what is the dogmatic system that arises from considering Christ as the center? Can it still be considered trinitarian?

All of these questions illuminate why Bavinck’s theology is not adequately understood until the soteriological dimension is considered and related to the ontological and cosmological. Thus, given our expositions in the previous three chapters, it is not surprising that we need to return to how Bavinck considers the relationship between creation and re-creation in light of the triune God. And, as we observed in Chapter 3, a critical aspect of considering all things in light of God for Bavinck is to trace God’s revelation back to its stable, eternal foundation. This is part of what it means to consider all things theologically for Bavinck. This is especially the case with regard to

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15 Veenhof and Heideman both wonder if Bavinck can adequately maintain the contingency and soteriological nature of the incarnation given his articulation of it as the exemplary form of God’s revelation in general. Veenhof, for example, observed great tensions within Bavinck’s work in relation to his account of ‘general’ and ‘special’ revelation. For Veenhof, Bavinck often mixes together concepts of nature and grace, keeping creation and re-creation so close together that it is hard to see how Bavinck maintains the contingency of the incarnation. Similarly, Heideman does not see Bavinck as fully maintaining the uniqueness of the incarnation because of Bavinck’s understanding of revelation as the embodiment of reason. John Bolt and Wolter Huttinga have both responded and argued that the tension that one finds in Bavinck as he tries to develop his account of nature and grace as separate yet related is one of his most redeeming qualities. Not seeking to eliminate the tension in Bavinck or ignore the lack of clarity that sometimes arises in Bavinck has when addressing these issues, both Bolt and Huttinga highlight how Bavinck’s presentation of the integral relationship, but necessary distinction, between nature and grace in Bavinck is due to the theocentric nature of his theology. As Huttinga notes: “The reason why the different dichotomies (between subject and object, or between the general and the special) are kept so closely together in Bavinck (to the consternation of commentators like Heideman and Veenhof), is that there is in Bavinck’s theology a pervasive discourse on divine being, even when it comes to the being of creation and to our knowledge of the divine.” Similarly, Bolt appeals to Bavinck’s unified account of the divine decrees. This thesis stands in line with Bolt and Huttinga, but it seeks to show how Bavinck’s theology is a pervasive discourse on the divine being and the motifs and mechanisms he uses to develop a unified, trinitarian account of the divine counsel. See Heideman, The Relationship between Reason and Revelation, 144; Huttinga, “Participation and Communicability,” 124-5; Bolt, Imitation of Christ, 250-253.

16 RD, III. 524: “Also soteriology must be viewed theologically, that is, as the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Also at stake in this domain is the honor of God, the assertion and revelation of all the perfections of God, which have been violated by sin. It is the will of God, in the church of Christ, to redeem the world and humankind from the power of Satan and to present them forever as a model of his wisdom and power, his holiness and grace. Just as surely as the re-creation took place objectively in Christ, so surely it must also be carried out subjectively by the Holy Spirit in the church.” The identification of Christ as the one who objectively carries out re-creation and the Spirit
the incarnation, for Christ may be the center but “like any other fact of revelation, the person of Christ…” must be “…viewed theologically in accordance with the Scriptures.” In the incarnation, Christ is the eternal one “who is ordained by God to display his attributes in this world of sin, particularly the attributes of righteousness and grace, against all opposition, to maintain his honor as God.” Thus, just as in his doctrine of Creation, Bavinck places re-creation within the eternal divine counsel (consilium dei) and relates it to God’s work of creation. This is fitting given that Bavinck sees all of God’s opera ad extra as rooted in his eternal counsel. Moreover, as we also noted in Chapter 3, the divine counsel is an all-encompassing, master concept in Bavinck. It does not simply concern the state of rational creatures. Rather, “it covers all things without expectation: heaven and earth, spirit and matter, things visible and invisible, creatures animate and inanimate. It is the one will of God governing the whole cosmos, past present and future.” Even though Bavinck does not see it as exclusively concerning the state of rational creatures, his articulation of the order of the divine decrees and identification of the pactum salutis (pact of salvation) as the consilium dei (eternal counsel) concerning redemption reveals several important features of his understanding of the relationship between creation and re-creation.

as the one who subjectively carries out re-creation in the Church requires some explanation. In some ways, Bavinck is adhering to a traditional articulation wherein Christ acquires all the benefits of salvation and the Spirit applies them to the believer. But in this case, as well as others, he uses an object-subject schema to articulate the relationship. His goal is to link the two works together as inextricable works of God in redemption.

17 RD, III. 274. See also, “The Essence of Christianity,” 46-47: “It is true that we then have the starting point and the center of Christianity, but we have not yet unfolded its full content. We cannot stop with Christ. Just because he is the subject and object, the core and center of the gospel, he is not its origin nor its final destination. He is the mediator of God and men and therefore points from himself back to the Father, just as he points forward to the future wherein God will be all in all.”
18 RD, III. 274.
19 See also footnote 36 in Chapter 3, 131.
20 RD, II. 392. In his chapter on the divine decrees, Bavinck treats providence as a separate decree of God from predestination. While he ultimately connects by articulating the unity of the divine counsel, Bavinck treats them separately to make a point. According to him, not everything in creation can simply be considered as a step or means to the eternal state of rational creatures. This is one of the ways that Bavinck tries to more thoroughly account for common grace within his articulation of the divine decrees.
First, in Bavinck’s treatment of the logical order of the decrees and *pactum salutis*, one encounters Bavinck’s attempt to develop a scriptural, theological account wherein the fall is *not* (strictly speaking) a necessary component of God’s good creation or self-revelation. However, it is still included in his counsel such that he (1) knows that the fall will occur and (2) wills to redeem creation such that *in redemption his perfections are made known*, particularly through his self-revelation in Christ.²¹ Second, as Bavinck develops his account of God’s divine counsel, one can see the way he creatively utilizes and appropriates both historic Reformed categories along with modern insights. Therefore, many of the answers to the questions above are found in Bavinck’s development of God’s eternal counsel, especially how God’s revelation in Christ after the fall is both contingent on sin and the climax and crown of God’s self-revelation. As such, his development of the eternal counsel, both in terms of the logical order of the divine decrees and the *pactum salutis*, aids us in our attempt to understand the doctrine of the Trinity in its soteriological dimension as well as its relationship to the cosmological.

### 3. God’s Eternal Counsel

Even though Bavinck references God’s eternal counsel throughout his writings, he treats the topic in two places in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. First, he discusses the divine decrees in general at the end of his doctrine of God proper prior to the doctrine of Creation.²² Second, he discusses God’s counsel concerning redemption (*pactum salutis*) in particular within his soteriological account of the covenant of grace. While Bavinck himself warns against arguments made solely on

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²¹ See *RD*, III. 29: Nothing can be “isolated from God’s government nor excluded from his counsel.”

²² In the English translation, Bavinck’s treatment of the doctrine of Decrees is placed at the beginning of Part III “God’s will on Earth as it is in Heaven.” However, in the original, Bavinck places the doctrine of Decrees at the end of his doctrine of God proper in “Hoofdstuk IV. Over God.” The placement in the Dutch helps illuminate Bavinck’s comments concerning his own choice to follow a synthetic *a priori* order in his systematic theology. See *RD*, II. 361, *GD*, 322.
the organization of dogmatic content, he does not see dogmatic organization as arbitrary. His placement of the doctrine of Decrees serves to emphasize how everything is rooted in the living, absolutely personal, triune God and serves as a manifestation of his glory. His placement of the pactum salutis within his treatment of the covenant of grace serves to ground it firmly in eternity and highlight the redemptive work of God as solely a response to sin. Yet, his development of the pactum salutis is conditioned by his earlier treatment of the doctrine of Decrees and doctrine of God. Thus, it is important to understand how Bavinck engages with the traditional infralapsarian/supralapsarian debate in Reformed theology in his development of the divine decrees before articulating his account of the pactum salutis.

3.1 The Logical Order of the Doctrine of Decrees: Historical and Causal or Teleological and Ideal?

Given our investigation of the cosmological dimension in Chapter 3, one might expect Bavinck to turn to infralapsarianism to develop his account of the logical order of the divine decrees. While primarily identified by whether the decree of predestination is before (supra, above) or after (infra, below) the fall, infra- and supralapsarianism contain theological implications about the nature of

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23 RD, II. 361: “Systematic order and theological interest demanded that predestination be treated under the doctrine of God. This was the order already followed by scholasticism and still followed also by the Lutherans. This also became the regular order for all Reformed theologians, some of whom treated election as part of the doctrine of the Divine Attributes, while others discussed it in a separate locus following that of the Trinity. The difference in order is not and need to be fundamental. Still, it is not accidental...In Reformed theology the primary interest is not in the salvation of humankind but in the honor of God...the synthetic a priori order involves a deeply religious motive for this reason alone, therefore, the assertion that this order presupposes a nominalistic concept of God and yields an arid, lifeless dogma, as some believe, is totally groundless. The doctrine of Predestination can be treated in an arid fashion either way: in the middle or at the beginning of one’s dogmatic system.”

24 See Chapter 1, 4.1-2. 67-9.

25 See Chapter 3.

26 The logical order of the divine decrees along with the concepts of eternal justification, immediate regeneration, and baptism on the basis of presumed regeneration were matters of fierce debate within Bavinck’s ecclesiastical context. These matters came to a head and were dealt with at the Synod of Utrecht in 1905, which adopted many of Bavinck’s articulations of these concepts over Kuyper’s. The Synod did not have any material effect on Bavinck’s views, but the second version of the Reformed Dogmatics does contain additional elements and explanations on the issues that the Synod dealt with. For a more in-depth treatment of the historical context and theological issues addressed at the Synod of Utrecht see J. Mark Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘The Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,” Mid-America Theological Journal (2008): 11-68.
creation, the character of God, and redemption.\textsuperscript{27} By placing the decree to redeem the world after the fall, infralapsarianism not only seeks to highlight God’s mercy but also gives creation an inherent worth of its own.\textsuperscript{28}

Yet despite Bavinck’s strong affirmation concerning creation’s inherent worth, he shies away from full-fledged support of infralapsarianism. Why? As he explains in his doctrine of God, neither infra- nor supralapsarianism can account for the ‘many-sidedness’ of Scripture.\textsuperscript{29} He praises infralapsarians for their modesty and sticking to the historical, causal order of the decrees. But he claims that their approach ultimately fails to satisfy the mind “because reprobation can no more be understood as an act of divine justice than election.”\textsuperscript{30} Just as faith and good works cannot be the cause of election, sin cannot be the cause of reprobation. Election and reprobation, within the divine counsel, are grounded in God’s divine sovereignty alone.\textsuperscript{31} The implementation of these decrees in time (salvation and condemnation) is certainly occasioned by faith and sin, but in the logical order of the decrees prior to creation, election and reprobation cannot be based on foreseen

\textsuperscript{27} See \textit{RD}, II. 385: “…it seems less harsh and shows greater consideration for the demands of [pastoral] practice.” In infralapsarianism, creation is not just a stage upon which the historical drama of humanity’s fall and redemption occurs; it has worth and value as a work of God. For a particularly poignant example of someone utilizing infralapsarianism to argue for the goodness of creation see Richard Mouw, \textit{He Shines in All That’s Fair} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Chapter 4, “Infra-versus Supra-

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{RD}, II. 390.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{RD}, II. 388. See also \textit{RD}, II: 385: “This difference is not resolved by an appeal to Scripture. For while Infralapsarianism is supported by all the passages in which election and reprobation have reference to a fallen world and are represented as acts of mercy and of justice… supralapsarianism finds support in all the texts that declare God’s absolute sovereignty, especially in relation to sin.” In his criticism of infra- and supralapsarianism, one finds another interesting parallel between Bavinck and Barth. Barth also criticized the tradition’s formulation of the divine decrees and sought to remedy perceived errors within the tradition. However, even though both criticize the traditional debate, they identify the problem differently. For Barth, the problem was that neither infra- nor supralapsarians took the Christological content of election seriously. For Bavinck, it was that neither adequately accounted for the unity of the divine decrees in the mind of God and considered each aspect of God’s decree in light of the final goal: the glory of God. Thus, their constructive proposals in relation to the divine decrees are different. Bavinck, as we will see, proposes an organic understanding of the decrees whereas Barth seeks to develop a thoroughly Christological account of election. See Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, §33.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{RD}, II. 385.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{RD}, II. 385.
faith or sin. For Bavinck, placing the decree of reprobation after the decree to permit sin, makes divine justice the ground for God’s decree of reprobation rather than divine sovereignty. According to Bavinck, because supralapsarians follow the ideal, teleological order of the decrees, they do (rightly) ground everything in God’s holy will and good pleasure. However, supralapsarianism also falls short because, in its articulation of predestination, reprobation, and the fall, it too closely equates the manner of God’s revelation with the goal of revelation: the manifestation of God’s glory. A supralapsarian approach “immediately includes in the … end the manner in which [the] glory of God will…manifest itself…” namely, “…in the eternal state of…rational creatures.” Thus, it presents the idea that God’s justice is exclusively revealed in the eternal state of the lost whereas his mercy and grace is exclusively revealed in the eternal state of the elect. This, according to Bavinck, is just as untenable as the infralapsarian position because even though God’s glory “with the manifestation of his perfections is the goal of all things; yet the double state of human blessedness and human wretchedness is not included in that goal but related to it as a means.”

3.2 Both Causal and Teleological? The Organic Order of the Doctrine of Decrees

Despite his criticisms of infra- and supralapsarianism, Bavinck also identifies the scriptural truths inherent in both approaches. He writes:

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32 According to Bavinck, to base either on foreseen faith or disbelief would be to follow Arminian logic. Given his adherence to the Canons of Dort, Bavinck was opposed to anything that could be construed as Arminian. See RD, II. 386.
33 RD, II. 386.
34 RD, II. 386.
35 RD, II. 389.
36 Bavinck identifies four main problems with the way that the decrees are traditionally articulated. First, as already noted, he sees it as wrong to present the ultimate “end of things as the revelation of God’s mercy in the elect and of his justice in the lost.” According to Bavinck, God’s justice and mercy are manifested in the eternal state of rational creatures but not exclusively nor exhaustively. Furthermore, Bavinck posits that God’s justice and mercy are present, in some way, in both heaven and hell. Second, he sees it as “incorrect to represent the state of the lost as the goal of predestination.” In other words, Bavinck is wary of utilizing the concept of ‘double predestination.’ He roots his
The truth inherent in supralapsarianism is that all the decrees together form a unity; that there is an ultimate goal to which all things are subordinated and serviceable; that the entrance of sin into the world was not something that took God by surprise, but in a sense willed and determined by him; that from the very beginning the creation was designed to make re-creation possible; and that even before the fall, in the creation of Adam, things were structured with a view to Christ. But the truth inherent in infralapsarianism is that the decrees, though they form a unity, are nevertheless differentiated with a view to their objects; that in these decrees one can discern not only a teleological but also a causal order; that the purpose of creation and the fall is not exhausted by their being a means to the final end; and that sin was above all and primarily a catastrophic disturbance of creation, one which of and by itself could never have been willed by God.\textsuperscript{37}

Given the truths within each order, adhering too fervently to either results in some type of theological deficiency. Therefore, Bavinck argues that one must avoid positing infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism as mutually exclusive conceptions of the divine decrees. Instead, both must be seen as part of the one ‘rich and complex’ counsel of God which “covers all things: heaven and earth, spirit and matter, things visible and invisible, creatures animate and inanimate. It is the one will of God governing the whole cosmos, past, present and future.”\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, rather than decide between the causal/historical order and the teleological/ideal order, Bavinck resituates them within a broad, unified vision of God’s one eternal counsel.\textsuperscript{39} According to Bavinck, the divine decrees do not primarily relate to one another successively in terms of before and after, cause and effect, means and end, but they relate to one another in “coordinate relation[ships] that cooperate in the furthering of what always was, is, and will be the deepest

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ground of all existence: the glorification of God.”\textsuperscript{40} Thus, the divine decrees are more like an organism than a straight line. They form an organic unity, and they are oriented towards and subsumed under their final goal: the glory of God. Each object of God’s divine counsel is and should be considered primarily as a means to display the glory of God. In relation to one another, each object of the divine decrees can be considered as coordinate with one another but not as a subordinate means to one another. In fact, Bavinck describes them using his organic motif. As each part of an organism is interconnected to its whole, so too each decree (with its differentiated object) is connected to God’s whole, all-encompassing counsel.

