

# **Paths Beyond Tracing Out**

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THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN  
IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

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**PATHS BEYOND TRACING OUT:**

THE CONNECTION OF METHOD AND CONTENT  
IN THE DOCTRINE OF GOD, EXAMINED IN REFORMED  
ORTHODOXY, KARL BARTH, AND THE UTRECHT SCHOOL

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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HOOGLERAAR IN DE THEOLOGIE,

ZO GOD WIL IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN

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*Sponsored by* **STICHTING AFBOUW KAMPEN**

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# Preface

The title of this book reflects the difficulties of the research which I was engaged in for almost twelve years. God's paths are beyond tracing out. Still, theology has the task to think about God and his ways. In the present study, I attempt to trace some different ways in which significant parts of the Reformed tradition of systematic theology have pursued this enterprise.

The fact that I did not completely lose my way, is in large part due to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Barend Kamphuis. He gave me great freedom in defining and performing my research, took pains to understand my complicated deliberations on the intricacies of the doctrine of God, and always continued to believe in the outcome, even when I – for a moment – did not.

A special word of thanks to Prof. Dr. Richard A. Muller of Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, USA). The start of my doctoral research almost coincided with his tenure of the Belle van Zuylen chair at Utrecht University, which gave me the opportunity to attend his lectures on John Calvin and Francis Turretin and to join numerous other seminars and discussions in which he took part. Moreover, he showed personal interest in my project and provided, in several friendly conversations, stimulating and decisive advice on the shaping of my dissertation.

The other members of the examination committee, Prof. Dr. Gijsbert van den Brink and Prof. Dr. Frank van der Pol should be greatly thanked for their acceptance of my dissertation and for their comments that helped me to improve the manuscript.

During my years of study, I had the privilege of participating in a number of research groups. First of all, I mention the Research-group Classic Reformed Theology (Werkgezelschap Oude Gereformeerde Theologie) at Utrecht University. I greatly profited from the expertise in reading and understanding Reformed scholastic texts gathered in this group. While I started as a critical outsider, many penetrating discussions with Prof. Dr. Antoon Vos, Prof. Dr. Willem van Asselt, Prof. Dr. Andreas Beck, Dr. Martijn Bac, and others, gradually turned me into an almost insider. Decisive insights attained in my research are inconceivable without the years of intensive study and debate within this group of Utrecht scholars.

Second, I enjoyed the almost daily discussions with my fellow AIOs (PhD students) at Kampen Theological University: Dr. Hans Schaeffer, Dr. Hans Burger, Dr. Koert van Bakkum, and Drs. Myriam Klinker-de Klerck. In different ways, we all were in search of promising new directions for Reformed theology.

While my dissertation slowly progressed, the emerging co-operation between the Theological Universities of Kampen and Apeldoorn resulted in the founding of a joint Research-group of Systematic Theology. I keep warm memories to a series of conversations on Reformed scholastic theology with Prof. Dr. Hans Maris, that took place in a climate of friendship and mutual respect, although we held (and hold) fairly different views on the matter. To the Research-group as a whole, directed by Prof. Dr. Gerard den Hertog, I owe many moments of friendly and fundamental discussion, and of sharp but stimulating criticism.

## Preface

As a group of AIOs at Kampen, we welcomed the institution of the “Promovendiberaad” of the Gereformeerde Bond in the Dutch Reformed Church (now, in large part, Protestant Church of the Netherlands), and joined its meetings. Among the members of the “systematical” section, Dr. Henk van den Belt, Dr. Arjan Markus, Dr. Maarten Wisse, and Dr. Willem-Maarten Dekker in particular gave encouraging and stimulating responses to my ideas.

By the friendly invitation of Prof. Dr. Gerrit Neven, I was permitted to attend a few meetings of “NOSTER Dogmatiek,” a section of the Netherlands Research School for Theology and Religion Sciences.

Theological research is impossible without the assistance of libraries. My “home” library at Kampen (Broederweg/Groenestraat), headed by Mr. Geert Harmanny, was always willing to fulfill my requests and patiently permitted me to have the books in usage for month or even years. The libraries of the Protestant University (Kampen Oudestraat), Utrecht University (Uithof) and Leiden University supplied the books I could not find elsewhere.

Part of my research (resulting in chapter 4 of this dissertation) was done during a stay at the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Grand Rapids, USA. I thank the Meeter Center Board for granting me a Student Fellowship during the summer of 2001. The Meeter Center director, Prof. Dr. Karin Maag, and its further staff: Mrs. Susan Schmurr, Mr. Paul Fields, and Mr. (now Prof. Dr.) Yudha Thianto, not only helped me with all scholarly and practical necessities, but also created a warm and friendly climate.

In the final stage, a couple of English readers (all doctoral students of Dr. Richard Muller) have been of great help: Dr. Greg Schuringa, Albert Gootjes, Nathan Jacobs, and Ted Van Raalte.

The consistory of the Reformed Church (liberated) at Pijnacker-Nootdorp, which I serve since March 2007, granted me the weeks of study leave that I needed in order to prepare the final manuscript for the examination committee and for the publisher. Moreover, I thank the congregation and the consistory for their interest, understanding, and support.

During the years spent at the research presented here, my wife Dineke and I saw our family grow up. While it was not always easy to combine the responsibilities of husband, father, and pastor, with the isolation and concentration needed to finish a dissertation, I am grateful for the lessons of life Dineke and the boys taught me. To quote – for one time! – a saying by Aristotle: *primum vivere, deinde philosophari*. And I add: *denuo vivere*. That is a promise, in more than one sense.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. *The Doctrine of God: Problems and Challenges*

How can we talk properly about God? This question is central to the Christian faith and, accordingly, to Christian theology. For many Christian believers, it is natural to talk and think about God in certain ways, and, perhaps more significantly, to talk *to* God in prayer. Holy Scripture presents itself as the revelation of God: the God who acts, speaks, and loves. Without God, one cannot even conceive of a Christian faith. This does not mean, however, that the questions of who God is and of how we can know God and speak about him are answered unambiguously. Religious and theological “schools” differ greatly about several of these issues. Within systematic theology, the doctrine of God is the place where these questions are most directly addressed.

Given the fundamental significance of the questions concerning God, it is somewhat surprising that the doctrine of God is not the most debated area of systematic theology. In the successive periods of the history of theology, attention has been drawn especially to the doctrines of Trinity, Christology, the means of grace, justification, and the church.<sup>1</sup> There is no such period in which the doctrine of God was equally central. Most discussions concerning God took place in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, or, in another direction, in the doctrine of creation and providence.

On the other hand, the doctrine of God seems to be a problematic part of Christian doctrine. To put it briefly, the doctrine of God attempts to describe or circumscribe the identity of God. In addition to discussing God’s external relations and works in creation and salvation, Christian theology focuses on God himself in the doctrine of God. In considering the identity of God, a theologian is immediately confronted with the question of how this identity relates to and is to be understood in view of other beings. This question has an *ontological* and a *conceptual* dimension: what sorts of connection and distinction should be assumed between God and other reality, and by what conceptual instruments can we properly speak about God? Over the centuries, Christian theology has faced these questions and formulated a doctrine of God in response to them. Let me present a sample of questions and problems concerning the doctrine of God.<sup>2</sup>

The *first* question deals with the relation between the God of Israel and the gods of other nations. The Apologists of the first centuries argued for the identity of the biblical God with the supreme divine being who was searched for in Greek philosophy. Their alliance with Platonic philosophy in particular, enabled them to maintain the biblical emphasis on the uniqueness and transcendence of God. The

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Epochen der Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1974), 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the article “Gott,” *RGG*<sup>3</sup> II, 1701-1745; the article “Gott,” *TRE* 13, 601-708; H.-M. Barth, *Die christliche Gotteslehre: Hauptprobleme ihrer Geschichte*, Studienbücher Theologie: Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1974).

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alleged rational plausibility of the Christian belief, on which they built their apologies, was of great help in the gaining of intellectual and social status. On the other hand, the universal ambitions of the Apologists lead to subsequent problems in Christian theology concerning the relation of Christian belief to other religions.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the centuries after the Early Church, Christian thinkers have wrestled with the problem of what Blaise Pascal (in his *Mémorial*) phrased as “the God of the philosophers” versus “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

The *second* problem immediately follows from the first. It is characteristic for the Christian faith that it believes in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The trinitarian and christological debates of the first five centuries consist of a struggle for clarification of the way in which the one, transcendent God can be present in the midst of our world in the person of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Related to a strict monotheistic doctrine of God, the doctrine of the Trinity deals with the problem of the one and the many, while the doctrine of Christology tries to unite transcendence and immanence, God and man. In these two doctrines lies the distinctive identity of the Christian faith. A critical question towards the doctrine of God in its historical development is, how the specific character of God as the Triune God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ is accounted for.

*Third*, from the biblical testimony it is clear that God is seen as the Creator of the world. In this respect, Christianity is fundamentally different from many other religions and from pagan philosophy. The Judaeo-Christian tradition does know a story of creation, but lacks any sort of theogony. In antiquity and Hellenism, most religions are polytheistic. Their accounts of the beginnings of reality comprise stories concerning the birth of the gods. These gods do not differ principally from the created world: in their influence upon creatures they are very limited and involved in mutual struggles. In short, the pagan gods can be viewed as personifications of immanent, inner worldly forces. Characteristic for the biblical God is that he is not located somewhere in created reality, but transcends it and is the ultimate Cause and Maker of everything. The most important philosophical consequences of this biblical view are, first, that a basic ontological distinction is made between Creator and creature, and, second, that the relation between necessity and freedom has to be established again. Contrary to the basically deterministic positions inherent to necessitarian, pagan thinking, Christian thought is challenged to articulate the consequences of the insight that God is the free Creator of reality. As we will see in the course of this study (particularly sections 3.1, 17.2, 22.2.4), it took ages of inquiry and struggle to arrive at an adequate formulation of these issues.

A *fourth* issue of debate is the relation between infinity and personality. This problem became urgent in the German philosophy from Kant to Hegel.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the history of metaphysics, God had increasingly been viewed as the Absolute and Infinite Being in contrast with finite and limited creatures. J.G. Fichte

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie,” in: *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 1967, 296-346.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie: Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte*, Uni-Taschenbücher 1925 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 216-293.

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held it impossible to maintain God's absoluteness together with a belief in a personal God. In his view, personality implies limitation and negation and thus defeats God's absoluteness. The philosophy of Idealism consists in attempts to explain how the Absolute can relate itself to our world without losing its absolute character. While in the 19th century the emphasis lay on the absoluteness of God, in the 20th century many theologians stressed the personality of God. The systematic question remains: can they be reconciled?

A *fifth* and final problem was forcefully raised by Karl Barth in response to the Kantian revolution in epistemology: how can God be known? Barth launched a heavy attack on the so-called natural theology of the Roman-Catholic church, which grounds the knowledge of God on an alleged "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*).<sup>5</sup> In Barth's view the doctrine of *analogia entis* is the pre-eminent invention of the Antichrist.<sup>6</sup> The only basis for theology that is accepted by Barth is God's revelation in his Word. His refutation of any kind of natural theology obliged 20th century theology to rethink the questions concerning the knowledge of God. Even if one disagrees with Barth's own position, it has become impossible to ignore the profound questions posed by him.

As the above survey of problems in the doctrine of God makes clear, it is a foundational part of Christian doctrine. Important religious and metaphysical intuitions, concerns, and interests will be reflected in one's account of the doctrine of God. What is said about God has enormous consequences for what has to be said about man and the world. The central message of the Gospel, redemption by God in Jesus Christ, cannot be fully understood without an awareness of at least the *basic implications* of the doctrine of God.

More recently, this doctrine has gained renewed interest, in part due to developments in philosophy and philosophical theology. It could be stated that since the Enlightenment the plausibility of belief in God has rapidly decreased. As a consequence, much of the traditional beliefs concerning God have been modified or abandoned. The theology of Karl Barth reacts to the "Kantian" turn by rejecting the traditional foundation of the doctrine of God in "general revelation" and replacing it with a strict concentration on the "special revelation" of the triune God in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Barth's critics complain about a lack of communication between this revelation-oriented, Christ-centered theology and the common world of thought: Barth can hardly make it clear how God can be known in our reality. In reaction, the project of Wolfhart Pannenberg can be seen as a way of demonstrating the plausibility and indispensability of belief in the existence of God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* vol. II/1, *Die Lehre von Gott* (Zollikon: Verlag der Evangelischen Buchhandlung, 1940), 67-200.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* vol. I/1, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes: Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik* (2nd ed. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1935), VIII: "Ich halte die *analogia entis* für die Erfindung des Antichrist und denke, daß man ihretwegen nicht katholisch werden kann." Barth maintains his verdict, *KD* II/1, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Barth, *KD* II/1. For further discussion, see part II of this study.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), and "Die Aufnahme."

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Apart from these theological developments, some Christian philosophers have inaugurated a new quest for the rationality of belief in God. This philosophical theology or philosophy of religion challenges the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of post-Enlightenment modern thinking by revitalizing the analytical approach that was the strength of medieval and pre-Enlightenment scholasticism. In recent philosophy of religion, questions concerning the existence and essence of God play a considerable role. Especially in Anglo-Saxon literature, there is a revival of “natural theology,” linked with a thorough analysis of the character and functions of religious language.

In these recent philosophical contributions to the doctrine of God, I see several different approaches. The so-called Reformed Epistemologists offer an alternative epistemology, in which belief in God can be considered “properly basic.” They widen the scope of rational knowledge as to include intuitive certainty and religious experience.<sup>9</sup> Another group of philosophers applies the “language game”-theory of Ludwig Wittgenstein to religious belief. They argue against an interpretation of religious belief in terms of rational and verifiable knowledge and propose to elaborate the function of religious language in the community of believers. As a final group, there are philosophers who follow the classical tradition of theism by defending the traditional arguments for God’s existence or by claiming that no coherent worldview or valid truth-claim is possible without the foundational belief in God’s existence.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the three groups are not mutually exclusive: it is possible to defend the classic theistic positions by utilizing insights from the Reformed Epistemologists, just as it possible to be a Reformed Epistemologist with strong sympathies for the Wittgensteinian approach.

The doctrine of God is a field full of problems and of challenges. An ardent question for Reformed theology is how the concepts and arguments used in the

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<sup>9</sup> Some Reformed Epistemologist literature: William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Hendrik Hart et al., eds., *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Christian studies today (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983); D.J. Houtenga jr., *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (2nd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Bart Cusveller, René van Woudenberg et al., *De kentheorie van Alvin Plantinga* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Various exponents of this group: Ian Markham, *Truth and the Reality of God: An Essay in Natural Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); Peter Hicks, *Evangelicals and Truth: A Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age* (Leicester: Apollon, 1998); Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs*, Reason and religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, Reason and religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

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doctrine of God are to be judged in relation to the biblical testimony concerning God. Is there a difference or even tension between a “biblical” and a “philosophical” component in the traditional doctrine of God? While similar questions can be raised in other areas of doctrine (e.g., Trinity and Christology), it seems that especially the doctrine of God with its abstract concepts and complicated arguments is dominated by philosophical thought and has been alienated from biblical simplicity. Many theologians in the last two centuries have diagnosed the traditional doctrine of God with “philosophical disease,” and have developed a more or less radical reorientation in the doctrine of God. In many circles, traditional concepts such as immutability, impassibility and foreknowledge have come under fire.

### ***1.2. The Hermeneutical Question Applied***

In this study, I propose to state the problem of “biblical versus philosophical” at a more general level: To what degree is there a connection between the historically determined instruments of thought and the doctrinal results of thought? In all different phases of Christian theology, we encounter the interaction between Scripture and context.<sup>11</sup> Just like any other type of knowledge, Christian doctrine is subject to contextual influences. Rather than condemning such interaction beforehand, I propose to examine more closely how the interaction takes place and what its consequences are. Moreover, I start my investigation with the expectation that “form” and “content” are mutually connected and inseparable. It will not do to restrict the contextual influences to the external shape of doctrine while assuming that the doctrinal content remains unaffected.

The leading question of this study is:

**How are method and content connected in the doctrine of God?**

I elaborate this main question in two directions: first, in this section, I explain the terms employed in the question; second, in the next section, I introduce the concrete application given to the question in the remainder of this study.

As a term for the formal side of the issue, I choose the word “method.” The main reason for this choice is that it enables an unbiased analysis of the material. While my research was occasioned by some suspicion about philosophical influences in the Reformed doctrine of God, the objectivity of my analysis would have been endangered if I had focused on the category of “philosophical influence.” In that case, the way of framing the question would in large part have determined the answer. “Method” as a heuristic device can be deployed into concrete points of analysis, as I will expound below.

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<sup>11</sup> My stating the main question in hermeneutical terms is due to the fact that my research took place within the research program “Renewal and Reconsideration from the Sources. In Search of a Relevant Reformed Systematic Theology for the 21st Century” of the Theological Universities of Kampen (Broederweg) and Apeldoorn.

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The choice for “method,” however, is not without problems. There are alternative words that seem to recommend themselves.

“Rationality,” for instance, indicates two important elements: (a) the fact that the whole way of thinking is comprised, and (b) the explicit or implicit intention of being rational in the formulation of doctrine, of being open to the application of rational standards. An important disadvantage, however, is the fact that the status and nature of rationality are critically discussed and differently viewed by the theologians examined in this study. So, it cannot function as an unequivocal common term.

“Form,” as a second alternative, is ready at hand as the opposite of “content” and has the strong suggestion of the formal characteristics of thinking that can be studied separately. It cannot be held, however, that the *formal* features of thinking sufficiently indicate the way in which a doctrine is constructed. A broader complex should be taken in view. As I have stated above, form and content may interact in ways that fall out of sight if we look only at the formal aspects.

In addition to considering these alternatives to “method,” we have to realize that “method” can be understood in several senses.<sup>12</sup> The most basic definition of “method” is: *a regulated way of attaining a goal*. In ancient Greek philosophy, it is taken for either the way of living a righteous life or the proper course of research and understanding. The latter meaning became dominant in the development of early philosophy of science by Plato and Aristotle. Typical for Plato is, first, the ontological foundation of his dialectical method and, second, the bifurcation of *synagoge* (reduction of the many phenomena to the unity of the Idea) and *dihairesis* (the distribution of the general ideas in species and sub-species). The ontological foundation of Plato’s methodology is dismissed by Aristotle, who concentrates on the art and technique of philosophical investigation. Central in Aristotle’s philosophy of science is his system of logic, culminating in the doctrine of syllogistics.

In the Middle Ages “method” is not a very important term. It can be taken as the art of thinking, the way to proceed in research or as the concise summary of knowledge. In a more specific sense, method is treated by Johannes Damascenus as a method of logic, consisting in (a) the *divisive* method by which a *genus* is divided in *species*, (b) the *definitive* method by which the subject is defined in terms of *genus* and *differentia*, (c) the analytical or *resolutive* method which resolves the compounded terms in their simple elements, and (d) the *demonstrative* method which is in essence the method of syllogism.

The Renaissance is a period in which scholars had a warm interest in methodological considerations.<sup>13</sup> A significant feature of the renaissancist doctrine of method is the emphasis on brevity and efficiency. A method is the shortest way to investigate, understand or explain a matter. A very renowned Renaissance methodologist is Pierre de la Ramée (Petrus Ramus). He develops one universally applicable method for all sciences, directed towards practical utility and based on

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<sup>12</sup> See the article “Methode,” in: Joachim Ritter, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 5:1304-1332.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Renaissance debates on method in relation to Reformed scholastic theology, see part I, chapter 4 below.

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the movement from the general and commonly known facts to the specific and unknown. However, the most influential doctrine of method was given by Jacopo Zabarella, who distinguished two methods: the demonstrative (or compositive/synthetical) and the resolutive (or analytical) method.

In the reflections on method from the 17th century onwards, a dominant role is played by the distinction analytical-synthetical. There was an increasing tendency towards one universal method which was independent from the objects under study. Philosophers such as René Descartes tried to find objective truth criteria. From Descartes onwards, method became a way of exposing truth in addition to being a way of investigation of truth. The doctrine of method by both rationalist and empiricist philosophers was based on the alleged correspondence between knowledge and reality. This realist supposition was radically undermined by the transcendental criticism of Immanuel Kant. Kant emphasized the role of the knowing subject in the act of knowing. In German philosophy after Kant, the ultimate justification of knowledge was searched for in an absolute and undefeatable starting point (Schelling) or in the eschatological fulfillment of the absolute spirit (Hegel).

The revival of Kantianism at the end of the 19th century led to a strict application of the method used by natural science on other domains of knowledge. Due to the influence of the "Vienna Circle," this approach became very influential during the 20th century, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, this "usurpation" was attacked by other philosophers such as J.G. Droysen. Droysen counted three different methods: the speculative method of philosophy and theology, the explanatory method of the natural sciences and the hermeneutical method of the human sciences. The plea for a hermeneutical method has found response especially in German philosophy and found a classic formulation in H.-G. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.

This short survey of the history of the conception of method reveals some interesting possibilities and problems. Generally, "method" is an important part of the "quest for truth." The ways in which this truth is pursued do differ, but some unanimity seems to exist in the distinction between a dividing and a composing method. It becomes clear that the process of knowing is complicated by many interfering components. In this study, "method" is taken not in the sense of one specific (view of) method but in a more general way. At this moment, and applied to the scope of this study, I understand by "method" the whole complex of presuppositions, argumentative procedures, lines of thought and worldview that are used in exposing the doctrine of God. "Method" indicates the way in which and the means by which the doctrine is formulated.

In order to make the category "method" operational in my research, I indicate the aspects that will receive attention in the subsequent parts of this study. They do not (deductively) derive from some prefabricated methodology, but are (inductively) discovered as relevant elements during the research.

- *Questions.* Gaining knowledge and insight normally starts with asking questions. The type of questions determines in large part the range of answers generated by the research. Vincent Brümmer, for example, distinguishes between *questions of fact* ("what is  $x$ "; "does  $x$  exist"; "how big is  $x$ "), *questions of*

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*meaning* (“what is  $x$  good for”; “how does  $x$  direct my life”), and *conceptual questions* (“what do we mean by  $x$ ”; “what is implied in ascribing property  $A$  to  $x$ ”). In addition, much 20th century theology focuses on questions such as how can we know about God?” and “what is the status of God language?” One can imagine that theologies concentrating on different types of questions will receive drastically different shapes.

- *Concepts*. Obviously, concepts form an important nexus of one’s framework of thought. As one philosophical dictionary defines it, a concept is a semantically evaluable, redeployable constituent of thought, invoked to explain properties of intentional phenomena such as productivity and systematicity. Applied to an assortment of phenomena including mental representations, images, words, stereotypes, senses, properties, reasoning abilities, mathematical functions, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Concepts can be viewed as the building blocks of discourse. They pointedly express someone’s cognitive attitude towards the elementary entities of which one is speaking. Concepts have the function to focus and fixate the content of thought, and thus move beyond loose “ordinary” language. Many presuppositions about the nature, properties, and relations of these entities coalesce in the usage and explanation of concepts. For this reason, it is clear that in the connection of method and content, concepts have a crucial role.

Theologians differ considerably in their usage of concepts: not only is there variation in the degrees of conceptual precision, also, and more importantly, the conceptual apparatuses employed in distinct theologies differ greatly in origin and scope. In my research, I will have to take these differences into account in order to avoid laying all doctrines of God on one conceptual Procrustean bed. On the other hand, we cannot restrict to register the provenience of concepts and to record their explicitly given meaning, but we will try to understand the conceptual functions and structures at a deeper level.

- *Sources*. In my statement of the hermeneutical question above, I referred to the interaction of Scripture and context. One way to describe this interaction is to point out the sources from which doctrinal material is taken. In general, I distinguish four important areas from which doctrinal elements may stem:
  - Scripture. For the main tradition of orthodox Christian theology, God’s revelation in Scripture is the foundational and decisive source of knowledge. Underlying the formulations of the doctrine of God, we can assume a more or less elaborate understanding of what the Bible reveals to us about God.
  - Tradition. By “tradition” I understand the whole history of Christian thought, especially as it has found expression in the Creeds and confessions of the Church. In the doctrine of God, important concepts, arguments, and distinctions are transmitted over the centuries from the Church Fathers to our days.

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<sup>14</sup> Definition from Chris Eliasmith, ed., *The Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind*, quoted via <http://www.swif.uniba.it/lei/foldop/foldoc.cgi?concept> (July 21, 2008).

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- Philosophy. Throughout the ages, Christian theology has been accompanied by and has interacted with philosophy of diverse plumage. In my analysis, I will examine both the explicit statements made on the relation between theology and philosophy, and the practical usage made of recognizable philosophical thought.
- Experience. Most theologians understand their discipline as not merely a theoretical enterprise, but as knowledge that has practical relevance and implications. For that reason, we may expect that in one way or another, human experience in a personal or collective sense will play a role in the exposition of the doctrine of God.
- *Ways of argumentation.* In the strictest sense, one could ask for the application of logic in the doctrine of God. It will turn out, however, that not every theologian makes use of explicit and formalized logical argumentation. It is, therefore, better to ask more broadly about the diverse argumentative characteristics we encounter with the diverse theologians under study.
- *Structures.* In the history of reflection on method, we find emphasis on method as a road to *discovering* knowledge as well as a manner of *presenting* knowledge. In the latter sense, one's method finds expression in the structure given to the exposition of a subject. On the one hand, structure may have the practical aspect of division and order that is required in any decent discourse. On the other hand, the structure chosen to present the material mostly reflects underlying choices as to the relevant questions, the decisive sources of knowledge, and the central concepts. In fact, I consider the structure(s) of the doctrine of God as an important indicator of the interaction between method and content. For that reason, I will not only take into account the formal structures made explicit by the examined authors, but will also try to understand their systematic implications, to discover determining conceptual structures beneath the surface, and to compare apparently different structures in view of underlying equivalence.

The next term to be explained is "content." Whereas "method" points to the "how," "content" answers the "What?"-question. I stated above that form and content cannot be separated. It seems possible and necessary, however, to distinguish between the "how" and the "what." The hermeneutical circle is not hermetically closed: while acknowledging that our horizon of knowledge is different from, say, the 16th century horizon, it remains possible to utter interpretative statements in which we try to circumscribe what the 16th century thinker intended to say.

The interpretative statements can take the form of propositions which can be affirmed or denied. Taking into account the different frameworks of thought between, for example, Reformed scholastics of the 17th century and Karl Barth in the 20th century, I believe to a certain degree in the translatability of their statements. On the level of propositions, the contents of doctrine can be approximately expressed and different or contrary propositions can be compared.

In addition to the clarification of the terms "method" and "content," a few words should be offered concerning the connection between the two. After having distinguished the two components, it is necessary to bring method and content

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together and to study the way in which they belong together. An important assumption is that method and content are mutually connected. Clearly, the method (the complex of presuppositions, argumentative procedures, lines of thought and worldview) exercises influence on the doctrinal results. Less clear, but equally important, is the fact that doctrinal statements may have methodological implications. The doctrine of predestination, for example, not only results from a certain way of thinking, but in turn has regulative power for other parts of theology. It could be argued that at the core of Christian doctrines lie some basic religious concerns which remain relatively unaffected by changes in worldview or method of theology.

### *1.3. Fields of Analysis*

It is conceivable and perhaps desirable to answer the question of the connection between method and content by an independent systematic exposition. The initial reason why I do not follow that course is that I am not equipped for such an enterprise. Instead, I have chosen to examine the possible ways of connecting method and content in the practice of important parts from the history of the doctrine of God. This has the additional advantage that we see the interaction operational in positive theology, rather than construing an inevitably abstract prescriptive theory. Only the in-depth investigation of the doctrine of God in actual execution provides insight into what is really at stake here.

The research presented in this book combines an historical and a systematic approach. The different versions of the doctrine of God are understood in their own cultural and intellectual context. At the same time, my ultimate interest is not in historical understanding as such, but in discovering the systematic potential of each piece of theology. The combination of historical and systematic research exposes this study to the risk of satisfying neither the historical nor the systematic theologian. I overtly accept that risk, and I hope that the reward will be in proportion. Another limitation imposed by this type of research is that I cannot discuss in full detail the Scriptural evidence adduced in the different accounts of the doctrine of God, nor can I give explicit biblical justification for my evaluative remarks (see also section 22.2).

The body of this study consists of three parts, each devoted to a distinct stage in the history of the doctrine of God. A few words on my choice for these objects of study:<sup>15</sup>

*Part I* attempts to give a survey of the doctrine of God in Reformed orthodox theology. The primary motive for starting here lies in my own affiliation to the confessional Reformed tradition (see the next section). Moreover, I realize that precisely in the doctrine of God, this tradition is charged with undue adherence to philosophical, Aristotelian thought. Reformed scholasticism<sup>16</sup> is held responsible for the “fatal deviation” from the biblical view of God under philosophical

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<sup>15</sup> A more extended justification of my selecting these particular strands of theology is given in the introduction to the respective parts of the book.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout the book, I will use the terms “Reformed orthodox(y)” and “Reformed scholastic(ism)” interchangeably. For an explanation, see part I, section 2.1.

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influence. For that reason, a fair understanding and appraisal of this theological tradition is crucial for Reformed theology today.

*Part II* of my study is devoted to Karl Barth's doctrine of God. Barth shows a very critical attitude towards the scholastic form of theology, and pretends to have developed a properly theological method instead. Barth's approach exerted an enormous influence on 20th century theology throughout all denominations. In the set up of this study, he functions as a contrast model of Reformed scholasticism.<sup>17</sup>

*Part III* gives a survey of the doctrine of God as developed in the so-called Utrecht School, a recent direction in systematic or philosophical theology. To my knowledge, no full-scale description and analysis of this School has been given thus far. The Utrecht School, aiming at maximal rational clarity, is quite explicit about its methodological choices. Interestingly, it connects the methodical and substantial concerns of earlier (medieval and Protestant) scholasticism to recent directions in philosophy (analytical philosophy, modal ontology).

I expect that, taken together, these parts of my study will yield sufficient insight into the problems and options in relating method and content in the doctrine of God, and thus will add to the understanding of the hermeneutical problematic. Moreover, the findings of my study will give a sense of the direction in which a Reformed doctrine of God at the start of the 21st century can be developed.

### 1.4. Starting Point

This study starts from a confessional Reformed standpoint. Reformed theology has a rich tradition, primarily stemming from the 16th and 17th centuries, though reaching back to the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages and the writings of the Church Fathers. It should be realized that the doctrine of God is not the most distinctly "Reformed" part of this theology. Reformed Orthodoxy joined to a general consensus in the doctrine of God.<sup>18</sup> The discussions about God's existence and being, his attributes and deeds do in most respects not differ fundamentally from Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology. Besides some fundamental polemical issues<sup>19</sup>, the most significant distinctive features of the Reformed doctrine of God can be found in the emphasis on Holy Scripture as the principle and norm of doctrine and the modest estimation of the role of reason in theology. Reformed

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<sup>17</sup> In part II, section 9.2, I explain why I treat Barth as a part of the Reformed tradition.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 1:75: "During the early orthodox period, the *loci [sic] de theologia* and the portion of the *locus de Deo* concerned with the divine essence developed, for the most part, as positive doctrine drawing nonpolemically upon the resources of the church fathers and of medieval scholasticism, the latter with emphasis on modified Thomist, Augustinian and Scotist formulations."

<sup>19</sup> Against the Roman Catholic opponents (and later against the Remonstrants), the Reformed emphasize the absolute dependence of man on God, and the nature of divine grace as an immanent attribute of God instead of a created *habitus* in man. The christological debate with the Lutherans is reflected in statements on God's attributes in which the Lutheran doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* is explicitly denied.

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theology of the 16th and 17th centuries is rather cautious regarding natural theology and arguments for God's existence.<sup>20</sup>

The characteristics of the Reformed doctrine of God as mentioned above can be found back in the confessional documents.

The *Confessio Belgica* gives in its first article a very concise description of God and his attributes:

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.<sup>21</sup>

The second article states that God can be known by two means: first, from the creation and sustenance of the whole world; second, from the revelation in the Holy Scripture. Though it may seem as if "natural theology" is given the first place, in fact very little space is devoted to it, and unambiguously the emphasis lies on the knowledge based on God's revelation in Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* gives a more detailed account of the doctrine of God. The Westminster devotes its first article to the doctrine of Scripture; in a short *pro memoria* it mentions God's manifestation by creation and providence. A renown detail of the *Westminster Confession* is its doctrine of the "good and necessary consequences" that can be deduced from Scripture.<sup>23</sup> Chapter II of the Confession treats the doctrine of God together with the doctrine of the Trinity. The initial description of God deserves full quotation:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed analysis of the early Dutch Reformed attitude towards natural theology, see John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575-1650*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> *Confessio Belgica*, art. I, in: Philip Schaff (ed.), David S. Schaff (rev.), *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 383.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, "Die Welterfahrung des Glaubens. Artikel 2 des Niederländischen Glaubensbekenntnisses (Confessio Belgica) gedeutet und bedacht," in *Vernunft des Glaubens. Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Wolfhart Pannenberg*, ed. Jan Rohls and Gunther Wenz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 336-356.

<sup>23</sup> WCF I.6., in: Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 603.

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and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.<sup>24</sup>

Noticeable in both the *Belgic Confession* and the *Westminster Confession* is, that on the one hand they try to describe God with words taken from Scripture, but on the other hand use terms that cannot be directly found in Scripture but originate from the tradition of Christian theology and philosophy. An issue of debate has been, whether or not the common distinction between communicable and incommunicable attributes of God is reflected in these confessional statements.<sup>25</sup>

Although it is not the primary aim of this study to examine the formulations of the doctrine of God in the Reformed confessions, its results may have consequences for the fore-mentioned articles. For the moment it is enough to conclude that the Reformed convictions concerning the doctrine of God find a concise expression in the confessional documents.

### **1.5. Outline**

In section 1.3, the three main parts of this study have already been introduced: Reformed orthodox theology, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School. Varying on the particular necessities of each part, I will start by sketching the historical context, then discuss the relevant methodological issues, and continue with the exposition of the doctrine of God. Each part closes with a summary and some critical discussion.

In the final chapter 22, a summary and evaluation will be given. In addition to answering the overall question – “How are method and content connected in the doctrine of God?” – I provide a sketch for elaborating the Reformed doctrine of God along the lines established by my research.

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<sup>24</sup> WCF II.1., in: Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 606-607.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Klaas Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, vol. 2 (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1949), 158 footnote 1. See further part I, section 5.4.2.



PART I

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

IN REFORMED

ORTHODOXY



## 2. Approaching Reformed Orthodoxy

### 2.1. Introduction and Definitions

The choice of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God has a threefold justification.

First, Reformed Orthodoxy is the period in which the Reformation rediscovery of the gospel was elaborated and systematized into a full-scale body of scientific theology. As such, it forms a substantial source of doctrine for the Reformed theology of today. Many of the questions, definitions, distinctions and arguments that appear in current theology, derive from the works written by the great Reformed theologians of the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries. Even where modern Reformed theology deviates from its historical roots, the orthodox fathers remain respectable partners in dialogue. Especially in the doctrine of God, it appears to be difficult to replace the Reformed orthodox treatment by an adequate alternative. Critical questions have been posed and different emphases have been laid<sup>1</sup>, but the framework of the doctrine of God has remained largely the same.<sup>2</sup>

Second, as it will become clear from the following description and analysis, Reformed orthodox theology shows a high degree of scientific and methodical sophistication. In general, it accepted the philosophy of Aristotle (in one of its modifications) as a guide for scientific thinking. Moreover, Reformed theology participated in explicit methodological reflection, interacting with current philosophical and educational debates. It developed a deliberate position on its own scientific status and procedures. Despite possible variations, Reformed Orthodoxy has a rather recognizable outlook that promises a successful analysis of the connection between method and content in this type of theology.

Third, in contemporary Protestantism much historical research has been done regarding the Reformation beginnings in the 16th century. It is common usage in theological treatises to look at Luther and Calvin for a legitimization of one's own position. In comparison to the interest in the earliest Reformers, less attention has been paid to their successors, the Lutheran and Reformed orthodox theologians. As a result, Reformed Orthodoxy (to restrict to this confessional "party") is a rather open field of historical and dogmatic research. By contributing to the work of exploring this era of theology, I hope to do a service to Reformed theology in the 21st century.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., by Karl Barth (see part II) and by some of the members of the "Utrecht School" (see part III).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 1:29: "The contemporary relevance of Protestant orthodox theology arises from the fact that it remains the basis for normative Protestant theology in the present. (...) Even when major changes in perspective are evident – as in the theology of Emil Brunner, Karl Barth and Otto Weber – the impact of Protestant orthodoxy remains clear both in terms of the overarching structure of theological system and in terms of its basic definitions. (...) We continue to be influenced by the orthodox language of an immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, but nonetheless historically active, God (...)."

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

Some reflections on the historical phenomenon called Reformed Orthodoxy find their proper place here.

The American church-historian Richard Muller provides the following definition of Reformed Orthodoxy:

“Reformed Orthodoxy,” indicates both the confessionally defined teaching of the Reformed churches and the era, ca. 1565-1700 or 1720, during which Reformed theologians made their greatest effort in the definition and defense of that confessional teaching.<sup>3</sup>

In this definition, emphasis lies on two aspects: the confessional and the educational features of Reformed Orthodoxy. In its confessional aspect, Reformed Orthodoxy is bound to the ecumenical creeds and to the Reformed confessions of the 16th and early 17th centuries. The educational activity of the Reformed carries with it a close connection to the scholastic method, which is described by Richard Muller as “the method characteristic of the classroom and of the more detailed systems of theology during the era of Orthodoxy.”<sup>4</sup> According to Muller, it should be realized that the scholastic method of Reformed Orthodoxy is not identical to medieval scholasticism: changes in logic and rhetoric due to the Renaissance and Reformation were incorporated into it. Muller’s remarks indicate a tentative general answer to the question of the connection between method and content, in that he warns us not to accuse the scholastic *method* for the *content* of doctrines that are implied in the Reformed confessional position.

On the disproportion of attention paid to the Reformation and Orthodoxy respectively, Muller comments:

The theology of orthodox or scholastic Protestantism has never been accorded the degree of interest bestowed upon the theology of the great Reformers and has seldom been given the attention it deserves both theologically and historically. Codifiers and perpetuators, like the theologians of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, simply do not receive the adulation given to the inaugurators of the movement. (...) If, however, these codifiers and perpetuators have been neglected in favor of the Reformers themselves, the neglect is clearly unjustified: what the Reformation began in less than half a century, orthodox Protestantism defended, clarified and codified over the course of a century and a half. The Reformation is incomplete without its confessional and doctrinal codification. What is more, Protestantism could hardly have survived if it had not developed, in the era of orthodoxy, a normative and

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<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition*, Inaugural Address Calvin Seminary Chapel September 7, 1995 (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary 1995), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Muller, *Scholasticism*, 26.