For Bavinck, there are at least three benefits to conceptualizing the decrees utilizing an organic order. First, it presents a more satisfactory picture of God’s self-consciousness wherein everything is eternally present than previous, traditional formulations.\textsuperscript{41} The whole history of the world as God’s divine self-revelation is contained within his world-consciousness (free knowledge) and closely related to his self-consciousness (necessary knowledge). The realization of his decree is historical and successive, but the idea itself is not because everything in God is eternally present. Thus, there is no conflict between the causal and teleological within God’s idea of the world. Consequently, this is another of the ways that Bavinck tries to synthesize his commitment to God’s timeless eternity with his desire to affirm the importance of history as a medium of God’s progressive revelation. In creation, creatures come to know God anthropomorphically, discursively, and historically what in God is simultaneous and eternal.

Second, it allows for a more satisfactory account of how various elements within reality manifest the divine perfections and display the glory of God. The whole world, including its history, is an organism of God’s glory. As with the parts of an organism, each part can display

\textsuperscript{40} RD, II. 392.
\textsuperscript{41} RD, II. 392.
something of the whole without being necessarily subordinate to another element.\textsuperscript{42} Or, as Bavinck explains using another metaphor, every element in creation works in concert with one another. What Bavinck seems to indicate here is that just like every part of the orchestra works in harmony to present music, so every element of God’s historical self-revelation works together in harmony to manifest God’s glory. Even though an orchestra is one, organic whole, one can appreciate the brass, woodwinds, percussion, etc. within the symphonic whole as they exist in relation to one another as well as on their own. So too, each historically realized object of God’s eternal decree should be understood in the same way. As he writes, in an extended paragraph worth quoting in full:

> Creation is not just a means for the attainment of the fall, nor is the fall only a means for the attainment of grace and perseverance, and these components in turn are not just a means for the attainment of blessedness and eternal wretchedness. We must never lose sight of the fact that the decrees are as abundantly rich in content as the entire history of the world, for the latter is the total unfolding of the former….Creation, fall, sin, Christ, faith, unbelief, and so forth, are certainly not just related to each other as means, so that a preceding one can fall away the moment the next one has been reached….Certainly the creation of the world did not just occur to make room for the event of the fall, but resulted in something that will continue to exist even in the state of glory. The fall did not just take place to produce creatures existing in a state of misery, but retains its meaning as a fact with all the consequences that have arisen from it. Christ did not only become a mediator—a position that would have been sufficient for the expiation of sin—but God also ordained him to be the head of the church. The history of the world is not a means that can be dispensed with once the end has come; instead, it has continuing impact and leaves its fruits in eternity.\textsuperscript{43}

Creation, the fall, sin, Christ, faith, etc. are ultimately subordinate to the goal of God’s glory and serve as a means to that ultimate end, but that does not mean they are subordinate to one another. Furthermore, nothing serves as the necessary manner by which God reveals his perfections; rather, they are self-consciously willed means through which God manifests his glory. In other words, God chooses all things as a means to reveal his perfections, but the manner that he chooses is not

\textsuperscript{42} According to Bavinck, the organic conception of the divine decrees allows for common grace to receive a greater place with the eternal counsel of God. See \textit{RD}, II. 392: “Much more so than in the past, the subject of common grace must be given its due also in the doctrine of the counsel of God.”

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{RD}, II. 390.
necessary. For example, the revelation of God’s mercy and love does not require redemption and election in Christ. However, in God’s eternal counsel, he wills that redemption reveals not only his mercy and love but also his justice. All things relate to one another omnilaterally as they are all considered in light of the glory of God.  

Third, and finally, in treating the decrees as an organic whole, Bavinck expands the doctrine itself so that it not only refers to the doctrines of Election and Reprobation but every other aspect of God’s divine counsel as well. As such, Bavinck sees the organic order as a way to integrate two truths that are broken apart in infra- and supralapsarianism. First, sin is a catastrophic and disruptive event caused by humanity in God’s good creation, meaning that creation has an inherent worth of its own and redemption is solely a response to sin. Second, in knowing and permissively willing the fall, God consciously structured creation such that he could redeem it, meaning that creation is a preparation for redemption and redemption elevates creation to its natural end.

In sum, what becomes apparent in Bavinck’s treatment of the eternal counsel is his desire to highlight the unity and inconceivably rich nature of God’s counsel and to hold together the historical and the teleological approaches within the logical order of the decrees. Holding the scriptural truths that he perceives within infra- and supralapsarianism together in the right tension, for Bavinck, is one of the goals of his systematic project. Whether or not he does so successfully or clearly is a matter of debate. However, within Bavinck’s systematic theology the benefit of conceptualizing the decrees as organic is that it allows every aspect of created reality to be referred

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44 RD, II. 392.
45 Within the Reformed tradition, infra- and supralapsarians agreed that God was not the author of sin and that he was the sole cause of election.
46 While not explicitly framed in terms of Bavinck’s organic conception of the divine decrees, one can see how the criticisms of Bavinck in Veenhof and Heideman noted in Chapter 4, footnote 15 are related to this discussion. Bavinck’s close relationship, but necessary distinction, between his account of creation and re-creation within the doctrine of the Decrees is indicative of the way he seeks to closely relate but distinguish between nature and grace in the rest of his dogmatics.
back to God and considered revelatory of his divine glory, and it allows him to connect all of God’s works back to his eternal counsel. Did God know and in some qualified sense will sin? Yes.\textsuperscript{47} To claim otherwise, would mean sin lies outside of God’s knowledge. Thus, in some sense, God does will to permit sin.\textsuperscript{48} Does God, knowing that sin will occur, manifest his perfections as he subdues, overcomes, and constrains evil?\textsuperscript{49} Yes. In fact, it is especially in God’s ability to overcome, subdue, and govern sin that “his attributes are splendidly displayed.”\textsuperscript{50} Does evil find its origin in God? No. God is not the author of sin, and its appearance in creation is due to humans alone. However, once it appears, he does exert his power over it. Is creation a preparation for redemption? Yes. Does creation have an inherent worth of its own? Yes. Are God’s perfections and triunity manifested more clearly through his work of redemption? Absolutely. Is the fall \textit{absolutely necessary} for God to reveal the triune God’s perfections? Absolutely not.\textsuperscript{51}

3.3 A Trinitarian Account of the \textit{Pactum Salutis}

Conceptualized as organic, Bavinck’s understanding of the eternal counsel is primarily oriented towards its fundamental unity. However, as we noted, unity for Bavinck does not mean uniformity. As we established in Chapter 3, the divine counsel arises from the essential communication of the Father, Son, and Spirit, contains within it God’s entire counsel concerning the world, is oriented towards God’s glory, and realized in time by the Father, Son, and Spirit as

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{RD}, III. 62.
\textsuperscript{48} See \textit{RD}, II. 196-7 and \textit{RD}, III. 66-70.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{RD}, II. 398-399: “Sin is not itself a good. It only becomes a good inasmuch as, contrary to its nature, it is compelled by God’s omnipotence to advance his honor. It is a good indirectly because, being subdued, constrained, and overcome, it brings out God’s greatness, power, and justice. God’s sovereignty is never more brilliantly manifested than we he manages to overrule evil for good (Gen. 50:20) and makes evil subservient to the salvation of the church (Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 3:21-23), the glory of Christ…and the glory of God’s name…”
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{RD}, III. 65.
\textsuperscript{51} Again, Bavinck draws on a common distinction between something that is absolutely necessary, whereby something \textit{is} simply necessary, and something that is necessary due to a set of circumstances. But, that does not mean that sin and evil \textit{per se} are willed by God. Rather, knowing that the fall would occur, God wills to redeem his fallen creation. The positive decree to redeem creation is necessary in the sense that it is willed by God, but it is not absolutely necessary. See, \textit{RD}, II. 343, \textit{RD}, III.
an outward manifestation (communication) of God’s perfections. Thus, God’s one divine counsel is inconceivably rich, the “fountainhead of all reality,” and contains within itself the goal and means of reaching it. Yet, as we also observed in Chapter 3, even though everything is grounded in God’s divine counsel and oriented towards his glory as the final goal, not everything manifests God’s perfections equally as the divine counsel is realized “before our limited field of vision in time and space.”

According to Bavinck, nothing manifests God’s perfections and triune essence more clearly than his work of salvation or re-creation. Applying his doctrine of the Trinity to the eternal counsel (consilium dei) concerning re-creation, Bavinck appropriates and develops a triniform account of the Reformed doctrine of the Pactum Salutis (counsel of peace, covenant of redemption). Seeking to overcome overly scholastic and defective forms of the pactum salutis, Bavinck presents the pactum as a deeply scriptural idea and the eternal counsel concerning redemption. In fact, Bavinck describes the pactum salutis as “…the divine work par excellence” because in it the triune God alone “conceives, determines, carries out, and completes the entire work of salvation.”

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52 RD, II. 397.
53 RD, II. 397.
54 See RD, III. 213214. Bavinck does critique some of the formulations in the past as being prone to scholastic subtlety and does not see Zech. 6:13 as a legitimate proof text. Although he does not engage in sustained critique, he does mention a few aspects of the scholastic formulation that he does not agree with. First, he criticizes the use of Job 17:3, Isaiah 13:14, Psalm 119:122, and Hebrews 7:22 to establish the idea that Christ “had from all eternity become the guarantor, not of God to us, but of us before God.” He also notes, with criticism, the distinction between fideiussor (one who gives bail in advance, guarantor) and expromissor (one who promises to pay for another) to address the question of the relationship between Christ and the sins of the Old Testament elect. Finally, he also disagrees with the scholastic dispute over whether the pactum salutis was a testament or a covenant. Despite seeing fault in these articulations, Bavinck sees the covenantal structure in the OT and NT as adequate grounds for maintaining an eternal covenant. It is important to observe Bavinck’s critical engagement and appropriation of this concept. As he often does, he utilizes the categories and concepts of scholasticism but critically and for his own purposes. Here we can observe another distinction between Bavinck and Barth in relation to their appropriation of the Reformed orthodox tradition. Bavinck critiques but adopts the pactum, whereas Barth describes it as an unscriptural mythology and rejects it. See Barth, Church Dogmatics, CD IV/1, 65.
55 Bavinck appeals to a number of different Scripture passages to defend the pactum, see RD, II. 214-5 for a full list.
56 RD, III. 215. See also RD, III. 590: “…it is the calling of the dogmatician to proclaim the full counsel of God and to disclose all the benefits that are included in the one splendid work of salvation.”
Given Bavinck’s emphasis on articulating the orderly relationship between time and eternity and his re-prioritization of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is not surprising that he appropriates and develops a trinitarian conception of the *pactum salutis*. Criticisms of the *pactum salutis* as a concept itself notwithstanding, Bavinck’s own articulation requires a close reading because it can sound like Bavinck has suddenly introduced a social conception of the Trinity whose being is constituted covenantally. As Bavinck writes: “The pact of salvation makes known to us the relationships and life of the three persons in the Divine Being as a covenantal life, a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom.” Even though the terms ‘pact’ and ‘covenant’ seem to implicate multiple wills within the Godhead whose plan of salvation then constitutes the Divine Being, they must be situated within Bavinck’s conception of God as the living, absolutely personal, *triune* Being and his articulation of the relationship between the divine essence and eternal counsel.

First, in describing the *pactum salutis as the pact* of salvation in which the three persons “cooperate…and perform a special task,” Bavinck seeks to maintain the *triunity* of the divine

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57 In his recent work *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, J.V. Fesko highlights the two major models of the *pactum salutis* in the history of theology: the Christological and the trinitarian. In the Christological model, the *pactum* is not sub-trinitarian but falls within the doctrine of Christ rather than the doctrine of God. In this account the triune God determines Christ to be the mediator of the covenant between the Father and the Son. In the trinitarian model, the *pactum* is considered a part of the doctrine of God and placed within the doctrine of God proper. Fesko notes that Bavinck along with Thomas Goodwin and James Durham follow the less common trinitarian model. Interestingly, however, even though Bavinck treats the *pactum* as the triune God’s *consilium dei* concerning redemption and develops it in a trinitarian manner, he places the *pactum* within his treatment of the covenant of grace and not in his doctrine of God proper. See J.V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 15-18.

58 The *pactum salutis* has been criticized for being overly speculative, anti-scriptural, and anti-trinitarian. On the last point, many have argued that conceptualizing Christ’s appointment as mediator as covenantally determined seems to introduce multiple wills into the divine life. While the discussions concerning the *pactum* are important, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in these debates. This thesis focuses on how Bavinck appropriates and articulates the *pactum* for his own dogmatic purposes. He did not appropriate the tradition uncritically, but he does utilize it nonetheless. For a more thorough treatment of the debate and a creative and constructive proposal see Fesko’s work in which he articulates the historical origins and development of the *pactum* (Part I), investigates the exegetical foundations of the *pactum* (Part II), and constructs a dogmatic account of the *pactum* (Part III) in Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*.

59 *RD*, III. 214.

60 *RD*, III. 214.
essence as he articulated it in his doctrine of God proper. While one in consciousness and will (self-consciousness and freedom), God’s personality unfolds immediately and completely into three persons. Even though the three persons do not each have their own self-consciousness and will, they are incommunicable subsistences within the divine essence. The relations within the divine essence, which for Bavinck is described in and through the language of communication (generation, procession), means that each person has a unique role within creation and re-creation that is fitting to the order within the divine essence. Far from bifurcating the essence into three separate persons, Bavinck portrays the covenant among the persons as “pact (συνθηκη) in the full [est] sense of the word.”⁶¹ For Bavinck, this means that each person relates to the one plan or will of God in the way that is fitting to the person. The Father is the one from whom the whole plan of redemption proceeds, the Son is the one through whom it is accomplished, and the Spirit is the one in or by whom it is applied.⁶² Thus, as the covenant of redemption is realized in time as the covenant of grace, the operations of the persons in the divine economy mirror the God’s relations ad intra, which means that various works can be attributed to particular persons. But, the work of God in the divine economy of redemption has one Author. All things flow from God and return to him through the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

In Our Reasonable Faith, Bavinck’s triniform account of the pactum salutis becomes clearer. In his treatment of the pactum salutis, he identifies the covenant as one eternal covenant whose content is threefold. First is election in Christ, which proceeds from the Father.⁶³ Second is Christ’s

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⁶² See Our Reasonable Faith, 268: “…the working out and the application of salvation wrought by Christ is also included in the counsel of God. The plan of redemption is established through the Father in the Son, but it is established also in the fellowship of the Spirit. Certainly, just as creation and providence come into being from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, so the redemption or re-creation takes place only through the applicatory activity of the Holy Spirit…All this the Holy Spirit can work out and bring into being because, together with the Father and the Son, He is the one true God who lives and reigns eternally. The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are well founded for the people of the Lord in the eternal and immutable counsel of God.”
⁶³ Our Reasonable Faith, 268.
acquisition of redemption for the elect as Mediator.\textsuperscript{64} Quick to qualify this, Bavinck writes: “This does not mean that Christ is the cause or foundation of the election, but just as creation and providence, both as counsel and as reality, proceed from the Father through the Son and so come into being, so the plan of salvation is also made through the Father in and with the Son.”\textsuperscript{65} Third is the application of salvation ‘wrought by Christ’ by the work of the Spirit, which “just as creation and providence come into being from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, so the redemption of re-creation takes place only through the applicatory activity of the Holy Spirit”\textsuperscript{66} Thus, each person within the one, living, absolutely personal, divine Being relates to the one, trinitarian plan of redemption uniquely but not exclusively.

Second, just like every aspect of God’s eternal counsel, Bavinck closely relates but necessarily differentiates the \textit{pactum salutis} from the divine essence. As the \textit{consilium dei} concerning creation and providence arises from but does not constitute the eternal communication of the divine essence, so too the \textit{consilium dei} concerning redemption arises from but does not constitute the eternal communication within the Godhead. In other words, Bavinck does not ontologize the \textit{pactum salutis}.\textsuperscript{67} God’s life is not constituted by the covenant or pact he makes to redeem the fallen world, nor is his essence ‘covenantal.’ Rather, the covenant originates from within God’s eternal processions. Just as every other aspect of the \textit{consilium dei}, the \textit{pactum salutis} is closely

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\textsuperscript{64} Bavinck carefully articulates how Christ can be called the object of God’s election in his appointment as the mediator of re-creation. However, he is not called the object of God’s election in the sense that “He, like the members of His church, was elected to come up out of the condition of sin and misery into a state of redemption and salvation. But He can be called that in this other meaning that He who was the Mediator of the creation would also be the Mediator of the re-creation, and would bring it about entirely by His passion and death.”
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\textsuperscript{67} In his article “Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Bavinck’s Reformulation of the \textit{Pactum Salutis} Contra ‘Scholastic Subtlety,’” Laurence O’Donnell successfully argues against claims that Bavinck ontologizes the \textit{pactum salutis}. This thesis is in agreement with O’Donnell’s assessment. Furthermore, as an aspect of the soteriological dimension, this thesis seeks to emphasize how the \textit{pactum salutis} is related to but not constitutive of the divine essence. See Laurence O’Donnell “Not Subtle Enough,” \textit{Mid America Journal of Theology} 22 (2011): 86-106.
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related to the divine essence as it arises within God’s *ad intra* communication. As such, it is oriented towards the manifestation of God’s perfections *ad extra*, but its realization is the result of divine sovereignty alone.

Third, as an aspect of God’s eternal counsel, it is bound to be realized in time by the one God in three persons. Just as God’s self-consciously willed plan to create is from all eternity, so too once he wills to redeem fallen humanity, it will be realized in time.\(^68\) In its realization in time, God’s temporal ‘sending forth’ or missions serve to reveal God by manifesting his glories in and through redemption.\(^69\) In time, the *pactum salutis* takes the form of the covenant of grace, which begins immediately after the fall and unfolds historically.\(^70\) In its realization from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, the benefits of the covenant of grace are fully acquired and applied.\(^71\) Its realization is possible because, in the one eternal counsel of God, creation is made such that it can be redeemed. And, in its realization, the covenant of grace most clearly manifests God’s *trinity* as it is the divinely ordained means through which everything ruined by the fall can return to the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit.\(^72\)

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\(^68\) *RD*, II. 343.

\(^69\) *RD*, II 320-321.

\(^70\) As Bavinck traces the historical unfolding of the covenant of grace, he distinguishes between the covenant of grace in a broad and narrow sense. Immediately following the fall, God’s punishment and promise to Adam and Eve are a form of grace in which God guarantees the continued existence of the world. After the fall, God graciously upholds and allows “the original powers, instilled by [him] at the creation in the various creatures, though broken…to be effective even after the fall for a long time.” Bavinck describes this as God’s common grace. From the time of Adam to Noah, Bavinck sees God’s common grace as limiting the effects of the fall and withholding the full effects of evil. After the flood, a new period of God’s gracious engagement with humanity begins as “…the grace manifested…immediately after the fall now [exerts] itself more forcefully through the restraint of evil.” God’s common grace enables human beings to achieve high levels of development in the arts, society, justice, etc. However, it is not enough. Built onto the broad work of God’s gracious restraint of sin, the narrow covenant of grace the one in which God brings particular salvation to his elect. See *RD*, III. 216-219.

\(^71\) Bavinck distinguishes between the decree and its execution in time. Thus, while he affirms the use of the term eternal justification in a qualified sense to affirm that Christ’s work in and for the church rests on an eternal foundation, he rejects the idea that in the eternal pact constituted complete justification. The decrees are meant to be executed in time. In Bavinck’s account, this also means that the processions, *pactum salutis*, missions, and order of salvation are interconnected but also necessarily distinct. See *RD*, III. 590-591.

\(^72\) It is important to highlight the *exitus-reditus* structure in this movement. The appropriation of operations within the divine economy does not negate but explains how all things flow from God and return to God.
4. The Communicability of the Divine Essence: Creation and Re-Creation

Having established the organic unity of the eternal divine counsel and developed a triniform account of the *pactum salutis*, it should not be surprising that when Bavinck turns to describe the realization of God’s eternal counsel pertaining to redemption, he once again appeals to the communicability of the divine essence. For Bavinck, every movement of God *ad extra* presupposes and depends on the essential communication of the divine, triune Being *ad intra*. Thus, just as he conceptualizes creation and providence as communicative acts, he also conceives of God’s covenant of grace (the temporal realization of the *pactum salutis*), particularly the incarnation, as a form of divine, supernatural communication (self-revelation) to another. In fact, according to Bavinck, to deny the possibility of creation or the incarnation is to deny the possibility of another. “Those who consider the incarnation impossible must, on further reflection, also at some point deny creation.”

Why? Because both rest on the fundamental presupposition that God’s absolute, essential communication provides the condition of possibility by which he can *freely* choose to communicate himself *relatively* to another. Everything in creation and re-creation is initiated by God’s self-consciously willed communication, and therefore everything is revelatory of his divine perfections. According to Bavinck, if God cannot communicate himself in creation, he could not communicate himself in the incarnation.

However, while Bavinck grounds the possibility of creation and the incarnation in God’s essential communication and describes both as God’s *relative* communication to the world, he distinguishes between the two even as he connects them. First, for Bavinck, creation and re-creation are both self-consciously willed communicative acts of the same living, absolutely

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73 RD, III. 277.
personal, triune God. In both, the one God reveals himself. In both, all things proceed from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. However, while the triune God’s revelation is the foundation of both creation and re-creation, the form and content of his revelation in re-creation are distinct from that of his revelation in creation before the fall. Why? Because after the fall, God’s (general) revelation in creation “is insufficient” and special revelation must be added. As Bavinck articulates in his article on “Common Grace,” in special revelation, “revelation comes to guilty man, who merits death, as a revelation of grace. Now when God—in spite of the transgression—calls man, searches him out, and sets enmity in the place of the defunct friendship, a totally new element appears in his revelation—namely his compassion and mercy.” In other words, in God’s work of re-creation, his communication is soteriologically qualified wherein the creator of the universe comes to his creation and reveals himself to be its gracious and merciful saviour.

The difference between the two does not lie in the Author, or even in a certain sense the content of God’s self-revelation: All of God’s works are trinitarian and display traces of his triune existence. However, as Bavinck writes in his *Reformed Dogmatics*:

In the works of nature it is at most only the Father as Creator who speaks to us by the Word (Logos) and the Spirit. But in the works of grace, God comes to us as the Father in the entirely unique sense of the Son, and as Father he consequently also reveals himself to us by that Son,

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74 See “Common Grace,” 40.
75 “Common Grace,” 40. In a certain sense, all of God’s revelation after the fall is a work of communicative grace—either special or common—because even God’s upholding and preservation of creation is a form of unmerited grace to a fallen humanity. In treating Bavinck’s identification of creation and re-creation as acts of divine communication in reference to his articulation of the relationship between nature and grace, it is important to note that Bavinck does *use the word grace inconsistently*. Already recognized by Veenhof, Bolt provides a helpful summary of the inconsistent use of the word grace in Bavinck. Appealing to Veenhof, Bolt writes: “He is quite confusing, for example, in terms of what he means by “grace” (and thus also revelation). It is not clear whether “grace” is a universal reality describing God’s relation to the world and to man, including both pre-fall and post-fall situations, or whether grace is properly only a post-fall reality, in some sense soteriologically qualified. From this confusion J. Veenhof judges that there are at least three different “sorts” of grace in Bavinck’s thought: (1) grace which is the foundation of all revelation and exists pre-fall; (2) common grace and (3) special grace, both of which have their origin in God’s revelation after the fall. Although inconsistent, his emphasis on nature and grace being the result and medium of divine, supernatural revelation does help illuminate the way that he sought to connect them. Furthermore, his inconsistent use of grace indicates how much he sought to closely relate but also differentiate God’s work in creation and re-creation.
more precisely by the Son who became incarnate in Christ and by the Spirit acquired by that Christ. Hence in the subject [agent] of revelation, both the connection and difference between general and special revelation clearly emerges.\textsuperscript{76}

Here, Bavinck makes an important, albeit veiled point that is vital to his argument as a whole. The Son, as the one through whom creation is made, is the mediator of God’s revelation in both creation and re-creation.\textsuperscript{77}

As the mediator of creation, the Son with the Father by the Spirit, communicates God’s trinitarian glories \textit{truly yet relatively}.\textsuperscript{78} The incarnation is the most exemplary form of God’s revelation as a whole. For Bavinck, the key aspect of God’s self-revelation is that he is able to communicate himself to another without flowing over into or becoming the other. In Christ’s incarnation, the Son unites God and humanity in such a way that there is no confusion, change, division or separation.\textsuperscript{79} As such, the incarnation is “the highest, richest, and most perfect act of self-revelation.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus, in Christ, who is both God and man, the fullness of God is made known. According to Bavinck, identifying the incarnation as God’s most perfect act of self-revelation does not reduce its uniqueness nor imply its necessity. Even though Bavinck sympathizes with those who posit an incarnation without the fall, he ultimately rejects the idea.\textsuperscript{81} For Bavinck, the

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\bibitem{RD1} \textit{RD}, I. 342.
\bibitem{RD2} \textit{RD}, III. 279. Bavinck appeals to Calvin to make this point and cites Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, II.xii. 4,6.
\bibitem{RD3} This is apparent in his appropriation and trinitarian description of the \textit{principia} of knowledge. Recall that in Chapter 1 we noted that Bavinck identifies the Son and the Spirit in general revelation in relation to the \textit{principia}. In general revelation the \textit{principium cognoscendi externum} is God’s revelation in creation, and the \textit{principium cognoscendi internum} is reason illuminated by the Logos, aided by the Spirit. Furthermore, he also identifies the Son, or Logos as playing a role in natural knowledge. According to Bavinck, for natural knowledge of the world, the \textit{principium cognoscendi externum} is the created world, and the \textit{principium cognoscendi internum} is reason as illuminated by the Logos (the second person of the Trinity).
\bibitem{RD4} The echoes of the Chalcedonian Creed in this sentence are deliberate. Bavinck recognizes the issues raised to two natures Christology in the nineteenth century, but he seeks to maintain a doctrine of Christ’s two natures. His rationale is that nothing proposed does more justice to Scripture’s teaching on Christ. See \textit{RD}, III. Chapter 6 “The Person of Christ.”
\bibitem{RD5} \textit{RD}, III. 278.
\bibitem{RD6} Bavinck rejects the view that the incarnation was necessary apart from sin as too deductive. Seeing his own development of the divine decrees as rooted in Scripture, Bavinck argues that the incarnation anyway hypothesis is not necessary because of the unity of the divine decrees. He writes: “On the basis of Augustine’s standpoint and more specifically on that of Reformed theology, however, there is no need for this entire hypothesis. There is no room for any reality other than the existing one. Accordingly, however much sin entered the world by the will of the creature, it was nevertheless included in God’s counsel from eternity and to him was not contingent or unforeseen. In that
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incarnation is a response to the fall. However, it is something that is known and planned for within God’s eternal counsel.

Moreover, as a soteriologically qualified communicative work of the triune God, the incarnation is the crown of God’s (special) revelation because in Christ the triune God’s gracious work of salvation is accomplished and made known. “It is in Christ that God becomes known to us not just as holy and just, gracious and merciful, but (most importantly) as Triune.”

82 In Christ every aspect of God’s self-revelation—including his revelation in creation—is illuminated and gathered up as the work of one living, absolutely personal, triune Being. “All revelation tends towards and groups itself around the incarnation as the highest, richest, and most perfect act of self-revelation.”

83 In Christ’s incarnation, the whole of God’s work is made known. It stands as the organic center of God’s self-revelation, through which everything can be observed. However, Bavinck closely relates God’s works with the idea of communication; Christ stands at the centre but not at the start nor the end of revelation.

84 Christ’s incarnation is God’s self-consciously willed act of revelation whereby God makes himself known as both creator and redeemer.

Second, as the centre and climax of God’s self-revelation, Bavinck applies his organic understanding of the divine decrees in order to articulate how the incarnation is simultaneously a contingent, soteriological response to sin and prepared for in advance. He writes:

Creation itself already must be conceived in infralapsarian fashion, and Adam was already a type of Christ. This view is unacceptable from the standpoint of those who think that God proceeded to the work of creation without a plan or decree and that at the creation God passively awaited to see what humans would do. But Scripture teaches us otherwise. In the act of creation, God already had Christ in mind. In that sense the creation itself already served as a preparation for the incarnation. The world was so created that when it fell, it could again be

82 RD, III. 278.
83 RD, III. 278.
84 See Chapter 1, 61.
restored; humanity was organized under a single head in such a way that, sinning, it could again be gathered together under another head. Adam was so appointed as head that Christ could immediately take his place, and the covenant of works was so set up that broken, it could be restored in the covenant of grace.85

Because God’s eternal counsel is one organic whole, Christ’s work of redemption is truly a work of re-creation wherein he restores God’s good but fallen creation. Knowing that human rebellion would destroy his good creation, God so created the world that when it fell, it could be fully redeemed. Full redemption means both the full restoration of creation and an elevation of it to its final goal: the glory of God. In Christ, creation is not just returned to its original state as if it had never fallen; it is restored and elevated at the same time. Creation’s inherent telos is achieved in Christ and applied in and through the work of the Holy Spirit who applies the benefits of the covenant of grace and instantiates the Kingdom of God. On this side of the eschaton, the Kingdom comes alive spiritually in the lives of believers, and on the other side of the eschaton, it comes spiritually, materially, and physically as all of creation is “gathered up in the future city of God—renewed, re-created, boosted to its highest glory.”86 In restoring the relationship between God and humanity, Christ assures the full and complete renewal and glorification of creation, even if its full consummated lies in the future.

Thus, the Son is the mediator of both creation and re-creation. Creation is a preparation for the incarnation, but it is not just a servant to the incarnation. After the fall, God’s work in Christ properly restores and redeems creation to its ultimate end. Thus, God’s redemptive work in Christ is cosmic in scope, rests on the reality of creation, and points towards the end when God will be all in all. In the language of communication, as the triune God’s self-revelation in creation is as

85 RD, III. 278. Cf. RD, II. 564. The description of creation itself as infralapsarian is strange. According to Mattson, in describing creation itself as infralapsarian, Bavinck was effectively removing infralapsarianism from ‘its native soil’ of the decree concerning predestination and planted it in new soil. While Mattson is certainly right that Bavinck has placed the term within a new context, his utilization of it here makes sense given his earlier articulation of the organic order of the divine decrees as well as his wish to maintain the truths inherent in infra- and supralapsarianism. See Bolt, Imitatio Christi, 256 and Mattson, Restored to Our Destiny, 175-176.

86 RD, IV. 720.
wide as the cosmos, so too his self-revelation in re-creation is as wide as the cosmos. Therefore, his communication in re-creation rests on his communication in creation. If God could not communicate himself in creation, neither could he communicate himself in Christ. The possibility of creation and the incarnation rests on the same principle (God’s communicability), and they both come into existence in and through the realization of the divine counsel. Because all of God’s communication ad extra is grounded in his eternal counsel, his work in re-creation is presupposed from the beginning. All things communicate the same God from whom all things flow and to whom all things return.

Third, as all of God’s communication ad extra is a work of the Father, Son, and Spirit, Bavinck’s articulation of God’s revelation in Christ’s incarnation focuses strongly on the distinction between God’s being and persons. Following the Calvinistic line of argumentation concerning the incarnation, Bavinck argues that the person of the Son, not the divine nature as such, became human.\(^{87}\) To articulate this, Bavinck again turns to the communicative nature of the divine essence and argues that God’s absolute communication opens up the possibility of the incarnation because the persons remain who they are yet fully communicate themselves to one another. This, according to Bavinck, opens up the possibility of “communion of a human being through the person with the being of God, without this being being identified with the human or flowing over into that human. In a word, the Trinity makes possible the existence of a mediator who himself participates both in the divine and human nature and thus unites God and humans.”\(^{88}\) And, it is particularly the Son who is suited for such a communion because he “occupies the place

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87 Bavinck sees the Calvinistic approach to the incarnation as the only one that can fully guard against Patrpassianism. It is important to note that while Bavinck’s trinitarian metaphysics and locus de Deo have a strongly catholic orientation; his treatment of Christ is decidedly Reformed. He constantly critiques Lutheran and Roman Catholic conceptions of the incarnation. *RD*, III. 275. On the extra Calvinisticum in Calvin’s thought see E. David Willis, *Calvin’s Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisiticum in Calvin’s Theology*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), esp. Chapter 3.

88 *RD*, III. 275.
between the Father and the Spirit, is by nature the Son and image of God.”

89 Even more than creation, the generation of the Son from the Father opens up the possibility of the incarnation wherein the Son can, remaining fully divine, assume a human nature and unite the divine and human into one person as the mediator. 90 However, as we established previously, the Son serves as the mediator of creation and re-creation. In sum, the absolute communication within the trinitarian essence of God makes it possible that the person of the Son, in whom the fullness of God dwells “in a manner of its own” can assume a human nature without confusion, change, division, and separation. 91

However, even though “trinitarian essence of God is the presupposition and condition of the incarnation,” the incarnation does not necessarily flow from eternal generation. 92 To claim that the incarnation is necessary for God makes the world into nothing more than a result of God’s self-realization (pantheism) rather than his self-consciously willed revelation, but to deny its possibility (Deism), makes God disconnected from the world. Therefore, just as in creation, the communicative nature of the divine essence makes the incarnation possible, but its actuality is grounded in God’s eternal counsel. 93

4.1 Self-Revelation in Creation and Re-Creation…and Scripture?

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89 RD, III. 276.
90 In identifying the trinitarian essence of God as the necessary precondition for the incarnation, Bavinck finds a kinship with Dorner’s account of Böhme and Schelling and the relationship between the divine essence and the incarnation. While he firmly critiques their theosophical approach wherein, they seek to infer the incarnation from the essence, he does agree that the trinitarian essence of God is the precondition for the incarnation. RD, III. 275. For his engagement with Böhme and Schelling on this point Bavinck cites I. A. Dorner, A System of Christian Doctrine, III. 291.
91 Bavinck affirms and upholds the Nicene Creed and two natures Christology. Similar to his treatment of the term ‘person’ in the doctrine of the Trinity, Bavinck affirms the Creed and its Christology because he sees it as the best and most scriptural portrayal of Christ. That does not mean he does not appreciate the various challenges that two natures Christology raises, but he does not see any alternative that is as faithful to Scripture. See RD, III. 298-319.
92 RD, III. 275. See also RD, III. 278.
93 RD, III. 278.
Understanding God’s communicative self-revelation *ad extra* is incomplete without a brief articulation of Bavinck’s theology of Scripture, especially because it highlights the work of the Spirit. As we have noted previously, Bavinck sees Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum* of theology and its norming norm. However, having articulation creation and re-creation as communicative acts of the triune God, several questions arise. What is Scripture and why is it authoritative? How is Scripture related to God’s revelation in Christ? Is it a witness to the Word or is it revelation itself?