## Approaching Reformed Orthodoxy

defensible body of doctrine consisting of a confessional foundation and systematic elaboration.<sup>5</sup>

The truth of this argument is even more evident when we realize that, as is indicated below, the codification and elaboration started already in the first half century officially labeled as the Reformation proper.

Next, some reflection on the chronological division of Reformed Orthodoxy is appropriate. In the quotation above, Muller speaks of Orthodoxy in the era ca. 1565-1700 or 1720. Though it is clear that in these years the flourishing period of Reformed Orthodoxy takes place, it could well be argued to make the margins somewhat larger.<sup>6</sup> Important theologians like Vermigli, Zanchi and Hyperius were already active before 1560.<sup>7</sup> Having received a classical scholastic education, they joined the Reformation in the course of the fourth to sixth decade of the 16th century, and started with the solidification of Reformed doctrine with help of their scholarly tools. It remains true, however, that after the death of John Calvin in 1564, this generation of scholastically trained theologians became increasingly important. At the end of Reformed Orthodoxy, similarly, the limit can be extended by several years. One of the latest codifications of genuine Reformed orthodox theology, the *Commentarius perpetuus in Joh. Marckii compendium theologiae christianae didactico-elencticum* by the Dutch theologian Bernardinus de Moor, dates from 1761-1771. In these years, however, the mainstream of theology went in other directions, under influence of different kinds of philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Within the larger era of Reformed Orthodoxy, three periods can be distinguished: Early Orthodoxy (1565-1635), High Orthodoxy (1635-1700) and Late Orthodoxy (1700-1790).<sup>8</sup> It should be kept in mind that these terms are rather arbitrary: they can be used for the historian's convenience but they do not imply an adequate description of the period at issue. With these precautions in mind, I briefly provide some characteristics of each part of Reformed Orthodoxy.

Early Orthodoxy is the era of initial codification of Reformed theology. From the 1560's onwards, theological education was instituted all over Europe. The first generations of professors needed to find a proper way of teaching and to formulate a clear and convincing account of doctrine. The theologians of this period did much pioneering work in laying down the foundations of theology. Girolamo

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<sup>5</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 1:27.

<sup>6</sup> As Muller does in his *PRRD*, 1:30-32.

<sup>7</sup> Muller, *PRRD* (first edition), 1:40-41, places Vermigli and Hyperius in the era of the Reformation (1517-1565). Though chronologically correct, this does not sufficiently reckon with the scientific continuity on both sides of the year 1565. In the second edition, *PRRD*, 1:49-59, Muller sketches a more gradual development toward doctrinal codification and elaboration, running from writers as early as Philip Melancthon and Martin Bucer to Vermigli, Musculus, Hyperius, and Zanchi.

<sup>8</sup> Muller, *PRRD* (first edition), 1:28-52. In the second edition, *PRRD*, 1:30-32, 60-84, Muller gives a slightly different division. Early orthodoxy then stretches from 1565 till 1640, subdivided into two phases by the Synod of Dordt (1618). Similarly, high orthodoxy is now taken as a nearly 80 years era, extending from 1640 til 1725; at the half of this period, around 1685, a new phase emerged after the death of leading theologians such as Voetius and Turretini. Late orthodoxy, from 1725 onward, now becomes a historically and substantially marginal phenomenon.

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

Zanchi is renowned for his thorough investigations on the doctrines of Trinity, God and creation.<sup>9</sup> Franciscus Junius wrote a treatise on the principles of theology, his *De vera theologia*.<sup>10</sup> Similar treatises were written by other authors. The method and content of theology were developed into well thought-out systems, fit for use as a textbook in the university classroom. Examples are the Leiden *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, the *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* by Amandus Polanus, and the *Theologiae Christianae Compendium* by Johannes Wollebius. An important share of the theologian's powers was demanded in these years by the polemics with Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism. In Lutheran areas, the Reformed had to defend their doctrines of predestination and the Lord's Supper against fierce attacks. Roman Catholic theology, reinforced after the Council of Trent by the growth of the Jesuit Society, tried to demonstrate the theological and philosophical failures of Reformed theology. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine wrote a famous work against the Protestants: *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos* (1586). Several Reformed theologians felt urged to react to Bellarmine's assaults: among others William Whitaker, Guilelmus Amesius, and Amandus Polanus.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas Early Orthodoxy is characterized by initial codification of theology and by polemics against Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology, High Orthodoxy is the era of further elaboration and sophistication of doctrine, of defense of the Reformed position against Remonstrant and Socinian opponents and of a first confrontation with the emerging rationalism of philosophers as Descartes and Spinoza. All questions of doctrine are dealt with in a subtle and detailed manner. Reformed theology has to provide an answer to the highly developed theology and metaphysics of the Jesuit Society. After the grounding of the Jesuit *Collegium* at Salamanca, theologians such as Francesco Suárez exerted an enormous influence on philosophical and theological thought far beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church. Branches of study that are established in this period are church history and ancient philology (especially the study of the Semitic languages). In comparison with the rather simple accounts of doctrine formulated in Early Orthodoxy, High Orthodoxy puts a larger emphasis on the polemical defense of doctrine. Positive and polemical theology are treated as distinct sub-disciplines.

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<sup>9</sup> Respectively *De tribus Elohim*, *De natura Dei seu, de divinis attributis*, and *De operibus Dei intra spatium sex dierum creatis*, published as the volumes 1-3 in his *Omnia opera*. Throughout this study, works by Reformed scholastic authors are quoted by shortened titles in the footnotes, while full titles are given in the bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> See below, section 4.3.

<sup>11</sup> A recent study of Bellarmine and his theology is provided by Thomas Dietrich, *Die Theologie der Kirche bei Robert Bellarmin (1542-1621)*, *Konfessionskundliche und Kontrovers-theologische Studien*, vol. 69 (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1999). Dietrich points out that the scientific quality of literature on Bellarmine is flawed by the discussions around his beatification in 1923 (20). On Whitaker and his polemic with Bellarmine, see F.G.M. Broeyer, *William Whitaker (1548-1595): Leven en werk van een Anglocalvijnistisch theoloog* (PhD thesis Utrecht 1982). Central aspects of the debate between Bellarmine and Amesius are discussed by Eef Dekker, "An Ecumenical Debate between Reformation and Counter-Reformation? Bellarmine and Amesius on *liberum arbitrium*," in Van Asselt and Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 141-154 (see the bibliography).

## *Approaching Reformed Orthodoxy*

Towards the end of the 17th century, High Orthodoxy finds its own codification in the works of Francesco Turretini, Johannes à Marck and Johann Heinrich Heidegger.

In the 17th century, Reformed Orthodoxy had managed to maintain its own discourse, occasionally entering into the discussion with contemporary philosophers, but not fundamentally disturbed by the developments in philosophy. From the end of High Orthodoxy onwards, however, it proved to be impossible to neglect the changes that had taken place in the philosophical and cultural climate. Within one generation, large parts of the Reformed churches changed in outlook and attitude, from a firm orthodox standpoint towards a mildly enlightened approach. In the history of the Swiss Reformed church, this silent revolution is connected with the so-called Swiss Triumvirate, Jean-Alphons Turretini, Samuel Werenfels, and Jean François Osterwald. In a spirit of tolerance and rationality, combined with an emphasis on the simplicity of practical belief, they reduced the specific belief-content of Reformed theology and tried to pacify it with the philosophy of that time. Similar developments can be found in Dutch church history<sup>12</sup> and, in the Lutheran context, in Germany. While it can be discussed whether these semi-Enlightened theologians still belong to the phenomenon called Orthodoxy, it is important to see that the increasing influence of the philosophy of the Enlightenment within the Reformed churches forms the background of Late Orthodoxy. There remained theologians willing to stay true to orthodox Reformed theology and to continue to (re)produce it, but the context had changed. They no longer existed in a friendly climate, but instead had to fight against, in their view, enemies within the body of the church. The appeal made by their predecessors to the Aristotelian philosophy and worldview by now had become implausible or even obsolete. This is not to say that the representatives of Late Orthodoxy were obscurantists or that there would be no support within the churches for their views, but it is a fact that they gradually lost the connection with the academic and cultural mainstream. The *Commentarius perpetuus in Joh. Marckii compendium theologiae christianae didactico-elencticum* (1761-1771) by Bernardinus de Moor appeared in an age in which, according to Herman Bavinck, scholastic theology was of merely historical importance, without vital contact to its own time.<sup>13</sup>

In short, Reformed Orthodoxy is a phenomenon largely extended in time and space, which implies considerable differences in genre, style and emphases. Still it is in a large measure unified by the doctrinal consensus as expressed in the confessional standards and by the educational purpose leading to a largely

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. the proceedings of the leading Dutch theologians in the controversy around the pastor Antonius van der Os in Zwolle, extensively described by R.A. Bosch, *Het conflict rond Antonius van der Os predikant te Zwolle 1748-1755* (Kampen: IJsselakademie, 1988), and the polemical series *Examen van het Ontwerp van Tolerantie* by the Dutch pastors Alexander Comrie and Nicolaas Holtius (Amsterdam: Bijl, 1753-1759); cf. C. Graafland, "Examen van het ontwerp van tolerantie," *Theologia Reformata* 15 (1972): 20-36, "Belijdenis, verkiezing en verbond: Enkele themata uit het Examen van het ontwerp van tolerantie," *Theologia Reformata* 15 (1972): 180-208; J. van den Berg, "De 'Calviniaanse Sociëteit' en het kerkelijk leven in Nederland omstreeks het midden van de achttiende eeuw," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 63 (1983): 205-218.

<sup>13</sup> H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1928), 164.

common method of teaching and thinking. As such, it presents to the fragmented theology of the 21st century a surprising picture of unified science.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will first briefly mention the state of the research on Reformed Orthodoxy (2.2) and indicate the perspective in which I examine Reformed orthodox theology (2.3). Chapter 3 gives an introductory sketch of the historical context in which the Reformed orthodox developed their theology. The main body of this part of my study is formed by the chapters in which the Reformed orthodox view of method is examined (chapter 4) and the content of the doctrine of God is analyzed (chapters 5 through 7). In chapter 8, I will bring together the findings of the preceding analysis and answer the general question of this study: “How are method and *content* connected in the doctrine of God” with respect to the Reformed orthodox account of this doctrine.

## **2.2. The History of Research on Reformed Orthodoxy**

Since the scientific research on Reformed Orthodoxy has a rather long history, including some persistent misunderstandings, it is necessary to provide a short survey of the different approaches to this era of theology, in order to indicate the stand taken by my investigation of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. In addition, the survey of the diverse directions taken in previous research provides some preliminary indication of the problems surrounding the interpretation of the doctrinal positions we encounter in Reformed Orthodoxy.

### **2.2.1. 19th Century Research**

The scientific study of protestant scholasticism started in the 19th century with the Swiss and German theologians A. Schweizer<sup>14</sup>, A. Ebrard, M. Schneckenburger, H. Heppe<sup>15</sup> and W. Gass<sup>16</sup>. It is arguable that the somewhat detached, historical-scientific approach of Reformed orthodoxy was made possible by the effective disappearance of this type of theology from the theological and ecclesiastical main stage. The 19th century interest in what is called “old protestant” theology is partly due to the process of unification between the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany. The development towards ecclesiastical unity raised the question, what were the doctrinal differences between the two churches, especially as they were worked out in the “orthodox” phase of Lutheran and Reformed theology? In the atmosphere of synthesis and tolerance typical of 19th century Protestantism, the pronounced positions and sometimes sharp polemics of the orthodox theologians were disapproved by many and contrasted with the simple biblical faith of the Reformers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der Reformirten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Orell, Fuesli & comp., 1854, 1856).

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Heppe, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt*, (Elberfeld: Friderichs, 1861).

<sup>16</sup> W. Gass, *Geschichte der protestantischen Dogmatik in ihrem Zusammenhange mit der Theologie überhaupt*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1854-1867).

<sup>17</sup> It was already clear to Schweizer himself that dogma-historical research in service of ecclesiastical unity runs the risk of distorting the positions; in *Centraldogmen* 1:VI, he complains that church leaders described the genuinely old Reformed doctrines as Schweizer’s own inventions, apparently in order to get rid of them in the process of unification.

## *Approaching Reformed Orthodoxy*

A specific feature of this early research is the thesis, proposed by Schweizer, of the so-called central dogmas. In Schweizer's view, both Lutheran and Reformed theology were centered on a specific doctrine that had regulative power over other parts of doctrine. The Lutheran "central dogma" is supposed to be "justification by faith alone," and the Reformed central dogma "double predestination."<sup>18</sup> Schweizer sketches Reformed theology as the most persistent continuation of the Augustinian theology of grace. He describes its merits, against other "Lehrsystemen" as follows:

Wahre Union muss aber dankbar die christlichen Interessen aufnehmen, welche von jedem der beiden Typen in durchgreifendster Bethätigung des protestantischen Princip verfochten worden sind; und gewiss ist die absolute Gottesidee, das Umfasstsein aller endlichen Ursachen und Erfolge von der unendlichen, das Gegründetsein namentlich alles Heilslebens auf die ewig in Gott wohnende Gnade, die Aufstellung einer vollständigen Theodicee und das ernste Ringen mit den Schwierigkeiten der religiösen Weltansicht überhaupt eine ehrenwerthe Leistung gegenüber jeder Lehrweise, welche diese Aufgaben entweder nicht einmal recht ins Auge fasst, schnell und oberflächlich sie preisgibt, wie im Socianismus; oder, wie es den späteren Lutheranern begegnet, sie dem Interesse an den kirchlich gegebenen Gnadenmitteln aufopfert; oder diplomatisch vorsichtig, wie man zu Trient vorgezogen, zwischen den schwierigen Problemen sich durchwindet.<sup>19</sup>

A serious problem with Schweizer's view of the Reformed theology of the 16th till 18th centuries is that he stood under the influence of two thinkers of his own time: Schleiermacher and Hegel. His dependence on Schleiermacher becomes clear in that he viewed the "absoluteness" of the Reformed doctrine of God as an equivalent of Schleiermacher's doctrine of "the utter sense of dependence." He is Hegelian in stating that the Reformed doctrine is the highest level in the development of Christian religion. Along with the "central dogma" thesis, a determinist interpretation of the theological heritage intruded the scholar's mind; an interpretation that even was transmitted by J.H. Scholten to Dutch theologians who intended to continue Reformed orthodox thought, such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.<sup>20</sup>

Though it may be true that the picture of the Reformed Orthodoxy was somewhat distorted by the "central dogma" thesis, it should be acknowledged that men like Schweizer and Gass had a profound and broad knowledge of their sources. They did much to keep vivid the history of the older protestant theology. Moreover, especially Schweizer endeavored to defend the true doctrines of the Reformation against the reproaches uttered by Ebrard.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Schweizer, *Centraldogmen* 1:XIII, 1-19.

<sup>19</sup> Schweizer, *Centraldogmen* 1:XII.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Antonie Vos, "Gespleten wortels van SoW. Bavinck en La Saussaye," *Kerk en Theologie* 52 (2002): 213-237.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schweizer, *Centraldogmen* 1:VII-IX, 21, 102, etc.

Gradually the picture of the orthodox period in theology became more nuanced and balanced. Specific issues such as the philosophical background of protestant theology and the *principia* of theology were studied by authors as Paul Althaus<sup>22</sup> and Hans Emil Weber.<sup>23</sup> Although they can still be blamed more or less for being prejudiced, their contribution to the study of Reformed Orthodoxy remains valuable for its disclosure of the sources and its attempt at interpretation.

### **2.2.2. Research in the Barthian Tradition**

In the *Church Dogmatics* by Karl Barth, major parts are devoted to what he calls “old protestant theology.” Drawing primarily on the *Reformierte Dogmatik* by Heinrich Heppe, he quotes them at length and discusses their definitions and distinctions. Although Barth disapproved of the Reformed orthodox view on natural theology and disagreed with their use of Aristotelian philosophy as an instrument for doing theology<sup>24</sup>, he took very seriously their substantial contributions, and, by that, gave impulses for a renewed study of these theologians.

The new interest in Reformed orthodox theology by dialectical theologians is shown by the re-edition of Heppe’s *Dogmatik* by Ernst Bizer in 1935. Karl Barth wrote the foreword to this edition. Barth describes his discovery and surprise when he first read this compilatory textbook:

Ich las, ich studierte, ich überdachte und fand mich belohnt durch die Entdeckung, dass ich mich hier jedenfalls in einer Luft befand, in der der Weg über die Reformatoren zur heiligen Schrift sinnvoller und natürlicher zu gehen war als in der Luft, die mir aus der durch Schleiermacher und Ritschl bestimmten theologischen Literatur nur zu vertraut war. Ich fand eine Dogmatik, die zugleich Gestalt und Substanz hatte, die orientiert war an den zentralen Hinweisen der biblischen Offenbarungszeugnisse (...), eine Dogmatik, die, indem sie die großen Anliegen der Reformation aufnahm und festhielt, zugleich eine würdige Fortsetzung der altkirchlichen Lehrbildung versuchte und doch auch die Kontinuität zu der kirchlichen Wissenschaft des Mittelalters wahren und pflegen wollte.<sup>25</sup>

The editor, Ernst Bizer, explicitly pleads for a neo-orthodoxy in line with the older Reformed Orthodoxy.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1914).

<sup>23</sup> H.E. Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1937-1951).

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see part II, section 10.3.1. In section 15.3.2, we will address the question how Barth’s own position in the doctrine of God relates to Reformed Orthodoxy.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, “Zum Geleit,” in *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt*, by Heinrich Heppe (ed. Ernst Bizer), Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen, Kreis Moers, 1935, III-IV.

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Later on, Bizer published a short treatise on *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*,<sup>26</sup> in which he continues on the comment made by the 19th century conservative theologian F.A.G. Tholuck, that the roots of rationalism must be established as early as possible, namely in the intellectualist thought of Orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> This thesis is elaborated in respect of four early orthodox theologians: Theodore Beza, Zacharias Ursinus, Lambertus Danaeus, and Girolamo Zanchi. From Beza, the *Summa totius Christianismi* with its *Brevis explicatio* is diagnosed as a causal explanation of salvation, formally acknowledging the inscrutable mysteries of faith, but in fact deducing with “unerbitterlicher Logik aus dem Gottesgedanken.” Starting from God’s all-operativeness, Beza cannot, in Bizer’s view, escape from the consequence that God is the “author of sin.” Bizer’s verdict of Beza is sharp:

Niemand wird bestreiten wollen, dass diese Prädestinationslehre einen entscheidenden rationalistischen Zug hat. Der Gottesgedanke, in dem höchste Gerechtigkeit und höchste Barmherzigkeit unausgeglichen und unvermittelt nebeneinander stehen, wird dem Werk Christi wie ein Prinzip übergeordnet.

The rigid application of causal logic leads to a determinist system.

Beza bemüht sich, seine deterministische These gegen physikalischen Determinismus abzugrenzen; die Spontaneität des Willens darf nicht gelehnet werden.

The result of Beza’s theological approach is

ein System, in dem wesentliche theologische Sätze durchaus einsichtig erscheinen und mindestens nachgedacht werden können.<sup>28</sup>

Bizer’s next witness of rationalization in early orthodoxy is Zacharias Ursinus. Indications of this development are:

- the positive view of true philosophy as harmonizing with theology;
- the intellectualist concept of truth and certainty of faith;
- the focus on cognitive capacities in Ursinus’ theory of man as *imago Dei*;
- the logical necessity operating in the doctrines of God’s justice and mercy, further applied to the way of salvation by Christ the Mediator;
- the occurrence of arguments for the existence of God;

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<sup>26</sup> Ernst Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, Theologische Studien, vol. 71 (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963). The “Bibliographie Ernst Bizer” by Christian Harms in *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie der Reformation. Festschrift für Ernst Bizer*, ed. Luise Abrahamowski, J.F. Gerhard Goeters (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 305-313, shows that besides the new edition of Heppe (1935, 1958), the edition of Johannes Wollebius’ *Christianae theologiae compendium* (1935), an article on “Die reformierte Orthodoxy und der Cartesianismus” (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1958) and the essay on *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus* (1963), Bizer was hardly involved in research of Reformed Orthodoxy. Most of his publications concern social-religious themes or studies in the history of (Lutheran) Reformation.

<sup>27</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 6-15.

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- the combination of Scriptural and rational arguments in the exposition of God's attributes and works;
- the rational argumentation against the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's body and its presence in the Lord's Supper.

Again, Bizer's conclusion is negative:

Wie wir sahen, treten in den angeführten Lehren jeweils Argumente der Philosophie oder der Vernunft neben den Schriftbeweis. Nirgends treten Vernunft und Schrift in einen Gegensatz. Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie ist das der Ergänzung und Vervollständigung, wobei immer wieder versichert wird, dass die Philosophie zum Heil nicht ausreicht.<sup>29</sup>

Since the invasion of Rationalism in 18th century theology was closely allied to the success of the natural sciences, Bizer takes his next two examples from the attempts by Danaeus and Zanchi to give a theory of created reality which entered deeply into the biological and chemical sciences. Bizer notices the spiritual interest of seeking God's glory in creation and the biblical foundation of this "theological natural science." On the other hand, Danaeus and Zanchi interact with philosophical concepts such as the fourfold *causa* scheme, and discussions concerning the relation of form and matter and the eternity of matter. Blending philosophical and theological insights, these orthodox theologians manage to point out the beauty and orderliness of the created world, in which each particle – man in particular! – serves its goal within the whole of creation.<sup>30</sup>

After the exposition of Danaeus' and Zanchi's "natural theology," we hear Bizer restate his critical judgment of Early Orthodoxy:

Die obigen Untersuchungen zeigen: In den zentralen Lehren vom Werk Christi, von der Prädestination, von der Rechtfertigung wie in der Naturtheologie ist derselbe Geist am Werk. Man fragt nach der Möglichkeit und nach der Notwendigkeit der Heilstatsachen und weiß sie vernünftig aufzuzeigen. (...) Mit logischer Notwendigkeit folgt das ganze Heilswerk und die ganze Schöpfung aus dem Gottesgedanken, und dieser ist wiederum vernünftig, wie ja auch die Existenz Gottes bewiesen werden kann. Geht die Bibel über die Vernunft hinaus, so kann doch wieder vernünftig bewiesen werden, dass sie das Wort Gottes ist, und so ist ihr Offenbarungsinhalt nicht wider die Vernunft, oder sie berichtet einfach die Faktizität des als notwendig Erschlossenen. (...) Das Verhältnis von Vernunft und Offenbarung ist ja bei unseren Autoren von vornherein so bestimmt worden, dass kein Gegensatz zwischen beiden bestehen darf und die Offenbarung die Vernunft nur noch ergänzen kann. Die in Luthers Theologie geläufigen und wesentlichen Gegensätze sind abgeschliffen.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 16-32.

<sup>30</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 32-50 (Danaeus), 51-60 (Zanchi).

<sup>31</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 60-61.

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More substantially, the description of both God and creatures in terms of *causae* implies the incorporation of God in causal categories. Despite the emphasis on God's transcendence, the first step on the way to Spinoza's *Deus sive natura* is made here, according to Bizer. While acknowledging that rational argumentation is intended to strengthen the theological position, Bizer states that it in fact leads theology into crisis when rationality develops its own, independent criteria and becomes its own norm and standard in opposition to God's revelation.

Diese Krise hat die Verhältnisbestimmung von Vernunft und Offenbarung auf Jahrhunderte zum Zentralproblem der Theologie gemacht. Dass sie in diese Krise hineingeführt hat, ist das Gericht über die Orthodoxie. Die Frage, ob wir diese Krise heute überwunden haben, wird auf die Frage hinauslaufen, ob wir uns zum reinen Glaubenscharakter der Glaubenserkenntnis bekennen wollen oder nicht.<sup>32</sup>

Other representatives of the Barthian tradition in the study of Reformed Orthodoxy are Otto Gründler and Heiner Faulenbach. They both – and almost simultaneously – published a monograph on a Reformed orthodox theologian, respectively Zanchi and Polanus.<sup>33</sup> A brief review of these studies helps to get a sense of the Barthian approach in the research of Reformed Orthodoxy.

The preface of Gründler's essay explicitly refers to Karl Barth's impetus toward a rediscovery of the great Reformers Luther and Calvin, and to the Christocentric interpretation of the doctrine of predestination performed by Barth. From this renewed insight into the theology of the Reformation arises the question of the continuity of later Reformed theology to Calvin's Christocentric teachings in view of the reoccurrence of medieval scholastic patterns of thought.<sup>34</sup> As an introduction to his analysis of Zanchi's doctrine of God, Gründler sketches the development of diverse forms of Aristotelian philosophy in Middle Ages and Renaissance. Following on hypotheses presented by Heinrich Heppe and Jürgen Moltmann, Gründler suggests that the moderate yet definite and direct influence of medieval Thomism in Zanchi and other Reformed theologians accounts for a substantial difference between Calvin and these later Calvinists.<sup>35</sup> As "The Problem" of his study, Gründler states the question of scholastic influence on Zanchi's theology, especially regarding the placement and theological presuppositions of his doctrine of predestination. Zanchi's doctrine of predestination seems to witness a causal framework of thought, rooted in a doctrine of God of which Calvin had freed himself.<sup>36</sup> We need not follow out the course of Gründler's review of Zanchi's

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<sup>32</sup> Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 62-63.

<sup>33</sup> O. Gründler, *Die Gotteslehre Girolamo Zanchis und ihre Bedeutung für seine Lehre von der Prädestination*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche, vol. 20 (Neukirchen 1965). H. Faulenbach, *Die Struktur der Theologie des Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf*, Basler Studien zur historischen und systematischen Theologie, vol. 9 (Zurich: EVZ Verlag 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 9-16.

<sup>36</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 21-24.

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doctrines of God<sup>37</sup> and predestination,<sup>38</sup> but can move to his conclusions that summarize the results of the investigation and do – not surprisingly – confirm the hypothesis hinted at in Gründler's statement of "The Problem." Gründler concludes that the analysis of Zanchi's theology yields

eine weitgehende Übereinstimmung zwischen Zanchi und Thomas von Aquin. Es handelt sich dabei nicht nur um eine Übereinstimmung in Form und Methode; vielmehr sind die Berührungspunkte zwischen beiden Theologen das Ergebnis gemeinsamer ontologischer und epistemologischer Voraussetzungen, denen die Philosophie des Aristoteles in seiner modifizierten thomistischen Form zugrunde liegt.<sup>39</sup>

As foremost specification of these "presuppositions," Gründler mentions "der Kausalbegriff":

Er beherrscht seine Gotteslehre; er bestimmt das Verhältnis zwischen Schöpfer und Geschöpf; er schafft die Möglichkeit zur Erkenntnis Gottes auf dem Weg der Analogie und charakterisiert die Lehre von der Vorsehung und Prädestination.<sup>40</sup>

The contrast between Calvin and Zanchi is stated as follows:

Trotz des doppelten Dekrets steht im Mittelpunkt der Theologie Calvins die Offenbarung Gottes in Christus, die jegliche metaphysische Spekulation verbietet. (...) Außerhalb der Offenbarung Gottes in Christus gibt es keine Gotteserkenntnis. Wenn Zanchi dagegen das Verhältnis zwischen Gott und dem Geschöpf als ein Kausalverhältnis versteht, ist es nicht verwunderlich, dass seine Gottes- und Prädestinationslehre christozen-

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<sup>37</sup> The discussion of the proper doctrine of God, Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 76-94, is preceded by a comparative survey of Zanchi's doctrines of Scripture, revelation, faith, and knowledge of God in relation to John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas (27-75). Whereas Gründler notices a fundamental agreement between Zanchi and Calvin concerning the priority of revelation, Scripture, and faith over reason and philosophy, he states that the more technical elaboration of the relevant doctrines shows far-reaching affinity to Aquinas, notably in the theory of analogical predication of the attributes of God (68-75). The survey of the doctrine of God pays little attention to Zanchi's extended discussion of all divine attributes (especially the "relational" attributes), but focuses on the doctrine of simplicity and on Thomist aspects of Zanchi's exposition that are often related to the issue of simplicity.

<sup>38</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 108-123, preceded by the doctrine of providence (97-107), which goes with predestination under the common heading of "God's decree" or outward act. Behind Zanchi's doctrine of providence, Gründler detects the idea of God's all-operativeness accompanied by a strong interest in the relatively independent operation of "secondary causes" under the government of God as "primary cause." In Zanchi's doctrine of predestination, Gründler notices a similar dominance of causal categories: God is both the *causa efficiens* and the *causa finalis* of the eternal decree and its execution (108-112). Furthermore, Gründler argues that in John Calvin's theology Christ is the foundation of election, while Zanchi grounds election immediately in God's own essence, the election of Christ being subordinately the first effect of the absolute decree of predestination (112-118).

<sup>39</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 125.

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trisches Denken vermissen lässt. In der Theologie Zanchis lässt somit der wiedererwachende Geist der mittelalterlichen Scholastik das reformatorische Denken an einem entscheidenden Punkt zurücktreten und leitet damit den Übergang zur Orthodoxie ein. In dem Maß, in dem unter dem Einfluss der thomistisch-aristotelischen Tradition die christozentrische Ausrichtung der Calvinischen Theologie einer kausalen Metaphysik im Denken seiner Nachfolger Platz machte, hörte die reformierte Theologie auf, Theologie der Offenbarung zu sein.<sup>41</sup>

Heiner Faulenbach's *Die Struktur der Theologie* intends to give a comprehensive survey of Polanus' theology. Faulenbach places Polanus in the context of the fierce controversies between and within the great Protestant confessions: Lutheran and Reformed theology, with the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, and with heterodox movements such as the Socinians and the Arminians; a complex situation that led to the consolidation of the doctrinal positions. With help of logical analysis, Reformed theology came to a systematization of doctrine. According to Faulenbach, the "Scripture principle" and the predestinarian dogma play key roles in the construction of this system. Polanus shared in the development of a distinct Reformed tradition of theology and became a respected teacher and defender of Reformed faith.<sup>42</sup>

Polanus' early writings reveal a keen interest in logic; following Philip Melancthon and Petrus Ramus, Polanus employed logic as an instrument to bring clarity and order in the exposition of theology. In addition, Polanus drew on the methodological insights of Jacob Zabarella. Faulenbach points to the eclectic and compilatory character of Polanus' Aristotelianism:

Polan erweist sich als Kompilator der vorherrschenden philosophischen Richtungen seiner Zeit. Er verbindet Aristoteles und den Neuaristotelismus eines Zabarella, den eklektischen Aristoteliker Melancthon und den Antiaristoteliker Ramus. Aus allen zieht er Nutzen und Anregungen, um ein alles genügendes System der Logik herauszustellen.<sup>43</sup>

Polanus understands logic, connected with wisdom, as a gift of God. As Faulenbach notices,

das ganze logische Verfahren, Wahrheit zu finden, wird in die Theologie übernommen, um dort die Wahrheit zu lehren und zu verteidigen. Der "modus cognoscendi" der Logik erreicht in der Theologie erst seine Vollendung; das Ziel der Logik ist

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<sup>41</sup> Gründler, *Gotteslehre*, 125-126.

<sup>42</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 1-17.

<sup>43</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 18-27 (quotation on page 26). Faulenbach's comments on Polanus' view of logic are based on his *Logicae libri duo* (1590, 1593, 1598) and *Syntagma Logicum Aristotelicum-Ramaeum* (1605, 1611). On the influences of Melancthon, Ramus, and Zabarella on the development of Reformed orthodox methodology, see sections 3.2, 4.1 and 4.2 below.

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transzendent. Die Logik selber transzendiert; sie erstrebt die Erkenntnis Gottes, der ihr Ursprung ist.<sup>44</sup>

Logic and theology stand harmoniously together, and logic yields the proper structure of theology. Moreover, Faulenbach argues that the application of logic in theology must entail a more than formal necessity. If theological statements do not comply with the rules of logical argumentation, Polanus concludes that they contain an error of thought.<sup>45</sup> Faulenbach joins the negative judgment of logic in theology that is common nowadays: to the usage of logic as present in Polanus, the objection can be raised "dass hier Glaubensaussagen in eine logische Form gepresst werden, die jeder Glaubensäußerung fremd ist."<sup>46</sup>

After his foundational discussion of Polanus' logic, Faulenbach gives a survey of the contents of Polanus' mature *Syntagma theologiae Christianae*, larded with critical analyses and comments of which I give a brief anthology:

Die bei Polan sofort feststellbare Konsequenz ist, dass das "credere" zu einem blassen Formalbegriff wird.<sup>47</sup>

Polan will also Schrifttheologe sein, der Vernunft und Logik einsetzt, um die christliche Lehre zu verstehen und auszubreiten; - noch, so kann man im Hinblick auf die weitere Kirchengeschichte sagen, ist die Vernunft eine Funktion des Glaubens und ihm untergeordnet.<sup>48</sup>

Die Schriftlehre Polans ist nicht vom Glaubensverständnis aus entworfen, so müssen wir feststellen; denn die Schriftlehre erscheint als eine selbständige Größe, als ein Prinzip, das ohne Glauben logisch zu fassen ist. Hier zeigt sich ein wichtiger Unterschied der Orthodoxie im Verhältnis zu den Reformatoren.<sup>49</sup>

Am Beispiel der Gotteslehre wollen wir daher eine vorläufige Bewertung dieses Tatbestandes aussprechen, die der Fortgang der Arbeit zu bestätigen hat. Polan will die logische Methodik gewiss nur als ein formales Mittel zur Ausgestaltung der Lehre wie zu ihrer Verteidigung verwenden. Aber jedes Mittel bringt unbemerkt sachliche Konsequenzen mit sich. Die aus der Philosophie entlehnte Logik wird ein Einfallstor für fremdes Gedankengut in die Theologie sein. (...) Die Folge ist, dass über weite Strecken der Eindruck eines metaphysisch gefassten Gottesbegriff herrscht.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 31-38.

<sup>46</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 50.

<sup>48</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 83. Later on, pages 115-128, Faulenbach construes a contrast between Calvin as holding together the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, and Polanus as objectifying Scripture as merely evident in itself (although some modifications are given on pages 128-131).

<sup>50</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 158-159.

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Zwangsläufig gelangt Polan zu einem logischen Parallelismus von Erwählung und Verwerfung, für beide gibt es keine Voraussetzungen auf seiten des Menschen. Diese deterministische Konsequenz gibt Polan offen zu.<sup>51</sup>

Faulenbach's final conclusions stand under the programmatic statement: "Das Werden der reformierten Orthodoxy ist zu verstehen als ein Strukturwandel des theologischen Denkens."<sup>52</sup>

From the above survey, it can be clear on what points this fatal change of structure takes place:

- the doctrine of Scripture;<sup>53</sup>
- the dominance of reason over faith in theology;<sup>54</sup>
- the incorporation of God and world in one ontological system and the introduction of a philosophical conception of God;<sup>55</sup>
- a deterministic doctrine of predestination;<sup>56</sup>
- the shift from "knowledge of Christ" to "truth about God."<sup>57</sup>

Despite his appreciation of Polanus' efforts in the context of his own time and in recognition of Polanus' relative merits, Faulenbach's verdict is devastating:

All dies muss zu einer grundsätzlichen Kritik an Polans theologischem Ansatz führen. Die Gottes- und Dekretenlehre kann nicht Ausgangspunkt der christlichen Lehre sein.<sup>58</sup>

In this "Barthian" current of research, the relationship between Reformed theology and (Aristotelian or scholastic) philosophy is assessed very critically. The main point of criticism raised by these scholars is that the Reformers' emphasis on faith directly depending on revelation was replaced by an attempt to prove the rational consistency and clarity of Reformed doctrine. In the substance of doctrine, these scholars state that the centrality of Christ is replaced by abstract reasoning starting from a conception of God that bears decisively Aristotelian features.

### **2.2.3. Revaluation of the Scholastic Tradition in the Newest Research**

During the last 30 years, authors such as Richard A. Muller (U.S.A.) and A. Vos, W.J. van Asselt c.s. (Utrecht, the Netherlands), advocated a new approach to Reformed Orthodoxy. This group of scholars criticizes the older research for the neglect of the general historical background, the lack of nuanced judgment and for the interference of unbiased dogma-historical interpretation with the demands of one's own theological agenda. In part III, section 17.3, I will give more information

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<sup>51</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 171.

<sup>52</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 273.

<sup>53</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 273-278, 285-289.

<sup>54</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 279-285

<sup>55</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 289-300.

<sup>56</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 300-312.

<sup>57</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 312-319.

<sup>58</sup> Faulenbach, *Struktur*, 322.

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about the development of the “Utrecht School” in the exploration of classic Reformed theology.

Concerning Richard Muller’s development, it is useful to mention the most important publications that mark the stages of his research. In 1976, Muller earned his PhD at Duke University under direction of David C. Steinmetz with a dissertation that was published in 1986 as *Christ and the Decree*.<sup>59</sup> As the first milestone, *Christ and the Decree* already confronts the problem of the “central dogma thesis” dominant in older scholarship, both in its 19th century shape of interpreting the whole Reformed tradition as a predestinarian system, and in the 20th century reprisal in the aftermath of Karl Barth, contrasting the “biblical” and “christocentric” theology of Calvin with the “scholastic,” “metaphysical,” “predestinarian,” and “determinist” doctrine of his successors.<sup>60</sup> In examining the interrelationship of the doctrines of Christ and predestination in authors extending from Calvin, Bullinger, Musculus and Vermigli, via Beza, Ursinus and Zanchi, to Polanus and Perkins, Muller comes to several remarkable conclusions. First, he identifies a strong continuity in the maintenance of the scriptural principle: all doctrine is, both in Calvin and in the early orthodox authors, rooted in biblical exegesis. In addition, the formal principle of Scripture is substantiated by Calvin with

a series of subsidiary motifs or principles derived from the scriptural revelation, which govern the shape and interests of Calvin’s doctrinal system.

In brief,

a trinitarian ground of doctrine serves to unite the predestinarian and christological motifs and to manifest the ultimately soteriological rather than metaphysical interest of Calvin’s predestinarian formulations.<sup>61</sup>

The same interconnection of Christology and predestination within a trinitarian framework is found in Musculus, Vermigli, Beza, Ursinus, Zanchi, Polanus, and Perkins.<sup>62</sup> The notable omission in this series concerns Bullinger, who gave a less systematic account but was largely responsible for the development in Reformed theology of a historico-soteriological elaboration of the doctrine of the covenant.<sup>63</sup> A point of both methodological and doctrinal importance is the conscious (though sometimes tacit) continuation of scholastic definitions, distinctions and arguments. In addition to the formal usage of Aristotelian conceptual language, Muller points

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<sup>59</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree. Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, Studies in Historical Theology, vol. 2 (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 1-9.

<sup>61</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 17-18.

<sup>62</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 51-52, 58-59, 82-84, 100-101, 113-115, 156-158, 161. In most of these cases, Muller points out that the trinitarian involvement in salvation is established by means of (often Scotistic modifications of) the Anselmic argument for the necessity of atonement.

<sup>63</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 40-44. According to Muller, the historical emphasis is also present in Calvin (27). It is accompanied by the focus on the unity of Christ’s person rather than on the divine and human natures constituting him (29-33).

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to the strong adherence to the Augustinian tradition of thought and to the prominence of Scotist views on the primacy of God's will governing issues of revelation, salvation, incarnation and of necessity and contingency.<sup>64</sup> It is true, in

all of the early orthodox systems we have examined, we have seen a certain formalism, a growing tendency to produce well defined, positive doctrine, and a considered use of logical argumentation (not to be confused with rationalism). We encounter, to be sure, a rigidly theocentric causality of salvation, but it is hardly more rigid than the predestinarianism of Calvin and far more open than Calvin to the consideration of problems of secondary causality involving the divine permission. Beside this causal rigidity and the increased systematization of doctrine, we do encounter a propositional rigidity uncharacteristic of earlier Reformed thought. But we must distinguish the form from the content: a propositional rigidity does not of itself indicate a priority of reason over revelation or a departure from the christocentric soteriology of the Reformation.<sup>65</sup>

As his overall conclusion, Muller formulates:

These final considerations taken together with the positive contribution of Reformed orthodoxy to the development of Christology in relation to predestination within a finely tuned soteriological structure are sufficient to refute the contention

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<sup>64</sup> Concerning Calvin, see Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 21, 28, 37. On Vermigli, see pages 61-62, 72-73, where we encounter the mixed antecedents of Vermigli's position: "Like Musculus' more nominalist or Scotist formulations, Vermigli's Thomist usages demonstrate the capacity of Reformed theology even in its early stages for formal development. Not only was Vermigli a Thomist, he was also an infralapsarian who followed the pattern of traditional Augustinianism." Concerning Beza, whose "scholasticism is an essentially conservative phenomenon," (88) Muller points to the "somewhat extended analysis of the will of God" which can be explained by looking "on the one hand to the emphasis on divine sovereignty present in Calvin's thought and perhaps to the massive treatment of the divine will in Musculus' *Loci Communes*, and on the other hand to the generally Scotist and nominalist underpinnings of Reformed theology mediated by Calvin and Musculus. The systematic antecedents of Beza's theology are structures in which the *voluntas Dei* rather than the *bonitas or iustitia Dei* is the prior category" (88-89). A remarkable Scotist influence is also found in Zanchi: "For all his Thomist training, Zanchi elaborates the doctrine of the divine will at length as a major focus of his doctrine of God and, more significantly, does so above the *loci* dealing with the goodness and justice of God, just as he sets the *omnipotentia Dei* above the *sapientia Dei*, indicating, it would seem, a strong voluntaristic as opposed to an intellectualistic, an Augustian [sic], perhaps Scotist rather than a Thomist leaning." (111). Perkins follows the Scotist limitation of the necessity of Christ's death for atonement (144). Polanus states, in a clearly Scotist fashion, that the divine will is the rule of all justice (153). As all these references are found through the Index of *Christ and the Decree*, we should note that the page numbers given there are not accurate but should be increased by 1 up to 6!

<sup>65</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 181-182.

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that early orthodoxy produced an unbalanced system which overemphasized the doctrine of predestination.<sup>66</sup>

As is apparent from a number of articles published in the late seventies and mid-eighties, Muller continued his research in the field of Protestant theology immediately after the Reformation. As a twin product of these endeavors, I mention the *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*<sup>67</sup> published in 1985 and the series *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, of which the first volume on the *Prolegomena* appeared in 1987, the second on *Holy Scripture* in 1993.<sup>68</sup> The latter project was started because Muller sensed the need to elaborate the research of Reformed orthodox theology on the issues of prolegomena, Scripture, and God. The first volume of the *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* gives an expanded critique of the older approach in terms of “central dogma” and “Calvin against Calvinists.”<sup>69</sup> After an introductory survey of Reformed orthodoxy<sup>70</sup> and its development of theological prolegomena,<sup>71</sup> Muller gives a topical discussion of the most important discussions of the term “theology” and its subdivisions, the distinction between natural and supernatural theology, object and *genus* of theology, the use of philosophy in theology, theological method, and the issue of fundamental articles. Reference to these topics will recur in relevant places of chapter 4.

In the meantime, Muller had included Jacob Arminius in his research of Protestant scholasticism, resulting in the 1991 publication of *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*. Muller notices that, given Arminius’ significance in the history of doctrine, it

is all the more surprising (...) that Arminius has received little positive attention from scholars and still awaits the definitive discussion of his system of thought. (...) There is no scholarly monograph on the relation of Arminius’ thought to its intellectual environment – the early orthodox or early scholastic thought of confessional Protestantism.<sup>72</sup>

The generalizing description of Arminius’ thought by both his admirers and his opponents fails to account *both* for his place in the theological tradition and contemporary debates and developments *and* for the fact that his disputed and condemned views of grace and predestination fit into a larger theological system created by a gifted professor of theology.<sup>73</sup> A survey of Arminius’ career as a

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<sup>66</sup> Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 182.

<sup>67</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

<sup>68</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

<sup>69</sup> Muller, *PRRD* (first edition), 1:13-27, 82-97.

<sup>70</sup> Muller, *PRRD* (first edition), 1:28-52.

<sup>71</sup> Muller, *PRRD* (first edition), 1:53-82.

<sup>72</sup> Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 4-13.

student, preacher, and professor reveals multiple influences on his thought from sources varying from Peter Ramus (cf. section 4.1) to Jacopo Zabarella (cf. section 4.2) and the great Jesuit metaphysician Francesco Suárez. From a superficial scan, it becomes clear already that Arminius cannot be labeled a “biblical” and “humane” theologian as opposed to the harsh and logically rigid determinism of Gomarus: Arminius and his opponents are on a par both in their usage of scholastic methods and in their biblical intentions. The difference lies in substantial convictions underlying the system of doctrine.<sup>74</sup> The importance of Arminius is that he provides a *contrast model* within *one* scholastic theological discourse.

On the occasion of his professorial inauguration, Arminius expounded his views on “theology.” Here he chose, more pointedly than most of his Reformed contemporaries, for a “practical” understanding of theology as fundamentally directed toward the goal of worshipping God. This practical thrust of Arminius’ theology is accompanied by a strongly intellectualist understanding of faith. As Muller concludes,

This synthesis of the practical with the intellectualist model, together with the alliance of revelation and reason indicated by Arminius’ emphasis on the foundational character of topics originally present in “legal theology,” God, creation, and providence, provides us with a preliminary indication of the thrust of Arminius’ thought and a basic sense of the direction of his theology (...) Arminius’ system, then, if it follows out the promise of his prolegomena, will propose an interrelationship of the Being of God with the being of the world that is both rational and regularized, an interrelationship of the two levels of being, the eternal and the temporal that is ordained by God and cannot be undone, not by sin and surely not by the work of redemption.<sup>75</sup>

More than several of his Reformed fellow-theologians, Arminius followed the Thomist synthesis of revelation and reason with its key concept of *analogia entis*.<sup>76</sup>

In the proper doctrine of God, a contrast arises between Arminius and his colleagues over the distinction between primary and secondary actuality (*actus primus – actus secundus*) of God’s being. While subscribing to divine simplicity, Arminius distinguishes rather strongly between God’s *essence* in itself apart from outward operations and the divine *life* involved in external activity. A pointed application of this distinction is found in the doctrine of God’s will: stating a difference between God’s antecedent (or absolute) and consequent (or conditional) will, Arminius creates room for human free choice in the course of salvation.<sup>77</sup> Combining this distinction with the Thomist priority of God’s intellect over his will, Arminius adopts in his own terms the famous concept of middle knowledge

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<sup>74</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 14-30.

<sup>75</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 55-79 (quotation on page 79).

<sup>76</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 83-112.

<sup>77</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 116-128. For the distinctions in the divine will, see section 7.3 below. Interestingly, the centrality of God’s “life” in the second group of attributes recurs in later Reformed Orthodoxy without the Arminian associations; see section 7.1 below.

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(*scientia media*) in order to account for free human actions known but not caused by God.<sup>78</sup> Parallel to this structure, Arminius' doctrine of God's will introduces the concepts of antecedent and consequent will (the former consisting of God's universal good intentions regarding mankind, the latter dependent on human assent to the gospel offer), of direct and indirect or permissive will (the latter accounting for the occurrence of sin), and of *concursum* as God's assistance to free human acts.<sup>79</sup>

Consistent with his approach to theology and his view of the doctrine of God, Arminius' statement of creation as fundamental to all God's subsequent work of salvation

evinces (...) a greater trust in nature and in the natural powers of man to discern God in nature than the theology of his Reformed contemporaries. (...) Arminius' theology tends to conjoin nature and grace, to understand creation as manifesting the ultimate purpose of God, and, therefore, to conceive of the divine act of creation as standing prior to all other divine acts *ad extra* and as establishing both the context and the limitations within which those acts must occur. An enormous shift in emphasis has, therefore, taken place, a shift away from the Reformed stress on the distinction or even, at extreme moments, the separation, of nature from grace.<sup>80</sup>

There is an additional implication of Arminius' doctrine of creation, that carries over into his doctrine of providence:

Arminius not only views the self-communicative or self-diffusive character of divine goodness as the basis for identifying creation as a revelation of the ultimate purpose of God, he also views it as a self-limiting act by which God makes the whole of creation necessary, by way of consequence, to the final advancement or glorification of creatures.<sup>81</sup>

By way of conclusion, Muller proposes

to view Arminius not merely as a Protestant scholastic but also as a teacher of theology immersed in the life and thought of his time, aware, as any teacher of theology must be, of issues at the forefront of theology, logic and metaphysics.<sup>82</sup>

The *avant garde* position of Arminius made him susceptible to innovations of the scholastic tradition that led away from the Augustinian priority of grace and revelation towards an early modern affirmation of natural reality and rationality.

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<sup>78</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 143-166. On *scientia media*, see also section 7.2, *Excursus 4*.

<sup>79</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 167-207.

<sup>80</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 233. I would make exception to Muller's statement of "separation of nature from grace" in genuine Reformed theology.

<sup>81</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 233-234. The elaboration of this insight in Arminius' doctrine of providence is discussed in Muller, *Arminius*, 235-268.

<sup>82</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 235.

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In apparent continuity with the tradition and with the eclectic approach common to most Reformed theologians of his age, Arminius came to a full-scale alternative to Reformed theology: his doctrine of predestination rests on a view of the relationship of God and world opposed to virtually all of the tendencies and implications of Reformed theology.<sup>83</sup>

While John Calvin already served as a starting point in *Christ and the Decree*, he received Muller's separate attention in *The Unaccommodated Calvin* from 2000. Against popular pictures of the great Reformer, Muller comes to some remarkable conclusions concerning Calvin's theological approach:

- Calvin set to himself the dual task of expositing the text of Scripture in his commentaries and of explaining the *loci communes* and arguments inherent in Scripture in his *Institutes*;<sup>84</sup>
- Through the exegetical tradition, Calvin was acquainted with scholastic arguments and distinctions; his negative utterances against scholasticism deal with "speculative aberrations," and are mostly polemically directed to the theologians of the Sorbonne rather than to the "scholastic fathers" themselves;<sup>85</sup>
- Calvin's *Institutes* show considerable similarity to scholastic patterns of argument and disputation;<sup>86</sup>
- In his search for a "right order of teaching," Calvin followed Philip Melancthon both in the "topical" method<sup>87</sup> and in the salvation-historical series of loci.<sup>88</sup>

The overall result of Muller's research is that, viewed from Calvin's part, there is no reason to construe a conflict between "Calvin" and "Calvinists": Calvin knew and employed scholastic patterns of arguing, while at the same time drawing on more humanist models and most of all dedicating himself to a thorough understanding of Scripture.

The relation between Calvin and subsequent Reformed theology is further addressed in the collection of essays titled *After Calvin*.<sup>89</sup> As this volume contains no substantially new material, I do not review it in detail here. To the appearance

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<sup>83</sup> Muller, *Arminius*, 269-285 (quotation on page 281).

<sup>84</sup> Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-38, 140-158.

<sup>85</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 39-61.

<sup>86</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 62-78.

<sup>87</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 101-107 (esp. 108-111).

<sup>88</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 118-139. On pages 135-136, Muller concludes that the placement of the doctrine of predestination at the end of soteriology is due to the place it has in the order of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, which served as a model for Melancthon's *Loci communes*.

<sup>89</sup> Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press), 2003.

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

in 2003 of the now completed series *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* I will return a few pages below.

In the newer research, much attention is paid to the roots of Reformed orthodox theology in the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages and to the contemporary scientific and cultural climate. It is emphasized that scholasticism is primarily a method, an instrument of inquiry and teaching, and not a doctrinal system. In this view, the Reformed return to the scholastic method was necessary in its context in order to bring Reformed thought on a scientific, academic level.

A significant feature of this approach is the “double continuity”-thesis that is stated over against the discontinuity-thesis prevailing in older scholarship. The discontinuity-thesis implies that the reapplication of the scholastic method was in fact a breach with the theology of the Reformers. It is held that scholastic thinking was necessarily indebted to Aristotelian metaphysics and was doomed to useless speculation and a fatal rationalization of faith. The double continuity-thesis instead maintains that there is a remaining continuity in the religious and doctrinal concerns with the great Reformers, and also a renewed continuity with the scientific, scholastic theology of the preceding Middle Ages.<sup>90</sup> In this view it was possible and, in fact, necessary to enter in the process of elaboration and consolidation of the Reformed doctrine, from at least three points of view:

- the educational need to provide a continuous stream of ministers for the local churches;
- the scientific need to provide a solid and intellectually satisfying account of doctrine that would enable Reformed theologians to communicate with other scientists;
- the confessional need to establish the Reformed position in debates with several opponents, initially the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans, later on the Remonstrants, Socinians and Rationalists.<sup>91</sup>

Evidence is brought forward, that the continuity with medieval scholastic theology was present from the very beginnings of the Reformation. Martin Luther, known for his forceful rejection of the scholastics, nevertheless used many of their biblical commentaries and systematic reflections. He was accompanied by Philip Melancthon, who reintroduced the Aristotelian philosophy in his educational system. John Calvin in his *Institutes* and other works often uses scholastic distinctions as helpful means of solving problems, although he also offers many places in which he sneers at the scholastics of his own day. Calvin was not a solitary theologian, though he was of outstanding stature. Many of his contemporaries already began actively to apply the scholastic method and

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<sup>90</sup> Willem J. van Asselt et al., *Inleiding tot de gereformeerde scholastiek* (Zoetermeer: Boeken-centrum, 1998), 25-28; Willem J. van Asselt “Studie van de gereformeerde scholastiek: Verleden en toekomst,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 50 (1996): 290-312. An extensive survey of past and recent research of Reformed scholasticism is now available in English in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, “Introduction,” in Van Asselt and Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 11-43.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 1:27-28, 33-37, 40-42, 49-52.

## *Approaching Reformed Orthodoxy*

tradition in defending Reformed doctrine: Petrus Martyr Vermigli, Girolamo Zanchi, and Theodore Beza.

In 2003, Richard Muller published a second edition of his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, in which the two volumes on prolegomena and Scripture are revised, and two new volumes on the divine essence and attributes and on the holy Trinity are added. Especially the treatment of the doctrine of God is, as can be expected, an important companion of my study. Here, Muller focuses the trend of his previous research on the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God.

By way of introductory thesis, he points out that this theology has some features that have thus far escaped scrutiny. The Reformed doctrine of God, to a larger extent than some other areas of doctrine, is strongly traditional and highly exegetical. The doctrine of God is built on “the interpretation of numerous key biblical *loci*,” which provide “a strong element of continuity between medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology.” The Reformed scholastics stand in the same “exegetical tradition of which the Reformers were a part,” both by receiving earlier material and by contributing new insights. Paying constant attention to the exegetical tradition as it functions in the Reformed scholastic doctrine of God, Muller aims to come

in a position to examine both the relationship between the Protestant doctrine of Scripture and the rest of theological system and the impact of the hermeneutical aspects of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture on doctrinal formulation in the era of Protestant orthodoxy in general.<sup>92</sup>

An important qualifier concerning scholastic method is stated by Muller at the outset:

The Protestant theologians of the late sixteenth and of the seventeenth century did not simply return to a form of medieval scholasticism. Scholastic method had itself altered and developed during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries – and, what is more, the Protestant scholastics retained in their theology both an element of the Reformation distrust for philosophical speculation and a high degree of concern for the biblical basis of theology.

When positively adopting the terms “scholastic” and “scholasticism,” the Reformed orthodox identified them

with a particular disputative form and method of theology used in the academic context and distinct from exegesis, catechetics, and even “positive” doctrinal exposition. (...) Accordingly, the philosophical or metaphysical elements of their doctrine of God evidence an eclectic approach to philosophy and an effort, paralleled by the work of the academic philosophers and logicians of the era, to develop a contemporary philosophy in dialogue with theology.

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<sup>92</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:30-31.

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Muller argues that “Christian Aristotelianism” is inadequate as a label for the philosophical position(s) concomitant to Reformed scholastic theology:

the Reformed thinkers of the era of orthodoxy engaged in an ongoing debate and dialogue with the older tradition, its late Renaissance manifestations, with various classical options – notably Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism – that had been revived in the Renaissance, and with the newer forms of scepticism and deism born in the sixteenth century.<sup>93</sup>

As a final general characteristic, Muller points to the relation of theology to piety. Reformed scholastic dogmatics

did not develop in a vacuum and was not formulated simply for the sake of classroom exercises in speculative thinking – it was a churchly dogmatics that reflected the concerns of religion. This characteristic of the orthodox dogmatics is most clearly evidenced in the Dutch and English theology of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

On a larger historiographic scale, Muller points to the positive, integral relationship of Reformed orthodoxy in the Netherlands to the piety of the Nadere Reformatie (...), and the relationship of the central, Reformed trajectory of English Puritanism to continental Reformed theology.<sup>94</sup>

Anticipating important results of his investigation, Muller notes a few points on which the older picture of the Reformed doctrine of God is in need of revision:<sup>95</sup>

- on the issue of arguments for the existence of God, the Reformed scholastics do not simply “revert to a purely Thomistic exposition of the five ways,” but share with the Reformers in moving from a more demonstrative, logical mode of presentation typical of medieval scholasticism to a more rhetorically-couched form suitable to Renaissance and humanism;
- Reformed scholasticism shows significant differences in view of the order and organization of the divine attributes and concerning the nature of the “attribution” itself;
- in the Reformed doctrine of God, we do not find an “unrelated deity.” The Reformed doctrine of eternity, for example, is unjustly described in terms of timelessness: in fact, it also assumes the immediate and intimate relationship of God to temporal beings, because “rather than identifying God as ‘timeless,’ it argues that God encompasses time”;
- the Reformed scholastic discussion of a series of divine “affections” goes along with the basic assumption “that God is utterly free in his willing”; this fundamental freedom of God has
  - epistemological as well as ontological implications, notably the limitation of the powers of reason to deal with questions concerning the nature and work of God;

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<sup>93</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:31.

<sup>94</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:31-32.

<sup>95</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:32-33.

- the Reformed writers  
evidence a significant interrelation, even interplay, between the doctrine of God and the other topics of their theology (...), often to the extent that aspects of the doctrine of God derive from concerns at the heart of other *loci*, notably Christology, soteriology, and eschatology.

After these introductory statements, Muller gives a concise survey of the development of the doctrine of God from the twelfth to the fifteenth century<sup>96</sup> and from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century,<sup>97</sup> and then enters into the topical exposition of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God.<sup>98</sup> I will refer to these parts of his standard work throughout the subsequent investigation.

### **2.3. Perspective**

This study will follow the pattern of research established by Muller, Van Asselt and their fellows. The analysis of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God will be based on a careful examination of the primary sources, with a strong awareness of the fact that Reformed Orthodoxy is no monolith but a contextual phenomenon extending over two centuries. It is important to notice the variety of opinions and to see why the differences arise. For this reason, I will pay attention to the polemical frontiers that affect the shape of Reformed orthodox doctrine.

While acknowledging the fundamental correctness of the newest research, I think it is necessary to move one step beyond Muller's method. Muller emphasizes the need for unbiased consultation of the sources and for a keen awareness of the historical and traditional context of the theology in the era of Reformed Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, he seems to restrict his research to the explicit statements made by the examined theologians. I think we should in addition try to analyze and assess what is going on in their arguments in a more implicit way.

For example: for the analysis of the Reformed orthodox view on the place of reason, it is not sufficient to quote the explicit remarks made on this subject. The explicit statements will reveal that the Reformed did not allow a principal, normative status of reason, but merely an instrumental use of it (especially a use of logic). In my opinion, it would be wrong to take this for granted: we can still analyze the practical use of reason (logic), and ask, in what manner is it used? What are the consequences of certain logical operations? Can the limitations of the "instrumentally used" philosophy at issue be traced?

A second point on which Muller's approach can be modified is the identification of the systematic positions of Reformed orthodox theology. As the overall objective of this study is systematic, we should not take for granted the impression of philosophical eclecticism with an apparent dominance of Thomist influence, but

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<sup>96</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:33-82.

<sup>97</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:83-150.

<sup>98</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:153-589.

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need to dig deeper in the conceptual structures of Reformed orthodox doctrine. In this respect, I am indebted to the group of Utrecht scholars who have provided this sort of analysis (see also part III, sections 17.2 and 17.3 below).

### 3. Reformed Orthodoxy in Its Historical Context

In order to understand the theology of Reformed Orthodoxy, its use of the scholastic method, and its discussion of philosophical and theological options, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the historical context in which the Reformed orthodox worked. In the following sections, I will discuss first, the background in medieval scholasticism (3.1), next, the Reformation and Renaissance in relation to Orthodoxy (3.2), and third, Reformed Orthodoxy in relation to the upcoming philosophy of Enlightenment (3.3). In the description, based on secondary literature, I will concentrate on theology as an activity in the field of learning, and on the philosophical developments in the subsequent eras with a focus on the domains of logic and metaphysics. The brief conclusion (3.4) will draw some lessons from the historical survey to be kept in mind during the subsequent analysis of method and content in Reformed orthodox theology.

#### 3.1. Reformed Orthodoxy and Medieval Scholasticism

The relation of Reformed orthodox theology with its medieval predecessors is not easy to establish. First, it seems to be separated from the tradition by the decades in which the Reformation had to oppose the excesses from late scholastic theology that permeated the Catholic Church. By this opposition, the connection with the preceding theology was consciously or unconsciously obscured, and the positive utilization of the scholastic method had to be carefully justified. Second, the rich variety of high quality theological approaches in the 11th to 14th centuries was transmitted to the 16th century in the form of “schools” (*sectae*) or “ways” (*viae*) of thinking. The Thomists, Scotists, Occamists, and Augustinians all cherished their own patron and tradition, to the effect that mutual communication became difficult.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the Reformed orthodox were free in their choice of authors and views, as they were not bound to a particular monastic order. The resulting eclecticism of Reformed Orthodoxy makes it difficult to identify the overall position: one must be aware of different influences that are not always in complete harmony with each other. Third, the Reformed orthodox continuation of medieval scholasticism is modified by the influences from Renaissance thinking, both as a revision of scholastic positions and as an alternative for scholasticism. By these three factors, the relation between Reformed Orthodoxy and medieval scholasticism is made rather complex.

Nevertheless, we can discern important aspects of continuity. On the formal level, Reformed Orthodoxy inherits from medieval scholasticism the dominant position of Aristotle's philosophy. From this starting point originates the continued reflection on the fields of logic and metaphysics.

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<sup>1</sup> CHLMPH, 97; Ulrich G. Leinsle, *Einführung in die scholastische Theologie*, Uni-Taschenbücher 1865 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 274-278. On the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* in the 15th and 16th centuries, see H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation: Vom Wegestreit zum Glaubenskampf*, 3rd, rev. ed. (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1989).

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In the High Middle Ages, the study of theology was one of the branches of academic learning. Together with law and medicine, theology belonged to the “higher” faculties which followed the basic training of the arts faculty. The positioning of theology in the university had major consequences for its status and practice. While in earlier centuries theology was taught primarily in ecclesial and monastic schools, from the 13th century onwards it developed more into a scientific discipline.<sup>2</sup> This had several important effects. First, the educational curriculum was so structured, that before entering the study of theology one had to complete the arts faculty. All theological freshmen were fully trained masters of arts. The arts faculty provided a comprehensive training in the main fields of what was then called “philosophy”: the “trivial” arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the “quadrivial” arts of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music. The courses were largely based on the works of Aristotle, complemented with other classical authors. It commonly took eight years to complete the arts faculty; after obtaining their degree, the new masters were supposed to lecture for two years before starting their study in the higher faculties. The result of this practice was that all academicians had received the same basic education, knew the same conceptual language, and used the same scientific method. The second, related, effect was that the theologians at the university were constantly confronted with students of other faculties. This enabled cooperation and exchange of opinions. Although the exchange of opinions often took the form of dispute and conflict, at least the different faculties did not live totally apart. By their preparatory training, theologians were able to participate in intellectual debates outside the proper boundaries of theology: several of them wrote philosophical treatises, were engaged in mathematical investigations and physical experiments, or were fascinated by astronomy and alchemy. In short, theology was a science among the sciences, although it was considered at least by many theologians as the queen of all sciences. A third effect concerns the scientific outlook of theology itself. Of course, there had always been clarification and justification in the development of doctrine and exegesis. But the scientific status of theology as an academic discipline stimulated a systematic reflection on and practice of strict and precise argumentation. The logical instruments provided by Aristotle’s *Organon* were applied in building theological arguments and in solving theological questions. By syllogisms and distinctions, an enormous range of detailed questions was examined and answered.

The word “question” brings us to the heart of medieval scholasticism.<sup>3</sup> Generally spoken, the educational practice of the Middle Ages consisted of four components: *lectio - meditatio - quaestio - disputatio*.<sup>4</sup> In the *lectio*, the master delivered a lecture based on an authoritative text. In addition, the student had time to *meditate* upon the offered material. Third, the *quaestio* part gave room to questions about the matter under consideration, which had to be answered decisively by the master. A fourth form of education was the disputation, in which

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<sup>2</sup> Leinsle, *Einführung*, 111.

<sup>3</sup> L.M. de Rijk, *Middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte: Traditie en vernieuwing*, 2nd ed. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 124-127.

<sup>4</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 56-58; De Rijk, *Middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte*, 127-131.

the student had to defend a set of theses against one or more opponents. These disputations were organized at regular intervals and were executed according to standard procedures and rules. Especially the *quaestio* developed into a well-defined technique governed by strict rules of argumentation and grew into a separate literary genre. The origins of this technique lay in the study of canon law, but it was introduced into (systematic) theology by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) in his work *Sic et Non*. Initially, the *quaestio* was intended to solve apparent contradictions within the authoritative tradition of the Church. So, Abelard gathered quotations from the Church Fathers concerning all kinds of theological questions, and tried to harmonize them when they contradicted each other.<sup>5</sup> This feature is still visible in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, in which he introduces the treatment of each question by the formula "It seems that ...," followed by a quotation from Scripture or the Fathers, and then opposes it to other quotations from the same sources introduced by "But on the contrary ...". Although this "polemical" aspect of the *quaestio* is never completely absent from the history of scholasticism, the *quaestio* can also serve as a more "neutral" starting point for a didactical discussion of a topic. In the solution of questions, logical techniques play an important role. Logic is used to provide a clear definition of the subjects and terms under discussion (the Categories), to analyze arguments by means of syllogisms, and to distinguish between different aspects or levels of speaking about a subject. Definitions, syllogisms, and distinctions form the core of scholastic argumentation. In order to ensure a complete treatment of the question, the magister finishes by refuting objections against his solution. In Aquinas' *Summa*, the objections mostly stem from the original conflicting positions mentioned at the beginning of the question.

The *quaestio* is the center of scholasticism as a scientific method. It is open to many diverse applications and allows for all different answers. By its standard structure, it guarantees a thorough examination and discussion of the subject matter. The *quaestio* plays an important role in the other academic genres: lectures and disputations.

A second line of continuity is the role of the philosophy of Aristotle. Although it may sound strange to 21st century ears, the whole era of 1200-1700 was philosophically dominated by "the Philosopher" from Stagire. Even before 1200 his influence was considerable, but in the Early Middle Ages he was accompanied by at least Plato (or Platonists) and Augustine. In this earlier phase, part of Aristotle's works was transmitted into Latin by the efforts of, among others, Boethius.<sup>6</sup> Boethius' transmission of Aristotelian philosophy within an Augustinian-Platonist framework provided the latent tensions that developed into a vivid debate between Platonism and Aristotelianism in the 12th century.<sup>7</sup> The selection known in the early Middle Ages comprised the *Prior Analytics* and a few works on physics. In addition, several pseudepigraphs were received as Aristotle's works, some of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Abelard's recent biography: M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), esp. 6-7, 34-40, 75-88, 95-118.

<sup>6</sup> *CHLGEMPh*, 538-555

<sup>7</sup> *CHLMPh*, 445.

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which were actually Platonic rather than Aristotelian. On the basis of these works, a rudimentary form of logic was developed and gradually refined. Towards the end of the 12th century, Aristotle's works gained new interest by the increased contact with the Eastern and Arabic world. Greek-speaking scholars from the Eastern Empire and Muslim philosophers in Spain and North Africa reintroduced the complete *corpus aristotelicum* to the Latin Christianity. At different places throughout Europe, individuals translated Aristotle's writings into Latin, either from the Greek or with help of Arabic translations and commentaries. At the middle of the 13th century, the translation project was almost completed, and the scientific study of the whole Aristotle could start.<sup>8</sup> The philosophy of Aristotle in all its ramifications provided a stimulating and generally convincing piece of thought. Almost all of the newly founded universities built their arts curricula on Aristotle's writings. Although this does not imply that all of Aristotle's views were approved of, it still gave Aristotle an enormous influence on the education of all academicians. Since almost all lectures were given on the basis of Aristotle's works, he determined the framework of scientific discourse, the questions, the concepts, and the regulative ideas.

The introduction of Aristotle as the authority in scientific matters did not take place without debate. Especially the relation to church and theology was critical. There was a considerable difference between Aristotle's rational, analytical, logical approach and the preceding ecclesial and monastic theology characterized by scriptural binding and spirituality.<sup>9</sup> During the 13th century, the church attempted to stop the flow of Aristotelianism by several official verdicts of his works. Already in the early 13th century, the examination of Aristotle was forbidden for theologians in some places, for example in 1210 at Paris. These attempts proved to be less than successful. From the beginning, theologians were fascinated by Aristotle and quoted him in their theological treatises. They also participated in the production of a mass of commentaries on Aristotle's works.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, afterwards the normative theologian of the Roman Catholic Church, actively stimulated his friend William of Moerbeke to translate Aristotle's writings in order to comment on them and to use them for his own thinking. Thomas was impressed by Aristotle's philosophy: for example, he thought Aristotle's system of astronomy to be "necessarily true."<sup>11</sup> Over against starting experimental astronomy in his own day, Thomas placed the rationally founded views of Aristotle above the empirical findings. Thomas' positive judgment of Aristotle and his rationality became one of the objects of an official condemnation at Paris in 1277.<sup>12</sup> The condemnation was intended to end a conflict of decades between natural philosophers from the arts faculty and exponents of the traditional theology. The so-called Latin Averroists or materialist Aristotelians accepted Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of matter, and taught a determinist system of reality. In the Parisian

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<sup>8</sup> CHLMPH, 45-61; F. van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1955).

<sup>9</sup> Leinsle, *Einführung*, 103-110.

<sup>10</sup> CHLMPH, 72-74.

<sup>11</sup> CHLMPH, 49, 62-64, 94.

<sup>12</sup> HDThG I, 683-684; CHLMPH, 527, 623; Leinsle, *Einführung*, 135-136.

arts faculty, David of Dinant (early 13th century), Siger of Brabant (second half 13th century) and a few others caused much unrest with these and similar views.<sup>13</sup> The eternity of matter was considered to contradict the biblical creation narrative (*creatio ex nihilo*: before the creation, matter did not exist); the determinist account of reality was criticized from the doctrine of divine freedom and omnipotence. To be sure, Thomas Aquinas was not an Averroist in the extreme sense. But on the question of the eternity of matter, he held the thesis that it could not be rationally refuted, although it was to be rejected on the basis of supernatural revelation. The rejection of determinism proved to be important for the development of a distinctively Christian philosophy. Intended to safeguard God's freedom towards his creation, it also stimulated the elaboration of the idea of contingency and the exploration of contingent, created reality. From Aristotle's works, there had always been acknowledged a class of contingent events. When the determinist interpretation of Aristotle was rejected, it gave way to Duns Scotus' theory of synchronic contingency (see further section 7.2. on contingency in relation to God's foreknowledge). Scotus severed the question of logical possibility from the actual state of affairs, and moved towards the "possible world" theory that was later fully shaped by Leibniz.<sup>14</sup>

A specific problem of medieval Aristotelianism centered on the theory of knowledge. Here, the 13th century Christian thinkers had to come to terms with a problematic from the Arabic reception of Aristotle: the question whether the intellect is passive or active, and, if active, personal or transpersonal. The main discussion in Arabic Aristotelianism is between Avicenna and Averroes. Both thinkers started with the Platonic universal Intelligence (realm of the Ideas), but their sketches of the transition from the highest Intelligence to actual, individual human cognition differed fundamentally. Avicenna applied only the passive intellect (the capacity of knowing) to the human mind. The active intellect (actual cognitive content) is, in Avicenna's view, a universal, transpersonal treasure, from which portions of knowledge are transmitted to men. Avicenna thus taught a dualism between the active (or actual) knowledge which is superhuman, and the passive capacity of receiving knowledge which applies to the individual. Averroes, on the other hand, held that both the passive and the active intellect are universal and superhuman (monopsychism). The transition of intelligibility and knowledge to the individual mind takes place by means of empirical sensation that produces phantasmatic images in the mind.<sup>15</sup>

In comparison to the traditional Augustinian theory of knowledge, which viewed knowledge as a gift of illumination given by divine grace, Aristotle's writings suggest a more active role of the human intellect in finding and shaping

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<sup>13</sup> *HDTG I*, 615, 683-684; Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle*, 67-75, 205-233.

<sup>14</sup> *CHLMPH*, 353-355, 367-369. In part III, especially sections 17.2.2 and 17.3, we will extensively deal with the continuation of Scotistic philosophy by members of the Utrecht School. In the present context, it suffices to note that the proclamation of Scotus as a revolutionary thinker is supported by broader recent scholarship on medieval philosophy. A comprehensive discussion of Duns' contributions to philosophy is given by Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> *CHLMPH*, 595-596; Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle*, 18-20.

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knowledge. In addition, the Augustinian-Platonic view presupposed an immortal soul endowed with innate knowledge, while Aristotelians denied the innateness of knowledge, and some of them even the immortality of the soul.<sup>16</sup> As an example of Aristotelian empiricist influence on the theory of knowledge, we see Thomas Aquinas describe truth (the normative concept of knowledge) as the adequation of the thing and the intellect (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*). Starting with empirical sensation, knowledge is formed, according to Thomas, by intellectual abstraction into a general concept of the object.<sup>17</sup> While in Aquinas' theory of knowledge the emphasis lies on the universal and abstract aspects, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham give a central role in knowledge to intuition: knowledge is primarily of individuals.<sup>18</sup>

The official condemnations of Aristotle's philosophy could not prevent its permanent dominance in both philosophy and theology. Of course, in theology the Holy Scripture, the doctrine of the Church, and the tradition remained the decisive sources, but in thinking through the articles of faith the conceptual instruments provided by Aristotle exerted a profound influence. It should be realized that the scholastic theologians utilized a modified Aristotelianism. Not only were explicit contradictions against the Christian faith eliminated, also the whole system of philosophy was elaborated and refined by the medieval thinkers. The ongoing process of interpretation, assimilation, and emancipation had the effect that one could speak of Aristotelianism in only a rough sense. The 16th century showed at least five different types of Aristotelianism: a Thomistic, Scotistic, Melanchthonian, Gallican, and Paduan variant.<sup>19</sup> The impact of this insight on the study of Reformed Orthodoxy is, that one should reckon with different forms of Aristotelian thinking, often dependent on the institution in which a theologian was trained. In spite of these differences, the fact remains that all scientific enterprise in the 13th through 17th century took place within a more or less Aristotelian framework. This provided a common worldview and a common conceptual language, to the effect that even radically different opinions could be mutually understood and discussed in an international enterprise of unified science.

On the basis of the works of Aristotle, medieval scholastic philosophy developed mainly in the fields of logic and metaphysics. The study of logic continued throughout the Middle Ages and resulted in substantial and original contributions to this science. The most significant development in metaphysics is found from the 13th century onwards, when great philosophers-theologians like Aquinas and Duns Scotus gave a systematic treatment of metaphysics from a Christian perspective.

From the beginning of the Middle Ages, logic was considered a basic discipline of philosophy. The early medieval development of logic is based on antique materials, especially the *Isagoge* of Porphyry and the *Prior Analytics* of Aristotle,

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<sup>16</sup> This becomes entirely clear in Pomponazzi's rejection of the immortality of the soul, in favour of its individuality, cf. *CHRPh*, 242.

<sup>17</sup> *CHLMPH*, 452-454.

<sup>18</sup> *CHLMPH*, 470, 609.