Grappling with these questions the first volume of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck once again shows himself to be attentive of the major theological and philosophical questions of his day. The questions of pertaining to Scripture, its relationship to the Word (Christ), and the nature and extent of God’s revelation arose to prominence in the wake of the Enlightenment and have continued to impact theology into the twenty-first century.\(^{94}\) In answering them, Bavinck follows the modern distinction between revelation—especially in history—and Scripture, but he seeks to avoid detaching revelation “from Scripture…” such that it becomes “…an accidental appendix, an arbitrary addition, a human record of revelation, which might perhaps still be useful but was in any case not necessary.”\(^ {95}\) To do so, Bavinck draws Scripture into the communicative work of the triune God. Scripture, for Bavinck, is the servant form of revelation and an aspect of how God “adapts himself to this reality” in order to make himself known.\(^ {96}\) Just as every event in history can only be known and accessed through human attestation, so too God’s works in history must be attested to in order to be known. The form that this attestation takes is Scripture. Without

\(^{94}\) For good overviews of different theologies of revelation see Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1992). For the impact of these discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in German thought see Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought*, especially Chapters 5 and 6: “Liberal theology” and “The Twentieth Century.”

\(^{95}\) *RD*, I. 381.

\(^{96}\) *RD*, I. 380.
Scripture, “We literally know nothing of the revelations of God in the time of Israel and in Christ… With the fall of Holy Scripture, therefore, all of revelation falls as well, as does the person of Christ.”

Relating Scripture to the ordinary means through which human beings come to know past events, Bavinck is also quick to guard its uniqueness. One of the main ways he does this is through his doctrine of Inspiration. Appealing to the work of the Holy Spirit, Bavinck identifies inspiration as an element within revelation. Thus, God’s revelation in nature and history, particularly his works pertaining to redemption—are not concluded until they are made permanent in and through the work of inscripturation. Developing his doctrine of Inspiration along trinitarian lines, Bavinck argues that the Holy Spirit takes everything from Christ, the organic centre of God’s revelation and true Word, and “add[ing] nothing new to revelation” divinely inspires the writing of Scripture. For Bavinck, connecting the work of the Spirit to the work of Christ is what allows for Scripture to be considered the word of God, not just a witness to it. Although God’s revelatory acts (such as the incarnation) must be distinguished from Scripture, Scripture cannot be dissociated from them or considered a mere witness to the events. Scripture is also a work of one, triune God’s divine communication. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture is the word of God. Through illumination and regeneration of the Spirit, the “treasures and wisdom and knowledge present in Christ and displayed in his Word,” are applied. Thus, even as the incarnation remains the crown and climax of God’s self-revelation, Scripture is the means by which God, through the Holy Spirit, communicates the glorious redemption wrought in Christ. As such, Scripture is the principium cognoscendi externum of theology and its norming norm.

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97 RD, I. 382.
98 RD, I. 382.
4.2 Self-Revelation, Creation and Re-Creation & the Relationship between Nature and Grace

Identifying creation and re-creation as communicative acts and describing the incarnation as the crown and climax of God’s revelation, serves a positive and apologetic role for Bavinck. Positively, it gives him a way to relate nature and grace without collapsing them. In nature and grace, the same God supernaturally communicates himself truly and relatively. Nature itself, although not divine, already contains an inherent worth and as it displays God’s glory and progressively manifests God’s perfections through history. Nature is already a result of God’s revelation and rests on God’s ongoing revelation. Thus, the difference between nature and grace does not rest in revelation per se but in grace. It is not that God starts to communicate himself after the fall, but that his communication after the fall is soteriological qualified. And, as it is soteriological, it manifests God in all of his glory. After the fall, God graciously works to redeem his fallen creation so that it can be restored and reach its final end. Grace does not supersede nature but restores it and elevates it to its final eschatological goal.99

With respect to apologetics, Bavinck utilizes his conception of creation and re-creation as acts of divine self-revelation to engage with other theological and philosophical traditions. Within the *Reformed Dogmatics*, the way Bavinck conceptualizes creation and re-creation as acts of divine self-communication (revelation) allows him to articulate both as self-consciously willed acts that are rooted in but not equal to the divine being against pantheism and Deism.100 However, he also utilizes his conception of creation and re-creation as forms of divine self-communication

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100 Here it is possible to observe again that Bavinck’s account of the God-world relationship is important in his account of redemption. Even in Christ’s incarnation and the re-creation of the world, the distinction between the creator and the creation remains intact.
(zelfopenbaring) to argue against other theological articulations of the relationship between nature and grace, including those within his own theological circles.

First, in the prolegomena of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck grounds his insights in the Reformation, particularly Calvin, and explains how conceptualizing creation and re-creation as forms of *revelation* undergirds his conception of the relationship between nature and grace.

[The Reformation] converted the quantitative antithesis between revelation and nature into a qualitative antithesis; in the place of a physical, it gave to it an ethical character. The revelation that appeared in Christ as such is absolutely not opposed to nature but to sin, which as an alien element has insinuated itself into the world. Revelation and creation are not opposed to each other, for creation itself is a revelation. Revelation was present before the fall. Even now revelation is present still in all the works of God’s hand in nature and history; his enteral power and deity are perceived and understood from his creatures.\(^{101}\)

According to Bavinck, one of the main insights of the Calvinist branch of the Reformation was to reconceptualize the relationship between nature and grace. Grace was not opposed to nature but sin. Closely connecting this to the idea of revelation, Bavinck argues that revelation itself was present before the fall. Rooting his conception in the Reformation, Bavinck attributes Schweizer with helping him conceptualize revelation as present even before the fall.\(^{102}\) Taking Schweizer’s insight but situating it within his own trinitarian conception of God’s self-revelation, Bavinck argues that God’s special revelation in Christ, while distinct, cannot be opposed to God’s revelation in creation. As we have previously noted, creation itself is already an act of God’s self-communication.

\(^{101}\) *RD*, I. 361.

\(^{102}\) Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 40. In his article “Common Grace,” Bavinck credits Schweizer with the insight that revelation existed before the fall and that the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is found in grace, not revelation. While appreciating and appropriating Schweizer’s insight as he articulates revelation as existing before the fall, Bavinck also criticizes Schweizer for equating natural theology or religion with the covenant of works. He also critiques Schweizer for robbing revelation of its supernatural character by construing natural religion, the religion of law, and redemptive religion as three stages in the religious process. Bavinck reprises this critique in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and also applies it to Scholten. See “Common Grace,” 39-40 and *RD*, I. 109.
The error of Anabaptist, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran theology, according to Bavinck, is that none of them develop the relationship between nature and grace correctly. According to Bavinck, Roman Catholic theology perpetuates a dualism between nature and grace such that grace is needed to perfect nature. Therefore, beyond nature, supernatural revelation is needed.103 Similarly, Bavinck identifies Anabaptist theology as resting on Roman Catholicism’s dualism between nature and grace but intensifying it such that nature is “…sacrificed… to grace.”104 According to Bavinck, not even Lutheran theology maintains the right relationship between nature and grace. In Lutheranism, God’s grace remains too restricted to the salvation of the believer and does not extend to the creation itself.105

Bavinck’s criticisms, however, are not limited theological systems and ideas outside of his own Reformed, ecclesial context. In “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” an address delivered at the Theological School in Kampen in 1888, Bavinck criticizes those within his own ecclesiastical circles for not taking the cosmic implications of the triune God’s re-creating work seriously. While Bavinck does not fully develop his theological account of God’s self-revelation in this address, one can see him beginning to work out his later articulations. As he develops his account of the catholicity of Christianity, Bavinck identifies what he sees as insights of the Reformers. According to Bavinck, they restored the “honor to the first article of our universal

103 Although Bavinck often engages positively with theologians important to Tridentine Catholicism, such as Thomas Aquinas, Roman Catholicism remains one of his biggest theological targets. It does seem, however, that Bavinck’s main target is actually nineteenth-century Neo-Thomism found in the Manuals of Theology. This is an area that requires further study, but there have been previous mentions of the need to distinguish and nuance Bavinck’s engagement with Roman Catholic thought as well as some scholarship highlighting Bavinck’s utilization of and affinity for Thomas. See Bolt, Imitatio Christi, 172 n.24, 180 n.29, 189 n.50, and 191 n.54; Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness and Theological Epistemology,” Scottish Journal of Theology 70 no. 3 (August 2017): 310-332; Sytsma, “Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” Arvin Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” Bavinck Review 6 (2015): 9-36; idem, Aquinas, Calvin and Contemporary Protestant thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).
104 Our Reasonable Faith, 126.
105 See Bavinck’s comments on the distinction between Lutheranism and Calvinism in Chapter 3, 59.
Christian faith,” which is the confession that God the Father created heaven and earth.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, as they affirmed God’s creation, the Reformers more adequately understood that redemption is that which restores creation from within. “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 that which is unholy. The kingdom of heaven may be a treasure and a pearl of great price, but it is also a mustard seed and a leaven.”\textsuperscript{107} Although Bavinck primarily develops these ideas in order to combat Roman Catholicism, he also turns to his audience and criticizes the isolationism and pietism that he perceives within their approach. At several points, Bavinck offers less than veiled criticisms of those listening for closing themselves off to the world, especially public life.\textsuperscript{108} He implores them to take the catholicity of Christianity seriously.\textsuperscript{109} To withdrawal oneself or one’s ecclesial community from engaging in public life, according to Bavinck, is to reject the universal and cosmological implications of Christianity.

Finally, in many ways, it also provided a way for him to try to articulate a Reformed theology in and for modernity. Bavinck was not unaware of the challenges and tensions inherent in seeking to formulate a Reformed theology in modernity, especially one that was connected to the past but not closed off to the present. Even as this thesis has sought to show how Bavinck himself developed his theology as a unified systematic account of the knowledge of God, that does not mean Bavinck did not perceive any dualities and tensions in articulating a dogmatic Reformed theology in modernity.\textsuperscript{110} Nor did he think it was possible to overcome every tension he

\textsuperscript{106} Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity,” 236.
\textsuperscript{107} Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity,” 236.
\textsuperscript{109} Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity,” 249: “Undoubtedly it would be much easier to leave this entire age to its own devices and seek our strength in quietness. But such a restful peace is not permitted us here. Because every creature of God is good and not to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because everything can be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, rejection of any one of his creatures would be ingratitude to God, a denial of His gifts. Our conflict is not with anything creaturely but against sin alone.”
\textsuperscript{110} For example, in his October 1888 article, “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl,” Bavinck writes: “Whereas salvation in Christ was formerly considered primarily a means to separate man from sin and the world, to prepare him for
perceived. However, for Bavinck, that did not mean one should cease dogmatic development or the search for systematic unity. As we noted in Chapter 3, Bavinck utilized his worldview typology as a tool for complex engagement. But he also explicitly appeals to his doctrine of God and the relationship between creation and re-creation to articulate how theologians should develop their theology.

In his 1911 rectorial address, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” Bavinck argues that because God is the living, absolutely personal, triune God who reveals himself in creation and re-creation, Christians cannot shun the insights of modern scholarship or segregate knowledge from faith. In his speech, in which he marvels at the scientific advances of his day, Bavinck argues that one cannot remain satisfied with God’s revelation in creation alone, for it is his revelation in re-creation in which believers come to know him as Father and understand the unity-in-diversity of the world as a brilliant display of his perfections. Throughout his speech it is clear that understanding the relationship between God’s revelation in re-creation and creation gave Bavinck a basis from which to appreciate the rich insights arising from modern science as well as provided him with a scriptural and theological framework from which to borrow and learn from other theologians and philosophers, both ancient and modern. Just as Augustine and other Church Fathers used Plato and

heavenly blessedness and to cause him to enjoy undisturbed fellowship with God there, Ritschl posits the very opposite relationship: the purpose of salvation is precisely to enable a person, once he is freed from the oppressive feeling of sin and lives in the awareness of being a child of God, to exercise his earthly vocation and fulfill his moral purpose in this world. The antithesis, therefore, is fairly sharp: on the one side, a Christian life that considers the highest goal, now and hereafter, to be the contemplation of God and fellowship with him, and for that reason (always being more or less hostile to the riches of an earthly life) is in danger of falling into monasticism and asceticism, pietism and mysticism; but on the side of Ritschl, a Christian life that considers its highest goal to be the kingdom of God, that is, the moral obligation of mankind, and for that reason (always being more or less adverse to the withdrawal into solitude and quiet communion with God), is in danger of degenerating into a cold Pelagianism and an unfeeling moralism. Personally, I do not yet see any way of combining the two points of view, but I do know that there is much that is excellent in both, and that both contain undeniable truth.” Given the argument of this thesis, one could say that Bavinck’s subsequent writings, especially his Reformed Dogmatics and Philosophy of Revelation, do work to combine these two points of view by reaching back into the theological tradition and appropriating various modern categories (absoluteness, personality, self-revelation) in order to develop a thoroughly trinitarian theology. Herman Bavinck, “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl,” 123-63.

111 This was partly because of his own view of science as that which seeks systematic unity.
Thomas and the Scholastics used Aristotle, so Bavinck felt free to use concepts like self-revelation, absoluteness, personality, organism from his context to develop his Reformed theology.\(^{113}\)

In sum, Bavinck perceived closing oneself off from one’s context as forsaking the integral relationship between God’s revelation in creation and re-creation.\(^{114}\) On the other hand, being ruled by one’s context results in a similar mistake because doing so means that one refuses to allow God’s special revelation in Scripture to order and guide one’s appropriation of contemporary categories.

5. A Trinitarian Account of the *Ordo Salutis* and the *Imago Dei*.

5.1 A Trinitarian *Ordo*

Returning to our exposition of Bavinck’s application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrines pertaining to redemption, it is evident that Christ occupies a central role in Bavinck’s triniform account of God’s communication *ad extra*—both in creation and re-creation. All of our knowledge of God is mediated by the one in whom and through whom redemption is accomplished. However, even though it is fitting to describe Bavinck’s articulation of salvation and even revelation as Christologically oriented, it is not fitting to stop ‘tracing Bavinck’s thoughts’ at Christology. For Bavinck, not only is creation’s goodness attributed to the Father, the knowledge of Christ’s works and the application of redemption—including re-creation itself—is bound up with the work of the Spirit.\(^{115}\) Again, even as Christ occupies the centre of his account

\(^{113}\) Cf. *RD*, I. 609: “Still, theology is not in need of a specific philosophy. It is not per se hostile to any philosophical system and does not, *a priori* and without criticism, give priority to the philosophy of Plato or of Kant, or vice versa. But it brings along its own criteria, tests all philosophy by them, and takes over what it deems true and useful. What it needs is philosophy in general. In other words, it arrives at scientific theology only by thinking.”

\(^{114}\) Bavinck, “Modernism and Orthodoxy,” 79-80. See also, *RD* I, 617.

\(^{115}\) This is one of the reasons why Scripture and not Christ remains the *principium cognoscendi* of theology for Bavinck. Christ is the full revelation of God in history, but Scripture is an inspired and revelatory witness to God’s revelation in history. Furthermore, “the Holy Spirit does not, after the act of inspiration, withdraw from Holy Scripture and abandon it to its fate but sustains and animates its heart and conscious.” *RD*, I. 440.
of salvation, he claims “soteriology must [also] be viewed theologically, that is, as the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Also at stake in this domain is the honor of God, the assertion and revelation of all the perfections of God, which have been violated by sin…Just as surely as the re-creation took place objectively in Christ, so surely it must also be carried out subjectively by the Holy Spirit in the church.”