<sup>19</sup> *CHLMPH*, 97.

translated by Boethius. The center of these writings is formed by the theory of the Categories: logic is primarily understood as correct classification. The first phase of medieval logic appears to be rather naive: logicians primarily searched for the referents of words. Logic was closely connected to semantics, and, as the conflict about the universals shows, to metaphysics.<sup>20</sup> Gradually, people became aware of the distinction between things and propositions. In many 12th century textbooks of logic one finds extensive theories of signification (what does a term signify on the level of words?) and supposition (what does a term stand for, or refer to?). But even then the distinction between terms and things remained somewhat confused.<sup>21</sup> The discovery and translation of more logical works by Aristotle (the *Posterior Analytics*) gave impulses to a closer examination of propositions and complex argumentations. The newer logic (*logica moderna*) focused on the so-called syncategorematic terms (logical modifiers like “all,” “no,” “similar”), whereas the old logic (*logica vetus*) was primarily interested in the categories.<sup>22</sup> The theory of inference was developed in order to judge the validity of arguments and to identify fallacies. An interesting phenomenon, in which medieval logic foreshadows Renaissance developments, is the insight that logic can be seen as a form of rhetoric. When the *Topica* of Aristotle were rediscovered, the medieval logicians realized that the “topoi” are the basic form of argumentation; the strict syllogism is only a sub-class.<sup>23</sup> Another important contribution is the elaboration of modal logic. Again, Aristotle’s writings contained some passages about modality, but in the High Middle Ages a more complete theory of modality was developed. Fundamental for any modal logic is the opposition square of necessity – contingency – possibility – impossibility. The modal qualifiers could be defined in different ways that often reflected theological views on divine knowledge, will, and power. Here, the medieval Christian philosophers gradually modified the dominant necessitarianism in Aristotle’s philosophy. A significant refinement of the modal language is the distinction between the (im)possibility of a proposition in the divided or in the compounded sense (*in sensu diviso – composito*). For example: the proposition “I sit and I walk” is impossible in the compounded sense (one cannot sit and walk at the same moment) but possible in the divided sense (“I sit” and “I walk” are both possible). In addition, the distinction between reality (things) and language (propositions) is emphasized: the (logical) necessity of a proposition or the necessity of a argumentative connection of propositions does not imply the (ontological) necessity of the state of affairs to which the propositions refer. The necessity *de dicto* does not entail a necessity *de re*.<sup>24</sup>

Medieval logic developed into a highly subtle science, and is the predecessor of modern formal logic that revived at the turn of the 20th century with the work of

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<sup>20</sup> *CHLMP*, 82-87, 118-121, 130.

<sup>21</sup> *CHLMP*, 135, 162, 173.

<sup>22</sup> *CHLMP*, 214.

<sup>23</sup> *CHLMP*, 290.

<sup>24</sup> *CHLMP*, 341-349. Cf. the early contribution to the study of medieval logic: Ph. Boehner, *Medieval Logic: An Outline of its Development from 1250 to c.1400* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952). For a recent exposition of the Christian development of Aristotelian logic, see Vos, *Philosophy*, 151-263.

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Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. All different forms of the syllogism were tested, fallacies were intensively studied, and a theory of consequences was developed to describe the non-syllogistic connections between propositions.<sup>25</sup>

The continuity of Reformed Orthodoxy with the medieval scholastic tradition of logic is not unbroken. In the same period that the Reformation took place, the traditional logic broke down and was in need of replacement by something else. This decline of logic was caused partly by oversimplification in 16th century textbooks,<sup>26</sup> partly by deliberate humanist attacks (cf. section 4.1. on Ramism). The subsequent decades between 1530 and 1570 saw both a revitalization of the traditional logic (Paduan Aristotelianism, see section 4.2.) and the development of more or less humanist modifications (Melanchthon, Ramus).<sup>27</sup> Though without all subtleties of late medieval logic, the Reformed orthodox were thoroughly trained in the basic components of logic, and several of them had developed a fine sensitivity for valid and invalid argumentation. Especially when opposite views had to be refuted, they utilized the syllogistic form and the theory of fallacies. Just as in the Middle Ages, some theologians participated actively in the study of logic (Polanus, Keckermann).

In the other important domain of philosophy, metaphysics, Christian faith bore considerable consequences for the scholastic thinkers. During the Early Middle Ages, the Platonic influence was strong, due to the adherence of many Church Fathers to some form of Platonism.<sup>28</sup> In the West, especially Augustine's views were exceedingly influential as he was the most regarded and most quoted authority from the Early Church.<sup>29</sup> Besides, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius introduced Platonic elements in Christian thinking.<sup>30</sup> Although the more consequent neo-Platonism by Johannes Scotus Eriugena<sup>31</sup> and Meister Eckhart<sup>32</sup> was rejected by the Church, basic Platonic ideas such as the hierarchy of Being and the existence of eternal Ideas largely determined the metaphysical views of many theologians. From Augustine's reception of Platonism, Christian theology inherited the interpretation of intellectual illumination as a gracious gift by God, and the correction of the abstract idealism by a salvation-historical approach.

The massive introduction of Aristotelianism around 1200 changed the study of metaphysics significantly. Aristotle's conceptual apparatus introduced new insights and problems. For example, Aristotle had criticized the doctrine of Ideas

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<sup>25</sup> Parallel to the tendencies in logic, Leinsle, *Einführung*, 202, notes a "linguistic turn" in theology after Duns Scotus.

<sup>26</sup> *CHLMPH*, 787-788; Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue; From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 53-91.

<sup>27</sup> *CHLMPH*, 789-791.

<sup>28</sup> A.H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), attempts to correct common generalizations concerning "Christian Platonism" by showing the varieties of Platonist Christian thought.

<sup>29</sup> *CHLGEMPH*, 341-419; *HDThG* 1, 406-463.

<sup>30</sup> *CHLGEMPH*, 457-472.

<sup>31</sup> *HDThG* I, 534-542.

<sup>32</sup> Leinsle, *Einführung*, 207.

in Plato's philosophy, and had replaced it by a duality of matter and form. Other aspects of his metaphysics are its alliance with physics, apparent in the emphasis on questions of change (act-potency), and the distinction between the essence and the existence of things. As a whole, Aristotle's philosophy led the attention more towards the concrete, individual existence of entities than towards the "high," abstract, rational foundations. The scholastic reception of Aristotle's metaphysics is not uniform, but varied and often quite creative. Theologians, in particular, thoroughly discussed the metaphysical problems and developed distinctly Christian answers. Among the most difficult problems of Western philosophy in general, and of Christian Aristotelianism in particular, is the relation between essence and existence. Platonism clearly gave priority to the essence of things, viewed as the eternal Ideas. In Aristotelianism, the distinction between essence and existence, as between *genus*, *species*, and *individuum*, is maintained, but the relation is more nuanced. Basic to Aristotle's philosophy is the idea of *hulemorphism*: everything consists of matter and form. "Matter" is considered to provide the individuality of things (it is the *principium individuationis*), whereas the "form" is reminiscent of the Platonic Ideas. Thomas Aquinas held a priority of the essence, and argued that concrete, individual existence adds nothing to the essence of a thing.<sup>33</sup> Only in the case of God, do existence and essence coincide. Via the strong emphasis on individuality (*haecceitas*) in the philosophy of Duns Scotus, his pupil William of Ockham comes to the statement that for all beings, essence and existence are identical.<sup>34</sup> The different positions have become famous by formulas that indicate the kind of difference between essence and existence: for Thomas Aquinas, (universal) essence and (individual) existence are really distinct (*distinctio realis*; they are different things); according to Duns Scotus, essence and existence are not distinct really, but formally (*distinctio formalis*; not the things themselves, but the definitions differ); Ockham states that there is only a rational distinction (*distinctio rationis*; we have different ways to describe the same entity).<sup>35</sup>

A significant problem concerning the relation of metaphysics and theology is the question of the object of metaphysics. Roughly speaking, three options can be discerned: a. metaphysics as the science of all being (*ens commune*, including a philosophical doctrine of God, often considered a separate part of metaphysics); b. metaphysics as the science of the Highest Being (metaphysics here is a philosophical theology, the *prima philosophia*); c. metaphysics as the science of being as such (*ens qua ens*: the aspect of being as abstracted from individual entities). The position of the medieval Christian philosophers on this question is not always clearly exclusive. Both Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus refuse to take God as the only object of metaphysics (this would equal metaphysics and theology), and Duns Scotus clearly defines metaphysics as the science of being as such.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For this reason, Aquinas rejected the "ontological" argument for the existence of God, developed by Anselm of Canterbury; *CHLMPH*, 402.

<sup>34</sup> *CHLMPH*, 402.

<sup>35</sup> *CHLMPH*, 398-402.

<sup>36</sup> *CHLMPH*, 385-392. On Duns Scotus' metaphysics, see L. Honnefelder, *Ens in quantum ens: Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1989); Vos, *Philosophy*, 264-301.

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Reformed orthodox theologians generally had a less vivid interest in metaphysics than their medieval predecessors.<sup>37</sup> In the newly founded Protestant academies and universities, metaphysics was normally taught by professional philosophers.<sup>38</sup> These remained within Aristotelian boundaries, but dealt also with newer developments such as Spanish Jesuit metaphysical thinking (Molina, Suarez) and the Cartesian and Spinozan systems.<sup>39</sup> Theologians utilized metaphysics as an auxiliary discipline from which they borrowed important concepts and definitions.

In addition to this general exploration of medieval philosophy, we turn to Richard Muller's volume on the Reformed scholastic doctrine of God, where he provides an insightful "pre-history" of this doctrine throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>40</sup> A brief review of his results helps to focus our attention from the wider field of medieval scholastic thought to the proper subject of the subsequent analysis.

Muller states that the theology of the Church Fathers, notably Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, contained already most elements of thought and formulation concerning the doctrine of God. Anselm of Canterbury, however, performed the first systematic presentation of this doctrine in his foundational treatises *Monologion* and *Proslogion*. Anselm advocates a philosophical realism.<sup>41</sup> Subsequent decades saw a fierce debate over the issue of realism vs. nominalism concerning the doctrines of God and Trinity: Gilbert de la Porrée reportedly advocated a real distinction between essence and existence, between God and his attributes and between the Godhead and each of the divine persons. The condemnation of Gilbert's teachings was a significant step toward a doctrine of divine simplicity. Early scholasticism of the 11th and 12th centuries showed a considerable Platonizing tendency, for example in Hugh of St. Victor. In Peter Lombard's *Sentences* textbook, a more modest, Scriptural and patristic approach is chosen.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Around the turn from the 16th to the 17th century, we find some exceptions: Bartholomaeus Keckermann, who as a rector of the Danzig gymnasium published a *Scientiae Metaphysicae brevissima synopsis et compendium*, in *Opera omnia*, 2013-2040; and Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Metaphysica tribus libris tractate, per praecepta methodical, theoremata selecta, et commentariola dilucida* (Herborn, 1613).

<sup>38</sup> For example the German metaphysician Clemens Timpler, who worked in Steinfurt; see Joseph S. Freedman, "Aristotelianism and Humanism in the Late Reformation German Philosophy: The Case of Clemens Timpler," in *The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe. Essays in Honor of Lewis W. Spitz*, ed. by Manfred P. Fleischer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 213-232.

<sup>39</sup> Aza Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis bei Suarez und Descartes im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen reformierten Theologie und Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (PhD thesis Leiden, 1999), passim, mentions Dutch metaphysicians who worked in the Aristotelian tradition (Gisbertus Voetius' sons Paul and David Voet, Senguerd, De Vries, Schoock) while receiving either Suarezian (Jacchaeus, Burgersdijck) or Cartesian (Heereboord, Van Velthuyzen, Clauberg) influences.

<sup>40</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:33-82.

<sup>41</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:34-35. Muller points out that Anselm's treatises should not only be read on their contribution to the "proofs of the existence of Gods," but primarily as coherent expositions of God's essence and attributes.

<sup>42</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:35-38.

An important point for our own analysis of Reformed orthodox doctrine is the development of the concept of divine simplicity, which is, according to Muller, “among the normative assumptions of theology.” Muller shows that, apart from some extremely “negative” or “apophatic” interpretations of simplicity, it normally does *not* exclude *all* distinctions in the Godhead. Muller describes the classic scholastic position as “allowing only those distinctions in the Godhead that do not disrupt the understanding of the ultimacy and unity of the One God.” Thus, it is excluded that attributes such as justice or love have a priority over God’s own essence (this warrants God’s ultimacy) and that the three Persons of the Trinity are conceived as parts of or as really differing from the one divine essence (this maintains God’s unity). Within this fundamental position, different argumentative approaches and emphases are possible and do occur during the Middle Ages.<sup>43</sup>

High scholasticism of the 13th and 14th centuries provides a further elaboration and clarification of the fundamental concepts. Despite its reputation as “speculative,” scholastic theology of this period shows a vivid awareness of God’s utter incomprehensibility. The theories concerning the *viae* through which God can be known and the construction of “proofs” of God’s existence remain bound by God’s revelation in Scripture: reason works on the ground of faith. Discussions concerning the relation between essence and existence in God vigorously participate in the metaphysical debates of the era, but foundational to the analysis of the concept of “being” is the biblical description of God as “the One Who is” (Ex. 3,14). Typical of high scholasticism is the discussion of the nature and ground of predication of concepts (i.e., attributes) to God: is predication univocal, equivocal or analogical; and is the ascription of different concepts to God’s one essence merely due to our cognitive limitations, or is there a real ground in God himself? Again, we see that the concept of simplicity is applied in a qualified way. Other interesting points are the (hesitant) introduction of the concept of “infinity” into the doctrine of God, and the development of insights in necessity and freedom concerning God and the world.<sup>44</sup>

In regard to 14th and 15th century thought, Muller notices that much scholarship taking the “synthesis” of faith and reason offered by Thomas Aquinas as the standard, tends to view the critical thinkers of the line Scotus – Ockham – Biel as the “inaugurators of a ‘decline’, indeed, of a decadence and ‘collapse’ of scholastic thought.” This neglects both the limited significance of Aquinas (outside his own order of Dominicans) and the constructive efforts made by Scotus, Durandus of Sancto Porciano and others. Moreover, the dynamics of late medieval thought cannot be reduced to “container words” like *via antiqua – moderna*, or nominalism. To be sure, some common characteristics can be discerned: an increasing tendency to separate faith and reason, theology and metaphysics, and a radicalizing of the insight in the contingency of the world (centering around the famous distinction of God’s absolute and ordained power).<sup>45</sup> Regarding divine simplicity, Duns Scotus advocated a third way between a merely “rational”

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<sup>43</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:38-44.

<sup>44</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:46-61.

<sup>45</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:61-70.

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distinction between God's attributes and a fully "real" distinction: his famous *distinctio formalis*, in Muller's explanation

a distinction belonging to the essential nature of a thing, but also, in a sense, a non-substantial distinction, a distinction unlike that between one substance and another, one essence and another, one thing and another thing.<sup>46</sup>

Further innovations brought about by Duns Scotus include the positive ascription of "infinity" to God as the *primum ens*, and the presentation of important attributes of the divine life (knowledge, will, power) as the basis for God's outward operations. Scotus' primacy of the will, allowing for structural freedom both in God himself and in created reality, was rejected already by William Ockham, one of Scotus' most important disciples. Consequently, later 14th and 15th century doctrine of God shows a diversity of approaches: Thomist, Scotist, Occamist.<sup>47</sup>

Looking back on Muller's survey of the development of medieval scholastic doctrine of God, we can tentatively make the following statements on this predecessor of Reformed Orthodoxy:

1. The systematic elaboration of key insights of faith was largely motivated by internal theological interests;
2. Medieval theologians and philosophers performed a careful reworking of philosophical concepts and distinctions, especially in application to God;
3. Even around key concepts such as divine simplicity and freedom, Reformation and post-Reformation theology inherited a diversified tradition, of which it could weigh the elements on their own merits.

### ***3.2. Reformed Orthodoxy, Reformation, and Renaissance***

The relation of Reformed Orthodoxy to the Reformation is problematic from various points of view. As we have seen before (section 2.2.2), much of the older scholarship assumed a discontinuity between Reformation and Orthodoxy, the latter in the worst case being viewed as a betrayal of the former. On the other hand, when in more recent studies the continuity between medieval and protestant scholasticism is demonstrated, the relation with the Reformation becomes difficult as well. Reformation leaders more than once rejected medieval scholastic theology together with the aberrations of the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther was emphatic in condemning the use of Aristotle's philosophy in theology.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, he proclaimed God's revelation in the Holy Scripture as the only foundation and norm of theology. He was convinced that deep and constant study of Scripture would lead to new paradigms that could never be attained by philosophy. Although John Calvin was probably less extreme in his criticism of scholastic theology, he was eager to beware of "idle speculations" outside God's revelation. In his view, scholastic theology had often made Christian faith obscure and

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<sup>46</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:70-73.

<sup>47</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:74-82.

<sup>48</sup> To be sure, his fierce *Disputation against the scholastics* was directed against the dominance of Aristotelian accounts of happiness as the goal of human life in Christian ethics; in this context, he utters far-reaching objections against the influence of scholasticism in theology.

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uncertain. On the other hand, Calvin acknowledged the positive results of the more sound scholastic doctors, and tacitly or openly utilized scholastic concepts and distinctions.<sup>49</sup>

In assessing the relation between Reformation and Orthodoxy we cannot neglect the influence of the Renaissance. Important exponents of the Renaissance emphasized the conflict between the preceding scholasticism and their own movement. This polemic approach continues to affect our picture of the relation between the Renaissance (including humanism) and the Middle Ages (primarily scholasticism). Indeed, several significant differences between humanism and scholasticism (to restrict to these) can be identified. The fundamental point is a shift of attention from the traditional sciences (logic, physics, metaphysics) to the "humanities" (*humaniora*): literature, history, ethics, and politics.<sup>50</sup> This both presupposes and produces a stronger emphasis on man, his place in the world, and his capacities. Furthermore, the study of the humanities requires an attitude and a method that differs from the traditional, scholastic scientific values. Textual analysis, historical scrutiny, and probabilistic, rhetorical argumentation come to the fore at cost of the logical, often a-historical, and eternal truth oriented approach of scholasticism. Understandably, the humanists developed educational programs to stimulate the exercise of their favorite studies. A large part of the sometimes bitter debates between humanists and scholastics can be reduced to educational competition: as both enterprises drew on the same, limited student population, they had to fight for their own interests and to demonstrate their superiority over the opponent. A cherished reproach uttered against the scholastics was their lack of linguistic sensitivity and refinement: judged from the classic examples of great writers, medieval Latin was full of barbarism and empty of elegance.<sup>51</sup>

Although there arguably is hardly any substantial, doctrinal dependence of the Reformation on the Renaissance and humanism, the Reformation did utilize aspects of the humanist reform. The Reformation return to the Holy Scripture as the sole source and norm of theology parallels the humanist return to the classic sources; more substantial is the consequent philological interest with the Reformers, who applied humanist-taught methods of textual analysis to biblical exegesis, and supported the efforts to establish a critical text edition of the Old and New Testament. In theological training, the study of the biblical languages received an important place; famous humanist linguists were appointed to chairs in academic institutions allied to the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Humanism

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 39-61. More emphasis on the critical attitude of Calvin against a rational approach of theology is laid by Christoph Strohm, "Das Theologieverständnis bei Calvin und in der frühen reformierten Orthodoxie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 98 (2001): 310-343. Strohm concludes, after a comparative analysis of the theologies of John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli, that the later tendencies towards rationality, morality, confessionality, find some basis in Calvin's thought, but still represent a substantial shift that is due to a changing context of theology.

<sup>50</sup> A revision of the earlier, strongly ideological view of Renaissance was provided from the 1950's onward by Paul Oskar Kristeller; cf. his *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

<sup>51</sup> See Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Harvard Historical Studies, vol. 120 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

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was also responsible for specific emphases in the reception of the antique philosophy. Besides an alleged rejection of Aristotle in favor of other ancient philosophical systems (especially Platonism,<sup>52</sup> Stoicism,<sup>53</sup> and Epicureism<sup>54</sup>), the humanists pleaded for a return to the original Aristotle by removing the ballast of medieval Arabic and Christian interpretation.<sup>55</sup> Although these tendencies are not so strongly discernible in Reformation theology, there occur similar effects in a more critical-historical attitude towards the Aristotelian tradition and in an increased knowledge and appreciation of the broad ancient philosophy. A unique example of the latter is Zwingli's speculation about the presence of ancient sages in heaven.

The great humanist among the Reformation theologians undoubtedly was Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560).<sup>56</sup> He received a thorough education in classical languages and literature, and in addition completed the arts program in both the *via antiqua* (Heidelberg) and the *via moderna* (Tübingen).<sup>57</sup> In developing an educational program for the Wittenberg University, he set the standard for Protestant education in the 16th and 17th centuries. In addition to a strong emphasis on the classical and biblical languages, his most epochal contribution was the reworking of Aristotelianism into a simplified and modified school philosophy.<sup>58</sup> This is all the more interesting, since he initially supported Martin Luther's highly critical attitude towards the dominant philosopher of scholasticism.<sup>59</sup> Apparently, Melanchthon became convinced of the merits of Aristotle's contributions to logic, rhetoric, natural philosophy, and ethics. Concerning logic, Melanchthon combined the core of Aristotle's teachings with a Ciceronian, Agricolaan emphasis on the rhetorical aspects of argumentation. Although this curtailed the scientific exactness of the later medieval logic, it made logic more suitable to the practical demands of 16th century education.<sup>60</sup> Melanchthon applied

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<sup>52</sup> *CHRPh*, 67-71.

<sup>53</sup> *CHRPh*, 360-374.

<sup>54</sup> *CHRPh*, 374-386.

<sup>55</sup> *CHRPh*, 69-71, 145.

<sup>56</sup> The most recent biography of Melanchthon is provided by Heinz Scheible, *Melanchthon: Eine Biographie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Melanchthon's training in both the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* is doubted by Siegfried Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen humanistischer und reformatorischer Theologie bei Philipp Melanchthon*, Regensburger Studien zur Theologie, vol. 2 (Bern / Frankfurt: Herbert Lang – Peter Lang, 1976), 99-106.

<sup>58</sup> On this school philosophy and its impact on (German) theology and philosophy, see P. Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1914); cf. also Hermann-Adolf Stempel, *Melanchthons pädagogisches Wirken*, Untersuchungen zur Kirchengeschichte, vol. 11 (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1979); Heinz Scheible, "Aristoteles und die Wittenberger Universitätsreform: Zum Quellenwert von Lutherbriefen," in *Humanismus und Wittenberg Reformation: Festgabe anlässlich des 500. Geburtstages des Praeceptor Germaniae Philipp Melanchthon am 16. Februar 1997 Helmar Junghans gewidmet*, ed. by Michael Beyer et al. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 123-144; Günther Wartenberg, "Melanchthon und die reformatorisch-humanistische Reform der Leipziger Universität," in Beyer et al., *Humanismus und Wittenberg Reformation*, 409-416.

<sup>59</sup> Scheible, "Aristoteles," 123-144.

<sup>60</sup> Deszo Buzogany, "Melanchthon As a Humanist and a Reformer," in *Melanchthon in*

his logical and methodical insights in his *Loci communes theologici*, which became a model of systematic theology for generations of Lutheran and Reformed theologians.<sup>61</sup>

Equally significant are the humanist traits in the work of John Calvin. It is generally known that Calvin was trained in law according to the *mos gallicus*, which defended a humanist, literary and historical-critical approach of law against the more scholastic *mos italicus*. In 1532, Calvin published a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* that established his fame as a humanist scholar.<sup>62</sup> Soon after this start of his career came Calvin's conversion to evangelical faith, resulting in the 1536 first edition of his *Institution of the Christian religion*. The latter work is a concise piece of theology, which developed during Calvin's life into the voluminous 1559 final edition.<sup>63</sup> This brief narrative already reveals that Calvin had not received a formal training in theology; he was an autodidact. This had the effect that Calvin utilized his acquired humanist abilities and gradually adopted more traditional, scholastic concepts and approaches. A clear combination of both is found in his references to the *Institutes*: he calls them *Loci* (a humanist term), but refers to separate chapters as *Disputationes* (a part of scholastic practice).<sup>64</sup> The humanist training remains apparent in Calvin's approach to biblical exegesis: he is sharply aware of the linguistic subtleties, for example the different meanings of a word in different contexts and the rhetorical designs utilized by biblical writers. In addition, the style of his *Institutes* reflects the more abundant argumentation style of the humanist rhetorician over against the brief and sober reasoning of the scholastics.<sup>65</sup>

A significant factor in the relation of Orthodoxy and Reformation lies in the theological personalities in and around the formative period of the Reformation. Some of the first generation Reformers had received a complete training in scholastic theology (Luther, Zwingli, Bucer). Despite their sometimes very critical attitude, it still provided them with a huge reservoir of questions and solutions

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*Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, ed. by Karin Maag, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 87-102; John Schneider, "Melancthon's Rhetoric As a Context for Understanding His Theology," in Maag, *Melancthon in Europe*, 141-160;

<sup>61</sup> See on the reception of Melancthon's *Loci* Helmar Junghans, "Philipp Melancthons Loci theologici und ihre Rezeption in deutschen Universitäten und Schulen," in *Werk und Rezeption Philipp Melancthons in Universität und Schule bis ins 18. Jahrhundert: Tagung anlässlich seines 500. Geburtstages an der Universität Leipzig*, ed. by Günther Wartenberg, Herbergen der Christenheit, Sonderband 2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1997), 9-30; on the relation between Melancthon and Calvin: Timothy Wengert, "'We will Feast Together in Heaven Forever': The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Philip Melancthon," in Maag, *Melancthon in Europe*, 19-44; the influence of Melancthon on the earlier editions of John Calvin's *Institutes* is described by Richard A. Muller, "Ordo Docendi: Melancthon and the Organization of Calvin's *Institutes*, 1536-1543," in Maag, *Melancthon in Europe*, 123-140.

<sup>62</sup> Strohm, "Theologieverständnis," 315-318.

<sup>63</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 118-139.

<sup>64</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 140-158.

<sup>65</sup> This holds in spite of Calvin's intention to excel in brevity.

which they could apply in their opposition to Roman Catholic doctrine and in the development of their Reformation message. Explanation of Scripture and formulation of doctrine did not take place without recognition of the earlier exegetical and dogmatic tradition. In addition, it is important that the Reformers were surrounded by groups of “second line” workers: perhaps less impressive, but capable theologians who shaped the theological education of new generations. Their role should not be underestimated: in many places, institutions of theological training were established, furnished with a few professors who lectured and published on the whole range of theological matters. Important examples are the Italian Thomists Peter Martyr Vermigli and Girolamo Zanchi, Calvin’s assistant and successor Theodore Beza, and the influential German theologian Zacharias Ursinus. As early as 1556, Andreas Hyperius published his *De Theologo, seu de ratione studii theologici libri IIII*, a complete survey of the theological study, starting with biblical and systematical theology, but also including elementary reflections on historical and practical theology (see also section 4.3. below).

In order to obtain a nuanced picture of the relation between Reformation and Orthodoxy, some doctrinal continuities can be identified. First, Reformed Orthodoxy clearly elaborates the Reformation slogan *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. The emphasis on Scripture as the source and norm of theology is explained in the prolegomena on the nature of theology; moreover, Reformed dogmatical handbooks contain an extensive *locus de Sacra Scriptura*, which develops the doctrine of Scripture against the Roman Catholic dominance of tradition and the spiritualist contempt of the written Word of God. In comparison to later medieval theological treatises, the dominance and frequency of direct appeal to biblical texts are remarkable in their dogmatic works.<sup>66</sup>

The gratuity of salvation is emphasized in the soteriology and the doctrine of predestination. This is connected to the role of faith as the means by which salvation is received. The correlation of revelation and faith replaces the Roman Catholic centrality of the sacraments.<sup>67</sup>

This is not to say that there are no shifts or differences in the relation between Reformation and Orthodoxy. An obvious difference is the change of favorite genres: the Reformers wrote sermons, biblical commentaries, confessional statements, and occasional treatises. The orthodox era saw the production of comprehensive works on all different levels: from simple instruction manuals to complete and detailed systems of theology. Moreover, the academic disputation practice resulted in the publishing of ordered collections of disputation texts, in which all thinkable subjects were treated by systematic series of *theses*.

### ***3.3. Reformed Orthodoxy and Enlightenment***

In relation to the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, Reformed Orthodoxy can be attacked from two sides at once. On the one hand, historians who favor Enlightenment’s emancipation from the bounds of religious authority consider Reformed orthodox theology as a backward offspring of medieval thinking that became obsolete by the scientific discoveries and philosophical

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<sup>66</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 2:94-148, 295-370.

<sup>67</sup> See Muller, *PRRD*, 2:285-294 on the correlation of faith and Scripture.

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developments of the Modern Era. This judgment parallels the popular view of the Roman Catholic Church's reaction to Galileo: final eruptions of authoritarianism in a principally lost battle. On the other hand, there are scholars who see in Reformed Orthodoxy a partial forerunner of Enlightenment; these can either regret the fact that Orthodoxy left the true path of the Reformation in favor of an intellectualist and eventually rationalist approach, or welcome the contribution of theologians to the rise of the new era in western thought. The former reaction is shown by Ernst Bizer in his treatise *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*.<sup>68</sup> Bizer discusses aspects of the theology of Theodore Beza, Zacharias Ursinus, Lambert Daneau, and Girolamo Zanchi. His conclusion is, that all four early orthodox writers show a strong emphasis on the rationality of faith and doctrine. In Bizer's view, this makes Orthodoxy vulnerable for an increasing dominance of reason over against God's revelation in Scripture. A more positive view emphasizes the close connection between the Reformation and the Renaissance in stimulating critical study and individualism; although Orthodoxy established new authoritative norms of thought, it could not turn back the process released by the rejection of the authority of the Church and the promotion of the Bible among the people. Within the Enlightenment era, several theologians saw a harmonious transition from orthodox, scholastic theology to an "enlightened" version of doctrine.<sup>69</sup>

Whereas the study of Reformed Orthodoxy is recently making a new start, Enlightenment has been the subject of many studies over decades. Although many different perspectives are taken and consensus will possibly never be attained, we can for our purposes utilize a definition by James Byrne:

The term may be used to refer to a general intellectual and cultural climate which characterized European thought – particularly in England and Scotland, France, the Netherlands, but also in several other countries – from the middle of the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

Byrne sees anticipations of Enlightenment phenomena in the Renaissance and even in Greek antiquity, but he realizes the need for a pragmatic delineation. As central aspects of Enlightenment, Byrne gives the following three: first, the emphasis on the power of reason to explain reality; second, a skeptical attitude towards established institutions and traditions, including a changing awareness of man's place in the universe and a strong optimism concerning rational progress; third, a scientific way of thinking, moving from empirical sensation to rational judgment, which heavily affected the status of religion and revelation (Bible criticism started here).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. the more detailed survey of Bizer's treatise in section 2.2.2 above.

<sup>69</sup> This thesis is promoted concerning the development of the biblical sciences by Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 6-18, 47-50; Muller, *PRRD*, 1:133-134, mentions a few proponents of this thesis in general.

<sup>70</sup> James Byrne, *Glory, Jest and Riddle. Religious Thought in the Enlightenment* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Byrne, *Glory, Jest and Riddle*, 5-17.

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The innovations in 17th and 18th century philosophy have multiple origins. First, the diversification of classical sources in the Renaissance reintroduced new possibilities of thought that had been unconsciously suppressed during the age of Aristotelian dominance. Besides the famous Platonist and Stoic revivals, other, formerly unknown, philosophical systems were available as a source of inspiration.<sup>72</sup> Second, the political and ecclesiastical events of the 16th century dissolved the unity of society and worldview, and allowed people to think more freely. Although it is difficult to prove a direct relation between confessional segregation and the rise of rationalism, it seems plausible to assume that the diversification of beliefs stimulated the quest for a universal criterion of truth.<sup>73</sup> It was only now that a real distinction between natural religion and positive religion could be made. Third, the discovery of new foreign countries widened the horizon;<sup>74</sup> moreover, an experimental approach was required for the technological improvements that enabled the discoveries (astronomy, optics). Both developments led to a sense of relativity which stimulated exploration and experimentation.<sup>75</sup> Fourth, the newly developing natural sciences abandoned the fundamental Aristotelian *hylemorphism* in favor of a corpuscular mechanism tracing back to ancient Greek philosophers as Democritus and Epicurus.<sup>76</sup>

Important areas for assessing the relation between Orthodoxy and Enlightenment are the discussions about the emerging philosophical movements of the 17th and 18th centuries (respectively Cartesianism/Spinozism, and the philosophy of Leibniz/Wolff). As was indicated above, the Reformed academic world consisted of more than theology: professors of philosophy performed the confrontation with the newer insights, sometimes adopting or modifying them, sometimes rejecting them from a decidedly Reformed Aristotelian standpoint. The direct bearing of the newer philosophies on Reformed theology seems to be limited.

One thing that becomes clear is that Reformed Orthodoxy was not on the main route towards the Enlightenment. Rather, it was the oppositional and deviating movements that showed most familiarity with the newer philosophies. From the 16th century onward, Reformed theology had to confront the Socinians, a sect founded by Fausto and Lellio Socino.<sup>77</sup> Methodologically, the Socinians combined

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel Garber, Michael Ayers, eds., *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38-47, 53-63.

<sup>73</sup> *CHSCP*, 67-69.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *CHSCP*, 87-100, on the impact of the confrontation between Western thinking and Chinese philosophy.

<sup>75</sup> Roger Bacon is exemplary of this attitude, *CHSCP*, 72-73.

<sup>76</sup> On hylemorphism, see *CHSCP*, 429-432; an atomism/corpuscular mechanism and its development unto Isaac Newton's mechanics, see *CHSCP*, 554-610.

<sup>77</sup> A survey of the lives of the founding fathers, Lellio and Fausto Socino, and of the main doctrines of Socinianism is given by Magda Martini, *Fausto Socino et la Pensée Socinienne: Un maître de la pensée religieuse (1539-1604)* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1967). An assessment of the relation between Socinianism and Enlightenment is provided by Zbigniew Ogonowski, "Der Sozinianismus und die Aufklärung," in *Reformation und Frühaufklärung in Polen. Studien über den Sozinianismus und seinen Einfluss auf das westeuropäische Denken im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Paul Wrzecionko, Kirche im Osten, vol. 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

the contention that knowledge of God is possible only through revelation with the attribution of a critical role in religious matters to human reason. The doctrinal result of this attitude was the denial of the Trinity and of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Primarily because of the latter heresies, the Socinians were fiercely battled by the Reformed orthodox.<sup>78</sup> In their view of the relation between revelation and reason, the Socinians can be considered proto-Enlightenment thinkers. At first sight, their emphasis on revelation seems to secure a fideist acceptance of the biblical truth. In effect, however, it means a separation of faith and reason, that subsequently allows reason an independent place as the judge of truth.<sup>79</sup> Misleadingly, the Socinians held the same maxim as the Reformed orthodox did: revelation is above reason, but never against reason. The consequences drawn from this maxim largely differed: the orthodox accepted doctrines as the Trinity as above reason, while the Socinians argued that these doctrines are squarely against reason.<sup>80</sup>

Whereas the Socinians were largely treated as dangerous opponents, Reformed Orthodoxy had a complicated relation to one of the most important early Enlightenment philosophies, Cartesianism. Since René Descartes lived in Holland for a long time, it is not surprising that some Dutch theologians critically confronted his opinions. The debate between Gisbertus Voetius and Descartes is well known.<sup>81</sup> Petrus van Mastricht, Voetius' disciple and successor, attacked Cartesianism in his massive treatise *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena*, as did his colleague Melchior Leydekker in *Fax Veritatis*.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, Descartes soon

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1977), 78-156.

<sup>78</sup> Johannes Cloppenburg, *Kort Begrijp van de Opkomste ende Leere der Socinianen* (Dordrecht: Vincent Caimax, 1652), contains a sketch of the history of this sect and a refutation of its doctrines. Cloppenburg lists 11 subjects in which the Socinians err: 1. Trinity and Christology; 2. State of integrity; 3. Fall and original sin; 4. Free will and grace; 5. Law and gospel; 6. Predestination and vocation; 7. Justification and repentance; 8. Resurrection and eternal life; 9. Church and ministry; 10. Baptism and Lord's Supper; 11. Governance and society.

<sup>79</sup> According to Ogonowski, "Der Sozianismus," 88-90, there is in Socinianism a development from the initial assumption of revelation as the sole source of belief towards the decisive role of rational judgment.

<sup>80</sup> Ogonowski, "Der Sozianismus," 102.

<sup>81</sup> On the reception of Descartes' philosophy, particularly in the Netherlands, see René Descartes, Martin Schoock, *La Querelle d'Utrecht*, trans. and ed. by Theo Verbeek (Paris: Les impressions nouvelles, 1988); Theo Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637-1650* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); J.A. van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality: Descartes and Voetius on God, Nature and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Theo Verbeek, "Voetius en Descartes," in *De onbekende Voetius: Voordrachten wetenschappelijk symposium, Utrecht 3 maart 1989*, ed. by J. van Oort et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 200-219; Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*; Jacobus Revius, *A Theological Examination of Cartesian Philosophy: Early Criticisms (1647)*, trans. and ed. by Aza Goudriaan, *Kerkhistorische Bijdragen* vol. 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>82</sup> A recent analysis of the Reformed scholastic involvement in the debate with Early Enlightenment, focusing on Melchior Leydekker's polemics with Cartesian and Spinozist thought, is given by J. Martin Bac, *Perfect Will Theology: Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as against Suárez, Episcopius, Descartes, and Spinoza* Studies in Church History (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

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found supporters in the medical and philosophical faculties, followed by theologians with some delay. A clear example is Jean-Robert Chouet, who taught philosophy at the Academy of Geneva from 1669 to 1686.<sup>83</sup> Chouet introduced Cartesian elements in physics (the equation of matter with extension) and methodology (*cogito ergo sum*, methodical doubt, the pursuit of clear and distinct concepts). The effects on theology are mixed: on the one hand, Chouet reinforced the rational character of theology at the cost of the revelational approach; on the other hand, he helped Reformed theology refute the Roman Catholic transubstantiation doctrine by applying the Cartesian definition of matter as extension to the Eucharistic sacrament.<sup>84</sup> In the Dutch context, a complicating factor in the taxation of Cartesian philosophy was its alliance with Cocceianism; the combination of this theological school and the new philosophy made it doubly suspect in the eyes of many Voetian theologians.<sup>85</sup> Aza Goudriaan identifies nine doctrines proffered by Descartes that met with decided opposition by the mainstream of Reformed orthodox theology:

1. the methodical doubt of everything (which was supposed to lead, at least indirectly, to atheism);
2. the denial of proofs for God's existence from the effects (cosmological proof);
3. the assertion of knowledge of God through the "Idea" of God;
4. the qualities of clarity, distinctness, and adequacy ascribed to this Idea;
5. the identification of thought (*cogitatio*) as constitutive of God's essence;
6. the thesis that God is omnipresent only by his power, not by his essence;
7. the statement that God is his (positively) own cause (*causa sui*);
8. the relation between God, eternal truths, and logical possibility;
9. the assumption of the possibility that God would lie.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to these fundamental theological questions, Bizer points to the shift in hermeneutical orientation and the conflict about Ptolemaic vs. Copernican cosmology that came along with Descartes' philosophy.<sup>87</sup> Dutch theologians that (partly) adopted Cartesian views were Abraham Heidanus, Balthasar Bekker, Franciscus Burmannus, Henricus Groenewegen, and Christoph Wittich.<sup>88</sup>

The philosophical counterpart of Cartesianism, the system of Benedict de Spinoza, met with general rejection in Reformed orthodox circles. Although the Reformed theologians may not always have been exactly acquainted with Spinoza's views,<sup>89</sup> their central objection was that the assumption of only one (material) substance led immediately to pantheism and consequently to atheism. In

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<sup>83</sup> Martin I. Klauber, *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1671-1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1994), 38-46.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-Alphonse Turretini was actively involved in this development; see Klauber, *Pan-Protestantism*, 144-145.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. F.G.M. Broeyer, E.G.E. van der Wall eds., *Een richtingensrijd in de Gereformeerde Kerk: Voetianen en Coccejanen 1650-1750* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1994).