For Bavinck, this means not only tracing all things back to the triune God who is the author of creation and re-creation but also developing a theological account of the order of salvation (ordo salutis) within which the Spirit applies the redemption Christ acquires. According to Bavinck, as God’s eternal counsel concerning redemption is realized in time, Christ accomplishes redemption (the removal of guilt, pollution, and misery) and the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of the covenant of grace that Christ wholly and completely acquired in his incarnation (in his humiliation and exaltation). Thus, even though the work of God ad extra has one principium, the acquisition of our salvation in and through Christ is applied by the Spirit. Although differentiated, they are bound together because they flow from the one God. “This work of application is, therefore, just as much a divine work as the creation by the Father and the redemption by the Son; and the Holy Spirit who brings it about and is therefore, together with the Father and the Son, the one, sole God, to be praised and blessed forever.”

Because the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, the Spirit agrees with the Father and the Son in his work of sustaining creation. From the essential unity of the Father, Son,

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116 RD, III. 524.
117 There is an integral relationship between the trinitarian pactum and the ordo salutis in Bavinck.
118 Contrary to many modern theologians, Bavinck retains the doctrine of the two states of Christ (humiliation and exaltation) in his theology. See RD, III. Part III, “The Work of Christ.”
119 Bavinck identifies Christ’s work as two-fold. Christ takes on the guilt and punishment (passive obedience) and also fulfils the law in our stead (active obedience). As Christ’s work is two-fold, so the application of Christ’s benefits is also twofold: justification and sanctification (renewal). Both justification and sanctification come in and through the Spirit’s work of uniting us to Christ. See RD, III. 395.
120 RD, III. 571.
and Spirit, it also follows that the Son and the Spirit work together in creation and re-creation. In re-creation, the Holy Spirit does not acquire the benefits of salvation, but “takes everything from Christ: as the Son came to glorify the Father, so the Holy Spirit takes everything from Christ: as the Son came to glorify the Father, so the Holy Spirit in turn came down to glorify the Son. To that Son he bears witness; out of his fullness he communicates grace; he leads people to that Son and through the Son to the Father. He applies all Christ’s benefits, to each in his measure, at his time, according to this order.”

The distinction between Christ’s acquisition and the Spirit’s application becomes important for understanding Bavinck’s claim that trinitarian salvation is a re-creation that elevates creation to its natural end. For Bavinck, the benefits of Christ—which flow from the good pleasure of the Father and include redemption, renewal, and restoration from sin as well as the elevation of creation to its natural end—are fully and completely acquired in and through Christ’s work. These benefits, according to Bavinck, are not an aggregate but an organic whole. Thus, when the Spirit applies the benefits of Christ, the application of all Christ benefits is guaranteed but also occurs in a particular order. Thus, the order of salvation (ordo salutis), wherein redemption from guilt, pollution, and misery is applied, happens in a particular order “…calling [with regeneration

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121 RD, III. 572.

122 Bavinck divides the benefits of Christ into three groups and connects them with his three offices. An interesting avenue for further study would be to compare Bavinck and Kuyper to see if Kuyper over-emphasized Christ’s kingly role and thereby initiated a line of Christian discipleship that was too focused on the Christ as King. According to Bavinck, Christ’s benefits “can be divided into three groups. Sin is guilt, pollution, and misery: a breach of the covenant of works, a loss of the image of God, and submission to the domination of corruption. Christ redeemed us from all three: by his suffering, by his fulfillment of the law, and by his conquest of death…the first group of benefits is given us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, is accepted on our part by faith, changes our consciousness, and makes our conscience free. The second group of benefits is conferred on us by the regenerative activity of the Holy Spirit, renews our very being, and redeems us from the power of sin. The third group of benefits is communicated to us by the preserving, guiding, and sealing activity of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our complete redemption and wrenches us free in soul and body from the domination of misery and death. The first group of benefits is that which anoints us prophets, the second as priests, the third as kings.” RD, III. 594. Emphasis added.
in a restricted sense, faith and repentance]; justification; sanctification; and glorification.”

Salvation, which comes to human beings through the covenant of grace is firmly rooted in eternity, is accomplished and applied in time by the living, absolutely personal, triune Being in a particular order to believers.

The true re-creation and renewal of all things wherein all of creation is elevated to its natural end and the Kingdom of God is fully instantiated is guaranteed and acquired by Christ. However, until the second coming, believers await the full consummation of Christ’s work, which will occur through the Holy Spirit by the good pleasure of the Father. Similarly, the complete sanctification and glorification of believers are already guaranteed and acquired by Christ. However, believers await the full and complete restoration that has been guaranteed in the Spirit’s work of uniting them to Christ. Thus, believers await with an assured eschatological hope that all the promises of the covenant of grace will become manifest following Christ’s second coming.

These affirmations become important in Bavinck’s articulation of one of Neo-Calvinism’s favourite themes: the Kingdom of God. For Bavinck, the material and spiritual Kingdom of God in which Christ is the head and all things are renewed, restored, and elevated is an eschatological reality. However, on this side of the eschaton, the Kingdom is spiritual and becomes in and through

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123 RD, III. 595. In the fourth volume of the Reformed Dogmatics, Bavinck articulates each of these elements within the order of salvation as well as the way that the Spirit works within the church as it proclaims the word and imparts the sacraments as means of grace.

124 Although salvation is a divine work that is accomplished and applied by the triune God alone, Bavinck also teaches that in “addition, the application of salvation is and remains a work of the Spirit, a work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, and is therefore never coercive and violent but always spiritual, lovely, and gentle, treating humans not as blocks of wood but as rational beings, illuminating, persuading, drawing, and bending them. The Spirit causes their darkness to yield to the light and replaces their spiritual powerlessness with spiritual power. Grace and sin are opposites; the latter is overcome by the power of the former, but as soon as and to the same degree that the power of sin is broken, the opposition between God and humans cease.” In Bavinck’s articulation, one can hear echoes of the language of the Canons of Dort, which states that “the divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones.” Following the Canons, Bavinck identifies the work of regeneration as primary in the ordo salutis, and he identifies it an act of the Spirit that revives and renews the will such that its opposition to God is taken away. See Bavinck, RD, III. 573 and Canons of Dort, 3/4.16.

125 RD, IV. 716-724.
the Spirit’s work in the lives of believers. In this age, the Kingdom is spiritual as the Spirit remakes human beings individually and corporately.126 And, through their lives, they can manifest the Kingdom in various spheres of society. However, the Kingdom remains primarily spiritual and incomplete. Furthermore, just as the work of acquiring and applying the work of redemption is initiated and accomplished by the triune God alone, so too the final consummation of the Kingdom is a work of God alone. As Bavinck writes in “The Kingdom of God, the Highest Good”: “Although God desires to expand his Kingdom on earth through people, although our working for that Kingdom remains our treasured calling and duty, although between our activity and the coming of the Kingdom of God there certainly and undeniably lies a close connection, the Kingdom of God is not purely a product of our moral activity. Even as it was established from beyond the world, and develops and expands by means of supernatural powers, so too the completion of the Kingdom of God is a supernatural act that occurs by means of divine cataclysmic intervention.”127

In sum, God’s work of redemption, according to Bavinck is a trinitarian work from beginning to end. Thus, his account is not just Christological but also Pneumatological. Flowing from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit, God redeems and renews his fallen creation. Far too many of Bavinck’s commentators have ignored the role of the Spirit in the application of salvation,128 which means that they miss a crucial aspect of how Bavinck relates nature and grace as well as how re-creation means restoration and elevation. Without Bavinck’s Pneumatological account,

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128 Although no scholar denies the role of the Spirit in Bavinck’s theology, the importance of the Spirit in applying the full redemption of Christ is often missed or under-emphasized.
redemption, as a present and assured future reality and notion that the Kingdom is and becomes, is difficult to understand.

5.2 Re-Creation as Reparation and Elevation: The Image of God, The Trinity, & Redemption

Turning to the renewal of human beings, Bavinck’s account of the imago Dei helps illuminate the role of the Trinity in his theology as well as his understanding of the relationship between creation and re-creation. It is also helpful because it highlights the centrality of the covenant within Bavinck’s dogmatic theology.

First, according to Bavinck, as the Son is the archetypal image of God, so human beings are the ectypal image of God in his creation. Like God, human beings display a glorious unity-in-diversity, both individually and corporately. Unlike God, however, the image is not fully unfolded in any particular human person. Each person is the image of God, but no person displays the fullness of the image alone. “Although Adam was created in God’s image, he was not that image immediately in the full sense, nor was he that image by himself alone.” According to Bavinck, “the image of God is much too rich for it is be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depths and riches in a humanity counting billions of members.” Humanity, as an organic whole, unfolds the depth and riches of the image of God together.

However, Bavinck not only conceptualizes the image of God as unfolded corporately but

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129 This is fitting given what we observed in Chapter 3, namely, that humanity shines forth the perfections of the Trinity most clearly.
130 This does not mean that human beings are created in the image of the Son. Bavinck sees human beings as created in the image of the triune God. Given our previous treatment of how Bavinck utilizes the concept of the communicability of the divine essence to articulate how the idea of the world is contained in the communication of the triune God, it is possible to see how humans are created in the full image of the triune God. Just as the essence is completely and fully communicated between the Father and the Son, so human beings, as the crown of God’s ectypal communication, and are created in the image of the triune God.
131 RD, II. 564
132 RD, II. 577.
also historically. The unfolding and development of the image, by means of grace, was meant to occur historically in time by faithful adherence to the covenant of works (Genesis 2). For at creation humanity, “...stood at the beginning of his ‘career,’ not at the end. His condition was provisional and temporary and could not remain what it was. It either had to pass on to higher glory or to sin and death. The penalty for transgressing the command was death; the reward for keeping it, by contrast, was life, eternal life.”

Humans, created morally mature, were able to live in accordance with the divine law. According to Bavinck, by abiding by the covenant of works (living according to the divine law) humans could by God’s grace, not their merit, develop from the state of integrity to the state of glory and, in so doing, fully image the triune God together as they manifested his perfection. The image of God in humanity “is both a gift (gabe) and a mandate (aufgabe).” Just as all of creation, humanity was destined for development towards its created telos.

When Adam transgressed the covenant of works, he not only brought about consequences for himself; he, as the organic head of the covenant of works, brought about the consequences of transgressing the covenant of works for all of humanity. In Adam, humanity was severed from its good beginning (original state of integrity) and incapable of reaching its ultimate end of glorifying God (glorified state). “The first sin, the sin for which our original human ancestors are responsible, has had calamitous consequences for them as well as all their descendants and unleashed a flood of misery on the human race. In consequence, humanity as a whole, and every single person, is burdened with guilt, defiled, and subject to ruin and death…universality of sin is even more articulately voiced in Holy Scripture.” In Adam, sin enters the world. In Adam, all die.

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133 RD, II. 577.
134 RD, II. 577.
135 In the fall, humans lose the narrow image of God but retain the broad image. See Chapter 3, footnote 144.
However, in Adam’s creation in the image of God, Christ’s incarnation and redemption were already in view. As the triune God already communicated himself in and through the creation of humanity in his image, he is able to communicate himself in and through Christ’s incarnation. Adam is already made in the image Christ, who is himself the true and full Image of God. In his incarnation, Christ serves as humanity’s true and better head who fulfills the requirements of the covenant of works, and who redeems humanity from sin and its consequences as the head of the covenant of grace. Although the covenants are under different heads, “the goal and end is a kingdom of God, a holy humanity, in which God is all in all.” As such,

Christ “…does not [merely] restore his own to the state of Adam before the fall. He acquired and bestows much more, namely, that which Adam would have received had he not fallen. He positions us not at the beginning but at the end of the journey that Adam had to complete. He accomplished not only the passive but also the active obedience required; he not only delivers us from guilt and punishment, but out of grace immediately grants us the right to eternal life.”

The end that Adam and humanity could no longer attain after transgressing the covenant of works is now accomplished in Christ. As the full image of God, Christ’s work repairs and restores that which was lost in the fall and elevates humanity to its created end. This occurs through union with Christ, wherein the benefits of the covenant of grace that Christ acquired are applied by the work of the Holy Spirit. As Christ’s benefits are given and guaranteed in the Holy Spirit’s application, all of them—even glorification—in some sense begins in this life.

6. The Soteriological Dimension

Returning to the soteriological dimension, it is now possible to expand on what Bavinck considers the most significant aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity, the one that is the foundation of Christianity itself and makes God known to us as triune. As the ontological dimension makes

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136 RD II. 578.
137 RD, III. 570.
God known to us as the living, absolutely personal, triune God who is complete and full in himself, the cosmological dimension is the application of the Trinity to doctrines pertaining to the God-world relationship. The soteriological dimension, then, is the application of the doctrine of the Trinity to doctrines pertaining to God’s work of re-creation. As the soteriological dimension pertains to re-creation, it is integrally related to the ontological dimension as well as the cosmological dimension. However, it is necessarily distinct from both.

In this chapter, we observed that Bavinck relates but necessarily distinguishes between the ontological and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. As he does, he utilizes his particular account of God’s divine counsel to articulate how re-creation, just like creation can be related to God’s essence but distinct from it. Arising from within the internal communication of God ad intra, God’s work of re-creation is a self-consciously willed, triune act. Just as the cosmological dimension, Bavinck considers the soteriological dimension to be contingent. However, its contingency is defined primarily as a soteriological response to human sin. In the soteriological dimension, God is not only known as having life in himself (ontological) nor as creator alone (cosmological), but as the triune redeemer of the world (soteriological).

According to Bavinck, in the soteriological dimension, God comes to humanity as merciful Father and gracious Saviour. This is why it is the most significant and precious for Christians. In it, God himself comes to the good but fallen world and re-creates it and renews it. This is why, according to Bavinck, “our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity…[for] From God, through God, and in God are all things. Re-creation is one divine work from beginning to end, yet it can be described in terms of three agents.”¹³⁸ In the soteriological dimension, the triune God from whom all things flow comes to draw the world back to himself. Just like creation, re-creation is a divine work from beginning to end.

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¹³⁸ RD, II. 334.
As the soteriological is rooted in but distinct from the ontological in Bavinck, the soteriological is integrally related to but necessarily distinguished from the cosmological.\textsuperscript{139} The divine act of creation is the beginning, but not the end, of the realization of the counsel of the triune God in time and space. The realization of the counsel of God includes not only creation but also re-creation. Yet, for Bavinck, while God’s counsel is one and the works of God in the divine economy cannot be isolated from one another, they must be distinguished from one another lest the relationship between nature and grace be confused. In other words, one must distinguish but not isolate the cosmological dimension and soteriological dimension as they both find their foundation in the ontological. The soteriological dimension pertains to what God has done as a response to sin alone. As such, it is distinguished from God’s work in creation, even as it rests on it, as God works to redeem, restore, and renew every aspect of creation.

As with the cosmological dimension, the soteriological acts of God in the divine economy mirror the divine, triune life \textit{ad intra}. As such, the works appropriated to each of the persons of the Trinity in salvation are not severed from the works appropriated to the persons in creation and preservation. All the works of God “proceed from the Father, are accomplished by the Son, and are completed in the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{140} Just as creation proceeds from the Father, so too re-creation proceeds from the Father. Just as the Son is the mediator of creation, so too is he the mediator of re-creation. He is the one “suited for the incarnation.”\textsuperscript{141} Just as the Holy Spirit is a gift, a personal immanent cause that gives all things their being and draws them to their end, so too the Holy Spirit is the one who completes/applies the work of re-creation. As Bavinck writes at the beginning of

\textsuperscript{139} The material on 216-7 have been taken and slightly modified from Gayle Doornbos, “Can the Trinity Save Everything? Herman Bavinck, Missional Theology, and the Dogmatic Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity” in \textit{God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church}, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Moscow, ID: The Davenant Institute), 144-6.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{RD}, II. 319.

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{RD}, III.276: “…the Son was the one suited for the incarnation. In the divine being he occupies the place between the Father and the Spirit, is by nature the Son and image of God, was the mediator already in the first creation, and as Son could restore us to our position as children of God.”
Volume 4 of the *Reformed Dogmatics*: “God produces both creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit.” The same God who creates is the one who redeems.

Yet, the works of God in creation and re-creation are distinct for Bavinck. Creation is the foundation of God’s relationship with the world. It is his first act of revelation and displays his glory. In and through creation, God establishes a relationship with humanity, which is articulated by Bavinck through the conception of the covenant. In creation, this relationship is encapsulated in the covenant of works. Furthermore, as Bavinck articulates in his article “Creation or Development,” it is at creation that the essence and end of all things are established. Thus, God’s creation is not static but inherently telic and meant for development. Human beings were meant to unfold and develop the image of God in and through adherence to the covenant of works. However, in transgressing that covenant, sin as guilt, misery, and pollution entered into every aspect of God’s good world, and the whole organism of creation was blocked from achieving its telos.

Re-creation or redemption do not usurp nature but restore it, reorient it, and elevate it to its final end. Grace is not opposed to nature but sin. The soteriological dimension of God’s work is founded on and preceded by the work of God in creation, but it is fundamentally contingent on sin. As grace is a response to sin, so too God’s work in re-creation is contingent on sin entering the world. Even as the soteriological dimension rests in the eternal counsel of God, it is not absolutely necessary. Seeking to articulate the relationship, Bavinck develops his own, unique account of the organic order of the divine Decrees and a trinitarian account of the *pactum salutis*.

While some have criticized Bavinck’s formulation, the chief point of importance here is Bavinck’s firm commitment to resist collapsing the soteriological dimension into the

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142 *RD*, IV. 33.
143 Bavinck, “Creation or Development.” In this article, Bavinck argues against the elevation of evolutionary science to a philosophical worldview. He does not argue against the sciences but against their philosophical claims concerning ontological and metaphysical principles. Furthermore, he argues that it is only within a Christian worldview that one can affirm the development of Creation, which is grounded in the telos that God established for creation.
cosmological, even as both find their metaphysical ground in the ontological dimension and are the outworking of God’s eternal counsel. Collapsing the two, according to Bavinck, results in re-creation swallowing up creation. At best, creation merely becomes the stage upon which redemption occurs. At worst, the fall or the incarnation becomes an ontological necessity.\footnote{See \textit{RD}, II. 424.} Certainly, for Bavinck, the fall and incarnation are inevitable given God’s knowledge and the decrees, but neither are \textit{inherently necessary}. To err in understanding the integrity and importance of creation is to sacrifice Christian teaching to Gnosticism or pantheism, whereby creation is diminished, and cosmogony becomes theogony. Certainly, creation is the place where re-creation occurs, but according to Bavinck, creation is not merely the stage for re-creation. If it is only a stage, then, grace swallows up nature. God’s glory and attributes \textit{are} more clearly and magnificently displayed in re-creation, but it is not the sole display of God’s glory. According to Bavinck, properly articulating the relationship between the cosmological and soteriological is also a way to guard against alternative theological articulations of the relationship between nature and grace. In sum, Bavinck’s distinction and differentiation (without separation) of the works of God in creation and re-creation, relies on considering the Trinity in its cosmological and soteriological dimensions. Only when they are properly articulated and connected can the full scope of God’s works \textit{ad extra} be maintained.

One important distinction in Bavinck’s articulation of the relationship between the soteriological and the cosmological can be seen in the way in which he articulates their role and importance in the Christian life. According to Bavinck, even though the soteriological dimension rests on the cosmological in terms of being a restorative and gracious response of the triune God to sin, it is God’s work in the soteriological dimension in which salvation is accomplished and through which believers are brought to the One in whom every “blessing, both spiritual and
material comes…” Thus, while Bavinck seeks to maintain the theological significance of creation in and through his articulation of the cosmological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, in the fallen world, it is only through the triune God’s redeeming work that one can come to know God truly. In knowing God as redeemer, one comes to know him as creator; the one, glorious, triune God whose work is displayed in both creation and re-creation.

Yet, even as they are distinct, the cosmological and soteriological dimensions describe the totality of God’s works ad extra. For Bavinck, the cosmological and the soteriological dimensions allow him to articulate and develop a comprehensive scriptural and trinitarian vision wherein every aspect of reality is alive with the glory and splendor of God. One of the ways that Bavinck articulates this is by developing creation and re-creation as acts of divine communication, specifically as self-revelation. The soteriological and cosmological dimensions are God’s relative, true, anthropomorphic communication of God. Thus, together they encapsulate every aspect of God’s work and seek to understand everything in relation to God. The cosmological dimension affirms that creation itself is revelatory of God. The soteriological dimension affirms that God’s work of re-creation is as broad in scope as his work of creation. However, even though everything communicates something about God, not every aspect of creation does so as clearly. Thus, it is in the soteriological dimension, occasioned by sin, that God makes himself known most clearly as the Father sends the Son and the Spirit so that through the Son by the Spirit everything might return to the Father.

7. Conclusions

Having traced key aspects of Bavinck’s theology through Chapters 2-4, it is possible to see how his theology is thoroughly trinitarian. As such, his whole theology can be seen as an outworking

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145 RD, II. 334.
146 This statement is made acknowledging the limitations of this thesis as noted in the Introduction. See Introduction, 4.2. 33-4.
of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. While Bavinck does seek to allow the various theological loci to be developed in the course of his systematic project, his project aims towards a fundamental unity. As he develops his theology, he subsumes everything under the knowledge of God. Thus, he not only seeks to articulate who the agent of creation and re-creation is but how creation and re-creation are truly trinitarian acts. The ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions help illuminate the internal logic by which Bavinck develops his theology, so much so, that one can use the dimensions to describe his systematic theology. Bavinck’s theology is an outworking of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity. They help illuminate the internal logic of Bavinck’s theology as well as highlight the structure of his dogmas.

However, even as the dimensions aid in illuminating the internal logic of Bavinck’s theology and show how his entire dogmatic is a systematic discourse on the triune God, our investigation also revealed some of the inconsistencies and tensions within Bavinck’s thought. Bavinck’s identification and articulation of creation and re-creation as forms of divine self-communication leads to some inconsistencies in his definition of grace. Furthermore, one occasionally wonders if Bavinck seeks to solve too many problems in his appeal to the Trinity, such as the relationship of the unity (one) and diversity (many) in the world or the subject-object problem in post-Kantian epistemology. In noticing these varying concerns and the different concepts and motifs he utilized to try to address them, the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis does contain an element of truth. Bavinck does appropriate insights from a variety of sources. However, as we have seen, Bavinck himself tried to reconcile these tensions by developing his theology as a system of the knowledge of God from within the Reformed tradition. Thus, the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis is unhelpful in illuminating the internal logic of Bavinck’s thought and seeking to understand how
Bavinck himself sought to draw together motifs and streams of thought to develop a Reformed trinitarian theology.

It is here that the dimensions are helpful not because they eliminate every tension or make Bavinck immune from critique but because they allow us to engage with Bavinck’s theology as he tried to develop it: a systematic account of God and his works. The whole of Bavinck’s theology is a discourse on the nature and work of the triune God. Even though we did not examine the whole of Bavinck’s theology, our examination of his theology in Chapters 3 and 4 showed how every part of his theology is functionally the doctrine of God. Every major and minor point of doctrine must be considered in light of God and drawn back to God. And, in considering every act of God in creation and re-creation one is drawn to consider the God who is the living, absolutely personal, triune One whose works are truly gifts.

Not only do the dimensions help illuminate the internal logic of Bavinck’s theology, but they also elucidate its structure. Structurally, the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine of the Trinity serve an organizational purpose within his theocentric, dogmatic project. The triune God is the one whom Bavinck approaches in his thoroughly theological and epistemologically focused prolegomena, and he is the one whose ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions he describes in the rest of the Reformed Dogmatics. As such, Bavinck systematically articulates a thoroughly trinitarian theology, wherein no part of his systematic project is void of the action of the triune God. All things come from God and return to God. Furthermore, grounded in the church’s historic confession of the triinity of God, informed by his Reformed orthodox heritage, and engaged with the questions and insights of modernity,

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147 Eglinton makes a similar statement regarding the structure of the Reformed Dogmatics, but he does not make mention of the way Bavinck’s structure relates to the dimensions of the Trinity Bavinck identifies. However, one can see the similarity between the statement made above and Eglinton’s description. He writes “The triune God is the literal centerpiece of Bavinck’s theology: he is the one approached in the Prolegomena and whose works in creation and providence are the subject of the remainder of Reformed Dogmatics. The Trinity is the heart of the Reformed vision and ‘grace restores nature’ is subordinate to it.” Eglinton, Trinity and Organism, 96.
Bavinck utilizes the doctrine of the Trinity to develop truly trinitarian, Reformed theology in modernity.
Chapter 5: Bavinck Among the Trinitarians

*Conversations in Contemporary, Trinitarian Theology*

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, this thesis has examined various aspects of Bavinck’s theology in order to argue that Bavinck’s systematic theology can be understood as his articulation of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity properly distinguished, developed, and related to one another. As it did it showed the positive (structuring, norming, and informing) and negative (apologetic) role of the doctrine of the Trinity in Bavinck’s theology. Although the primary task of this thesis is to contribute to the field of Bavinck scholarship, which has long recognized the importance of the Trinity in Bavinck but not adequately examined it, a secondary task is to suggest Bavinck as a conversation partner to contemporary discussions concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and its role in shaping and structuring dogmatic theology. The goal of this chapter is to be exploratory. It is meant to point forward to areas of meaningful and fruitful conversation rather than carry out the dialogues in full. Thus, it will raise more questions than it answers as it suggests further lines of inquiry.

This chapter presents Bavinck as a conversation partner on the assumption that Bavinck’s theology, while not beyond reproach, has something to offer to contemporary theological reflection both within more conservative, Reformed theological circles as well as the broader landscape of academic theology for three reasons. First, even though reading Bavinck (or any historical theologian) through the lens of contemporary questions can cause a myriad of issues, the questions he was wrestling with concerning how to retrieve the theological tradition he inherited within his post-Enlightenment context means that Bavinck remains remarkably contemporary. Second, as Bavinck develops theology within his context, he anticipates various elements within the so-called trinitarian revival in contemporary theology but also stands in contrast to it in a
number of ways. In other words, in many ways, Bavinck stands as an anticipatory but divergent theologian in relation to the modern revival of the doctrine of the Trinity. Finally, for those seeking to develop theology within the Reformed theological tradition that Bavinck himself inhabited, Bavinck’s approach and method can serve as a model and a reminder. Bavinck offers a model for how to *develop theology* from within a tradition. As he does, he also reminds those who wish to follow him that because theology remains the positive task of articulating the knowledge of God from his revelation in Scripture, it does not (nor can it) do so in a cultural or contextual vacuum. Bavinck did not perceive attentiveness to pressing questions and openness to fresh and renewed insights to be at odds with Reformed doctrinal formulation. The collapse of the ‘two Bavincks’ hypothesis has opened up avenues for seeing Bavinck’s method and theological development afresh. However, it has also led some to return to the ‘Orthodox Bavinck’ and ignore some of the truly creative aspects of his dogmatics, \(^1\) such as his articulation of God as absolute personality, utilization of self-consciousness, and identification of revelation as self-revelation.

This chapter will proceed in two parts. First, it will present an overview of some of the key features and salient points of the so-called trinitarian revival in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this section, the theological revival of the doctrine of the Trinity will be identified as a creative and serious response to a number of issues and critical questions that arose within the matrix of post-Enlightenment theology and philosophy. Just as Bavinck’s theology did not arise in a vacuum, neither did the trinitarian revival. Thus, it is important to situate the key features of the modern revival of the doctrine of the Trinity contextually. \(^2\) Second, it will suggest that Bavinck

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\(^1\) See, for example, Daniel Ragusa, “Trinity at the Center,” and James Cassidy, “The Trinity, Image of God, and Apologetics: Bavinck’s Consistently Reformed Defense of the Faith” (paper presented at Reformed Forum Theology Conference, Grayslake, IL, October 8, 2016, [https://reformedforum.org/rt16_02_cassidy/](https://reformedforum.org/rt16_02_cassidy/)).

\(^2\) This statement should not be interpreted to mean that all theology is contextually and culturally determined. This has been a perspective that has gained traction in contemporary theology. This view can be presented so strongly that theology itself is seen as a discipline which is solely oriented to responding to contextual questions. The problem with such an approach is that it neglects the doxological function and task of theology.
could serve as an interesting conversation partner within contemporary dogmatic discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity. This section will contain three interrelated parts. First, it will identify Bavinck as an anticipatory but divergent figure in relation to the modern revival of the doctrine of the Trinity. Second, it will utilize the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions as a useful framework for dialogue. Third, it will close by identifying various questions and lines of inquiry to which those interested in carrying forward Bavinck’s trinitarian project should attend in order to understand even more thoroughly the internal logic of Bavinck’s theology as well as his method for developing theology from within a particular tradition.

2. The Revival of a Doctrine: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology

2.1 The Story of a Doctrine’s Fall and Revival

The narrative of the restoration and revival of the doctrine of the Trinity in the latter half of the twentieth century is commonplace among contemporary theologians. The general narrative is that the doctrine of the Trinity increasingly declined in importance after the Reformation, so much so that by the time of Schleiermacher, it could be relegated to a mere appendix. Although who

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4 In this narrative, Schleiermacher’s ‘relegation of the Trinity’ to a mere appendix is often misunderstood and misrepresented. Schleiermacher did propose a radical shift in the doctrine and its presentation, but his presentation is far more complex and creative than most allow. For example, in his article “On the Discrepancy Between Sabellian and Athanasian Method of Representing Method of Representing the Doctrine of the Trinity,” Schleiermacher argues for Sabellianism as the proper model for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. For Schleiermacher, the Trinity is viewed only through the effects of divine causality on human beings. History is the arena in which God unites himself to the world in a threefold manner, and the differentiation of the persons arise not from God as he is in himself but from the union of the Godhead from something that is without. Thus, in history, the union between God and the world are received in the feeling of absolute dependence in three προσοποιημένον (members of the trinity that signify a continence or visage presented to our apprehension). The Father is the union of God with the world in its governance; the Son is the union of God with the person of Christ who is the Redeemer; the Spirit is the Union of God with the community of the Church who sanctifies it (not individual members but the body as the whole). Given this approach, one can see why Schleiermacher placed the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of the *Christian Faith*. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, “On the Discrepancy Between Sabellian and Athanasian Method of Representing Method of Representing the Doctrine of the Trinity,” trans, M. Stuart *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 18 (April 1835) 1-79.
exactly bears responsibility for the doctrine’s demise is articulated variously, two particular elements are often highlighted as contributing to doctrine’s decline. First, the decline is attributed to the rise of rationalism after the Enlightenment, which challenged the coherence, cogency, and relevance of the doctrine. Second, the decline is attributed to an internal defect within the western theological tradition itself: the prioritizing of divine unity within the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition of theological reflection. Prioritizing divine unity led to conceptions of the divine that increasingly defined God under the general category of being and generic divinity such that the doctrine of the Trinity became a mere afterthought. The result? An increased distance between the doctrine of God proper and the material content of dogmatics. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Trinity, as Stephen Holmes describes, “was perceived either as wrong or, at best, as useless orthodoxy…[which] seemed to be no more than one of six impossible things to be believed before breakfast each morning: abstruse; obscure; and of no practical import.” Yet, it is here that heroes enter into the narrative, starting with Karl Barth and Karl Rahner and

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5 Some attribute the neglect of the doctrine to the Reformation itself. Often interpreting Luther’s strong statements against Scholastic theology and Melanchthon’s exclusion of the doctrine from the first edition of his *Loci Communes* as indicative of an overthrow of the traditional doctrine of God in favour of a more biblical-Christocentric one, some see the neglect of the doctrine as related to the Reformers leaving their task incomplete. Had the Reformers carried out their systematic program in full, the argument goes, they would have sought to articulate a non-speculative doctrine of the Trinity within a soteriological, Christocentric, biblical frame. In this story, the villains are the Protestant Scholastics who recapitulated the doctrine of the Trinity as they received it from their medieval predecessors. What is surprising about this story is that it was utilized by many of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Liberal, Protestant theologians who did not have much use for the traditional doctrine of the Trinity and saw themselves as true children of Luther and Melanchthon as they sought to carry out the full implications of the Reformation by excluding metaphysical speculation and concentrating on how to articulate God for us in Christ. See Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), §34, 281; Adolf van Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, eds. T.K. Cheyne and A.B. Bruce, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1901), § 1. For a good overview of this period, see Powell, *Trinity in German Thought*, Chapter 5. For contemporary treatments that contrast this interpretation of the Reformation and its relationship to the doctrine of the Trinity see E.J. Hutchinson, “Melanchthon’s Unintended Reformation? The Case of the Missing Doctrine of God,” in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Moscow, ID: The Davenport Institute, 2018), 1-51; Muller, *PRRD, IV. The Triunity of God*.

6 Perhaps the most famous criticism of this tradition is found in Karl Rahner. However, his critique, as well as others, is most likely the result of the late nineteenth-century work of Theodore de Régnon who drew a deep distinction between the development of the Trinity in the West and East. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2014), 9-21. On de Régnon’s thesis and its impact on theology, see Michel René Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 no. 2 (1995): 51-79.

continuing through Colin Gunton, Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert Jenson, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Catherine LaCugna, John Zizioulas and countless others, to restore the doctrine to prominence such that the doctrine of the Trinity in contemporary theology is seen as a deeply practical, fecund doctrine that *not only* solves a variety of theological conundrums *but also* serves as a model that can cure social, ecclesial, and ethical ills.