<sup>86</sup> Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Bizer, "Reformierte Orthodoxie und Cartesianismus," 329-347 (hermeneutics), 347-372 (cosmology)

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Bizer, "Reformierte Orthodoxie und Cartesianismus."

<sup>89</sup> As Klauber, *Pan-Protestantism*, 67, 76, points out concerning Jean-Alphonse Turretini.

addition, Spinoza's contribution to the rise of Bible criticism made him an enemy of Reformed theology.

In German theology, the philosophy of Christian Wolff was the most influential exponent of Enlightenment thought. Wolff, often described as the disciple of Leibniz, was also influenced by Descartes, and in turn exerted influence on Immanuel Kant. In his philosophical system, he aimed at clarity of concepts, strength of evidence, and completeness of argumentation; this gave his contemporaries the impression that he had succeeded in solving all philosophical problems. In a typically Enlightenment fashion, Wolff saw a rational account of God (natural theology) as a preparatory stage for the positive revelation of God. He viewed revelation as above reason, but not against reason. This is not exceptional (it was also held by the Reformed orthodox writers of an earlier era), but Wolff used this maxim for restricting the possible content of revelation: God cannot reveal something that changes the nature of things; He cannot reveal something contradicting his known properties; revelation cannot contradict the laws of logic, the laws of nature, and the laws of language. The positive qualifications Wolff ascribes to God mostly circle around perfection, aseity, and utmost rationality. God's power is bound to his wisdom and perfection; therefore the actual world contains the largest possible amount of perfection: it is the best possible world. The salvation by Jesus Christ, which the scriptural revelation is full of, is interpreted by Wolff in terms of moral perfection.<sup>90</sup> The theologians that followed Wolff's philosophy applied a "scientific" method to the Bible and revelation. Natural theology received all the more room at cost of the revelation in the Bible. The Wolffian theologians applied more or less mild forms of Bible criticism (the least mild is Hermann Samuel Reimarus). They stimulated the development of Christianity in the direction of a mainly moral system.<sup>91</sup>

The relation between Reformed Orthodoxy and the great British (pre-) Enlightenment philosophers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, is less documented. A partial explanation of the lesser interaction between British Reformed theology and Enlightenment philosophy is that, after the Act of Conformity (1662), Reformed theology largely disappeared from the academic stage. Among the Reformed orthodox, Hobbes is mentioned critically by some authors because of his implicit atheism. According to Martin Klauber, the late orthodox rejection of innate ideas is partly due to the influence of John Locke's theory of knowledge, which derives all knowledge from sense experience.<sup>92</sup> A very significant contribution of British thinkers to the making of Enlightenment is the philosophy of deism.<sup>93</sup> Deism seems to origin in 16th century France; its earliest document is *De Tribus Impostoribus*, an

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<sup>90</sup> Wolfgang Gericke, *Theologie und Kirche im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen, vol. III/2 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 74-76.

<sup>91</sup> Gericke, *Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, 81-89.

<sup>92</sup> Klauber, *Pan-Protestantism*, 74. To put it exactly, Jean-Alphonse Turretini depended on Locke for his rejection of the innate ideas, but he utilized Cartesian rationalism to demonstrate the Christian truths as being clear and distinct. On Locke's rejection of the innate ideas, see also W. Stoker, *De Christelijke Godsdienst in de Filosofie van de Verlichting: Een vergelijkende studie over de geloofsverantwoording in het denken van Locke, de deïsten, Lessing en Kant*, *Philosophia Religionis*, vol. 19 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980), 9-13.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Stoker, *Christelijke Godsdienst*, 47-92.

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anonymous book in which a natural religion on Epicurean foundations is propagated.<sup>94</sup> From France, the deist thoughts were transmitted to England by Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648). Cherbury developed the distinction between historical truths and rational truths: the positive facts of Christian religion and its alleged revelation belong to the realm of probability; what really matters is the eternal and truths of reason. According to Cherbury, the original, rational religion comprises five truths:

1. there is a highest God;
2. He must be worshipped;
3. virtue and piety are essential to religion;
4. sin must be compensated by repentance and conversion;
5. God's goodness and justice provide temporal and eternal reward or punishment.

This enumeration of the content of natural religion may as such not be unusual (see below on the content of "natural theology"); Cherbury's innovation consists in the reversal of the relation between reason and revelation: the rational truth has the priority, the revealed truths merely complement it.<sup>95</sup> Later deists eliminated the supra-rational, mysterious aspects of Christian faith, and eventually arrived at a complete identification of a purged Christian faith with their rational religion.<sup>96</sup>

The transition from Reformed scholasticism to Enlightenment was gradual, and consequently is hard to discern. It consisted mainly of a shift of emphasis on different issues. One example is the defense of the divine authority of Scripture. Whereas Reformed theology from Calvin onwards had emphasized the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, in combination with the immanent trustworthiness of Scripture, in the final quarter of the 17th century theologians began to concentrate on the external evidences: the ancient authorship, the widespread dispersion of revelation, the occurrence of miracles, the beauty and moral standing of Scripture, the fulfilling of the prophecies, etc.<sup>97</sup> By these evidences, the late orthodox writers intended to prove the rationality of their belief in the divinity of Scripture, especially against the Roman Catholic contention of the obscurity of Scripture. But this strategy made the doctrine of Scripture vulnerable to the incipient Bible criticism, which undermined the historical authenticity of the biblical books and spread doubts about their correct text.

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<sup>94</sup> Gericke, *Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, 54-55.

<sup>95</sup> Gericke, *Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, 55-57. The Zurich professor of theology Johann Heinrich Heidegger refers to Cherbury in his *Corpus theologiae*, 4: the idea that a common religion based on principles of reason and nature is sufficient for salvation, already extant in Early Christianity, is reintroduced by Herbert of Cherbury in his work *De Veritate, Causis Errorum & Religione Gentilium*. Heidegger lists the five "articles" of natural religion proposed by Cherbury, and rejects the idea of "Christianity without Christ" implied in Cherbury's position.

<sup>96</sup> Gericke, *Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, 59-65.

<sup>97</sup> See Klauber, *Pan-Protestantism*, 104-130.

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Another significant realm of change is the question of natural theology.<sup>98</sup> Since the Early Church Apologists, Christian theology had always attempted to connect the revealed knowledge of God to the natural cognitive abilities of man. A whole tradition of “proofs for the existence of God” shows that opinions diverged on the most suitable argumentation, but it still testifies a common trust in rational demonstration as a support of revelation based faith (cf. section 5.3. below). The Reformation, with its radical return to Scripture as the source of the knowledge of God, meant a decrease in the value of natural theology. John Calvin, for instance, acknowledged a certain knowledge of God, deriving from both an innate sense of the divine and the external testimonies of God’s workmanship in his creation; but Calvin had a pessimistic view of the actual effects of this possible knowledge, and he did not treat it as a foundation for the revealed knowledge of God.<sup>99</sup> In his footsteps, many Reformed orthodox theologians formally state the existence of natural theology, but at the same time assure that it is not sufficient to attain salvation.<sup>100</sup> Gradually, the role of natural theology becomes more prominent. Francesco Turretini sees ground to argue against the Socinians, that there is a natural theology, which he distinguishes in innate (*insita*) and acquired (*acquisita*). He denies the statement that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*: although discursive knowledge is acquired during one’s lifetime, there are common apprehensive concepts (*notiones communes*) that reside in the mind from birth. In Turretini’s account, the concepts of natural theology and natural law are closely connected. Still the function of natural theology is very limited in Turretini’s view: objectively speaking, God reveals himself sufficiently to all people, but subjectively and factually, the knowledge derived from natural revelation is not sufficient for salvation. Turretini also distances himself from Huldreich Zwingli’s inclusion of ancient heroes like Hercules, Theseus and Socrates into heavenly blessedness.<sup>101</sup>

With Turretini’s son Jean-Alphonse, the importance of natural theology has enormously increased. In an apparent attempt to counter rationalist attacks on Christian religion, Jean-Alphonse endeavored to give the Christian faith a rational foundation by an expansive natural theology. To start with, he states that faith and reason can never be at odds, on the ground that God is the author of both reason and revelation. This means that, in principle, knowledge of God can be attained by human reason. But, because of the difficulty of this way and the corrupted state of man, it is convenient for God to provide an easier way: revelation. The universal existence of religions shows, how feeble men are in attaining the true knowledge of God. With Jean-Alphonse Turretini, the proportions between natural and revealed theology are reversed: the older Reformed orthodox held that a few things about

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<sup>98</sup> For an extensive survey of Gisbertus Voetius’ views of natural theology, see Andreas J. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676): Sein Theologieverständnis und seine Gotteslehre*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 92 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 149-174.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. the chapter “Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God,” in David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 23-39, and Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>100</sup> Rather optimistic is James Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 5: natural theology serves “to further unto salvation: and that by preparing and inducing men to seek God.”

<sup>101</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 7-15.

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God are known to all men, but that revelation was needed to give true knowledge of God; with the younger Turretini, natural theology comprises all but a few mysterious doctrines.<sup>102</sup> He even manages to discuss all the divine attributes in his natural theology. This treatment is full of quotations from the classical Latin and Greek sources; only a few texts from Scripture are mentioned in margin.<sup>103</sup>

A change that did not directly destroy the content of Reformed orthodox belief, but indirectly undermined its relevance, is the increasing emphasis of practical piety and ethics as the goal of religion. Although this is far from absent in Reformed theology from Calvin onwards, in the Enlightenment it becomes a strategy to de-emphasize the importance of explicit doctrine.

As a conclusion of this section, I would state that during the 17th century the Enlightenment and Orthodoxy fought an undecided battle over the relation between revelation and reason, and over the main lines of a philosophical metaphysics. In this battle, Reformed Orthodoxy maintained its positions and showed little awareness of change. By the turn of the 18th century, Reformed Orthodoxy seems suddenly to have lost the battle: the Enlightenment ideas and sentiments have created a cultural climate in which the older positions are no longer tenable; a growing number of theologians take up the challenges posed by the newer philosophy, and in doing so, they attain substantial shifts in the organization and content of doctrine.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

The historical survey given above centered on the continuities and discontinuities between Reformed Orthodoxy on the one hand, and medieval scholasticism, the Reformation and Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, on the other. The following conclusions do not aim at a satisfactorily complete appraisal of these extended epochs of European culture, but primarily point out the factors relevant to our analysis of Reformed orthodox method and doctrine of God.

First, it has become clear that Reformed orthodox methodology stands in continuity with the earlier, medieval scholasticism and with the general contemporary scientific discourse in adopting Aristotelianism as a general framework of thought. Aristotle's logic and metaphysics serve as the tools that are used in explaining Christian doctrine. As we have seen, however, one should be cautious to identify the philosophical position of any theologian as "Aristotelianism." Just as Augustine and other Church Fathers had endeavored significant modifications of platonic thought, medieval thinkers such as Anselm of Canterbury, the Victorines, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, Durandus de S. Porciano, and William Ockham received the Aristotelian corpus of logic (*Analytica*), metaphysics and ethics in a critical and creative way. One is justified in discerning a distinct Christian type of Aristotelian philosophy represented in different schools of thought. In this "Christianized" Aristotelianism, foundational insights from the Church Fathers,

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<sup>102</sup> J.-A. Turretini, *Opera omnia*, 4-6.

<sup>103</sup> J.-A. Turretini, *Opera omnia*, 81-99.

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most notably Augustine, continued to have a decisive influence and to provide impulses toward a truly Christian philosophy.

In addition to the medieval trajectories of Christian thought that were transmitted to 16th and 17th century Reformed theology, contemporary 16th and 17th century Aristotelianism itself was not a unified philosophy, but consisted of several branches. The Reformed orthodox theologians were often trained in one variant or another, and they were eclectic in picking out the elements of philosophy they could make use of. Among the main forms of "Aristotelianism," we should acknowledge the Thomist, Scotist, and Nominalist schools originating in the Middle Ages, the Melancthonian and Paduan renewals and adaptations of Aristotle in the 16th century, and the distinctly Jesuit and Reformed systems of metaphysics developed in the final quarter of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century.

It should be realized that in the 16th and 17th centuries there were no serious alternatives to Aristotelian philosophy in its broad sense stated above. It is true, the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries contained significant revivals of Platonism, Epicureism, Stoicism and other ancient philosophies, which gained dominance in some cultural and academic circles. The official education at the university level, however, remained based on Aristotle. The only alleged alternative that received an official status at several, notably Protestant, universities is Ramism (cf. section 4.1 below).

Concerning the (dis)continuity of Reformed Orthodoxy with the Reformation and the Renaissance, we have to distinguish between different dimensions. On one level, the Reformation shared with the Renaissance the return to original sources and languages. In the field of academic education, this led to the renewal of university curricula and to the development of adapted "school philosophies" as provided, for example, by Philip Melancthon. The humanist movement behind these educational reforms chose to contrast itself with the older scholastic educational practice. We should not, however, overvalue the differences suggested by competitive polemics. While it is true that some of the Reformers had a more "humanist" than "scholastic" orientation, they were at the same time accompanied by numbers of theologians trained in varieties of scholastic thought which they continued to apply to the exposition of biblical doctrine. The reprise of scholastic method in the second and third generation of Reformers/codifiers (e.g., Vermigli, Zanchi, Hyperius, Beza, Ursinus) went along with the incorporation of valuable components of the humanist approach. Beyond the methodological lines of continuity, Reformed Orthodoxy clearly aims at continuing and elaborating some of the key doctrinal insights of the Reformation: the decisive role of Scripture as God's own Word, and the gratuity of salvation by faith in Christ.

In assessing the relation between Reformed Orthodoxy and Enlightenment, we have reason to reject the older hypothesis that Orthodoxy's intellectualism and logical systematizing of doctrine constitute a major step towards the rationalism of the 18th century. When newer philosophies started to develop during the 17th century, Reformed orthodox theologians dealt more or less critically with them. This is especially visible in the case of the early (pre-) rationalism of the Socinians, the philosophy of René Descartes, and positions defended by philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch de Spinoza. In these discussions, Reformed Ortho-

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doxy has the apparent disadvantage, from our perspective, that it kept to older philosophical models in defending theological positions. This diagnosis should not prevent us, however, to weigh the doctrinal insights motivating their rejection of the new proposals as dangerous to faith. Moreover, we should be careful not to conflate the Reformed harmony of revelation and reason (in which revelation is decisive, reason instrumental) with the Enlightenment's gradually developing subordination of faith to reason. It is arguable that the adoption of Enlightenment philosophies by the academic world in Europe led to the sudden death of Reformed Orthodoxy in the early 18th century.

## 4. Reformed Orthodox Methodology

This chapter explores the explicit statements on the method of theology in Reformed Orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> Reformed orthodox theology shows a vivid interest in scientific method. Partly this is due to its renewed appreciation of medieval scholastic theology, partly it benefits from the general methodological revival in the late 15th and the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the Reformed orthodox statements of method show traditional as well as more innovating features.

In this chapter, I will first deal with the philosophical discussion on method in the 16th century and its impact on the formation of a Reformed theological method. The most prominent antagonists in this discussion are Peter Ramus (4.1) and Jacopo Zabarella (4.2.). In the subsequent sections, I discuss some specifically theological reflections on method by several 16th and 17th century writers (4.3.) and their elaboration into concrete methodological instructions (4.4.).

### 4.1. Ramist Influence?

In the study of Reformed Orthodoxy, the logical and philosophical views of Petrus Ramus have been pointed to as a decisive source of influence for the building of Reformed theology. A classic formulation of this hypothesis is found in Jürgen Moltmann's article "Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus für Philosophie und Theologie im Calvinismus."<sup>3</sup>

Moltmann sees Ramus' philosophy as an alternative between the Lutheran school philosophy of Philip Melanchthon (which exerted influence on Reformed theology as well) and the stricter Reformed Aristotelianism inaugurated and represented by Theodore Beza. In several Reformed institutions of higher education (notably Heidelberg and Herborn), Ramism dominated the curriculum. Moltmann suggests that

der Ramismus nahezu von jeder Opposition gegen die Genfer Orthodoxie Bezas assimiliert worden ist. Das sind im 16. Jh. die originalen Strömungen des *Spätzwinglianismus* (Bullinger, Gualter, Molanus), der *Heidelberg-Herborner Föederaltheologie* (Olevian, Piscator, Naso) und des häretischen *Humanismus* (...). Es sind im 17. Jh. die jeweils komplexen Strömungen des *Arminianismus* (Wtenbogaert, Arminius), des *Amyraldismus* und des *englisch-niederländischen Vorpietismus* (Perkins, Amesius), die

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for a detailed analysis of the Reformed orthodox reflections on methodological questions: Muller, *PRRD 1*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N.W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> J. Moltmann, "Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus für Philosophie und Theologie im Calvinismus," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 68 (1957): 295-318. Moltmann is followed by Wilhelm H. Neuser in his contribution to *HDThG 2*, 328-330.

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teils mehr von ramistischer Theologie, teils nur von ramistischer Methodik beeinflusst sind.<sup>4</sup>

As a movement of "humanist lay theology," Ramism has, according to Moltmann, played a significant role in 16th and 17th century Christian philosophy and theology.<sup>5</sup>

Moltmann interprets Ramus' position as a contribution to the larger 16th century debate between Averroist Aristotelian philosophy that endangered articles of faith such as the creation of the world and the immortality of the soul, and a genuine Christian philosophy. As a Christian philosophy, Ramism aims at practical piety and at a purification of theological language, reducing it to biblical simplicity without scholastic intricacies. This practical direction is elaborated with help of an empiricist-analytical method that led to a more historical-dynamical approach of revelation and doctrine. According to Moltmann, this approach "entspricht übrigens dem methodischen Ansatz Calvins."<sup>6</sup>

As a conclusion of his research, Moltmann states that Ramism is a reaction against the Aristotelian scholasticism of Reformed orthodoxy, of which Beza is the inaugurator. Moltmann takes Calvin's theology – "eine lebendige komplexe Gedankenwelt, die weite theologische Spannungen durchzuhalten vermochte" – as a norm, to which Beza's orthodoxy failed: in Beza's Aristotelian logic, Calvin's doctrine of predestination was systematized into a doctrine of decrees, which in turn became the "central dogma" of orthodox Calvinism. In contrast,

Der Ramismus bedeutete philosophisch und methodisch den empiristischen Gegenschlag gegen Bezas Aristotelisierung; denn er befreite die Theologie aus ihrer philosophischen Umklammerung und gab ein biblizistisches oder humanistisches Denken frei. Die Föderaltheologen in Heidelberg und Herborn, die aufgeklärten Heilsgeschichtler in Saumur, die frühen Pietisten um Perkins und Amesius haben die ramistische Dialektik benutzt, um eine antibezaistische Calvinrenaissance zu betreiben oder um auf Elemente des vorreformatorischen Reformhumanismus bei Calvin zurückzugreifen.<sup>7</sup>

By advocating rhetoric instead of logic, empiricism instead of metaphysics, Ramus produced a decidedly biblical theology. Ramus conquered at once paganist versions of Aristotelianism and theological scholasticism in Reformed theology. In Moltmann's view, Ramism is a more fertile continuation of Calvin's than Beza's scholastic orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup>

In order to test Moltmann's hypothesis on the significance of Ramism, I start with a description of Ramus' contribution to philosophy, and in addition try to find the traces of Ramism in Reformed orthodox theology.

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<sup>4</sup> Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 296-297.

<sup>5</sup> Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 295-297.

<sup>6</sup> Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 298-306.

<sup>7</sup> Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 317.

<sup>8</sup> Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 317-318.

## *Reformed Orthodox Methodology*

Ramism is the philosophical approach originating from the French philosopher Pierre de la Ramée, or Peter Ramus.<sup>9</sup> Born in 1515, Peter Ramus received his higher education at Paris, where, after his graduation as a Master of Arts, he continued to teach to a younger generation. The main subjects in the Arts program were grammar, rhetoric, and logic, followed by physics, ethics, and metaphysics. Almost all subjects in the Arts faculty were taught in connection to the works by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Peter Ramus started his teaching career with an apparent dismissal of Aristotle as the supreme Schoolmaster. According to Ramus, the first question about Aristotle is, whether he wrote all his alleged works himself; Ramus suspects that Aristotle's disciples and his later commentators inserted their own opinions into Aristotle's works as we now know them. At this point, Ramus reveals a truly humanist outlook: humanism is the movement of scholars immersing themselves in intense historical and philological study in order to undo the masters of antiquity from the dust that descended on them during the dark Middle Ages. After urging the question of the authenticity of Aristotle's works, Ramus still has problems with what he believes are true works written by Aristotle himself. He thinks that they are badly ordered: they do not sufficiently follow the order of nature, and therefore are hard to learn and to remember.<sup>10</sup>

Ramus' program is to replace the Aristotelian body of sciences and arts with a more simplified, natural, teachable curriculum.<sup>11</sup> From 1543 on he published a series of teaching books on logic, rhetoric, mathematics and other arts. His writings aroused fierce discussions; some of the more traditional Aristotelians defended their Master and charged Ramus with incompetence. Despite the heavy attacks, Ramus received an assignment as a Regius Professor of philosophy and eloquence: a chair founded by the French king in order to promote the humanist interests and to counterbalance the traditional scholasticism in the Parisian university. Peter Ramus died in 1572 as a late victim of St. Bartholomew's Massacre.

Especially famous became Ramus' treatment of the art of logic, including his view on method. Ramus viewed his *methodus universalis* as the heart of his educational program. Here, he wished to distance himself from the scholastic teaching system of his days. But as a matter of fact, Ramus owed more than he was willing to admit to the Aristotelian and medieval tradition in logic. One of his alleged innovations is that he introduced into his logic important parts that previously belonged to rhetoric. But even here, Ramus was not original: he followed the lead of the 15th century Dutch humanist, Rudolph Agricola, as did so many of the 16th century writers on logic and method.

Ramus divided his logic into two parts: invention and judgment.<sup>12</sup> The invention of arguments consists of consulting general storeplaces of argument, the

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<sup>9</sup> On the life and career of Ramus, see R. Hooykaas, *Humanisme, science et réforme. Pierre de la Ramée (1515-1572)* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 3-4; Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins' Theology*, American University Studies, Series VII Theology and Religion, vol. 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 14-19; and Ong, *Ramus*, 17-35.

<sup>10</sup> Hooykaas, *Humanisme*, 20-23; Ong, *Ramus*, 36-49.

<sup>11</sup> Hooykaas, *Humanisme*, 7-19; Ong, *Ramus*, 171-195.

<sup>12</sup> McKim, *Ramism*, 19-25; Ong, *Ramus*, 171-195.

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so-called *topoi* or *loci communes*. In the older logic, terms were examined from the 10 Categories or predicaments as distinguished by Aristotle, often handled in the shape of Porphyry's Tree of Categories. The Categories represent the different aspects of entities in reality; they were used as guiding principles of knowledge. The *loci communes* on the other hand, as a device originating from rhetorical theory, do not primarily reflect the structure of reality, but rather function as pragmatic resources of argument.

In the second half of his logic, judgment, Ramus removed the traditional theory of syllogism from the center stage, and replaced it by what he calls "method." Although Ramus claimed his theory provided a universal method for doing all sciences, it is basically a didactical method for teaching the arts. In Ramus' terms, an art is a body of precepts, unified by a single subject field and a specific ability that is its goal. In practice, the Ramist method consists of two parts: definition and division.<sup>13</sup> By those two means, one should proceed from the general to the singular, from the universal to the particular. For example, logic is defined as the art of arguing well. It has two parts: invention and judgment. Invention is defined and divided; its parts in turn are defined and divided, and so on, until the most particular, individual aspects of the matter are explained. Then the teacher returns to the second part of the initial bifurcation; he defines and divides it, and so on. This explanation does already suggest a tree diagram, which was in fact used by Ramus himself and by many of his followers, and which became one of the most famous features of the Ramist method. It was Ramus' firm conviction that by this method (and by this method alone) all arts could be taught and learned easily.

From the primary sources, some influence of Ramist thought in theology cannot be denied. To start with, Ramus published a brief theology of his own: the *Commentariorum de Religione Christiana, Libri quatuor*.<sup>14</sup> Here, he explicitly applies his own method on the study of theology. Rejecting "scrupulous scholastic questions," he wishes to give a "popular exposition and treatment" of theology, paying attention to the variety of rhetorical genres extant in Scripture and tradition. He describes theology as the doctrine of living well (*doctrina bene vivendi*); he explains this by saying that one should live in accordance to God as the source of all good things. Theology is, in Ramus' view, a practical discipline: it is directed towards practice and exercise (*usus et exercitatio*).<sup>15</sup> Ramus wishes to keep close to the explicit teachings of Scripture; an intention he fulfills in his own discussion of the doctrine of predestination, which emphasizes the historical course of God's election of his people.<sup>16</sup> His fundamental division of the material of theology is between faith in God and actions of faith;<sup>17</sup> this division found some followers among later theologians.<sup>18</sup> Ramus' exposition of "faith" is structured upon the

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<sup>13</sup> McKim, *Ramism*, 25-33; Ong, *Ramus*, 225-269.

<sup>14</sup> Reprint Frankfurt: Minerva, 1969.

<sup>15</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 1-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 9-10, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> However, one should be cautious in assuming dependence on Ramus whenever a division between "faith" and "works" occurs: Polanus, *Syntagma*, 131, lists, besides Scriptural

Apostles' Creed,<sup>19</sup> his discussion of the "actions of faith" upon the Decalogue,<sup>20</sup> the Lord's Prayer,<sup>21</sup> and the sacraments.<sup>22</sup> As such, Ramus' theology is based on catechetical models, rather than aimed at a fully systematic discussion of doctrine.

One of the clearest examples of a Ramist-like theology is contained in William Ames' *Medulla*, which is obviously structured according to Ramist principles. First, the definition of theology as *doctrina Deo vivendi* closely resembles Ramus' description *doctrina bene vivendi*.<sup>23</sup> Second, the complete treatment of theology is divided in two parts, just as with Ramus: faith and obedience.<sup>24</sup> In addition, strong emphasis is laid on the will as the primary active faculty for the exercise of theology. This results in the clearly practical outlook of Ames' *Medulla*.<sup>25</sup> Third, the technique of bifurcation is continued in the doctrine of God, where the fundamental distinction is between the sufficiency and the efficiency of God.<sup>26</sup> A further bifurcation appears when the question "Who God is" is subdivided in "How great God is" and "How God is," and so on.<sup>27</sup>

In the later 17th century, English theologian Edward Leigh provides a broad description of the character of theology, in which he mixes influences from different sources. Among the more traditional, Thomist or Scotist, statements, one finds the following definition: "Divinity is the true wisdom of divine things, divinely revealed to us to live well and blessedly, or, for our eternall Salvation." In clearly Ramist terms, Leigh explicitly parallels theology as the *ars bene vivendi* with logic as the *ars bene disserendi* and rhetoric as the *ars bene loquendi*.<sup>28</sup>

Another author who uses the Ramist pattern of bifurcation is Henricus Alting: he divides the content of theology in *Deus* and *Dei opera*, and further on distinguishes between God as absolutely viewed and God as existing in the

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evidence, 12 authors or documents that support it, including Ignatius, Irenaeus, Augustine, Beza, Zanchi, Ursinus, and Calvin.

<sup>19</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 10-95.

<sup>20</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 96-202.

<sup>21</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 203-256.

<sup>22</sup> Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 257-348 (including a detailed refutation of the Roman-Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation).

<sup>23</sup> Amesius, *Medulla*, 1-3; cf. with Ramus, *Commentariorum*, 6: "Theologia est doctrina bene vivendi (...), id est Deo bonorum omnium fonti congruenter & accomodate." Cf. also the choice for *religio* as the object of theology by Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 3-4, and the definition by Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 1 ("theologia est disciplina (...) docens modum bene beateque vivendi in aeternum"). Also in the *Synopsis*, disp. I, th. XI,4 we find the expression "modum bene et beate vivendi."

<sup>24</sup> Amesius, *Medulla*, 3-5. Cf. also the division between *fides* and *charitas* by Wendelin, *Christiana Theologiae*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Amesius, *Medulla*, 3. Similarly, Polanus, *Syntagma*, 130, calls theology a *disciplina practica*; its goal is not only knowledge, but operation. Even the doctrine of Trinity that could be viewed as highly theoretical has the practical goal of bringing us to glorifying God and living in communion with the triune God. To be sure, the definition of theology as a practical discipline could have medieval as well as Ramist antecedents, see section 4.3 below.

<sup>26</sup> Amesius, *Medulla*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Amesius, *Medulla*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, 1-5.

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relations of the Persons;<sup>29</sup> he also makes bifurcated distinctions in discussing specific items as the divine foreknowledge and the justice of God.<sup>30</sup> A further indication of Ramist influence on Alting is his reserved attitude towards metaphysics: he denies the legitimate usage of metaphysical arguments in theology, which he bases on the assumption that metaphysics deals with being in general, whereas the object of theology is the most special being: God.<sup>31</sup>

In Polanus, we find an interesting ambivalence on this point. On the one hand, he uses the Ramist pattern of faith and works, God and his works, etc. as an architectural device for his exposition. On the other hand, in reviewing several *distributiones* of theology, he argues that the division between God and God's actions is "not legitimate" as the basic division, for the following reasons: (1) the works of God are comprehended in God himself, and thus the two parts of the division coincide; (2) God is the proper (*adaequatum*) object of theology, and can therefore not be a part of it; (3) as a practical discipline, theology should also deal with the way to the goal of glorifying and enjoying God, and should not be restricted to God and his works; (4). it is ambiguous to separate God's essence from his works, since the "internal acts" of God (decree, providence, predestination) are identical with the divine essence.<sup>32</sup>

If we try briefly to assess the significance of Ramism, I would state three points:

1. The Ramist method is a method of teaching. As such, it has its merits, particularly its emphasis on structure, clearness and brevity. But we should not expect more from it than it intends to provide. Ramism is not the forerunner of modern, experimental science. It has certainly helped prepare the ground, by dissociating from the ancient authorities and by emphasizing the practical use of knowledge; but it simply does not provide the instruments needed for experimental research. It just explains and structures a given body of knowledge. Experimental, empiricist science only started to gain ground by the 16th century discoveries in astronomy and the theory of science by Francis Bacon. This later development accounts for the disappearance of Ramism as a separate branch of science after 1630.<sup>33</sup>
2. As a philosophy and as a method, Ramism shows serious defects. Many of Ramus' contemporaries complained about Ramus' dismissal of metaphysics. This reveals that he was concerned more with effective teaching than with a quest for truth. Regarding the specific Ramist method, it should be noticed that, compared to the medieval scholastic method of the *quaestio*, it lacks a sense of need for discussing intricate questions. Its alleged simplicity of defining and dividing does not reflect the actual enterprise of thinking. Ramism did not provide a full-fledged alternative to Aristotelianism, and part of its decline was

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<sup>29</sup> Alting, *Loci communes*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Alting, *Loci communes*, 17, 28; *Problemata*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Alting, *Loci communes*, 2; *Problemata*, 6-9.

<sup>32</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 131-132. The basic division approved of by Polanus is the (equally Ramist) one between faith and works. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:160-161, fails to notice the ambivalence in Polanus.

<sup>33</sup> Hooykaas, *Humanisme*, 26-32, 51-63, 101-104.

caused by the revival of Aristotelianism around 1600 (especially due to the Spanish Jesuits).

3. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, Ramism was booming business. Especially in Germany<sup>34</sup> and England, institutions of higher education adopted the Ramist way of teaching. From England it was exported to the newly founded colonies that now form the United States of America.<sup>35</sup> But when it gained influence, its distinctive features became harder to trace. This holds especially for the Ramist influence in theology. There are a few theologians who explicitly approved of Ramus' teachings on logic and method (e.g., Johannes Piscator). Others were more or less influenced by his method, particularly several theologians who studied in Cambridge or Oxford. William Perkins and William Ames use Ramist patterns of structuring their treatises; Ames also gives a Ramist-like definition of theology, followed by a few other theologians. The ongoing bifurcation occurs in such writers as Bartholomaeus Keckermann and Amandus Polanus. But even in these cases, the Ramist influence does not seem to entail major consequences for the substance of doctrine, and it is balanced by different methodological approaches. There is no unambiguous evidence for Moltmann's contention that Ramism was the philosophy of all those opposing Reformed orthodox theology of Theodore Beza's sort.

## **4.2. Innovative Aristotelianism**

In fact, the educational reform by Petrus Ramus could be viewed as innovative Aristotelianism. In his statements, however, the polemical tendency against Aristotle is dominant. In this section, another strand of Aristotelian philosophy is discussed that remained closer to the original Aristotle, while, in typically humanistic fashion, removing the medieval interpretations. The innovative Aristotelianism flourished in Padua, and its great champion was Jacopo Zabarella.<sup>36</sup>

Zabarella, who lived from 1533-1589, was, according to Neal Gilbert, the most renowned teacher of logic in Europe during the sixteenth century.<sup>37</sup> He was a professor of philosophy at the University of Padua (Italy), and deliberately built his teaching on the works of Aristotle. He wrote a massive commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, and in addition published a series of treatises dealing with logical issues, in which he strove for a correct and fruitful interpretation and explanation of Aristotle.

Zabarella unfolded his view of method in a work titled *De methodis* (4 books). From the outset, Zabarella is very clear about what he is going to oppose: it is the

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<sup>34</sup> Hooykaas, *Humanisme*, 113-124, mentions the universities of Marburg, Kassel, Rostock, Helmstadt, Basel, Zurich, and Bern as examples of institutions that were organized according to Ramist principles. Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 296, points to the academy of Herborn that had incorporated Ramism in its official statutes.

<sup>35</sup> About Ramist influence on British and early American education, see McKim, *Ramism*, 37-50, and Richard E. Dickson, *Ramism and the Rhetorical Tradition* (PhD thesis Duke University, typescript 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Herman Randall, *The School of Padua and the Emergence of Modern Science*, Saggi e testi / Università di Padova - Columbia University, vol. 1 (Padua: Antenora, 1961).

<sup>37</sup> Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts*, 167.

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traditional theory of method developed by Galen, who distinguished three methods: compositive, resolute, and definitive.<sup>38</sup> An important aspect of Zabarella's own view is his strong distinction between order (*ordo*) and method (*methodus*). He states that order is merely concerned with the right distribution and structuring of the materials, whereas method has the task to establish an inferential connection between the different parts of knowledge. Thus, order is a prerequisite for good science, but it does not generate knowledge and science itself. It only serves to facilitate the process of learning.<sup>39</sup> In discussing the norm for determining the right order, Zabarella loosens somewhat the connection between knowledge and reality: he states that the right order does not necessarily follow the order of nature, but that it must follow the order of knowing; that which is more known to us, must precede that which is less known.<sup>40</sup>

After defining the concept of order, Zabarella goes on to refute Galen's claim that there is a threefold order: compositive, resolute, definitive. Zabarella demonstrates that there are only two orders: one is compositive; it reasons from the first principles and causes towards the individual effects; the other is resolute; it first sets the goal, and subsequently examines the principles and the means by which the goal can be attained. Over against Galen and his 16th century defenders, Zabarella maintains that the definitive order, which provides a definition of the object and explains the parts of the definition, is not an independent order: it can be reduced to either the compositive or the resolute order.<sup>41</sup>

The next important step in Zabarella's argument is his claim that each of the two orders belongs exclusively to one out of two sorts of sciences: the compositive order is used in the contemplative sciences, the resolute order in the operative or practical sciences. By contemplative sciences, Zabarella (with all Aristotelians in general) means the sciences that have as their subject-matter things that exist or happen necessarily, without any possibility for human beings to manipulate them. Examples are metaphysics, which deals with the ultimate components of reality, and physics, which studies the natural entities just as they are. In order to attain this goal, one should just start with the most common and best known principles of the discipline, and then proceed towards the most specific consequences. When the body of knowledge is fully covered, the system of science is complete. The practical or operative sciences, on the other hand, have as their subject-matter the contingent things, which stand open to being influenced by freely willed operations of human beings. Examples are the science of ethics, which directly concerns human actions, and the art of architecture, which is completely within man's control. Because these practical sciences involve voluntary action, they proceed by stating the goal, and from the goal backwards find the way and the means to attain it.<sup>42</sup>

After dealing with the two sorts of order, Zabarella now turns to method. Order merely provides the best way through a body of knowledge. Method, on the other hand, has the power to produce knowledge, proceeding from things known to

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<sup>38</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 133-134.

<sup>39</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 139, 149-151, 223.

<sup>40</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 144.

<sup>41</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 165-176.

<sup>42</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 180-183.

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things unknown.<sup>43</sup> Zabarella seems to restrict his discussion of method to the contemplative sciences. He states that all method can basically be reduced to syllogism. As a strict Aristotelian, he limits the use of syllogism to necessarily true propositions. Such propositions contain a strictly implicative relation between cause and effect.<sup>44</sup> Now the relation can be established in two directions: from cause to effect, or from effect to cause. Zabarella calls the former way demonstrative or compositive, the latter way resolutive. The result is, that within the contemplative sciences, such as physics and metaphysics, we have a twofold method: a demonstrative method that argues from known causes to unknown effects, and a resolutive method that argues from known effects back to unknown causes.<sup>45</sup>

As the above exposition makes clear, Zabarella squarely opposes Peter Ramus' view of method. Ramus starts from logic and rhetoric, and claims that method consists exclusively of definition and division. Zabarella starts from physics (natural sciences), and claims that method is demonstrative or resolutive to the exclusion of the alleged methods of definition and division.

It is not so easy to locate the *direct* influence of Zabarella on the development of Reformed orthodox method.

The most interesting person to investigate is a theologian who studied thoroughly both the Ramist and the Zabarellan views on logic and method: Bartholomaeus Keckermann. Born in 1571 at Danzig, he studied in Leipzig, Wittenberg, and Heidelberg. After some years of teaching theology and Hebrew, Keckermann was appointed rector of the gymnasium and professor of philosophy in Danzig, where he worked from 1601 until his early death in 1609. During these years, he worked with admirable zeal to produce *compendia* for all the different branches of philosophy he had to teach. Five years after he died, in 1614, all his works were published in two volumes of about 2000 columns each. His emphasis clearly was on logic, but he also wrote on physics, astronomy, geography, history, economy, navigation, and rhetoric.

In his logical works, Keckermann extensively reviews the discussion between Ramist and Aristotelian philosophers (or, as he names them, *Peripathetici*). He shows a profound knowledge of Ramus' works and those written by his followers. His criticism of Ramism can be summarized in two words: mutilation and confusion.<sup>46</sup> By *mutilation*, Keckermann means the omission of metaphysics in the Ramist system. Contrary to Ramus, Keckermann states that metaphysics is quite useful, especially in theology. According to Keckermann, Ramus *confused* his logic by mixing art, prudence, and science, and by reducing all methods to his favorite

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<sup>43</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 223-225.

<sup>44</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 226-229, 272-275.

<sup>45</sup> Zabarella, *De methodis*, 230, 268. Note that the "resolutive" method occurs in two different senses: first, as the general method of the practical sciences, and second, as one way of arguing (from effects back to causes) within the contemplative sciences.

<sup>46</sup> Keckermann, *Dissertatio ad Logicæ studiosos de Logicorum Praecognitorum instituto, deque controversiis inter Philosophos Peripateticos & Rameos*, in *Opera omnia*, 77-89. Keckermann's critique of Ramism is briefly mentioned by Moltmann, "Petrus Ramus," 301, but it does not play a role in his evaluation.

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pair of definition and division. Keckermann's sympathy clearly is with Zabarella, although he does not agree with him on all issues. He supports Zabarella's statement that definition and division are not truly methods.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Keckermann uses the device of definition and division everywhere in his own teaching. As a didactical order, the Ramist method seemed useful to him, although he supplemented it with so-called *canones* in which he explained the preceding statements and entered into discussions.<sup>48</sup> In summary, Keckermann seems to be a Zabarellean in theory, and a semi-Ramist in practice.

Of special interest for the study of Reformed Orthodoxy is Keckermann's implementation of his methodological insights into his theological system. His initial definition of theology comes as a surprise, compared to the definitions given by many of his contemporaries (see 4.3 below). Whereas most Reformed theologians consider theology as either *scientia* (science) or *sapientia* (wisdom), Keckermann defines theology as: the religious prudence to attain salvation.<sup>49</sup> He clearly views theology as a practical, operative science; it has a clearly practical goal: salvation, consisting in the *fruitio Dei* as the highest good; and it deals with the means given by God to attain this goal. He explicitly rejects the view, that theology is a mixed discipline with some theoretical and some practical elements.<sup>50</sup> Keckermann's choice for a fundamentally practical theology does not imply, however, that there are no theoretical aspects in his system. The theologian's first task is to reflect on God as the first and highest principle, on which the whole system of goal and means depends.<sup>51</sup> In Keckermann's *Systema SS. Theologiae* he then follows a fairly traditional exposition of the doctrine of God; traditional with at least this exception, that he discusses the doctrine of the Trinity before he deals with the divine attributes. In his doctrine of the Trinity, he is not satisfied with just giving the traditional statements; he even provides a 38-step-demonstration of the Trinity: on the basis of the respective acts of intellect and will in God, he proofs that there must be three persons in God, no more and no less.<sup>52</sup> After Keckermann's preliminary discussion of God as the principle of theology, he turns to the proper body of doctrine; he divides theology into two parts: one concerning the knowledge of man's misery and inability to attain salvation, the other concerning the knowledge of God's redemption and restoration of mankind.<sup>53</sup>

Bartholomaeus Keckermann is one of the clearest examples of a theologian who examined thoroughly the philosophical discussion on method of his days, and who used its results in his own theology. However, he stands almost alone in his specific choices. As Richard Muller mentions in his discussion of Reformed orthodox prolegomena, only Johann Heinrich Heidegger comes close to

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<sup>47</sup> Keckermann, *De methodo*, in *Opera omnia*, 824-830.

<sup>48</sup> A similar procedure is found in Polanus' *Syntagma*: after an introductory definition, mostly consisting of a division into several members, he gives *axiomata* and then enters into further (polemical) discussion.

<sup>49</sup> Keckermann, *Systema SS. Theologiae*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Keckermann, *Systema SS. Theologiae*, 68-69.

<sup>51</sup> Keckermann, *Systema SS. Theologiae*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Keckermann, *Systema SS. Theologiae*, 72-83.

<sup>53</sup> Keckermann, *Systema SS. Theologiae*, 139-141.

Keckermann's view of theology as exclusively practical; although he does not even use the specific term prudence as indicating the *genus* of theology.<sup>54</sup>

### 4.3. Theological Reflections on Method

In this section, I discuss some Early orthodox writers who were apparently not in direct contact with the philosophical discussions of their time, but developed their own view of the method of theology within the framework of the theological tradition. An early attempt to provide a methodical account of theology is a book written by Andreas Hyperius, *De Theologo, seu de ratione studii theologici* (1556).<sup>55</sup> It is an introduction to the study of theology, running from prerequisites for the ministry to instructions for church government. The center of the book is formed by an introduction to the exegesis of Scripture. Concerning the public exposition of Scripture, Hyperius distinguishes between a *methodus popularis* and a *methodus scholastica*. The former is more rhetorical, and fit for addressing a larger public. The latter is more academic, concerned with exact logical analysis, and should be used in the schools.<sup>56</sup> In passing, Hyperius mentions another division of methods: the *methodi resolutoria, compositiva, and definitiva*.<sup>57</sup> In exegesis, one should apply the resolatory method, in explaining the *loci communes* the compositive method. The *loci communes* form the counterpart of exegesis: after analyzing the text of Scripture, one should gather all data into thematically ordered chapters.<sup>58</sup> Hyperius thinks the *loci communes* are especially helpful in reducing the intricate polemical questions to the main issues of Scripture.<sup>59</sup> He arranges all theological topics under no more than 6 headings: God, creature, church, doctrine, signs or sacraments, and eschatology.<sup>60</sup>

Next I briefly mention Antoine de Chandieu, a French minister who added to his treatise *De verbo Dei scripto adversus humanas traditiones* a preface, in which he explained his method.<sup>61</sup> Chandieu has attracted some attention, since Wilhelm Neuser portrayed him as the crown witness of the introduction of scholastic method into Reformed theology.<sup>62</sup> But, as a matter of fact, Chandieu's preface is

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<sup>54</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 1:344, 353 (mentioning, besides Heidegger, Cocceius, Burman, Heidanus, and Baxter); Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 3: theology is "doctrina seu sermo de Deo & rebus Divinis"; 21: "theologia tota practica est." The change from Keckermann's *prudentia* to Heidegger's *doctrina* is not noticed by Muller.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. W. van 't Spijker, *Principe, methode en functie van de theologie bij Andreas Hyperius*, Apeldoornse Studies, vol. 26 (Kampen: Kok, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Hyperius, *De Theologo*, 398-404.

<sup>57</sup> As we have seen in the previous section, this is precisely the triad of methods presented by Galen and rejected by Zabarella.

<sup>58</sup> Hyperius, *De Theologo*, 421-422.

<sup>59</sup> Hyperius, *De Theologo*, 425-427, 464-496.

<sup>60</sup> Hyperius, *De Theologo*, 453-464.

<sup>61</sup> Chandieu, *De verbo Dei scripto adversus humanas traditiones. Theologica & scholastica tractatio*, in *Opera Theologica*, 3rd ed. (Geneva: Joannes le Preux, 1592). The "Praefatio de vera methodo Theologica simul & scholastice disputandi" is found on pages 5-13.

<sup>62</sup> Wilhelm Neuser, "Von Zwingli und Calvin bis zur Synode von Westminster," in *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, ed. by Carl Andresen, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 167-351; the section on Chandieu is found on pages 309-312.

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quite short and simple, just repeating the distinction we found in Hyperius between the popular and the scholastic way of dealing with a subject.<sup>63</sup> Chandieu is well aware, as were his colleagues, that the scholastic method was abused by many in the late Middle Ages.<sup>64</sup> Therefore he adds the warning, that scholastic reasoning must proceed exclusively from the proper principles of theology (the Word of God) and must deal with necessarily true propositions only.<sup>65</sup>

Around the same time that Chandieu wrote his preface to the doctrine of Scripture, Lambert Daneau, another French minister who became a professor of theology at Geneva and Leiden, published his *Christianae Isagoges ad Christianorum Theologorum Locos Communes*. According to the preface written by Theodore Beza, it was intended as a Reformed successor of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*.<sup>66</sup> In this work, published in 1583, he does not provide prolegomena to theology. In a shorter work, his *Compendium Sacrae Theologiae*, he gives a few statements on the nature of theology. He identifies theology as the true science of the true God, as it is revealed in Scripture. Thus, the foundation of theology is Scripture. The goal of theology is the glory of God and the salvation of man. The object of theology is the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Its subject is the soul of man that is enlightened by God's Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

A far-reaching influence on Reformed orthodox methodology was exerted by Franciscus Junius, Daneau's successor as a professor of theology at Leiden, who published his treatise *De vera theologia* in 1594.<sup>68</sup> Junius gives a systematic description of theology, which, although it does not contain much explicit methodical instructions, nevertheless lays the ground on which a concrete method can be built.<sup>69</sup>

He defines theology as "wisdom concerning divine things."<sup>70</sup> This definition contains two important elements: First, the description of the character of theology

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<sup>63</sup> Chandieu, "Praefatio," 11-12.

<sup>64</sup> Chandieu, "Praefatio," 6-8.

<sup>65</sup> Chandieu, "Praefatio," 9, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Theodorus Beza, "Praefatio," in: Lambertus Danaeus, *Christianae Isagoges ad Christianorum Theologorum Locos Communes, libri II*. Geneva: Eusthatius Vignon, 1583.

<sup>67</sup> Lambertus Danaeus, *Compendium Sacrae Theologiae, seu Erotemata Theologica, in quibus totius verae Theologiae Christianae summa breviter comprehensa* (Montpellier: Ioannes Giletus, 1595), 1-2.

<sup>68</sup> In this study, the edition of the treatise by Abraham Kuyper is used: "De Theologia Vera, ortu, natura, formis, partibus, et modo illius, libellus; quo omnes christiani, de sua dignitate; et theologi de gravitate sui ministerii secundum Deum admonentur," in *D. Francisci Junii Opuscula theologica selecta*, ed. by Abraham Kuyper, *Bibliotheca Reformata*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller and Johan Herman Kruyt, 1882), 39-101.

<sup>69</sup> A recent analysis of Junius' *De theologia vera* is provided by Willem J. van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 319-335. Further on Junius' theology, see Christiaan de Jonge, *De irenische ecclesiologie van Franciscus Junius (1545-1602)*, *Bibliotheca Humanistica & Reformatorica*, vol. 30 (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1980), especially p. 51-57 on *De theologia vera*.

<sup>70</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 48-49.

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as “wisdom,” by which Junius positions it in the paradigm of the forms of knowledge commonly distinguished in the Aristotelian theory of science (*intelligentia, scientia, sapientia, prudentia, ars*). “Wisdom” (*sapientia*) may be taken as one of the forms of earthly knowledge, but it is seen as a higher level of knowledge as well: it derives its lofty character from the heavenly truths that form its content. Second, the object of theology is indicated as “divine things”; Junius here chooses a middle road in the discussion on the object of theology: should it be defined as “God,” or as “religion”? The former is said to lead to speculation and to an unjustified narrowing of the field of study; the latter runs the risk of taking human religious activity to the exclusion of divine revelation. Junius escapes from the first danger by including in “divine things” both God himself and the things related to God, and from the second danger by his explicit reference to revelation as the source of theology.

A fundamental distinction is made between archetypal and ectypal theology: the former indicates the knowledge God has of himself; the latter signifies the knowledge of God by other beings. According to Junius, the two types of theology relate to each other by way of analogy: they do not merely share the same “name,” but have something in common, despite important differences. To be sure, archetypal and ectypal theology cannot be placed under one *genus*, since archetypal theology is identical with the divine essence which cannot be shared with anything else.<sup>71</sup> Ectypal theology is distinguished by Junius in *theologia ectypa simpliciter dicta* and *theologia ectypa secundum quid*. The former is the whole and perfect body of knowledge of God that can be communicated to creatures; it is accommodated to our capacity of understanding, but still resides, as it were, in God’s mind in order to be revealed to us. The latter is the relational form of knowledge that is graciously transmitted to creatures by God. This *theologia ectypa secundum quid*, in turn, exists in three forms: the theology of union in the person of Jesus Christ, the theology of vision by the angels and saints in heaven, and the theology of revelation for human beings during earthly life.<sup>72</sup> The implication of the archetypal-ectypal-distinction is twofold: one, theology is dependent on revelation by God; two, there is a supreme model to which the earthly theology should conform as much as possible.

The knowledge of God is communicated by two means: nature and grace. Junius defines natural theology as knowledge deduced from principles that are evident from the light of natural human intellect. However, since human nature is corrupted by the fall of Adam and Eve, no one has the possibility to attain salutary knowledge of God by means of natural theology.<sup>73</sup>

Supernatural theology is needed to give man the necessary knowledge of God leading to salvation. Junius discusses this theology with the aid of the scheme of

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<sup>71</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 49-53. Cf. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 3, who relates the divine self-knowledge to the mutual knowledge of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Junius’ nearly immediate successors at the Academy of Leiden give a trinitarian description of God’s archetypal self-knowledge in *Synopsis*, disp. I, th. III.

<sup>72</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 53-63.

<sup>73</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 63-70.

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fourfold causality: material, formal, efficient and final cause.<sup>74</sup> He defines the matter of theology as “the divine things, namely God and the things related to God.” The form of theology is the divine truth, considered either as a whole or as the harmony of its parts. The efficient cause of theology can be divided into a principal cause (God the Father in his Son by his Spirit) and an instrumental cause (the spoken Word of God). Theology has a twofold final cause: the ultimate and highest goal is the glory of God; the nearest and subordinate goal is the salvation of the elect.<sup>75</sup>

In the final paragraphs of his treatise, Junius reflects on the concrete subjective manifestations of the knowledge of God in individual theologians. He admits that little can be stated about it, but he emphasizes the need to search the unity of theology in the one, perfect and immutable truth of God.<sup>76</sup>

In Junius' argument, a synthesis of several traditional elements can be traced. He develops his view against the background of the traditional Aristotelian theory of science, in which every science should build on principles that are taken to be self-evident. It is remarkable that in defining supernatural theology, Junius does not dismiss this requirement, but instead introduces the light of a higher science (revelation and illumination by the Spirit) to which the evidence of the principles applies.<sup>77</sup> A rather basic distinction in scholastic thought is the distinction between a thing absolutely taken (*absolute* or *simpliciter*) and a thing considered in some specific respect (*relate* or *secundum quid*). Junius uses the distinction with respect to the knowledge of God transmitted by revelation: taken in itself and seen from God's side (*pro communicantis modo*) theology is one and perfect; viewed as accepted by individual men, it is fragmentary and imperfect.<sup>78</sup> More fundamentally, it is clear from Junius' exposition that in the Reformed view theology is inconceivable without revelation from God. In the mainstream of Reformed Orthodoxy, wherever the exact place of discussions on natural theology may be, they fall under the heading of God's revelatory activity. Often, the sections on natural theology have a rather obligatory character: from the perspective of completeness they are inserted, but the substance of theology is explicitly based on God's gracious, special revelation in Scripture. Reflecting the efforts of federal theology, some writers show awareness of the *oeconomia* in God's revelation, moving from childhood through adolescence to maturity.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> On the allegedly Aristotelian implications of this causal scheme, see Van Asselt, “Fundamental Meaning,” 328-329 and the references given there in footnote 42.

<sup>75</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 70-74, 78-92.

<sup>76</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 92-99.

<sup>77</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 71-72. Muller, *PRRD*, 1:223-228, 233-234, and Van Asselt, “Fundamental Meaning,” 322-323, emphasize the fundamentally Scotistic origin and implications of the Reformed orthodox view of theology, to the denial of a Thomistic epistemology based on the *analogia entis*. As this may be true concerning the archetypal-ectypal distinction and the subsequent emphasis on God's revelation as the only source of our knowledge of God, it is remarkable that Junius can unproblematically follow Thomas on the point of describing theology as a subalternate science deriving its principles from the “higher science” of God's revelation.

<sup>78</sup> Junius, *De vera theologia*, 74-78, 92-99.

<sup>79</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 7, 18. In the latter context, Heidegger contrasts the historical

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Original, at least in the context of Reformed Orthodoxy, is Junius' elaboration of the distinction between the archetypal and ectypal knowledge of God. Although the distinction was known as an argumentative device, and although Junius' predecessors had reflected on the relation between God's knowledge of himself and our knowledge of God, it had not yet been investigated so thoroughly. Junius' scheme allows seeing the differences and the positive relation between the two forms of knowledge.<sup>80</sup>

Junius' statement of the nature of theology rapidly became standard in Reformed theology. Whereas Junius provided a thorough and at times original investigation into the scientific foundations of theology, many of his successors restricted themselves to a summary of his main results.<sup>81</sup> Within this tradition, the most debated issue remains the question, whether theology is theoretical (*scientia*) or practical (*sapientia, prudentia, ars*). The fact that Junius described theology primarily as "wisdom" (*sapientia*), while further emphasizing the scientific character of theology, might indicate the permanent ambivalence on this point. The Leiden *Synopsis* keeps a strict balance between theology as theoretical *scientia* and as practical *sapientia*: "theory and practice in theology are not opposed and different things, but conditions that belong together in pursuing eternal life, and are gathered in their proper order."<sup>82</sup> Interesting in this respect is the remark that theology is concerned with necessary things, some in the absolute sense necessary (God and his attributes), some on the presupposition (*ex hypothesi*) of God's will (God's works and our worship of him). Though under the label of "necessary," this distinction echoes the Scotist distinction between the necessary and the contingent dimensions of theology.<sup>83</sup> Some theologians explicitly lay emphasis on the theoretical, contemplative character of this science;<sup>84</sup> others give priority to the

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*oeconomia* of revelation with the philosophical dogmas and technical terms belonging to human wisdom. He accuses scholastic theology of introducing a "mixophilosopho-theologia" at severe damage of Church and faith. The list of loci in Heidegger's *Corpus theologiae* (page 21) reveals a significant prominence of covenantal history.

<sup>80</sup> In later Reformed Orthodoxy, the distinction and relation between archetypal and ectypal theology was not universally accepted. Among others, Turretini, *Institutio*, 6, adopts it, together with most of the subsequent distinctions (*theologia unionis-revelationis-visionis; theologia naturalis-supernaturalis; theologia objectiva-subjectiva*). His contemporary Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 3, states that the proper "archetype" of our knowledge of God is not God's self-knowledge, but that which God has decreed to reveal to man. This could be implied in Junius' definition of ectypal theology as *ex archetypo informatam per communicationem Gratiae*, and in his distinction between *theologia ectypa simpliciter dicta* and *secundum quid* (*De vera theologia*, 54).

<sup>81</sup> This can be seen with Lucas Trelcatius sr., *Compendium Locorum Communium S. Theologiae*, 6-7, with his son Lucas Trelcatius jr., *Scholastica & Methodica Locorum Communium S. Theologiae Institutio*, 1-5, the *Synopsis*, disp. I, th. I-XXI, and with M.F. Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 1. More examples of authors drawing on Junius are provided by Van Asselt, "Fundamental Meaning," 323.

<sup>82</sup> *Synopsis*, disp. I, th. XXIII.

<sup>83</sup> *Synopsis*, disp. I, th. X,2. Cf. Muller, PRRD, 1:234, on a "minor disagreement" among the Reformed orthodox on the question whether the distinction *theologia archetypa-ectypa* should be equated with the *scientia necessaria-libera*.

<sup>84</sup> E.g., Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 3.

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practical worship of God that should be the result of the theological study. A clear example of the latter approach is Petrus van Mastricht, who explicitly claims that theology is a practical science, although on the way to attain this goal the contemplative, theoretical method plays a role. Mastricht pleads for a close connection between the content of faith (doctrine) and the practical obedience of faith.<sup>85</sup> Heidegger, following the definition of theology as practical, refutes a misunderstanding that could arise from the term “practical”: it does not imply that God is an object of our “operations,” but only means that theological knowledge is not for its own sake, but serves the goal of God’s glory and service.<sup>86</sup>

One aspect of the Reformed scholastic reflections on theological method deserves a more extended discussion, as it directly affects the knowability of God and has in recent theology been the victim of various misunderstanding.<sup>87</sup> In the contributions reviewed above, we can see a constant emphasis on God’s Word in Scripture as the principle, source, and norm of theology. We know God by means of his own revelation – both general and special, but we should note that by far the greatest weight is ascribed to special, supernatural and gracious revelation in Scripture. The Reformed orthodox are unanimous in realizing that God is incomprehensible to us, so that we cannot know God “in himself”, but only on the basis of divine revelation. The distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology is crucial here: we have no direct access to the knowledge of God, but are dependent on God’s external self-disclosure. Even so, our human rational capacities are insufficient to “comprehend” God; we can at best “apprehend” him. Consistent with their view of revelation, the Reformed orthodox state that we do not know God through his essence, but through his effects, operations and names by which He wills to reveal himself to us. Within the framework of revelation-based knowledge, the Reformed scholastics employ the famous threefold way of knowing God: the *via negationis*, *via eminentiae*, and *via causationis*. These three ways function as different procedures of construing a conceptual terminology of the attributes of God: some are construed by way of negation (in-finity, in-dependence, im-mutability, etc.), others by way of superlatives (omni-science, omni-potence, perfection, etc.), a third way is to describe God as the source or cause of goodness, wisdom etc. It is important to notice that the Reformed orthodox do not construe these concepts “out of the blue” by purely philosophical reasoning, but fill the three categories with many Scriptural testimonies of God, his glorious properties and mighty deeds.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 15, 48, 50. A description and analysis of Mastricht’s theology is now available in Adrian C. Neele, *The Art of Living to God: A Study of Method and Piety in the Theoretico-Practica Theologia of Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706)* (PhD thesis, Utrecht 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> This discussion is immediately connected to the exposition of the divine names (section 5.2 below), and thus forms a natural transition from theological methodology to the proper doctrine of God.

<sup>88</sup> This exposition borrows from Muller, *PRRD*, 3:164-167. The proposal made by J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Beknopte Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), 162 to replace the three *viae* by the *via revelationis* creates a dilemma that would never cross the Reformed scholastic’s mind.

#### 4.4. Concrete Methodical Instructions

Whereas the different positions in the theory of science, described in the preceding sections, have impact on the method of theology, there still can be found some more practical reflections on method by Reformed orthodox writers.

The inauguration of fresh professors of systematic theology was a popular occasion to unfold one's views on the method of theology. An early example of such a lecture is the *Oratio* held by Zacharias Ursinus at the start of his professorate of *loci communes* at the University of Heidelberg, September 1562.<sup>89</sup> He argues that, in addition to reading the biblical books, theologians need well-structured instruction in the most important parts of biblical doctrine; this is the task of the *loci communes* professor. Ursinus states, following his teacher Philip Melancthon, that the doctrine of the church is one coherent story. It is impossible to abandon one article of faith and keep the others intact.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, knowledge of the whole body of doctrine is necessary to judge opinions in accordance to the Word of God.<sup>91</sup> Ursinus realizes that his present student population is partly ill-prepared, and therefore needs catechetical instruction before the properly scholastic treatment of doctrine can start.<sup>92</sup> He proposes to start his teaching at an intermediate level, for which he indicates the following elements: he will discuss the most important parts of doctrine; in doing this, he will not pursue difficult questions, but provide definitions, necessary distinctions and additional propositions; evidences from Scripture and arguments deduced from them will be given; objections from adversaries will be mentioned and briefly refuted. Ursinus is emphatic in identifying Scripture as the sole norm of theology. Although Christ and the apostles sometimes reasoned, and reason is useful in collecting and illustrating doctrine, it is exclusively with divine testimonies that doctrine should be demonstrated. Ursinus explicitly rejects the demonstrative method, which is used in teaching the arts; instead, theology has to discuss the parts in a historical order.<sup>93</sup>

Several decades later, Henricus Alting devoted his *Oratio inauguralis* to the question: how must the *loci communes* be taught? Alting sees the utility of this discipline in its assistance to understanding Scripture and judging doctrinal discussions. With respect to the method or right order of teaching, he calls attention to the great variety of opinions concerning the right method. In his view, the basic methodical laws do stand firm, but the application differs. Alting commends the *historica series* as the most appropriate way of dealing with theology. What Alting understands by this method is that, beginning with the

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<sup>89</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, "Oratio habita in Academia Heidelbergensi, cum auspicaretur Locorum Communium Professionem. Calend. Septembr. Anno Domini MDLXII," in: *Opera theologica*, 414-423.

<sup>90</sup> Ursinus, "Oratio," 418.

<sup>91</sup> Ursinus, "Oratio," 419-420.

<sup>92</sup> Ursinus, "Oratio," 416-417. Ursinus mentions the forthcoming "formula Catechismi puerilis," thus providing indirect evidence of his own involvement in the production of the Heidelberg Catechism.

<sup>93</sup> Ursinus, "Oratio," 417. The concept of *historica series*, developed by Melancthon, underlies among others the *Institutes* of John Calvin; see Muller, "Ordo Docendi," in: *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 118-139.

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doctrine of God, one proceeds through his works, first the eternal, next the temporal works. A decision of some importance is Alting's choice to separate the didactical and the polemical (elenctic) theology. Alting combines the analytical and the synthetical method.<sup>94</sup>

An extremely negative view on the relation between philosophy and theology would involve that both sciences produce contradictory truths. This "double truth"-thesis is refuted by Bartholomaeus Keckermann in a separate treatise *Brevis et simplex consideratio controversiae hoc tempore a nonnullis motae, de pugna Philosophiae & Theologiae*.<sup>95</sup> He lists 12 arguments to support the thesis that true philosophy and theology never contradict each other. Among those are the statement that both sciences are given by God; they deal with the same principles, since truth is one and simple, it is not multiple or complex.

Most Reformed orthodox writers are careful in allowing philosophy a role in theology; the degree to which they do this differs. In comparison to the fore-mentioned ideas of Henricus Alting, Petrus van Mastricht is rather negative about the use of philosophy. The only positive contribution of reason consists, in his view, in the arrangement of doctrine. In relation to his opinion on the practical character of theology, it is remarkable that Mastricht states that the theological method includes the speculative aspect.<sup>96</sup>

Leonard Rijssen provides a detailed discussion of the role of reason, which has implications for the method of theology. He sees a fourfold function for philosophy: a. as a preparation for the acceptance of the gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*); b. as a confirmation of faith; c. as a means for receiving and accepting doctrine; d. as a preparation for the knowledge of the highest science (theology). He emphasizes the limited range of action of reason: it cannot grasp the truths of Trinity, fall and corruption, Christ the Mediator, true happiness, and the means to attain salvation. The function of reason parallels with the functions of the senses in religious matters: it can perceive, confer, explain, discern and vindicate the truths of revelation. In these respects, reason has the right to judge the specific aspects (*judicium privatae discretionis*), but not the right to decide the truth of a doctrine (*judicium decisionis*). Accordingly, Rijssen states that when in theology a so-called mixed syllogism (*sylogismus mixtus*) is used, its content should be taken from revelation alone, while its form may be governed by the rules of reasoning.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Henricus Alting, "Oratio Inauguralis de Natura, Ortu, Usu, Ordine, sive Methodo Locorum Communium Theologicorum," in: *Scriptorum Theologicorum Heidelbergensium Tomus Primus, continens Locos Communes cum Didacticos, tum Elencticos*. Freistad [= Amsterdam], 1646; numbered separately 1-13.

<sup>95</sup> Keckermann, *Opera omnia*, 68-74. A detailed analysis of this treatise, in the larger context of Reformation and Post-Reformation reflection on the relation between philosophy and theology, is provided by Richard A. Muller, "Vera Philosophia cum sacra Theologia nusquam pugnat: Keckermann on Philosophy, Theology, and the Problem of Double Truth," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 341-365, reissued in Muller's 2003 volume *After Calvin*, 122-136.

<sup>96</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 15.

<sup>97</sup> Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 5-13. We should realize that Rijssen's *Summa* is based on Turretini's *Institutio*.

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### *Excursus 1. Philosophy and theology in the mixed articles*

Some Reformed orthodox authors make a distinction between simple or pure and mixed articles or questions (*articuli puri – mixti; quaestiones simplices – mixtae*). An early discussion of this problem is given by Johannes Maccovius in reference to the work of Bartholomeus Keckermann. From Keckermann he adopts the insight that theology is full of so-called mixed conclusions (*conclusiones mixtae*), which consist of a theological and a metaphysical or physical term. Examples are: whether the Persons of the Trinity are modes of existence? whether the two natures in Christ constitute a person? whether Christ's body is in or outside a place? Maccovius himself then responds to the objection that there must be a congruence of subject and predicate in a syllogism: when the subject is theological (e.g., "Christ"), the predicate may not be philosophical (e.g., "local"). Maccovius affirms this contention in the sense that there must be some positive relation (*affectio*) between subject and predicate; but he denies that theological matters have no such relation to philosophical concepts. In this connection, he firmly restricts the function of "natural" theology, since it cannot achieve the goal of giving us salvific knowledge of God. But the usage of reason is legitimate, because theology is not directed to insane people or children!<sup>98</sup>

The pure or simple questions can be expressed in syllogisms that consist exclusively of statements taken from biblical revelation. In this category, philosophy can help explain the terms, but it has no demonstrative power. The mixed articles or questions consist of one biblical and one philosophical proposition. Here, philosophy has the power to demonstrate the validity of a conclusion.<sup>99</sup> An example<sup>100</sup> is a much debated question of Christology: is the body of Christ ubiquitous? The Reformed argue that philosophy (physics) teaches that every body is of limited extension. The Bible teaches that the body of Christ is a true body. Therefore, the conclusion is that Christ's body is limited in extension and thus not ubiquitous.

In circumscribing the respective roles of faith and reason in mixed articles, Turretini gives some practical rules. *First*, in a mixed syllogism, the *minor* term must be taken from Scripture, while the *major* term is derived from philosophy. This means that a general truth (e.g., a body has limited extension) can be philosophical, but the question whether this truth does apply must be decided by biblical evidence. *Second*, in refuting adversaries it can be shown by reason, that the key term in the *minor* is connected to the *major*; this is not to confirm the truth of the *minor*, but only its logical connection to the preceding proposition. *Third*, the mixed syllogism has no validity outside what is warranted by the quantifiers and qualifiers of the propositions. This is true for syllogisms in general, and the appeal to a revealed proposition does not change it. *Fourth*, Turretini maintains that the mixed syllogism remains theological with respect to its matter, although it is logical and rational with respect of its form. In this connection, Turretini warns that the proper norm of what is to be believed is not a philosophical sense of possibility and impossibility, but the Word of God. Things that seem impossible to the human mind, nevertheless are possible to God.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 4-5.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 7-8.

<sup>100</sup> Given by Turretini, *Institutio*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 25-26.

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Remarkably, Turretini also has a discussion of what in modern terms can be called the “principle of consistency.”<sup>102</sup> In Turretini’s own words, the debate is about the question whether human reason has the right to object (or contradict). He maintains this right against the Lutherans. The background of this discussion is the Lutheran claim that the ubiquity of Christ’s body should be believed on the basis of Scripture, even if it is contradictory to reason. The Lutheran theologian Meisner explicitly held, against Calvin, that the axiom “Contradictory things are simply impossible because it is impossible that the same thing *is* and *is not*” is most dangerous concerning divine things. In his characteristic way, Turretini clears the way by precisely establishing the *status quaestionis*: question is not about corrupted sinful reason, but about restored and illuminated reason; the principles of faith are not derived from reason, but from Scripture; the normative function of reason regards not the sentences themselves, but their connections and consequences; reason is not said to pursue the mysteries of faith, but merely to know the (non)-contradiction of propositions concerning these mysteries; at stake is not the right of reason to decide absolutely and unlimitedly, but merely to discern truth and falsehood in subjection to God’s Word. The way thus being cleared, Turretini frankly upholds the Reformed position that reason can judge in matters of faith. If this is rejected and the right theory of affirmation and negation and contradiction is neglected, Turretini claims, the gate is widely opened to all sorts of heretics and fanatics. The primary “source of solution” is the insight that in the final analysis this judgment of reason is not human, but divine: it is operated by the Holy Spirit.

Another important insight behind Turretini’s exposition is the legitimacy of “good and necessary consequences” drawn from the explicit sayings of Scripture. Therefore, not only open and direct contradiction is to be judged by reason, but also implicit and indirect contradiction. The Reformed position is maintained primarily against some Roman Catholic theologians (Perron, Gunter, Cotton, Arnoldus, Veron and others) who required their opponents to prove their views only by words expressly given in Scripture.<sup>103</sup> Taking up a favorite Catholic expression, Turretini in the end concludes that it cannot be denied that what is found by evident and necessary consequence, is “formally revealed” by God, and is justly called a formal object of faith. Turretini advocates several forms of consequences, and distinguishes their degree of certainty and usefulness. Among Turretini’s arguments in favor of the legitimacy of logical consequences from Scripture is the example of Christ and the Apostles; most notably the argument produced by Jesus against the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead in Matthew 22. Remarkably, he denies that the power of this argument rests on Christ’s special authority, and instead claims that the power resides in the argument itself. Turretini limits his plea for the legitimacy of consequences in two directions: first, he points out that in drawing consequences from Scripture, reason is not an independent source of truth, but merely an instrument performing the operation of formal reasoning; second, he

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<sup>102</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 30-32. A similar discussion on the use of the senses in matters of faith is given on pages 32-34. Here, Turretini maintains the proper use of the senses against the Roman-Catholic dismissal of sense perception in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

<sup>103</sup> These Roman-Catholics appealed to article 5 of the *Belgic Confession*, where Scripture is called the rule of all truth, containing all that is required for God’s glory and our salvation; therefore nothing should be added to it or detracted from it. Turretini points out that this confessional statement is directed against the Roman-Catholic reverence of the tradition outside Scripture, but does not imply the rejection of logical consequences drawn from Scripture.

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rejects the position defended by many Lutherans that all statements that can validly be deduced from their own Confession share the status of Scriptural truth.<sup>104</sup>

Largely parallel to the views developed by Turretini, J.H. Heidegger attains some sophistication concerning this matter.<sup>105</sup>

The principal starting point is the insight that attention for God's Word is elicited by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Dispelling the clouds that cover the heart, false wisdom and desires, the Spirit awakes the conscience in order to recognize the glory of God that is naturally known to man. With his heart opened, man receives the saving knowledge of God and compares it with what he knows by nature, to judge the latter in respect to its conformity with God's dignity.<sup>106</sup>

Heidegger advocates a third way between underestimation of the function of reason in matters of faith (which he surprisingly ascribes to the Roman Catholics, because they appeal in the final instance to the authority of the Church) and overestimation of reason (the Socinians are identified as proponents of this position). A first insight that even natural reason receives is the fact that there is in God a mystery that goes beyond human thought and understanding. The knowledge of God, according to Heidegger, immediately has the soteriological dimension: we acknowledge ourselves as sinners and God as our Redeemer. This insight exceeds the capacities of natural reason.<sup>107</sup>

Fundamental to a faithful use of reason is that we render our minds captive in obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). This willful subjection of reason to Christ does not make us irrational. Quite the contrary, Heidegger shows how the allegedly rational(ist) Socinians in fact commit many logical errors by distorting the meaning of terms, drawing invalid conclusions, etc. In obedience to Christ, by the illumination of the Spirit, reason starts to function properly again.<sup>108</sup> To give a literal quotation:

Faith does not destroy reason, but stimulates it; it does not embarrass, but gives direction; it does not blind the mind, but illumines it; it does not suppress, but liberates the mind from desires, errors, ignorance, reckless judgments, resistance against God's truth, as Satan's snares by which the mind was bound to do Satan's will; and faith does so by elevating the mind above itself towards God in order to know and receive those things which it could not know and receive before, since these were folly to it. The ways and

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<sup>104</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 34-40. The reference to the Lutherans is elaborated on pages 44-49, where Turretini rejects the view that all articles of faith are fundamental (as many Lutherans stated in reaction to the alleged "syncretism" of George Calixtus). The dissertation of J.M.R. Diermanse, *De fundamentele en niet-fundamentele geloofsartikelen in de theologische discussie* (Franeker: Wever, 1974), pays attention (pages 56-72) to the Lutheran and Reformed debates on the fundamental articles.

<sup>105</sup> For a more detailed exposition of Heidegger's view of faith and reason, see my article "Geloof op zoek naar inzicht: Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1632-1698) over de verhouding van geloof en denken," in *Charis: Opstellen aangeboden aan prof.dr. J.W. Maris*, ed. by A. Baars et al. (Heerenveen: Groen, 2008), 242-253.