2.2 After the Revival: Contemporary Effects and Questions

There is certainly a large amount of truth in this narrative. As Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders describe in their introduction to *Advancing Trinitarian Theology*, “…the Trinity has become a rallying cry for a theological program in modern dogmatics after Karl Barth.” In the landscape of contemporary theology, one can no longer consider the doctrine to be ‘lost’ or

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10 As the reader will see, the intent of this chapter is *not* to present Bavinck as the one who should be seen as “saving” the doctrine of the Trinity over Barth. Barth’s trinitarian theology stands as a major influence on mainstream academic theology in a way that cannot be denied.

suffering ‘neglect.’ There has been a ferment of creative theological proposals concerning the doctrine of the Trinity as well as constructive applications of it to the work of dogmatic formulation. However, as the doctrine of the Trinity has become commonplace and its importance is no longer questioned as a matter of routine, theologians and philosophers have begun to raise questions about the assumptions and theological articulations of the doctrine in the modern theology. Some of the questions are directly related to the trinitarian revival itself. For example, were the theologians of the trinitarian revival correct in their assessment of the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition and the consequences of beginning the doctrine of God proper with *De Deo Uno*?\(^{12}\) Or, what are the similarities and differences between historical formulations of the doctrine and contemporary ones?\(^{13}\) And, can the doctrine itself provide the solution to every theological and social ill?\(^{14}\) However, some of the questions are more perennial in nature. What is the role of philosophical concepts and constructions, especially metaphysical ones, in dogmatic construction? What can theology say about the God who not only encounters us in his personal, self-revelatory economy of grace but about who and what God is? How should the doctrine of the Trinity shape other theological loci? Such questions have arisen from within systemic theology but also, at least in the Protestant world, through a re-appraisal of the Scholastic tradition in its Medieval and Reformed iterations.\(^{15}\) As a result of these lines of inquiry, several constructive proposals from

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\(^{12}\) One of the major challenges to this assumption has come through the work of Lewis Ayres and others who have significantly challenged the de Régnon thesis and its applicability to the Church Fathers. See Lewis Ayres, *Nicea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and idem, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).


theologians like Fred Sanders, Katherine Sonderegger, and John Webster have begun to appear—
proposals that take the trinitarian revival seriously and learn from it while also diverging from

As a variety of theologians begin to raise questions regarding the methods and
developments of the twentieth-century revival of the doctrine of the Trinity and as we seek to offer
Bavinck as a conversation partner within this ongoing dialogue, it is necessary to turn from the
common narrative of the trinitarian revival and examine the impetus behind the revival as well as
its salient features. As we do, we will see that the best way to understand the trinitarian revival, in
general, is as a serious \textit{theological project} that sought to develop Christian theology after the
Enlightenment while, at the same time, adopting some of its methods and conceptual apparatus.
As such, some of the features that draw this broad project together are as follows: first, a desire to
free theology from the invasion of foreign philosophical elements, especially (Greek) speculative
metaphysics, by focusing on God’s self-revelation within the divine economy of grace; second, an
evaluation and re-definition of the categories and concepts utilized within traditional articulations
of the doctrine of the Trinity; and third, an increased focus on the relationship between time and
eternity, particularly concerning how to employ the concept of history in theology.

\section*{2.3 Freeing Theology from Philosophical Speculation}

One of the main concerns of the trinitarian revival was to re-centre the doctrine of God on
the divine economy, the history of salvation. As previously stated, the primary impetus for this
move was the observation that the doctrine of God had become overly philosophical in nature. As such, it was argued, the question of God’s identity was detached from Scripture and salvation. God was considered remote, extrinsic, and not really involved or related to his creation. Rather than seeking to develop theology on the basis of God’s self-disclosure, particularly in Christ, the unity of God was given dogmatic priority and developed under speculative, metaphysical categories. The divine in these systems is One who was far off, not nearby. The divine is One who remains external and indirect; He is One considered in relation to himself as an Object, not as a Subject pro nobis. In such systems, the Trinity became increasingly isolated from the rest of dogmatics. The solution was to re-orient theology and the doctrine of Trinity to the divine economy (in general) and the person of Christ (in particular). Grounding and orienting doctrine Christologically guaranteed that the doctrine of God would remain within the bounds of divine revelation and attached to God’s act of salvation. God in Christ is the content of who God is. This is not a God who is far off, but One who is pro nobis. Christian theology is an articulation, in human language, of God for us as he has disclosed himself in his self-revelation. Thus, within the trinitarian revival, it became commonplace to give the doctrine of the Trinity a particularly

17 For typical examples of this approach, see Jenson, Systematic Theology, I. 103 and Rahner, The Trinity, 21-24.
18 Hans Frei describes this assessment in his article “Niebuhr’s Theological Background”: “God was thought of as a being, immaterial and eternal, but otherwise analogous to individual substances in the natural world in that he contains within himself his own being or individuality. Just as individual beings are related in a purely external manner to other individuals…so the relation of God to his creatures is an external and indirect relation: he touches them through the agency of other creatures.” Hans Frei, “Niebuhr’s Theological Background,” in Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper, 1957), 32.
19 The Christological or Christocentric approach to doctrinal formulation has its roots in Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Herrmann. Although in many ways Barth, Jenson, Jungel, Moltmann, et al. diverge from the Liberal theological tradition of the nineteenth-century, their use of the person of Christ to shape, orient, and ground their theology as well as seeing Him as the content of Christian teaching follows the nineteenth-century pattern. See Richard Niebuhr, Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction (New York: Scribner, 1964). I am indebted to a footnote in Sonderegger’s work for pointing out this connection and the reference to Niebuhr. See Sonderegger, Systematic Theology, xxiii. n. 5.
20 Two strong examples of this approach are found in Moltmann and Jüngel. In The Crucified God, he writes: “The material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the Cross. The formal principle of knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity.” Moltmann, The Crucified God, 241. Similarly, in God as the Mystery of the World, Jüngel writes: “…Christian theology is therefore fundamentally the theology of the Crucified one.” Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 13.
Christological shape and to consider *De Deo Trino* prior to *De Deo Uno*. For most theologians, these methodological commitments served as a means to integrate the doctrine of Trinity with the rest of dogmatics, give theology a decisively trinitarian shape, and develop less speculative doctrines of God. It allowed them to reprioritize the Trinity, making it the centre and architectonic of theology. However, in its most extreme forms, this move resulted in identifying God’s divine Identity with the divine economy.\(^{21}\)

### 2.4 Redefining Terms: Substance and Person

While part of the desire to free theology from its (Greek) philosophical dress was due to certain iterations of dogmatic theology that were rationalistic and overly beholden to metaphysical speculation, another aspect of this desire was due to the post-Enlightenment criticism and reconfiguration of many of the traditional philosophical concepts utilized by theologians, such as substance and person. Because the shifting notions of substance and person bore directly on many of the theological debates concerning the doctrine of God in the eighteenth through twenty-first centuries, it is the second common feature of the trinitarian revival that needs to be highlighted. For many nineteenth-century Liberal theologians, such as Ritschl, Harnack, and Herrmann, this resulted in a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity altogether and an attempt to revitalize Christianity by returning to and unpacking the historical event of Christ.\(^{22}\) But rather than rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity like their predecessors, Barth and Rahner and other twentieth-century theologians saw the Trinity as central to the Christian God’s unique identity, and thus they began their serious, creative, and constructive projects to restore the Trinity to dogmatic prominence. In fact, while some traditional approaches to the doctrine of God remained throughout the modern

\(^{21}\) A primary example of this can be found in Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 336-337.

\(^{22}\) For a good summary of the rejection of the Trinity in nineteenth-century German theology see Powell, *The Trinity in German Though*, Chapter 5.
period and the trinitarian revival, new avenues had been opened up for dogmatic development, particularly via the categories of nineteenth-century Idealism. Careful to guard against conceptualizing God’s being as distinct from his triune existence, many theologians turned to the resources of post-Enlightenment theology and philosophy to develop their doctrines of God.

First, the concept of substance, which had traditionally been augmented and utilized for Trinitarian theology, went through a series of shifts beginning with Descartes and continuing through Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume. These shifts culminated in Kant’s critique of substance metaphysics as a whole. Creating an antinomy between God and the world, Kant’s critique raised serious epistemological and metaphysical questions. However, it also challenged the use of the term substance to articulate the singular being of God.

Responding to the challenges raised by Kant, theologians not only devoted more attention to the epistemological issues, particularly the idea of revelation, but also utilized the nineteenth-century philosophical conception of substance as subject. Such descriptions, found in the subjective Idealism of Schelling and the Absolute Idealism of Hegel, presented the Absolute as the living One, who is vitality and life. Seeing in the shift to the subject a useful avenue for articulating the truths of revelation, theologians began to describe God as the Living One who encounters us. As they did, they employed the Christological method we identified above and

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utilized God’s revelation in Christ as the structure and ground of the triune Identity. Thus, rather than follow the traditional structure of western doctrines of God, which asked whether it is \((\text{An sit})\), what it is \((\text{quid sit})\), what sort it is \((\text{qualis sit})\), the primary question in modern trinitarian theology became “Who is God?” And, who is God? God is the divine Subject who (freely) encounters us and discloses himself to us in Christ. God is the divine Subject whose identity is his triune selfhood.

While variously developed, one can observe examples of this move in Jenson, Jüngel, Moltmann, Barth, and to some extent Rahner. Jenson, Moltmann, Jüngel, and Barth most explicitly took up the critique of traditional essence language for God and sought to rid the doctrine of God from its excessively metaphysical terminology. Their concern was with the living God—the God of vitality and life—not an abstract, infinite, unmoved, and unrelated essence.

Furthermore, post-Enlightenment philosophy also aided theologians in developing an account of the divine persons and their relationships to one another. As with the challenge to substance metaphysics, the reconceptualization of personhood within philosophy and psychology presented trinitarian theology with serious problems. If personhood is defined as consciousness and freedom and something that is inherently relational, can theology maintain its use of the term person to describe the Father, Son, and Spirit? Barth and Rahner both said that it could not, and

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25 See Rahner, *The Trinity*, 15-21 for a critique of the practice of starting with *De Deo Uno*.
26 For a similar assessment, see Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, I. xii.
27 While many theologians within the trinitarian revival sought to articulate a closer relationship between God and the world, they also wanted to maintain God’s freedom to create. Whether or not various proposals actually succeeded in maintaining God’s freedom in creation is a matter of debate. This is especially the case as panentheism starts to become an increasingly popular way to articulate the God-world relationship. While there are many different kinds of panentheism, one of the perennial issues that it faces is how to maintain the self-sufficiency of God and his freedom to create. For an analysis of panentheism and its contemporary iterations, see John W. Cooper, *Panentheism*.
28 For example, even though Barth still utilized the concept of essence, he explicitly notes that the subject of theology is “God and not being, or being only as the being of God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 260. Jüngel did not think that a metaphysics free theology was possible, but he did think that classic metaphysics was incapable of thinking and speaking of a God who dies. Thus, he utilizes Barth and Hegel to formulate his own articulation of God, the crucified One, ‘as the Mystery of the world.’ See Jüngel, *God as Mystery of the World*, 38-40 and idem, *God’s Being is in Becoming*, 2-7, 85, 120-121; See also Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, I. 212; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 26; idem, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 143-144; and Rahner, *The Trinity*, 51-55
they both developed alternative definitions of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Others, like Moltmann, Jenson, Jüngel, Leonardo Boff, and Zizioulas, saw the new conception of personhood as profoundly useful for developing an account of God’s triune selfhood. Thus, they took up the new conception of personhood and developed it for their own theological ends. Often situating their development historically by appealing to the theology of the Cappadocians, they also appealed to the logic of relationality and structure of consciousness within thinkers like Hegel, Böhme, and Schelling to articulate divine tri-unity. God is a being-in-relation, a being-in-love, one who is self-consummated in and through history, a society of three persons, etc.

2.5 Eternity and Time: The Concept of History and the Doctrine of God

Along with the desire to free theology from metaphysical speculation and the awareness that theology must respond to shifts in the notions of substance and person, the last common feature of the trinitarian revival is the employment of the concept of history in the doctrine of God. A new focus and importance were given to the concept of history philosophically through Romanticism and German Idealism. Romantics, often utilizing and reappointing Neo-Platonic conceptions of Infinity and Spinoza’s philosophical conception of substance in which God and the world formed

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29 Barth chooses to refer to the persons as ‘modes of being,’ and Rahner refers to the persons as ‘three distinct manners of subsisting.’ See Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, 138-139; Rahner, The Trinity, 103-115.


31 While many theologians associated with the revival of the doctrine of the Trinity turned to Hegel, Schelling, and other Idealistic philosophers to aid them in developing their articulations of God’s tri-unity, they did not do so without reference to the theological tradition. Many accepted the de Régnon thesis and appealed to the Cappadocian Fathers for their own theological development. Of the theologians in the West, Peter Lombard was often appealed to as a model because Sentences began with De Deo Trino. See Peter Lombard, The Sentences: The Mystery of the Trinity, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), Distinction II.

32 For example, Jüngel’s description of the inner logic of trinitarian perichoresis by which the modes of being give themselves to one another through self-negating love and his claim that God is his own mediation draw from the logic and terminology of Hegelian relation and subjective self-determination. Even as there are echoes of Augustine and Richard of St. Victor in this description, the language and logic Hegel’s Idealism is also incorporated. See Jüngel, God as Mystery of the World, 40-41, 343-373.
one God-world complex,\textsuperscript{33} began to articulate the world as the progressive manifestation and articulation of the Infinite (Lessing) or replaced Spinoza’s substance with the concept of an Infinite substantial force within history that progressively manifested itself in the one God-world complex (Herder).\textsuperscript{34} Picking up on these developments within philosophy, Schleiermacher developed a philosophical theology that utilized Spinoza’s concept of substance combined with Herder’s concept of Infinite force to articulate God as the living, Vital force of the world: God is the All-one of finite being upon whom everything is dependent.\textsuperscript{35} For Schleiermacher, God remained unaffected by the world, but the experience of the dynamic life force within human consciousness was dramatically historicized.\textsuperscript{36} In Hegel and Schelling, history became a category to describe not only the progressive revelation of God in the world but also the entirety of the unfolding of the God-world complex wherein God is also affected by the world.

Through these philosophical reflections, history became an important category, particularly by the nineteenth century. While many nineteenth-century Liberal theologians utilized the concept of history to argue that the classical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity belonged to a particular, historical reflection of the content of human self-consciousness of the divine, Barth and the theologians of the twentieth-century revival integrated the concept of history and revelation in order to develop and argue for the doctrine of the Trinity. Drawing on Hegel and other philosophers, theologians began to understand history as the arena or event of God’s self-

\textsuperscript{33} Baruch Spinoza, “A Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being,” 191-215.
\textsuperscript{34} These assessments of Lessing and Herder are based on the analysis of their thought in Copper, Panentheism, 77-80.
\textsuperscript{36} For example, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Sabellian and Athanasian Method.” Similarly, as Powell summarizes in his work on the Trinity in German thought, “This dynamic and historical relation to the world is according to Schleiermacher the real meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity…the doctrine of the Trinity is a way of representing the historicity and progressive nature of this relation; in history, God becomes a Trinity.” Yet, God himself, in his essence remains one, undifferentiated, and concealed for Schleiermacher. The Trinity is God revealed and known as it arises in historical, successive union with finite reality. God as hidden and unrevealed is not a proper object of human investigation and cannot be known. Powell, Trinity in German Thought, 9.
disclosure (his revelation). It should not be surprising, given the methodological commitments we highlighted earlier, that these accounts were developed along Christocentric lines.

While this approach proved to be a fecund one for theologians seeking to re-prioritize the Trinity, considered in relation to the primary question of modern trinitarian theology (Who is God?), it also stimulated new conceptualizations of the God-world relationship. If history is the arena or the event of God’s self-revelation, then his being must be conceived of as historical in some way. If not, how is it possible to guard against God becoming merely an abstract or extrinsic cause rather than really related to and involved in the world he creates? If God acts in history as a divine Subject, is he affected by the world? What does the Christ-event, especially the cross, reveal about the divine Identity’s relationship to time? The answers theologians gave to these questions were neither simple nor uniform. For some, even though God cannot be equated with his relationship with history, he is deeply affected by his involvement in it (ex. Moltmann). For others, God remains transcendent over time but his relationship with time is developed Christologically; Christ is the one who reconciles time and eternity and defines the God-world relationship (ex. Barth). It is beyond the purpose of this chapter to articulate all of their answers to these questions in detail. Rather, it is to highlight that the trinitarian revival took history and God’s relationship to history seriously. As the arena of God’s self-disclosure, trinitarian theologians sought to develop systematic accounts of God’s Identify that, while maintaining a

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37 Shifts in the theology of revelation are also an integral aspect of the rise of the centrality of history in dogmatic development. However, for the sake of brevity, this chapter does not address them specifically.