<sup>106</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 9

<sup>108</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 10

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thoughts of God are superior to man's ways and thoughts; but they are not contrary except to curved ways and wrong thoughts.<sup>109</sup>

Heidegger rejects the claim made by "fanatics" such as the Weigelians, Anabaptists, Rosicrucians, and mystical theologians that reason should be excluded from theology. As Heidegger puts it, this destruction of reason merely serves to protect the enthusiasm and gross ignorance of these groups. The same holds for the denunciation of reason by some "papists" in order to secure the doctrine of transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements.<sup>110</sup>

He mentions the fact that the knowledge occurring in theology is not only noetic, but also dianoetic: argumentative reasoning is involved in it. Heidegger distinguishes between a principal use of reason (*usus principalis*), which applies to the mixed articles of faith, and an organic use of reason (*usus organicus*), which applies to the pure articles. Regarding the mixed articles, reason has a fourfold function:<sup>111</sup>

- a. It attempts to consider and understand the content of revelation. God is no impostor, demon or liar; therefore, reason can by illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit explore the divine testimonies according to certain and indubitable criteria.<sup>112</sup> Heidegger puts emphasis on the fact that faith has a receptive character: we hear the Word of God, receive it in our heart, and consider it in our conscience and mind.
- b. It defends the principles of faith by showing that these contain nothing impossible or contradictory, and by refuting the arguments put forward by "perverted" reason. This defense is especially addressed to adherents of other religions such as Judaism and Islam. Heidegger appeals to the apologetic efforts dating from the Early Church and extending through the Middle Ages (Thomas Aquinas) to recent days (Luis Vives, Philippe de Mornay, Hugo Grotius).
- c. It draws conclusions from these revealed principles, in order to confirm faith and salvation from a rational point of view. Heidegger points to Paul's approach in Acts 14 and 17 as biblical examples of this attitude.
- d. It judges the simple things and words that are used in the articulation of faith. Heidegger clearly distinguishes between the "simple terms" such as natural words and ideas (for example, "man," "body") and the construction of propositions by connecting these simple terms. The simple terms can be understood and judged by reason; the conjunction and use of terms in propositions of faith is judged by faith based on revelation. Heidegger uses a far-reaching example to illustrate this statement: reason can judge the simple terms "God" and "blood," but only faith can understand what it means that "God acquired the Church by his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The use of reason with respect to the pure articles is fourfold as well:<sup>113</sup>

- a. It receives and accepts God's revelation. Referring to 1 Corinthians 2:24, Heidegger argues that only "spiritual man" can do this.
- b. In religious doctrine, reason is the instrument (*organum*) of judgment concerning true and false, certain and uncertain, valid and invalid conclusions, orderly and

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<sup>109</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 11-12.

<sup>112</sup> This sentence reveals a twofold opposition against René Descartes: first, against the hypothetical option that God deceives us; second, against the principle of universal methodical doubt.

<sup>113</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 12.

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confused reasoning. This judgment is performed according to the rules of good and necessary consequence, which God impresses on rational creatures. Again, the light of God's Word and the interior illumination by the Spirit are required to judge correctly. Heidegger compares revelation to the weight in a scale and reason to they eye measuring the weight. Regarding this function of reason, Heidegger notices that Scripture contains clear, direct and explicit statements, but also more obscure, indirect and implicit passages. The latter can be understood by rational scrutiny, making explicit the consequences hidden in enigmatic utterances. In a strong formulation, Heidegger states that the consequences proceeding from faith belong equally to faith. It is precisely analogy, consequence, conformity and connection that constitutes faith.<sup>114</sup>

- c. It formulates the contents of revelation by all means of knowledge comprising languages and arts: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics (logic), ethics, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. In all these efforts it is necessary that the proper, salutary usage of knowledge is distinguished from misuse and error.
- d. It compares the elements of faith with each other: Old and New Testament, fountain and river, supernatural and natural revelation, one doctrine of faith with another, text and text, argument and argument, foundation and superstructure.

From this extensive survey of Reformed orthodox authors on the use of philosophy it is clear that they accept and advocate sound rational activity on important levels of faith and theology. Any separation of faith and reason is rejected, while at the same time the primacy of faith and the required obedience of reason to God's own revelation are clearly maintained. On the one hand, it is remarkable that Heidegger and Turretini ascribe to reason the role of "judging" concepts even including "God." On the other hand, we find strong criticisms of medieval scholastic theology and pleas for a theological style that keeps close to the plain and simple words of Scripture.<sup>115</sup>

### **4.5. Conclusion**

Reformed Orthodoxy participated in the broader reflection on method in the 16th century. Reformed theology shared in the attempt at reorientation between traditional scholastic strategies of thought and learning, and humanist innovations of education. In addition to a more general approach to method in "school philosophy" as initiated by, among others, Philip Melancthon, the methodologies present by Peter Ramus and Jacob Zabarella were discussed, adopted and applied by theologians. The impact of both Ramus and Zabarella (the latter being significantly less mentioned than the former, probably due to his high-tech scientific style as opposed to the popularizing style of Ramus) is primarily on the organizational or architectural level of definition and division. Zabarella's emphasis on analysis and

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<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 12-15. Clearly, the "methodists" should not be identified with the 18th century group around the Wesley brothers, but with a strand in Roman Catholic theology that advocated a strict separation of explicit and implicit articles of faith. In Heidegger's view, the motive of these "methodists" is to withdraw doctrines like the primacy of the Pope and transubstantiation from the rational scrutiny of their Scriptural grounds in order to promote the sheer authority of the Church.

<sup>115</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 18-20.

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synthesis as proper forms of method is reflected in the adoption of the resolute and compositive methods by Reformed theologians from the second half of the 16th century. Also the central role of syllogistic reasoning agrees with Zabarella's approach rather than with Ramus' exclusive statement of definition and division as the sole method. With Muller, we note that elaborate syllogistic arguments are mainly found in the polemical parts of theological systems,<sup>116</sup> and function either as a step-by-step demonstration of a doctrinal point on the basis of biblical texts or as a detailed refutation of the opponent's position by pointing out formal errors of fallacies.

Along with these early modern debates, medieval discussions of the status of theology in (Aristotelian) theory of science are reiterated: is its *genus* best described as science, wisdom, prudence, or art? If it is in a relevant sense a science, is it then practically or theoretically (*speculative*) oriented or, if mixed, in what proportions? What method is most appropriate, the inductive or the deductive procedure? Our survey of Reformed orthodox contributions to methodology shows that Reformed theology contains a variety of approaches, often treated not as mutually exclusive but as complementary. Moreover, the extremes on both sides of the spectrum are rather seldom; most authors express nuanced and integrative views of method.

Besides its participation in philosophical debates on method, Reformed orthodox theology also endeavored the establishment of a concrete theological methodology. The most important findings of the foregoing research lie in this area. The following elements should be mentioned:

- a. The fundamental starting point of theology is seen in God (as *principium essendi* and *archetypus*) and God's revelation, especially in his Word as testified in Scripture (the *principium cognoscendi* and primary *ectypus*).
- b. The statement in terms of *archetypus* – *ectypus* aims at a conformity between knowledge and object in theology: appropriate knowledge must be in conformity with God as the central object of theological science. This prevents from the start the development of theology as an autonomous human enterprise. At the same time, the Reformed orthodox acknowledge the difference between the unity and truth of theology in an abstract sense, and the diversity, imperfection and possible failure in the exercise of theology by concrete human subjects. They do not claim truth and perfection for their theology in advance, but ascribe these normative properties to the divine prototype to which their endeavors have to conform modestly.
- c. Consistent with the starting point in revelation, Reformed theologians insist on the central and decisive place of Scripture in the exposition of doctrine. In terms of the standard methods of induction/analysis/resolution and deduction/synthesis/ composition, they advocate a two-way relation of Scripture and doctrine: first, detailed exegesis examines individual texts and derives more general doctrinal points from them (this is the original genesis and connotation of *loci communes*, as evidenced in many 16th century biblical commentaries by, e.g., Bucer, Vermigli, Zanchi); second, the *loci communes* thus found are further investigated in their conceptual meaning,

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<sup>116</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 1:187.

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- implications, and relations, a procedure in which the biblical evidence recurs in a different form (the legitimacy of this second procedure is advocated in the inaugural lectures of, for example, Ursinus and Zanchi).
- d. Under the heading of revelation, “natural” or “general” revelation (with its cognate “natural theology”) is briefly mentioned, largely for the sake of completeness of treatment; Reformed orthodoxy is unanimous in restricting the scope and effectiveness of this category of revelation and the knowledge resulting from it. Moreover, it is important to notice that the fundamental statements on natural theology found in the Reformed systems of the 17th century start in God’s gracious act of “natural revelation”: it is only because God makes himself known through creation, providence, conscience etc., that man can acquire some notions of God.
  - e. Reformed theology assumes a fundamental congruence between revelation and reason: the theory of “dual truth” is explicitly rejected; at the same time, revelation clearly has the primacy as the source and norm of theological knowledge. In general, the Reformed orthodox hold a carefully positive view of the use of philosophy in theology. Distinctions are employed to express in what sense philosophy can and cannot play a role. Reason and philosophy should not play a principal role (*usus principalis*), but merely an instrumental role (*usus instrumentalis / organicus*).
  - f. A specific application of these insights in the relation between philosophy and theology is found in the discussion of the so-called mixed articles or mixed syllogisms. In the theory of mixed syllogism, it is argued that physical or metaphysical truth must be maintained when investigating the implications of biblical statements. It should be noticed that in the theory of mixed syllogisms, the *minor* premise must be taken from Scripture. While the *major* term states a general definition or logical rule, taken from philosophical insight, the *minor* indicates whether or not a certain fact occurs on the basis of biblical testimony. The rational analysis by means of a syllogism explores the logical implications of Scriptural statements, on the presupposition that biblical revelation is not irrational. Reformed theology thus presents itself as a biblical and rational theology.



## 5. Doctrine of God: Names, Being, Attributes

### 5.1. Method of Description

As we have already seen, Reformed Orthodoxy is a broad historical phenomenon chronologically extending from ca. 1560 through 1750 and geographically covering almost all central and western Europe. Reformed orthodox theology was taught by hundreds of professors in universities and schools in countries like Switzerland, Germany, France, Holland and England. Consequently, it is impossible to deal in sufficient detail with every particular treatment of the doctrine of God by any Reformed orthodox theologian. It will be necessary to select some of the more outstanding authors from different areas and different times. Furthermore, the description in the next three chapters will be restricted to the main lines of the doctrine of God and in addition will concentrate on a few much-debated questions that reveal some characteristic features and concerns of Reformed Orthodoxy.

The geographical diversity contains theologians<sup>1</sup> who worked in Geneva (Turretini, Pictet), Zurich (Heidegger), Basel (Polanus), Great Britain (Vermigli (partly), Ussher, Leigh, Baxter), Heidelberg (Zanchi, Ursinus), Herford (Musculus), Anhalt (Wendelin), and the different theological faculties in Holland: Leiden (Junius, Gomarus, the Leiden *Synopsis*, Walaeus, De Moor), Utrecht (Hoorndijk, Van Mastricht), Groningen (Alting, Maresius, à Marck) and Franeker (Maccovius), in addition to some works written by local ministers such as Leonard Rijssen and Guilelmus Amesius.

The same authors can be grouped by their chronological order. Following the division of Reformed Orthodoxy given by Richard Muller, we can distinguish:

*Early orthodox* theologians (1560-1635): Vermigli, Hyperius, Zanchi, Ursinus, Musculus, Junius, Gomarus, Walaeus, the *Leiden Synopsis*, Polanus, Alting, Amesius, Maccovius;

*High orthodox* theologians (1635-1700): Turretini, Heidegger, Ussher, Leigh, Baxter, Wendelin, Hoorndijk, Van Mastricht, Maresius, à Marck, Rijssen;

*Late orthodox* theologians (1700-1750): Pictet, De Moor.

In almost all Reformed orthodox treatments of the doctrine of God, five elements are dealt with:

1. The names of God;
2. The being of God;
3. God's attributes;
4. God's works;

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<sup>1</sup> See for brief biographical information Muller, *PRRD* 1 (first edition), 40-52. The theologians mentioned above are grouped according to their places of professional, academic activity. It should be noted that Gisbertus Voetius is not structurally incorporated in this investigation. The reason for this omission is the fact that a separate dissertation on Voetius's doctrine of God was published in 2007: Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*.

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### 5. The Persons of God.

The first three of these constitute the doctrine of God in a stricter sense. The fourth one deals with the divine decree (providence and predestination) and is connected to the subsequent chapters on creation and salvation. The doctrine of the Persons of God (Trinity) is usually treated after the discussion of the being of God has been completed.<sup>2</sup> The doctrines of decree and Trinity will not be described here in detail. Nevertheless, they are mentioned because of possibly interesting connections with the doctrine of God properly spoken. Behind this superficial structure of the doctrine of God lies a common scholastic and humanist pattern of investigation that was part of the education of every 16th and 17th century academician: the treatment of a subject by the subsequent answering of the questions:<sup>3</sup>

An sit? (Whether it is?)

Quid sit? (What it is?)

Quale<sup>4</sup> sit (How it is, or Of What sort it is?)

Within this basic pattern, significant modifications are possible, such as the question after the name of the thing, the question of quantity, and the individual existence.<sup>5</sup> The sequence of the five elements may vary with the different authors.

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<sup>2</sup> An exception is Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 73-162, who arranges his treatment of the doctrine of God as follows: An sit Deus, Utrum unus tantum Deus, Quid sit Deus, Qualis sit Deus, De nominibus Dei, De divinis personis, De divinis attributis. As can be seen, the doctrine of the Trinity is placed between the divine names and the divine attributes. Zanchi first wrote his treatise *De tribus Elohim*, and later his *De natura Dei*, with the explicit purpose of first discussing who God is (*quis sit*) and then how God is (*qualis sit*): *De natura Dei*, Praefatio (last page) and col. 1. Zanchi explains his procedure as follows: "The method and true rationale of teaching requires that, when we have sufficiently known and seen from Holy Scripture who the true God is, we continue with the nature or attributes of this true God, who is the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as taught in Scripture." Here, the attributes of God are explicitly referred to as attributes of the triune God. Interesting in Bucanus, *Institutiones theologicae*, is the extreme brevity of the "proper" doctrine of God (pages 3-7) compared to the doctrine of the Trinity (pages 7-36).

<sup>3</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:156, points out that this pattern of investigation is not exclusively "scholastic," but that "this set of questions, albeit used by the medieval scholastics, is actually derived from classical rhetoric and was available to the Reformers both from ancient handbooks like Quintillian's *Institutiones oratoriae* and also from humanist manuals like Melanchthon's *Elementa rhetorices*." Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, I 370, mentions a complete set of 10 questions provided by Melanchthon as a guide through the treatment of a concept: "Prima, quid vocabulum significet. Secunda, an sit res. Tertia, quid sit res. Quarta, quae sint rei partes. Quinta, quae sint species. Sexta, quae causae. Septima, qui effectus. Octava, quae adiacentia. Nona, quae cognata. Decima, quae pugnantia." On II 298, footnote 261, he states that Melanchthon utilized the four questions proffered by Aristotle in the *Analytica posteriora*: An sit, Quid sit, Quod sit et Quare sit, complemented with six questions from the topical (rhetorical) tradition. The 10 questions mentioned before often appear in Reformed orthodox treatises, for instance in Polanus, *Syntagma*, 174-175. Aristotle's fourth question ("Why is it?") does not apply to God because of his necessary existence.

<sup>4</sup> In application to the doctrine of God, the Reformed scholastics normally use "qualis" instead of "quale," thus making it clear that God is not neutral, but personal.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 64-65: an sit, quid sit, quis sit; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 62:

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Sometimes, the being (essence) of God is treated first, followed by the names, attributes etc.<sup>6</sup> In a few cases the works of God are discussed before the doctrine of the Trinity, but most of the theologians place the doctrine of the Trinity immediately after the treatment of the divine attributes. For the purpose of this chapter, the sequence as stated above is followed.

Since the question of division of topics concerning God is a hotly debated issue in recent theology, a few comments need to be given here. A tradition of scholarship, including Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance, and O. Gründler, has suspected Reformed Orthodoxy of importing “natural theology” and of returning to “medieval metaphysics” by means of this order of the doctrine of God. Their criticism focuses on the place of the Trinity and of the divine names. In Karl Barth’s words,

the question who God is, which it is the business of the doctrine of Trinity to answer, is held in reserve, and the first question to be treated is that of the That and the What of God, as though these could be defined otherwise than on the presupposition of the Who.

Or, varying on this argument, Otto Weber describes traditional doctrine as moving from a “general” doctrine of God to the “special Christian doctrine of God,” a movement which Weber judges “dangerous” to Christian theology.

Against this diagnosis, Richard Muller argues that the sequence of the aforementioned questions does not intend to separate the Trinity from the discussion of the divine essence and attributes. In Muller’s view, it is merely a matter of “the standard logical and rhetorical order of discussion, according to which the existence of something ought to be attested prior to any discussion of the thing.” We can add the insight that this “prior attestation” generally does not consist of a merely rational demonstration of God’s existence or of a full-fledged natural theology: it is a mixture of diverse signs of God’s existence, including Scriptural witness (cf. section 5.3 below). Moreover, Muller argues that the Reformed orthodox move from an initial, basic statement of “what” (or “who”, in modern terms) God is which includes the Trinity (cf. section 5.3 below), to an elaborate discussion of “what sort” God is, in terms of the whole series of attributes *and* the Trinity. In brief, Muller’s claim is that

the entire traditional discussion of essence, attributes, and Trinity is devoted to answering the question of “who” (or “what”) God is, not merely the presentation of the Trinity. ... From the perspective of the older orthodoxy, to restrict “who” to Trinity – or to claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is all that is specifically Christian in the doctrine of God – would be a major error in theology. Rather, the traditional ordering of

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quod sit, quid sit, quis sit. Turretini, *Institutio*, 153, has the same triad as Heidegger, corresponding to a threefold polemical frontier: atheists (the existence of God), pagans (the essence of God), and Jews and heretics (God existing in three Persons).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 151-187; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 76-97; Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 64-65; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 21-24; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 73-162.

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doctrine begins with the primary datum of the biblical revelation, the oneness of God, and then, on the basis of this biblical monotheism, moves on to the mystery of the threeness of God. This ordering of doctrine, moreover, makes clear that all of the divine attributes belong equally to each of the divine persons in their essential oneness – and, via the resultant argument that the work of the Trinity *ad extra* is the common work of the three divine persons, opens the doctrine of God outward toward the doctrine of creation and the other *loci* of the system: the divine identity is not merely a matter of the doctrine of the three divine persons, but of the identity of those persons as the infinite, omnipotent, merciful, and gracious God.<sup>7</sup>

We will evaluate the relation between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity later. On this point, it suffices to notice that there is an alternative explanation of the order of doctrine against the accusation that the Reformed scholastics unduly postponed Trinity from their discussion of the divine essence and attributes.

As mentioned before, the discussion below will focus on the main lines of the doctrine of God. All substantial parts of the Reformed orthodox accounts of the doctrine of God will be discussed, though not in exhaustive detail. Two aspects of it deserve special consideration:

- a. the coherence of the so-called incommunicable attributes (particularly the place of the doctrine of divine simplicity);
- b. questions concerning the relation of the divine intellect and will, with respect to the issue of necessity and contingency.

In the course of description, it will become clear that these two questions directly affect the total outlook of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God.

In the description of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God I have chosen to arrange the material systematically: I expound the convictions that are held in common concerning a specific part of doctrine, and in addition review the issues under discussion within Reformed Orthodoxy, including the various options and their implications. In the footnotes, I relate the individual authors to the positions mentioned in the main text. In some instances, I chose to devote some space to a particular writer, because his contribution proved to be fundamental for the development of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God, or revealed insights that have great systematic interest. If such exposition of the ideas of an individual author or of a specific discussion exceed the limits of a few paragraphs, I have sheltered it in an excursus. By following this procedure, I aim at doing most justice to the primary sources, while at the same time sufficiently grasping the overall structure and systematic questions and options.

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<sup>7</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:156-159. Cf. similar conclusions stated in view of Voetius by Andreas Beck, "Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God," in Van Asselt and Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 213-214; Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 227-232.

## 5.2. The Names of God

The Reformed orthodox writers discuss the biblical names of God in more or less detail. This part of the doctrine of God is innovative in comparison to medieval theology. It is promoted by the increased importance of scriptural evidence in theology and by the flourishing of linguistic (orientalist) studies in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it satisfies the methodical requirement of clarifying the “name” (*nomen*) before entering into the discussion of the “thing” (*res*). It is noticed that in the Bible the name of God often stands for God himself, his attributes and his glory; therefore a discussion of divine names is an appropriate entrance into the doctrine of God.<sup>9</sup> As Heidegger remarks, a proper definition of God cannot be given; instead, the names, attributes, effects and virtues of God are needed to circumscribe his being.<sup>10</sup> Some theologians enter deeply into philological investigations concerning the proper pronunciation and significance of the Hebrew names of God.<sup>11</sup> Others merely summarize the results gained by their predecessors.

### *Excursus 2. Zanchi on the Divine Names*

A remarkable discussion of the divine names is given by Girolamo Zanchi. He utilizes the chapters on the divine names to develop a theory of the knowability of God.<sup>12</sup> *A priori*, Zanchi states that God’s essence is one and simple. This should be borne in mind when dealing with the different names used for God in Scripture and theology: they do not indicate any additional qualities (*accidentia*), but the simple essence of God itself. In front of Zanchi’s discussion stands the divine “self-portrait”

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<sup>8</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:246 sees the start of the doctrine of God with the divine names as an expression of the fundamental “biblicism” of the Reformation. In this respect, there is a striking continuity between the theology of the Reformers and of their scholastic successors. In this connection, it is remarkable that Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 47 makes an immediate transition from the discussion of God’s essence to the exposition of the divine attributes, omitting the divine names from his survey.

<sup>9</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 505. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:246, points out that this development of discussing the divine names in front of the doctrine of God does not “appear to arise from a nominalist or Ockhamist interest in divine “names” as a term preferable to divine “attributes”: the Reformed motive in developing a doctrine of the divine names is fundamentally exegetical and does not at all relate to a theory of attributes as mere terms or concepts grounded not in the thing but in our perception only.” For a further substantiation of the claim that Reformed Orthodoxy does not follow a nominalist interpretation of the divine attributes, see section 5.4.1 below. Muller qualifies his own dismissal of nominalism when (page 247) he speaks of “a potential sign of a nominalist accent” in Calvin and Musculus because of their disclaimer that finite names never provide a full description of God’s infinite essence (cf. also *PRRD*, 3:274, where a “potentially nominalistic accent” is noted again, in view of John Calvin’s and Pierre Viret’s understanding of God’s attributes as identifiable only *ad extra*). The disclaimer concerning finite names for an infinite God occurs also in Zanchi’s exposition of the divine names discussed in Excursus 2.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 6-15; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 509-551, quotes contemporary Hebraists such as Buxtorf, Van Leusden, Van Alphen, Coccejus, and Vriemoet.

<sup>12</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 1-26. In Zanchi’s own words, the exposition of the divine names is a brief *compendium*, showing summarily who and how God is.

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from Exodus 34:6. There God starts with pronouncing twice his name Jehovah, thus indicating, says Zanchi, that he owes his existence to nothing else, but exists through himself. The initial declaration of self-existence bears on the subsequent revelation of predicates such as power, mercy, goodness, etc. In this connection, Zanchi makes an important statement on the alternating description of God's properties in abstract and concrete terms:

And this is the reason why God is more properly called "life" than "living"; "wisdom" than "wise"; "light" than "lighting"; etcetera. Why so? Because he lives by himself, not by life; is wise by himself and by his own essence, not by some wisdom that would be added to the divine essence. And furthermore that he is often called "wise," "mighty," "good," and other names that are called God's attributes by theologians, that is done by the Holy Spirit partly in order to make us understand for our capacity, how that essence of God is; partly in order to indicate that this essence is a thing really existing in three Persons, and not some abstract, wisdom, goodness, power. For God is on the one hand often abstractly called "essence," "goodness," "life," and "wisdom" in order to teach it that it is him, existing not by participation but by himself, and being most perfect, wise, and good, not by participation and therefore imperfectly, but by himself and therefore perfectly; on the other hand he is also often called concretely *ὁ ὢν*, just, living, wise, good, so that we understand that he really exists and really is most just, living, doing right things, etcetera; which cannot be the case than by a thing existing by itself.<sup>13</sup>

Zanchi states that Scripture is full of names of God, by which God reveals himself to us.

Next, Zanchi gives a series of ten distinctions regarding the names of God, in which he briefly addresses the difference between essential and personal names, communicable and incommunicable names, absolute and relational names, negative and affirmative names, literal and figurative names, abstract and concrete names.<sup>14</sup>

However, how can these names refer to God? Zanchi structures the treatment of this problem in a series of nine questions.

The *first* question is whether any name applies to God in order to distinguish him from creatures and to make him known to us. Zanchi's response is twofold: on the one hand there can be no name for God that perfectly expresses his being, because he is infinite while all names for God are derived from finite creatures.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand Zanchi acknowledges the fact that in Scripture God uses names to

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<sup>13</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 1-3, referring to Bernard of Clairvaux' *De diligendo Deo*.

<sup>14</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 4-8. In this context, Zanchi refers to (Pseudo-) Dionysius Areopagita (author of *De divinis nominibus*) as "a disciple of Plato rather than of the Apostle Paul."

<sup>15</sup> A more restrictive view is expressed by De Moor, *Commentarius*, 505-506: "there are no such names that plainly and clearly express his most perfect Nature (according to Genesis 32:29; Judges 13:18; Proverbs 30:4)." God is incomprehensible, his essence is ineffable. "Thus in a certain sense, God can be called anonymous (as Lactantius reported him to be called by Trismegistus)." A similar reserve concerning God's name, tending towards calling God "anonymous," is found in Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 67.

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make himself known to us, and thus states that as far as is necessary for our salvation, we can justly attribute these names to God.<sup>16</sup>

The *second* question answered by Zanchi is, whether any name is stated so essentially for God, that by this name we receive knowledge of God's essence. Zanchi refers to his distinction regarding the first question: what and how God's being is, can by no name be perfectly expressed because God is infinite, but as far as we should know him in order to be saved, the biblical names of God do indeed indicate and make known his being. Zanchi emphatically maintains that the affirmative names used for God do truly indicate God's essence in a particular respect, while rejecting the opinion of people who interpret these names as merely negative or causative.<sup>17</sup>

The *third* question is whether some names are properly predicated of God. Zanchi here points to the fact that the Scriptures use many metaphorical terms for God, and that even the less metaphorical words are still derived from earthly reality. He distinguishes between the matter that is signified (*res seu perfectiones per ipsa nomina significatae*) and the mode of signification (*modus, quo nomina haec, perfectiones illae significant*). In the former respect, the several qualities indicated by the names are primarily in God, and secondarily, by analogy, in creatures. Concerning the latter respect he states that the form of the names is indeed derived from our knowledge of creaturely reality.<sup>18</sup>

The *fourth* question is whether the multitude of divine names is contrary to God's unity and simplicity. Zanchi firmly denies this: the multitude of names does not indicate a multiplicity of virtues in God, but is only due to the finitude of our minds. Human knowledge arises from mental concepts, which are formed subsequently for different aspects of the same reality. We cannot think together in the same moment mercy and justice, and we see them as different qualities, but in God, both mercy and justice are identical with the one and simple divine essence.<sup>19</sup>

The *fifth* question elaborates on the fourth: if the many names indicate the one and simple essence of God, are then these names synonyms? Zanchi answers in the negative: although indeed God's essence is one and simple, our knowledge of him takes place in different respects that justify the usage of different names. We do not mean the same when we say that God is just and that he is good. These attributes are not contrary to each other, but yet they differ from each other in having different *rationes*.<sup>20</sup>

The *sixth* question is whether it is appropriate for God to be named by words that are derived from the vilest creatures. Zanchi's answer is, that in all creatures two aspects can be discerned: first, their being created by God and so being endowed with some qualities or perfections in which they resemble him; second, their being fundamentally different from God by the distinction between Creator and creature. The fact that God wills to be called by creaturely terms testifies his sovereignty over and love for his creature.<sup>21</sup>

The *seventh* question is whether all things that are predicated from creatures can also be predicated from God, and reversely. Zanchi responds to the first half of the

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<sup>16</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 11-14.

<sup>18</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 15. Zanchi's formulations balance between a merely rational distinction and a formal distinction between the divine names and attributes.

<sup>20</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 15-16.

<sup>21</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 16-17.

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question by giving three rules: first, terms that absolutely indicate a perfection, apply primarily to God and secondarily, by participation, to creatures; second, other terms that indicate a perfection not absolutely, but in combination with specific creaturely features (e.g., "power" is implied in "lion"), can be attributed to God only metaphorically, whereas they are originally predicated from creatures; third, words that signify a mere vice in creatures (e.g., sinner, liar, etc.) do not apply to God at all. To the other part of the question: whether names of God can be used for creatures, Zanchi answers generally with the statement that this can only be the case, if the properties indicated by the words do in fact occur in creatures. More specifically he states that the words for perfections that creatures can never receive (e.g., infinity), do not apply to creatures; that concrete names for God's individual being can only improperly and exceptionally be used for created beings; that the same applies for the abstract names; whereas the words used for the three Persons in the Godhead can in an other sense be used for creatures.<sup>22</sup>

The *eighth* question is how the names are predicated of both God and created beings. Zanchi refers to the traditional distinction between univocal, equivocal and analogical predication. With denial of the first two sorts of predication, he defends analogical predication as the proper way of attributing concepts both to God and to created beings. He grounds the analogical predication on the order that exists between God and creature: God is the efficient and final cause, created beings are effects of God as efficient cause, and means used by God to attain his ends. A second argument for analogical predication is the fact, that we can obtain knowledge of God by means of his creatures, which would not be possible if there were no similarity between God and the created beings. In this analogical relation God has priority: whatever perfection exists, is in God primarily and in creatures only secondarily. Zanchi points to two sorts of analogy: the first consists of a relation between several things to one common point of reference; the other is a relation between two things, the one of which is subordinated to the other. The former does not apply to the analogy between God and creature, because there is nothing superior to God. The latter is the proper kind of analogical relation between God and creature.<sup>23</sup>

The *ninth* and final question is whether some names of God have begun to apply to him in time, while not being attributed to him before. This question refers to divine names that indicate a relation with created beings. Zanchi answers the question with quotations from Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Augustine stated that only after the world was created God can be called Creator and Lord, but that God has not changed by his coming into relation with his creatures. From Thomas the argument is added, that from God's point of view, the relation between himself and the creatures is not a real, but a rational one, whereas from the point of view of the creatures, it is a real relation.<sup>24</sup>

Girolamo Zanchi gave an exposition of the divine names that laid the foundations for a theory of the knowability of God in an early stage of the development of Reformed Orthodoxy.<sup>25</sup> His theory can be summarized in three key terms: simplicity, concepts, and analogy. By Zanchi's insistence on the

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<sup>22</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 18-22.

<sup>23</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 22-24.

<sup>24</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 24-26.

<sup>25</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 1-26.

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simplicity of God, he avoids beforehand a substantial separation of different qualities in God, e.g., justice and mercy. Zanchi maintains that what is distinguished in our reflection on God's being, is in fact the same in him. The reason why different names are used is that God is infinite, while our intellect is finite and thus unable to grasp the fullness of God in one simple term.

This insight is connected to Zanchi's view of concepts. Zanchi follows the theory developed by Thomas Aquinas, that our knowledge in general consists of mental concepts that are abstracted from the things we know. Our mind receives mental images from sense perception, and in turn selects relevant aspects as characteristic for the object of knowledge. Although he is aware of the difference between knowledge in general and knowledge of God, Zanchi illustrates by this theory what we do when we call God by different names: we see in God several aspects, which we work out in a mental concept, e.g., justice or mercy. The fine point is, that on the one hand, these concepts do not represent the full reality of the known object (God), but on the other hand they are more than mere concepts: they have a basis in the reality of the known object. From the part of the knowing subject, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of mercy and justice: it is not the same to say that someone is merciful as to say that he is just. From the part of the known object (God), it can be stated that he is both merciful and just in such a way, that these two are not separate qualities that exclude each other, but they are essentially the same because of their identity with God's being as a whole.

In his view of analogy, Zanchi comes to his most positive statements on the possibility of knowing God and predicating terms to him.<sup>26</sup> In order to grasp his exact position, it is necessary to answer three questions: what does Zanchi mean by "analogy"? what is the basis of the analogy? what kind of analogy does Zanchi admit? First, Zanchi stands in the broad medieval tradition of distinguishing between three sorts of predication: univocal, equivocal, and analogical. In the case of univocal predication, a term is used in exactly the same meaning for two different entities. Univocal predication presupposes essential identity in a certain respect. E.g., both a sheet of paper and fresh snow can be called "white" univocally. Concerning their color, they are identical; there is no respect in which the one is "white" but the other is not. In the opposite case of equivocal predication, the same term is predicated of two entities in a different sense. E.g., both a voice and a mountain can be called "high," but the meaning is not the same in these two cases. There is no essential identity in the respect indicated by the predicate. The third sort of predication is analogical predication: the term is not predicated from both entities in exactly the same way (univocally), nor is merely the same word used with totally different meanings (equivocally), but there is similarity as well as difference. For example, both the rotation of the planets and a certain argument can be called "circular"; the difference is that the planets move through space but an argument by thoughts, the similarity is that both arrive after some time at the same point of departure. Therefore, when Zanchi uses analogical predication for our knowledge of God, he points to the difference and the

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<sup>26</sup> See also Harm Goris, "Thomism in Zanchi's Doctrine of God," in Van Asselt and Dekker eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 121-139. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 218-222 argues that in the "analogical" predication advocated by Voetius a "univocal core" is assumed.

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similarity between God and us. Second, Zanchi describes the ground for this analogy in terms of causes: God is both efficient and final cause of creation. The creatures are the effects of God as efficient cause, and serve as means for God as final cause. God as a Creator bestows being to his creatures, and as such communicates some of his own perfect Being. Zanchi utilizes the Platonist term “participation” to indicate the creature’s side of this order of being. In this view, there is a strong ontological connection between God and the creatures. Zanchi can even state, that in some sense God *is* everything that is (because he contains all perfections in himself), though inasmuch as he is God, he is *not* the same as everything that exists.<sup>27</sup> Thus, between God and all creatures there is both a similarity and a difference, which is based on the way they have their being: God has his Being by himself, in an absolutely unique way, whereas creatures have their being by participation, due to its bestowal by God.<sup>28</sup> Third, Zanchi distinguishes different kinds of analogy. The kind of analogy that relates different entities to a common point of reference is rejected by Zanchi. This analogy would destroy the absolute superiority of God, as it assumes the existence of universal qualities apart from God. The other sort of analogy is admitted by Zanchi: an analogy in which one part is original and the other part derived from it. This distinction parallels the causal relation between the Creator and the creature.

In addition to these preliminary issues, the divine names as revealed in the Old and New Testaments were interpreted in detail. In most cases, the etymological derivation of the names is most important in the argument. In contrast, we find little contextual or salvation-historical material. As an exception, we can point to the discussion of the question whether the patriarchs did already know the name YHWH (which seems to be denied in Exodus 6:2). One explanation is that the name as such was already known and used by the patriarchs, but that the full content would only become evident by God’s deeds in the liberation of his people from Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

In reviewing the biblical names of God, the Reformed orthodox make different constructions and distinctions. Alsted, among others, distinguishes between two functions of the biblical names of God: some of them designate the essence of God, others ascribe specific attributes to him.<sup>30</sup> A remarkable item, occurring throughout Reformed Orthodoxy, is the question of the number of the divine names. From Zanchi, via Alsted, until De Moor, the ancient theory (common among the Jews, and adopted by Jerome and Origen) is mentioned that the Old Testament contains exactly 10 proper names of God.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> The term “participation” can draw on 2 Peter 1:4. When dealing with this passage, Turretini, *Institutio*, 172, explains that our “partaking in the divine nature” should not be understood in the sense of formal participation in God’s essence, but in the analogical sense of regeneration, by which the marks of divine holiness and justice are imprinted upon us.

<sup>29</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 532-535.

<sup>30</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 60-64, adds a few to this list; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 511-512, maintains the traditional decade.

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Names of God that yield the best insight in God's nature and character, are El/Elohim, Sjaddai, and most of all YHWY and its variants Jah and Ehjeh.<sup>32</sup> In fact, as Richard Muller notices (referring to Perkins and Trelcatius), the combination of "Jehovah" and "Elohim" is

descriptive of the entire doctrine of God, given that "of this description there are two members, the one of the *Essence*, and the *Unity* of the Essence: the other of the *Persons* and the *Trinity* of the persons, which two can neither be separated from the declaration of the divine Nature, nor ought to be confounded in the same: for as there is an exceeding great and indivisible [indivisible?] unity of the divine Essence in the plurality of the persons: (for the Essence of the Father is the Essence of the Son and the holy Ghost:) so there is a real and different *Distinction* of the persons in the unity of Essence (so to be the Father is not to be the Son or the Holy Ghost.)"<sup>33</sup>

In dealing with the name *Elohim*, the Reformed have to cope with some difficulties. There seems to be some biblical warrant for a "generic" or "common" understanding of this name and its etymological cognates: it is not only ascribed to the God of Israel, but also to gods in general and even, by analogy, to human beings occupying a weighty office such as judge or king. Usually, the Reformed scholastics accept an analogical (applied to creatures) and an improper (applied to false gods) usage of the name, but insist on the proper and essential signification that applies only to God.<sup>34</sup> A further matter of discussion is the question, whether the plural name *Elohim* counts as evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. Many authors accept the plural as a conclusive argument,<sup>35</sup> others give a more careful interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

Most Reformed orthodox view the name YHWH as most fully indicating his essence.<sup>37</sup> The interpretation of this name shows some differences. Commonly, it is understood as proclaiming God's independent existence: he has his being by

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<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of modern biblical sciences, the separate discussion of these variants betrays some linguistic naivety with the Reformed scholastics.

<sup>33</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:258. Quotation is from Trelcatius, *Methodica & Scholastica Institutio*, l.iii (interpunction and italics taken from the original).

<sup>34</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 29; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 29; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 140; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 62 (concerning *Adonai*); Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 180; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 155; Alting, *Loci communes*, 14; Bucanus, *Institutiones theologicae*, 7; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 24; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 85, 87, 89; Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 6-7, 14-15; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VII, th. 40-41; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 521.