38 The Christ-event historically conceived became (in scholastic terms) the *principium cognoscendi* of theology. This does not deny that the following theologians also utilize and rely on Scripture; it is simply to point out the centrality that the historical Christ-event has in their theological formulations of the doctrine of God. This also does not deny that the incarnation of Christ did not raise theological questions about the identity of God throughout the history of Christian reflection. However, moving Christology into the doctrine of God via the historicity of God’s incursion into time and space is a particular methodological approach.

39 To provide an adequate account of the various answers given to these questions would require several volumes.


41 See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2. 44-54, 184-5.
distinction between God and creation, did not bifurcate God’s being from his action in his economy.  

In sum, given the three characteristics we highlighted, it is not a stretch to say that the Trinity—as God’s self-disclosed Identity in Christ—becomes the architectonic principle of theology for many modern theologians. In modern doctrines of the Trinity, the doctrine of God, and especially God’s tri-unity, is integrally related to God’s actions in his divine economy.

3. Bavinck among the Trinitarians

Even in our brief treatment of some of the features of the so-called trinitarian revival, it is hard to ignore some of the striking similarities between Bavinck and the trinitarian project in modern theology. Bavinck was concerned with deistic conceptions of the divine that presented God as merely extrinsic and unrelated to creation. He was strongly opposed to the attempts of Deists and other rationalists to articulate truths of God based on ‘reason alone’ abstracted from revelation. Furthermore, he vehemently opposed any deistic rendering of the divine attributes whereby God is not related to the world at all. Moreover, just as Hegel, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and countless others proved to be thought-provoking interlocutors for contemporary trinitarian theologians, they also proved to be fascinating interlocutors for Bavinck. While he was the most critical of these philosophers and theologians, whom he identified under the broad category of ‘pantheist,’ he also found engaging with them to be far more profitable than

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42 Rahner’s famous ground axiom, “the ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity,” is one of the most common ways that theologians in the twentieth century developed their accounts of the relationship between God’s being and his acts. While Rahner himself utilized the axiom to relate the missions to the divine processions more closely than they had been in the history of theology. However, in subsequent development, Rahner’s axiom has been utilized to make bolder claims than he himself would have been comfortable with. See Rahner, *Trinity*, 21-24. For a good treatment of the difference between classical articulations of the relationship between the economic and the immanent and contemporary treatments since Rahner see Seung Goo Lee, “The Relationship between the Ontological Trinity and the Economic Trinity,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009): 90-107.

43 *RD*, II. 332.

44 *RD*, II. 251.
those he considered ‘Deists.’\textsuperscript{45} Even though he often rejected the presuppositions of contemporary philosophy, he was also willing to take up their insights and categories, ‘free them from their admixture of errors,’ and develop them for his own dogmatic use.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, Bavinck was also keenly aware of how the shifts in philosophical conceptions of substance and persons impacted the traditional articulations of the doctrine of God,\textsuperscript{47} and he recognised the rise of historical consciousness.\textsuperscript{48} For Bavinck, this also led to developing an extended account of the relationship between God, history, and revelation. Finally, and most notably, Bavinck saw the doctrine of the Trinity “as is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant.”\textsuperscript{49} As this thesis has argued, Bavinck’s theology is thoroughly trinitarian. The whole of his systematic theology is the doctrine of the Trinity in its ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions.

Observing these similarities, it is possible to see Bavinck as someone who anticipated the modern revival of the doctrine of the Trinity. In identifying Bavinck as an anticipatory figure, however, it is essential to differentiate between an anticipatory figure and an influential figure. While Bavinck’s theology did impact theological development in the Netherlands, it remained relatively unknown outside of Dutch, Reformed circles. It did have some impact on the Anglophone theological world via Louis Berkhof, Cornelius VanTil, and Gerhardus Vos.\textsuperscript{50} However, even those figures remain relatively unknown outside the world of confessional, Dutch Reformed theology.\textsuperscript{51} Thus, Bavinck’s relation to the modern revival of the Trinity is truly

\textsuperscript{45} RD, II. 599.
\textsuperscript{46} RD, II. 332.
\textsuperscript{47} RD, II. 296-304.
\textsuperscript{48} PR, Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{49} RD, II. 333.
\textsuperscript{50} Louis Berkhof’s systematic theology is a summary of many of Bavinck’s main points, and Van Til’s theology in his Systematic Theology also draws on Bavinck for a number of key points. Vos was responsible for many translations of Bavinck’s works into English. See Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) and Van Til, Introduction to Systematic Theology.
\textsuperscript{51} It should be noted that Barth did read Bavinck and appropriated some elements of Bavinck’s theology into his work. As John Vissers argues in his article “Karl Barth’s appreciative use of Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics,” Barth...
anticipatory. It looks forward to it and is related to it as a forerunner. As such, it is possible to say that Bavinck anticipates the mid-twentieth century turn to the doctrine of the Trinity in at least four ways. First, he sees the doctrine of the Trinity as essential to the Christian understanding of God’s identity and dogmatic formulation. Second, similar to the later trinitarian theologies, Bavinck sees the demise of the doctrine in theological liberalism as untenable for the Christian faith and a dead end for theology. Third, he also anticipates how important the concepts of history and revelation would become in recentring theological reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity. As such, he too seeks to develop his Reformed, trinitarian theology in conversation with contemporary ideas and concepts. Finally, he sees the doctrine of the Trinity as a fecund doctrine that can be developed to address particular theological and philosophical conundrums, such as the relationship between unity and diversity. In these ways, and others, Bavinck anticipates the revitalization of the systematic importance of the Trinity in the latter half of the twentieth century.

However, even though Bavinck anticipates the revival, he also stands in relation to it as a divergent figure. Part of this is due to Bavinck’s historical, ecclesial, and social context. Even though many of the questions he took up are similar to those addressed in the twentieth-century revival, he did so within the particular dogmatic, ecclesial, and social context of the Netherlands at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, while the rise of theological liberalism did impact Bavinck’s dogmatics, he was impacted by his own ecclesial tradition, the specific shape of Dutch theology in the nineteenth century, and his participation in the Neo-Calvinist movement. Furthermore, while Bavinck did live through World War I, he died long before the start of World War II. Even though context does not determine dogmatics, it is impossible to dismiss the

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references Bavinck in his *Göttingen Dogmatics* and three times in the *Church Dogmatics*. He cites Bavinck in reference to the doctrine of Revelation, the Trinity, and theological anthropology. While Barth did have knowledge of the Dutch Neo-Calvinists and referenced Bavinck with appreciation, it is still more accurate to describe Bavinck as an anticipatory rather than heavily influential figure in relation to the trinitarian revival. See John A. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 no. 1 (2010): 79-86.
importance of World War II had on questions pertaining to suffering and the God-world relationship within certain strands of the trinitarian revival.

Yet, even beyond social location and ecclesial context, reading through the brief description of three of the key features of the trinitarian revival in relation to Bavinck’s trinitarian theology, there are also some discernible differences. Such differences include but are not limited to, his interpretation, appropriation, and development of an self-consciously Augustinian account of the doctrine of the Trinity; his refusal to ground and structure the doctrine of the Trinity Christologically; his dismissal of the Hellenization thesis and (generally positive) reception of the Scholastic tradition in its Medieval and Reformed iterations; his reception and re-affirmation of the classical attributes of independence, immutability, infinity (with respect to space: omnipresence, with respect to time: eternal), and unity (unity of numerical singularity and unity of simplicity); and his rejection of the trinitarian organization of theology (following the Apostle’s Creed) in favour of a theological, historical-genetic ordering. Given these differences alone, the opportunities for comparison between Bavinck and any theologian associated with trinitarian revival would be profitable. Furthermore, as contemporary theologians start to reassess the judgments of the tradition that arose within the trinitarian revival, Bavinck could serve as a thought-provoking figure. For example, Bavinck did not see moving from *De Deo Uno* to *De Deo Trino* to be at odds with developing of a thoroughly trinitarian theology. In fact, he even argues that this order is important to the development of trinitarian doctrine.\(^{52}\)

Alongside these profitable avenues of dialogue, there are also three potentially fruitful lines of engagement that employ the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the doctrine that we utilized in this thesis to identify the triniform shape of Bavinck’s theology. The first line of engagement has to do with Bavinck’s own development of the dimensions, especially

\(^{52}\) *RD*, II. 149-150.
his account of the relationship and distinctions between the dimensions. While some theologians may find Bavinck’s account of the dimensions too bound to classical theism, critique his utilization of the doctrine of decrees as too speculative, find his account of God’s relationship to the world inadequate, and critique his utilization of the doctrine of the Trinity to resolve the problem of unity and diversity, Bavinck’s development of the dimensions serves as a reminder that dogmas are not isolated from one another. Part of the task of dogmatics is to reflect on the relationship between distinct theological loci systematically. Bavinck’s account of the systematic relationship but necessary distinction between the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions should be studied as a serious proposal because it ‘considers everything in light of God’ but does not collapse everything into the doctrine of God proper.

Furthermore, even if one does not find Bavinck’s particular theological development of the dimensions convincing, one cannot ignore the reasons why he distinguishes them. To collapse the cosmological into the ontological makes creation necessary. When collapsed, creation becomes either a necessary overflow of the divine life or something that God does to fill some divine lack. In either case, it is hard to guard the freedom of God in creation and to protect against the incursion of the world-historical process into the divine life. However, completely disconnecting the cosmological from the ontological means that creation bears little or no relation to its creator. In such a case, creation may bear some distant resemblance to God as its extrinsic cause, but it is hard to understand how its nature, development, history are really related to God at all. To collapse the soteriological into the ontological makes it difficult to maintain the radically contingent nature of the fall and the incarnation. However, to detach the soteriological from the ontological can result in a doctrine of God unattuned to redeeming work of the triune God that flows from the Father in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Such a doctrine of God and accompanying account of salvation would be deeply impoverished, both intellectually and existentially. Finally, while collapsing the
cosmological or the soteriological dimensions into the ontological diminishes God’s proper transcendence and freedom and detaching them seems to diminish a true account of God’s proper immanence, isolating the cosmological from the soteriological results in an ethereal account of redemption that denies the inherent goodness of creation. However, collapsing the soteriological into the cosmological makes creation a mere stage upon which redemption occurs. Redemption swallows up creation, and God’s relationship to creation is solely articulated through the lens of redemption.

As we have noted, Bavinck argues for these distinctions on the basis of Scripture and by appealing to figures within the history of theology, particularly the early Church. But he does not simply parrot or repristinate their views. Instead, he seeks to develop them in conversation with the pressing issues and ideas at the turn of the twentieth century. As such, one cannot help but wonder if—in true Bavinckian fashion—the dimensions could be utilized to formulate a typology of the theologies that have arisen out of the twentieth-century revival in terms of how they develop and relate the dimensions. Thus, the second line of constructive engagement could take place at a broader level of general developments within theological systems. One could assume, for example, that Bavinck would have observed many theologians, such as Barth, as collapsing the soteriological into the cosmological. While the Christological focus in contemporary theology can be appreciated, certain issues do arise when God’s revelation in Christ is used as the sole ground of the doctrine of God and the exhaustive source for understanding the God-world relationship. Furthermore, Bavinck could have also classified a number of the theological proposals in the twentieth century in which the cosmological or soteriological where collapsed into the ontological. While all of the theologians involved in the modern revival of the doctrine of the Trinity affirm that God’s Identify or Personhood is more than he is in the world, some have a difficult time maintaining the freedom of God in creation (ex. Moltmann, LaCugna). Moreover, one could also
assume that Bavinck would also be wary of attempts to regain the independence of the ontological
dimension by completely detaching it in every way from the cosmological and soteriological.

Finally, as theologians seek to do justice to the irreducibly Trinitarian nature of
Christianity, Bavinck’s identification of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological
dimensions could open up new avenues for constructive theological dialogue in two ways. This is
different from the two lines of engagement listed above, especially the second one. The second
line of discussion above offers the dimensions as a means through which to articulate the broad
movements of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. But, in many ways, it could also be
developed in a decisively apologetic manner. And, as such, it is particularly enticing for many
conservative, Reformed theologians to applaud. Finding within Bavinck a systematic way to assess
and reject alternative theological proposals—especially those that seem to collapse the God-world
relationship or misconstrue the relationship between nature and grace—is appealing to those who
find classical theism as developed in the Reformed tradition particularly appealing. However, to
see the dimensions as solely apologetic is neither truly Reformed nor Bavinckian.

Thus, the first way that the dimensions could be used within constructive systematic
theology is to provide a framework within which serious theological and philosophical
engagement can take place, especially for those seeking to develop Reformed theology. While
Bavinck appealed to Scripture and the theological tradition to identify the necessary distinction
between the dimensions, he also sought to develop them and articulate them within his own
context. Thus, he did not always jump to judge alternative perspectives but engaged them
thoughtfully and carefully. He was not afraid to incorporate new ideas that he saw as scripturally
founded and in line with the tradition (self-revelation, absoluteness and personality, self-
consciousness). Certainly, his appropriation of insights from his context was done carefully and
with recourse to historical theology. However, he was far less antagonistic than some of his
followers have been. Thus, even for those who wish to develop constructive theology with recourse to the distinctions that Bavinck makes between the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions, the dimensions should not shut down but open up dialogue. How have other theologians related the dimensions? And, perhaps more importantly, why have they related them in the manner that they do? What is the underlying concern that they are trying to address in their articulations of the relationship between God, creation, and redemption? What concepts and conceptual apparatus can be utilized from contemporary theology and philosophy for the purpose of systematic development? Thus, the dimensions can also serve as a way to engage in the ongoing task of theological reflection on the God who has created the world and redeemed it in Christ. For those wishing to continue in the stream of Reformed theology that Bavinck himself inhabited, it may provide a way to carry forward Bavinck’s Reformed yet  irenic project.

Finally, beyond providing a framework and method within which to do justice to the triniform reality of the Christian faith for Reformed theologians, the dimensions may also be a way for theologians to re-engage the relationship between God’s being and acts that does not automatically fall into the immanent-economic schema. The distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is helpful, but articulations of it can sound like God is split into two. While some might argue that distinguishing the ontological dimension from the cosmological and soteriological results in the same problem, there is some room here for creative development and alternative articulations. It raises again the perennial question of the relationship between God’s being and his acts, the relationship between the order of being and the order of knowing, and what constitutes proper methods for predicating truths about the divine life. This is especially the case

53 While widely used today, the immanent-economic distinction arose to prominence in the mid-eighteenth century. Prior to that, the more common distinction was between missions and processions. The suggestion of this paragraph is not to do away with these distinctions but to offer another way to think about the way that the being of God relates to his acts and what can be said of God’s being from his acts.
because an account of the dimensions includes both an account of their distinction and *relationship to one another*. However, it could serve as a useful framework within which to articulate systematic theology and the relationship between God, creation, and redemption.

In closing this chapter, it should be apparent that there are several fruitful lines of inquiry that could be pursued. Having identified Bavinck as a trinitarian theologian whose theology can be understood as the outworking of the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions of the Trinity, this thesis opens up the possibility for further research both pertaining to Bavinck’s own trinitarian theology and his relationship to other twentieth and twenty-first century trinitarians. Much more remains to be studied in relation to Bavinck’s trinitarian thought. Without resurrecting the ‘two-Bavincks’ hypothesis, there is a need to study particular areas of Bavinck’s trinitarian theology, especially how he saw himself as appropriating contemporary categories and (just like the early Fathers) freeing them of an admixture of errors as well as how he understood himself to be creatively appropriating and developing aspects of the tradition. This thesis showed some of the ways that Bavinck did this, and the dimensions provide the framework within which Bavinck appropriated insights in order to develop a Reformed theology. But there remains much more to be explored. Much more work remains to be done within Bavinck’s doctrine of God proper itself and the way that Bavinck employs it to constructive ends within his dogmatics. There also remains more work to be done concerning Bavinck’s theology after 1911. However, the dimensions can serve as an excellent framework for such future inquiry.\footnote{The author of this thesis plans to pursue these lines of inquiry particularly those relating to Bavinck’s notes in his copy of the second edition of the dogmatics on the doctrine of God as well as his manuscripts on Kosmologie.} Furthermore, within the ongoing dialogue on the nature and task of systematic theology and the role of the doctrine of the Trinity in shaping dogmatics, Bavinck could serve as a thought-provoking dialogue partner. As this chapter has emphasized, he is a theologian who took the irreducibly trinitarian nature of theology
seriously. Thus, along with many others, Bavinck can aid in the contemporary task of articulating how the confession of the Trinity stands at the centre of the Christian life and dogmatic enterprise.
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