<sup>37</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 80 (including God as the primary being, *primum ens*); Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 177, distinguishes between the name YHWH as signifying God's essence absolutely considered, and the name *Elohim* as pointing to God's essence together with its modes of existence (the three Persons of the Trinity). An independent account is given by Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 7-11; he takes *Sjaddai* ("self-sufficient") as God's most fundamental name, and interprets YHWH as simply meaning "being" (*ens*), without the connotations of eternity and all-causality.

himself, and is not dependent on anything else. Consequently, this name belongs exclusively to God and cannot be shared with any creature. The Reformed authors refute arguments proffered by the Socinians claiming that the name YHWH is also ascribed to, for instance, the Ark of the Covenant or the city of Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> The reverse side of God's aseity is that everything else has its existence from God: he is the first cause of all.<sup>39</sup> In addition, several authors point to the trustworthiness and constancy implied in the name: God is faithful to both his promises and his menaces. This aspect is often strengthened by a reference to God's immutability.<sup>40</sup> While the core of meaning of YHWH and other names is found in indicating God's unique and independent being, Mastricht (for one) also points explicitly to the personal and federal aspects of God's names.<sup>41</sup>

As the polemic with the Socinians makes clear, the proper understanding of the divine names is important in maintaining the orthodox Christian doctrine of God as trinitarian. Not only do the Reformed scholastics employ the philological peculiarities of Old Testament terminology to argue that it gives occasion to the doctrine of the Trinity; more basically, they insist on the essential character of the divine names in order to safeguard the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### **5.3. The Being of God**

The word "being" in the heading of this section can be interpreted in two ways: first as indicating the existence of God, second as pointing to his essence. In Reformed Orthodoxy, these two items are closely connected.

For the Reformed theologians it is evident that God exists.<sup>42</sup> Most of them find it unnecessary and illegitimate to prove God's existence as if it could be seriously

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<sup>38</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 139 (does not refer to the Socinians, but mentions *Photiniani* and *Samo-sateniani* as opponents on this point); Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 31; Turretini, *Institutio*, 166-169; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 61; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 176; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 153; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 188; Alting, *Loci communes*, 18; Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 70; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 86 (a Platonist sounding formula about "Esse, quod ab eo redundat in omnia"); Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 87; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 67-68 (including perfection and simplicity); Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 121; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 544-549. See also Muller, *PRRD*, 3:261-265 on the debate with the Socinians.

<sup>39</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 139; Turretini, *Institutio*, 166-169; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 61; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 177; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 153; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 70; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 87; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XVI.

<sup>40</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 139; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XVI; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 31; Turretini, *Institutio*, 166-169; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 61; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 177; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 153; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 188; Alting, *Loci communes*, 18; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 544; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 87 (Mastricht refers to Zanchi for the view that the three consonants of the Hebrew *Hajah* refer to the three forms of time: past, present, future); Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 70; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 469, who connects the name YHWH with both God's essence and his covenantal faithfulness.

<sup>41</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 85. To be sure, by "personal," Mastricht points to the three Persons in God.

<sup>42</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 43, is rather outspoken in stating that God's existence can be known without revelation.

doubted.<sup>43</sup> Some of them, for example à Marck and Turretini, explicitly warn against the Cartesian doubt of the existence of God. They also reject the adjacent view of God as a cognitive Idea or as a thought (*cogitatio*).<sup>44</sup>

Generally, the Reformed orthodox assume two grounds for providing arguments for God's existence: first, the need of justification of faith towards unbelievers and second, the rational strengthening of the basic belief in God. Concerning the latter, we should realize that the "proofs" do not pretend to yield a fully rational understanding and demonstration of God, but merely provide some rational indications to make the point that there are good reasons to believe that the living God does exist. Regarding the justification of faith towards unbelievers, the issue of atheism is dealt with. It appears that atheism is not considered a serious menace for belief in God: most of the so-called atheists merely refuse to accept the gods of vulgar religion; the few thinkers that explicitly deny the existence of any God at all, prove by their practice of life that this denial is purely theoretical.<sup>45</sup> In later Reformed Orthodoxy, the denial of God's existence seems to have become a more live option, under influence of philosophers like Spinoza and Hobbes.<sup>46</sup>

The arguments for the existence of God consist in several classes.<sup>47</sup> The ontological argument as developed by Anselm is seldom found explicitly in Reformed orthodox expositions. A variant, however, which states that the fact of thinking about God presupposes the actual existence of God, meets with approval by some authors.<sup>48</sup> Heidegger seems to interpret the Cartesian *idea Dei* along the classic lines of the *notiones communes* resident in the human mind; he understands the notion of God as an anticipation of the true knowledge of God. In Heidegger's view, the universal occurrence of such an image, idea or concept of God must be occasioned and caused by God himself.<sup>49</sup> An interesting argument, based on the

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<sup>43</sup> E.g., Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 458: this doubt is hardly tolerable. An exception is Andreas Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 74, who allows the possibility of doubting God's existence.

<sup>44</sup> A Marck, *Het Merck*, 6-7, 75-77, 96; Turretini, *Institutio*, 43; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 77-79 (referring to his *Gangraena Cartesiana*). Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 183-190 points to the combination of the methodical doubt and the Idea of God in the Reformed scholastic accusation of Descartes' implicit atheism.

<sup>45</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 8-9 (here he mentions the names of the Caribbean godhead Stignan and the supreme god of the Mexicans called Hoizili Pochtli, and the Peruan god Pirococha), 157-158; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 3; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 3. On the occurrence of atheism in the 16th – 18th centuries, see *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 558, who mentions three frontiers: atheism in the classical sense, Spinozism, and materialism (including Hobbes).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism*. See also Muller, *PRRD*, 3:170-195.

<sup>48</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 172. An explicit defense of the Cartesian argument for the existence of God is provided by Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 3, who sees it in one line with the Anselmian ontological argument. Its refutation by Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 71-72, seems to affect Anselm as well. Turretini, *Institutio*, 158, carefully criticizes the Cartesian *Idea Dei* on the ground that the infinite majesty of God forbids our "clearly and distinctly" knowing his essence. We can only receive more or less clear and distinct knowledge of God by verbal revelation, not by reason alone.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 63. On page 66, Heidegger refutes the argument that only

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aseity of God, is presented by the Saumurian *Syntagma thesium*: in creatures, there is the sequence of “if p, then q”; this implies that “if not p, then not q”; but since God exists by himself, he has no antecedent on which the truth of his existence depends; therefore, God’s existence holds, whatever other state of affairs, and thus his existence is necessary.<sup>50</sup> More common are arguments based on the Five Ways developed by Thomas Aquinas, focusing on causality, cosmological order and teleology.<sup>51</sup> Still, the attempt to give “logically necessary” grounds for God’s existence remains visible. In Heidegger, for instance, we find a very concise version of a “modal” argument based on the divine name YHWH. The argument starts from the supposition that a divine being cannot exist (it is impossible). Why? Either because it has no cause, or because it is self-contradictory. The former does not hold, because a being can exist by itself (*a se*), without a cause; the latter does not hold as well, since the highest perfection does not involve contradictions. Moreover, it is possible that something temporal, contingent and good exists; then it is even more likely that an eternal, necessary and most good being exists. For the former cannot, because of its weakness and limitation, bring itself into existence, but depends on a necessary and eternal efficient cause. If a necessary being can exist, it does in fact exist; for if the possibility occurred that it does not exist, it is necessary (not able to not-exist) and contingent (able to not-exist) at once, which involves a contradiction. In brief, the concept of an eternal and necessary being, which is suitable for God, excludes the possibility that God does not exist.<sup>52</sup>

More to the fore of many discussions of the theistic arguments are the typically renaissancist, rhetorical arguments such as the consensus of all peoples, the political and historical order, the occurrence of heroes, the excellence of the human mind, the testimony of conscience, the immortality of the soul, and the miraculous events that take place.<sup>53</sup>

Although the existence of God is never seriously doubted, there still is some variance concerning the evidence of God’s existence. In general, the Reformed orthodox hold that the fact of God’s existence is a self-evident axiom: it is immediately understood as soon as one understands the proper meaning of the term “God.” The reason for this position is, that the concept of God implies his necessary existence: it is unthinkable that a being is rightly called “God” without being necessary. One step further: once it is admitted that it is possible that a being defined by the term “God” exists, it is necessary that it exists.<sup>54</sup>

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knowledge acquired by sense perception is true knowledge; an argument that in Immanuel Kant’s philosophy helped to exclude the knowledge of God from proper knowledge.

<sup>50</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 64-65. The fact that Heidegger mentions the word of God as one of the evidences for his existence shows that he did not perceive a separation between natural and revealed theology.

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 62-63. This argument resembles Duns Scotus’ ingenious argument in *De primo principio*. See the bilingual edition by Wolfgang Kluxen: *Abhandlung über das erste Prinzip* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974).

<sup>53</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 459-465; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 135. After listing 16 arguments for God’s existence, Polanus concludes that all men know through a “touch of divinity, before any use of reason” (*ex tactu divinitatis, ante omnem rationis usum*) that God exists.

<sup>54</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 153-160; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 62 (who confronts the atheists

## Doctrine of God: Names, Being, Attributes

The other aspect of God's being, besides his existence, is his essence. We should realize that, within the Reformed hermeneutics of the 16th and 17th centuries, the two aspects are already given in the divine name YHWH, which is the ultimate ground for speaking about God's existence and essence.<sup>55</sup>

The Reformed orthodox are aware of the difficulties in ascribing a substance or an essence to God: it seems to incorporate God in the scheme of metaphysical classification. Therefore, they are eager to emphasize that God's essence is totally unique. God does not fall under the rules of classification, and hence cannot be defined in terms of *genus* and *differentia*. As Polanus remarks, in order to define God, a "logic of God" would be required. God exists as a "numeric individual," not in *genus* and *species*.<sup>56</sup> Or, instead of the common *genus – differentia*, one can use "Spirit" as the most general term, and treat the attributes and the divine Persons as parallel to the *differentiae*.<sup>57</sup> De Moor argues that "spiritual nature" as the most general description of God is more convenient than "entity" (*ens*) or "substance" (*substantia*). "Entity" is not sufficiently specific, and "substance" does not properly apply to God, since God is neither a "primary substance" (*prima substantia*: a person) nor a "secondary substance" (*secunda substantia*: a sort). In this connection, De Moor even rejects the Anselmian definition of God as "perfect being," apparently because of the Cartesian abuse of this concept.<sup>58</sup>

Similar problems arise concerning the term "nature." As Wolfgang Musculus states, only when the "nature" of something is known, the thing itself is known. Musculus tends, however, to define a "nature" as that which is given, imparted or begotten (from the Latin *nascor* – to be born) and provides the individual character. That definition of "nature" cannot apply to God. Musculus therefore accepts an extended meaning of "nature," but then still the analogy between God's "nature" and created natures fails. In the final analysis, Musculus takes precisely the difference between God and creatures as the starting point of a modified definition of the "nature" of God:

There is in God some quality by which he differs from all created things ... and seeing that this quality does not arise by chance or accident, nor is acquired from another being, nor is it mutable, but is natural, proper, and unchangeable, it follows that God has a nature.<sup>59</sup>

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of his days, for example Thomas Hobbes); Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 21; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 135, reproaches Thomas Aquinas for denying that God's existence is self-evident (*per se nota*).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:231-238.

<sup>56</sup> Danaeus, *Isagoges*, 3-4; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 558; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 134 (cf. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 67).

<sup>57</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 561. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 134, warns not to interpret "Spirit" as a *genus praedicabile* which God would have in common with other "spiritual" beings (angels, men).

<sup>58</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 560-563.

<sup>59</sup> Musculus, *Loci communes*, I.4-5 and XLII. References through Muller, *PRRD*, 3:208-210.

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Despite these difficulties, the Reformed orthodox maintain the terminology of a divine “essence” or “nature.”<sup>60</sup> This is polemically directed against the Socinians, who denied that the Bible ascribes a “nature” to God, in order to avoid the acceptance of a divine “nature” in Jesus Christ, and thus to subvert the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the Socinians, the word “God” and the other names of God merely indicate a function or a power. To the contrary, the Reformed state that God has proper, essential names, and a distinct essence or nature.<sup>61</sup> The definition of this essence is often tautological, such as “God’s essence is the Godhead itself, by which God is God and is distinguished from all other things.”<sup>62</sup> Several authors emphasize that the essence of God can never be thought of apart from the Trinity. In fact, they find it necessary to explain how the terminology of God’s essence in the doctrine of God relates to the language of one essence in three Persons. Polanus, for example, states that God has his essence through himself in the mode of the Father giving the essence to the Son and the Spirit receiving it from Father and Son conjointly. The divine essence does not exist outside the personal relations in the Trinity.<sup>63</sup> According to the Leiden *Synopsis*, a description of God consists of three members: first, his essence is indicated by its various attributes; second, the three divine Persons are enumerated; third, God’s works are mentioned. This makes it clear that the separate discussion of the attributes of God does not imply a separation between doctrine of God and doctrine of the Trinity at the deepest conceptual level.<sup>64</sup>

### **5.4. The Divine Attributes**

The discussion of the divine attributes in most cases forms the largest part of the total doctrine of God. Here the basic statements concerning the essence of God are elaborated in different directions. The analysis of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the divine attributes is preceded by some reflections on its systematical status and on the various patterns of classification.

#### **5.4.1. The Systematic Place of the Doctrine of Attributes**

In all Reformed orthodox treatments of the doctrine of God, it is emphatically stated that the word “attributes” should be understood correctly, namely as essential properties (*proprietas essentialis*). It is wrong to interpret it as indicating qualities (*accidentia*) in addition to the essence of God. In addition to “attributes,” some authors speak of God’s “perfections” (*perfectiones*) or “excellencies,”

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<sup>60</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 56, states that God’s essence is God himself, but not the “form” of God (*forma Dei*; on the metaphysical implications of the term *forma*, see Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v.); Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 176, distinguishes between the Greek biblical words *ousia*, *phusis*, and *morphè*. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 134, states that God is a Spirit in terms of an essential or substantial form (*essentialem seu substantialem formam*). He adds that this form does not exist in any matter; parallel to the term *forma*, Polanus uses the words *purissimus actus*, thus denying any potentiality in God.

<sup>61</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 506-509; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 156;

<sup>62</sup> Alting, *Loci communes*, 15: “essentia Dei est ipsa Deitas, per quam Deus est Deus & ab omnibus aliis rebus distinguitur.”

<sup>63</sup> Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 91-92; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 134-135.

<sup>64</sup> *Synopsis*, disp. VI, th. XVII-XVIII.

indicating that not only all imperfection is to be removed from the concept of God, but even that in a positive and real sense all pure perfections should be ascribed to God.<sup>65</sup>

Lambert Daneau's view of this matter seems to be somewhat outside the mainstream: he provides an initial distinction between properties and accidentals (*proprietates – accidentia*), and divides the properties in natural and essential properties (*proprietates naturales – essentielles*). By "accidentals" he understands qualities that apply to God due to an additional relation towards his creature, which does not affect God's essence (e.g. God's being a Creator). The "natural properties" have as their characteristic, that they identify God as the source and perfection of qualities that also occur among creatures: power, will, knowledge.<sup>66</sup> Daneau probably is dependent on Hyperius, who gives a similar distinction between *nomina negative / affirmativa*, which together indicate the essence of God, and *nomina accidentaria* that signify something following on the nature and operations of God, which do not at all reveal God's essence.<sup>67</sup> It seems that this complicated view was soon abandoned by most of Reformed Orthodoxy.

In Maccovius, however, there are interesting indications providing some conceptual room for a distinction between "essential" and "accidental" properties. On the one hand, Maccovius follows the tradition in repeatedly denying the occurrence of accidents in God. A specific polemical focus here is the debate with the Socinians and Conrad Vorstius. The same debate, however, occasions Maccovius to develop a more nuanced view. So he distinguishes between attributes residing as perfections in God himself and attributes ascribed to God in virtue of "a merely extrinsic denomination from created things, such as his being Lord, Judge, Revenger." A further elaboration of the latter category is found with respect to God's decree. The Socinians denied that the decrees are essential to God, and still they inhere in God. In response, Maccovius states that, taken in the sense of wisdom and will by which God decides, the decree is essential; but there is also a non-essential factor because the decree extends to and terminates in a created object. In this latter respect, God's decree is free and can be otherwise than it actually is. By this distinction, Maccovius can on the one hand safeguard the insight that as an internal act the decree is identical with the essence of God, while on the other hand he prevents the objects decreed to become necessary by claiming that the external relation of the decree to the objects is free and contingent.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 579.

<sup>66</sup> Danaeus, *Compendium*, 5-7. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:215, notices some peculiarity with Daneau's account of God's properties and accidents, but does not specify it.

<sup>67</sup> Hyperius, *De Theologo*, 188.

<sup>68</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 127-131. On pages 129-136, Maccovius lists sixteen arguments to refute the Socinian attempt to make a difference between God's essence and his decree. The ingenious arguments and objections of the Socinians are scrutinized, laid apart in hypotheses and disjunctive propositions (either ... or), and thus reduced *ad absurdum*. A remarkable detail is that the Socinians claim that God's *potentia* extends larger than his *voluntas*, a Cartesian position *avant la lettre!*

A similar differentiation between necessary and contingent (free) dimensions in God is found with Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 56: God's will can be viewed either (1) as his essential act, or (2) as the concrete determination of the will to actualize some state of affairs,

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In common scholastic language, the “attributes” are “predicated” of God. Richard Muller gives the following description:

“Predication” is the logical act of attribution by which a subject is united with a predicate. The act of predication assumes some relationship between a given subject and that which is being attributed to it .... There must be something that is materially the same, but also formally different, about both subject and predicate in order for there to be an affirmative predication that is not merely a tautology. The subject and the predicate, the thing and its attribute, are, therefore, not convertible: the affirmative predications “God is love” and “God is goodness” do [not] allow the inference that “Love is God” and “Goodness is God.” The entire traditional language of the divine attributes, therefore (despite what has sometimes been claimed concerning divine simplicity), presumes a real or entative identity but also a formal difference between the divine subject and its predicates and, in addition, between the various predicates as well.<sup>69</sup>

All Reformed orthodox theologians believe in the simplicity of God, and therefore state that there is no real distinction (as if the being and attributes were different “things” or “substances”) between God’s being and his attributes or between the attributes mutually. As Polanus says: there is nothing in God which is not either essence or person.<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on the identity of God’s essence and attributes has a polemical interest against the Socinians: these heretics separate them in order to deny the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. The Reformed orthodox hold that the attribution of divine properties to Jesus Christ in Scripture demonstrates, that he is truly God.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, against the Lutheran doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* they maintain that the attributes that are proper to the divine nature cannot be imparted to Christ’s human nature.

The different attributes are discerned from our point of view: because we as finite creatures cannot grasp the fullness of the divine being, we need different words and concepts, which all together express our knowledge of God. Several

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or (3) as the rational relation to the object, arising from the previous determination of the will. Only in the first meaning, God’s will is necessary, Wendelin argues. Because creatures are free, God’s will is not necessitated, but determines freely.

In reviewing the different classifications of divine attributes (cf. section 5.4.2 below), notably the absolute – relative distinction and divisions between essential and active properties, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:217-222, notices the occurrence of a “relational” component in the classic doctrine of God, but fails to connect this to the initial exclusion of “accidents” in God and to the question of necessity and contingency.

<sup>69</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:197-198. Muller’s speaking of a “material” identity is not likely to be found with the scholastics in relation to God, as it reminds of the Aristotelian form – matter metaphysics and would suggest a composition out of matter and form.

<sup>70</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 141: “In Deo nihil est, quod non sit aut essentia aut persona.”

<sup>71</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 169.

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authors explicitly refer to the adagium *Finitum non capax infiniti*, which is especially known from the Reformed – Lutheran debates on Christology.<sup>72</sup> A somewhat discussed question is, whether the attributes differ purely by our conceptions,<sup>73</sup> or whether there is a foundation of the difference in the reality of God’s being. Turretini states on the one hand, that the diversification of attributes is due to our limited capacity of knowing, but on the other hand holds that there is a basis in the thing itself (*fundamentum in re*). The attributes are different because of the different relations in which they take place and the different objects to which they are directed.<sup>74</sup> The strong connection and the necessary distinction between the attributes are expressed in Turretini’s statement: the attributes are predicated mutually in the identical sense, not in the formal sense; that is: they refer to the same reality, but do not denote the same formal characteristic.<sup>75</sup> The latter term (formal characteristic) points towards Duns Scotus’s *distinctio formalis* as the theory that most suitably explains the relation between God’s essence and his attributes. Similarly, Polanus states that “by a different “form” man is intelligent, by a different “form” he is just. The same holds for the [divine] attributes of the second order.”<sup>76</sup> The Scotistic *distinctio formalis* is explicitly denied by Johann Heinrich

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<sup>72</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 126 (mentioned by Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 67); Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 190; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 19; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 6. In relation to the principle finiti ad infinitum dari proportio non potest, Muller, PRRD, 3:201 states that it “probably also implies that the Reformed would not accept the univocal predication of being of God and of the finite. This, at least, is a probable conclusion.” The repetition of “probable” indicates that Muller is not fully certain on this point. Since the Utrecht School advocates a univocal predication, and would “probably” argue that it is present in Reformed Orthodoxy as well, here lies a knotty problem of interpretation and evaluation.

<sup>73</sup> Against Muller, PRRD, 3:289-290, I would argue that a statement by Alting “that the attributes ‘do not differ from the essence, nor among themselves ... but only according to our conception’ “ is not an unambiguous sign of nominalist influence. In medieval scholastic thought, we find both “older conceptualism” that comes close to Scotus’s formal distinction, and “newer conceptualism” that coincides with Ockham’s nominalism.

<sup>74</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 169-170. Cf. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 581, who accepts a distinction between the attributes in view of their objects, effects, and our mode of conceiving them.

<sup>75</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 170. The same formula is used by Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 154. Muller’s judgment (PRRD, 3:216) that the “Reformed orthodox manifest relative agreement on the problem of predication of attributes, following out a Thomist pattern of argument modified with Scotistic accents,” will for the final part be based mainly on this acceptance of the “formal distinction.” In a later context (pages 287-289, 295-297), Muller comments: “The Reformed orthodox ... tended to accept the Thomist and nominalist arguments against Scotus, but remain dissatisfied with the nominalist and, at times, with the original Thomist solution. Specifically, the definition of perfections as being ‘in’ God ‘eminently, though not formally’ represents a rejection ... of the language of the Scotist *distinctio formalis* – yet, in rejecting (and sometimes misunderstanding) the term, the Reformed orthodox also accept some of its implication .... The resulting hybrids, scholastic Protestant approaches to the distinctions between divine attributes, were framed at least in part by a reaction to the modified version of the formal or modal distinction by the foremost metaphysician of the time, Francis Suárez .... This solution then passed over into the writings of such thinkers as Walaeus, Maresius, Twisse, Le Blanc, Voetius, and Turretini. Thus, Voetius identifies the distinction of the attributes from one another

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Heidegger. The reason is that, according to Heidegger, the alleged difference in definition of God's essence and attributes is caused merely by our limited understanding, not by God himself. Moreover, the attributes of knowledge, will, power, mercy, grace, justice, etc. do not differ from each other substantially, but merely by different relations to their objects.<sup>77</sup>

Following medieval scholastic theology, the Reformed orthodox utilize different terms to indicate how God has his different attributes. In the first place, God has properties in a formal sense (*formaliter*): according to their proper definition, that is in their intrinsic form or essence, they are in God. Examples are God's eternity and simplicity. Secondly, some properties are in God in an eminent sense (*eminenter*): without any degree or mode of imperfection which occurs in other instances of the property. For example: God's intellect and will. In the third place, some attributes are in God by way of power or virtue (*virtualiter*): in virtue of his power as the First Cause, God can bring about properties which he does not possess himself. As an example, properties of created beings like motion, figure, speech etc. are stated to be "virtually" in God.<sup>78</sup>

In the doctrine of divine attributes, the Reformed orthodox elaborate and explain what they initially said about the divine essence. It is their conviction that the attributes in fact are nothing but the simple essence of God viewed in diverse relations. Moreover, they are firmly convinced that the fundamental insight in the identity of essence and attributes is rooted in biblical revelation. As Muller argues, there is an interaction between the understanding of Scriptural testimonies of God and philosophical, conceptual inquiry. In this interaction, the Bible-based awareness that God is "not like man" but is infinitely exalted above us, seriously qualifies the method of the theory of attributes.<sup>79</sup>

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*eminenter* as the equivalent of a distinction *ratio ratiocinata*, but now identifying more fully how that rational distinction is founded 'in the thing' or 'in the nature of the thing' by way of eminence. He also accepts the traditional assumption that the persons [of the Trinity] are identical *essentialiter* but distinct *personaliter* – and that the relational distinction between the persons is a *distinctio realis*. Voetius also uses the 'formal distinction' but tends to assimilate it to the distinction *ratio ratiocinata*."

<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 70.

<sup>78</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 583; cf. Turretini, *Institutio*, 170. Cf. Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 47-50, who follows the lead of the Jesuit metaphysician Francesco Suárez in equating the (Scotistic) "formal" vocabulary with the (Thomistic) terminology of "eminence" and "virtue." Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 143-148, points to the different backgrounds of the terms *eminenter* and *formaliter*. From a Thomist perspective, the created perfections are eminently present in God; the mode of predication is analogical. From a Scotist perspective, the created perfections are formally present in God; this presupposes the univocity of being. Goudriaan points out that the Jesuit metaphysician Suárez chose a fundamentally Scotist starting point (univocal, formal predication), which could afterwards only verbally be reconciled with the Thomist approach in terms of analogy and eminence.

<sup>79</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:201-203, referring to Mastricht, Turretini, Pictet, Zanchi, Gomarus, Leigh, and Ridgley.

### 5.4.2. Patterns of Classification

In Reformed orthodox statements of the doctrine of God, various ways of classifying the divine attributes are found. Some appear to be introduced for merely didactical purposes, in others more systematical interests are involved.

A preliminary question which is often tacitly passed over is whether any classification of divine attributes can be appropriate, given the simplicity of God and the substantial identity of the attributes. According to Harm Goris, Thomas Aquinas held a very strong view of simplicity, to the result that any ground for assuming an order among the attributes was denied. When Reformed scholasticism, for example in Girolamo Zanchi, starts to speak of a “natural order” in God’s attributes, this is seen by Goris as a trace of Scotist influence.<sup>80</sup>

The most common division is that between incommunicable and communicable attributes. In this classification, the first group contains attributes that cannot be found in created beings. They emphasize the extraordinary and transcendent character of God. The following five form the core of the incommunicable attributes: simplicity, independence, infinity, immutability and perfection. The second group consists of divine proprieties that have some resemblance with qualities found in creatures. Here attributes like life, intellect, will, power, goodness, grace and justice are located. Several writers add some qualifications to the terms “incommunicable” and “communicable.” If the former group were completely incommunicable, we would not be able to ascribe them to God. The latter group is not communicable in the sense that creatures share in these properties in the same way as God possesses them. What is communicated to creatures are images and effects of God’s “communicable” attributes. Therefore, it is appropriate to conceive of the “communicability” of God’s attributes in the sense of analogy, not univocity or equivocity (see also section 5.2. above). Strictly speaking, there is no “proportion” between the Creator and creatures; still, God accommodates his revelation to our understanding, using words that give us some “taste” of the knowledge of God. Man’s being created after the image of God is especially mentioned as a ground for the possibility of identifying communicable attributes: in the products of God’s workmanship, the traces of the Maker can be found.<sup>81</sup> With regard to the “communicable” attributes, Mastricht emphasizes that

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<sup>80</sup> Goris, “Thomism in Zanchi’s Doctrine of God,” 137-139. It should be noted that the references to Zanchi’s *De natura Dei* given by Goris all introduce a certain “order” between God’s attributes on account of “our understanding.” It can be doubted whether this entails a structural order in the attributes themselves.

<sup>81</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 468-469; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 70; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 96-97; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 588. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 137, distinguishes between the *vestigium Dei* and the *imago Dei* that is at stake in the analogy of the communicable attributes. *Vestigium Dei* is called “being itself” and the general goodness of God demonstrated in creation. The *imago Dei* properly speaking is the resemblance with God residing in man’s intellect, will, integrity, righteousness and dominion over other creatures. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:225, senses a “fundamentally Thomistic doctrine of the existence of creatures by participation in the essential goodness of God” behind the ‘communicability’ of divine attributes, to the result that what is communicated to creatures is “not the divine attribute itself ... and certainly not the divine essence” but “an impartation of attributes resembling those of infinite being to finite being.”

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they are ascribed to God not merely in a negative or causative sense, leave alone in an ambiguous sense, but in a proper, positive and essential sense.<sup>82</sup>

A somewhat different classification is that of negative and positive attributes.<sup>83</sup> In this division, the negative attributes emphasize the difference between God and all created beings. According to De Moor, the term “negative” applies to our mode of conceiving of this group of divine attributes, namely by negating an aspect of our created, limited reality. In God himself, attributes like infinity and independence are utterly positive.<sup>84</sup>

A division between absolute and relative attributes prevailed in Lutheran Orthodoxy, but was taken over by some Reformed orthodox authors.<sup>85</sup> In discussing this distinction, De Moor assumes a difference between attributes that do and do not have a relation to creatures. The relative attributes occur properly when the creatures exist, but they have a foundation in an absolute attribute, and thus are truly essential in respect to their fundament.<sup>86</sup> De Moor gives the example of God’s goodness and mercy: mercy is a relative attribute that presupposes a miserable creature to have mercy with; it is based, however, in God’s goodness as an absolute attribute that God has even before creation. Similarly, God’s punishing justice presupposes a sinful creature to be punished, but has an eternal basis in God’s holiness. If we compare De Moor’s explanation to Zanchi’s discussion of this question, we discover substantial agreement caught in different terms. Early and late orthodox agree upon the essential nature of God’s attributes or virtues that are related to creatures. Zanchi is stronger, however, in his emphasis on this essentiality, and views the “relation” involved as bearing only on the creature, not on God himself.<sup>87</sup>

In De Moor, we find also mentioning of a different approach to classification of the divine attributes. Associated with the Cartesian philosophy in which God is

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<sup>82</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 95.

<sup>83</sup> Mentioned with reserved approval by Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 152; applied by Alting, *Loci communes*, 15; Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 6; mentioned as a possibility (to which he adds “relative” properties such as Creator, Governor, Lord) by Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 25; paralleled with the incommunicable – communicable distinction by Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 70.

<sup>84</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 585: “Negativa vero Attributa plurimum ita dicuntur in relatione non ad ipsa Dei Attributa, sed ad nostrum Concipiendum Modum & Nomina quibus exprimuntur; dum Infinitas, Independentia, Immensitas, licet Negative efferantur, maxime Positivam in Deo Perfectionem dicunt. Negativus vero ille Concipiendi & efferendi Modus inde oritur, quod nos finiti simus, Deus vero ejusque Attributa infinita.”

<sup>85</sup> For example, John Owen; see Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth. John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 103. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 71 states, after having discussed and defended the incommunicable – communicable pattern, that the absolute – relative distinction is in fact more accurate. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 245-248, describes Voetius’ division of the attributes in terms of “regulative” and “operative” properties, and notes a connection with the distinction made by some Lutheran theologians between *attributa immanentia* and *attributa operativa*.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 138. Maccovius takes the absolute – relative distinction as a subdivision of the incommunicable attributes (!). He concurs with De Moor in stating that the relative attributes have a foundation in the absolute ones.

<sup>87</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 24-26.

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viewed as “mere thought” (*mera cogitatio*), some theologians (Burman and Poiret are mentioned) distinguish between *internal* and *external* attributes of God. The internal attributes are formed by the pair *intellect* and *will*, as the two exclusive modes of mental life. All other things that can be said of God are merely “external denominations.” De Moor, following his “auctor” Johannes à Marck, rejects this view, as it reduces important divine perfections to merely negative and relational properties. In De Moor’s wordings, we hear the difficulty of communicating from two totally different systems of reference: Descartes’ specific language of, for instance, “spirit” and “relation” is hard to understand from a more traditional Aristotelian terminology.<sup>88</sup> A Marck’s and De Moor’s reaction to the division into internal and external attributes contains also an interesting constructive proposal: as a transition between the discussion of God’s essence and his attributes, they provide a discussion of God’s life (*vita Dei*), consisting of the three “faculties” of intellect, will, and power. Important here is the addition of “power” to the Cartesian duo of intellect and will. Ironically, the choice to start with these “basic” faculties seems to amount to the acceptance and incorporation of Cartesian insights in a different key. Seen at the background of the traditional theory of divine attributes, it is remarkable that aspects normally occurring in the second group of attributes (communicable properties) are now placed in front of the whole discussion. As a result, the doctrine of God receives a less abstract and metaphysical appearance.<sup>89</sup>

Petrus van Mastricht chooses an independent route. He mentions the traditional divisions (incommunicable–communicable, negative–positive, absolute–relative), but prefers a division in three parts: what God is – how great God is – how God is. The reason is that he emphasizes the “obligations” or “functions” of God as the “Spirit existing by himself.” In this order, the discussion of “what and how great” God is, serves to prepare the way to the exposition of God’s capacities, virtues and operations.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, De Moor employs an interesting terminology in classifying the attributes:

There is a complex of all divine attributes or perfections in *infinity*, as it is said negatively, or in highest *perfection*, as it is said positively. For these are not properly called an attribute, but rather a certain complex of all attributes by which our mind, as by a brief summary, tries to understand, in a concept still less distinct and rather obscure, whatever can be thought of God.<sup>91</sup>

Remarkable in this statement is the distinction made between proper, concrete attributes, and attributes of a higher level of abstraction (in modern language, they

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<sup>88</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 586-587. This discussion refers back to the exposition of God’s (mental) life and its faculties, discussed immediately below.

<sup>89</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 572-579. On page 588, De Moor makes an explicit connection between the “faculties” and the “communicable attributes” on the one hand, and the “essence” and the “incommunicable attributes” on the other hand.

<sup>90</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 94-95.

<sup>91</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 582.

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could perhaps be called meta-attributes). De Moor explicitly states that infinity and perfection extend to God's essence, its faculties of intellect, will and power, and all subsequent perfections.<sup>92</sup>

The preliminary discussions of the status of the attributes and the patterns of classification set the stage for the subsequent lengthy examination of each of these divine properties. We should keep in mind a few insights when moving through these expositions in the next two chapters:

- the attributes should not be understood as something different from God, but as essentially identical with God;
- the difference between the attributes is mainly based on our limited understanding, but can also be argued for in terms of different concepts or formal definitions;
- while different divisions of the attributes are advocated, most result in a bifurcation between attributes that describe God as he is in himself as the Creator over against all creatures, and attributes that express the ways in which God as the Creator relates to his creation;
- along these lines, a careful modification of the old principle *in Deum non cadunt accidentia* can be detected when the "relational" properties of God are said to be "accidental" or "contingent" inasmuch as they "terminate" in their "objects."

We will return to the systematic impact of these observations in chapter 8.

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<sup>92</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 585.

## 6. Doctrine of God: Attributes of the First Order

The first group of attributes consists in most authors of at least five or six from the following series of ten: simplicity, independence, aseity, spirituality, infinity, eternity, omnipresence, incomprehensibility, immutability, and perfection. Several of these attributes are almost synonymous. The attributes of simplicity, independence, spirituality, and perfection in particular are closely related.

These attributes are called the incommunicable, negative, absolute attributes or the attributes of God as he is in himself. I have labeled this group “attributes of the first order,” because nearly all authors agree in the identification of this group, despite differences in the exact classification. The common feature of these attributes is that they define God’s being as it is fundamentally distinct from created beings. Hence, the terms used cannot be attributed to any created being.

We will first discuss the divine simplicity and independence, because these two are often treated as preliminary attributes that provide the rules for all discussion of God’s being. The spirituality of God is often closely connected to the doctrine of simplicity, so I will discuss that in the same section.<sup>1</sup> God’s infinity is often taken as a general term, in which a further distinction is made between infinity related to time (eternity) and to space (omnipresence/immensity). Immutability is an attribute that follows more or less directly from one or more of the preceding attributes. God’s perfection can be seen as the correlate of his simplicity: it is the summary of all his perfections or attributes.

### 6.1. *Simplicity*

Simplicity (*simplicitas*) is understood as that attribute, by which God is stated to be free from all composition. The possible forms of composition are summed up by several authors: physical composition as the members that form a body, or composition out of matter and form; logical composition out of *genus* and *differentia* or subject and predicate; metaphysical composition out of act and potency, individuality and nature, being and essence.<sup>2</sup>

Most of these forms of composition are to be understood within the framework of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. The composition by matter and form is

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:271: “The first series of attributes treated in many of the Reformed orthodox theologies, spirituality, simplicity, invisibility, immutability, and perfection, follow directly from the principle of the essential unity of God, from his independence, from the implications of the discussion of the divine names, and by way of conclusions drawn from a series of biblical texts. Simplicity, spirituality, and invisibility, moreover, stand together in many of the Reformed orthodox systems as a triad of related attributes – so related, indeed, that they imply each other and, at times, demand virtually the same definition.”

<sup>2</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 142; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XXIV; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 72; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 104; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 609-610. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:277-278 mentions the main forms of composition denied for God, but does not elaborate on their implications nor does he indicate the source of the traditional enumeration of compositions.

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the basic procedure for the bringing into existence of individual entities: there is unformed, rough matter, upon which the pre-existing rational form is impressed in order to give the entity its proper essence and destination. The metaphysical forms of composition by act and potency, essence and existence, run parallel to the physical composition by form and matter.<sup>3</sup> Potency or passive potential is located in matter: in itself, it is nothing, but it has the potential to become something by being acted upon. "Act" denotes the actual realization of a thing, the degree to which it corresponds to its destination. The distinction between essence and existence is one of the most complicated issues in medieval Aristotelianism (see section 3.1 above). The result in this context is the seclusion of any of these polarities in God.

The absence of composition in God can be expressed by the negative formulas "There is not one thing and another in God" or "There is nothing in God which is not God," or by the positive formula "Whatever is in God, is God." The result is the same: the Reformed orthodox conception of simplicity does not allow for *real* distinctions within the one being of God.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Muller argues that, although the intricate explanation of all sorts of composition that do not occur in God may seem philosophical and speculative,

the basic concept is not: from Irenaeus to the era of Protestant orthodoxy, the fundamental assumption was merely that God, as ultimate Spirit is not a compounded or composite being. It is also the case that, from the time of the fathers onward, divine simplicity was understood as a support of the doctrine of the Trinity and as necessarily defined in such a manner as to argue the "manifold" as well as the non-composite character of God. ... The objection that this potentially philosophical point might not be easily rooted in Scripture ..., was never taken particularly seriously by the orthodox tradition – given, as Wytttenbach indicates, that the alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity is so bizarre as to be neither amenable to any exegetical result nor acceptable to reason. It belongs to the very nature of composite things that they come into being and perish – and Scripture certainly indicates that God cannot either be made or destroyed! Various opponents of the doctrine, therefore, like Vorstius, the Socinians, and various Remonstrant theologians, were viewed as heterodox in the extreme.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 161: the metaphysical forms of composition are based on the distinction act – potency.

<sup>4</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 126; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 72; Turretini, *Institutio*, 175. For the interpretation of "real distinctions," see section 5.4.1 above. In Polanus's account, *Syntagma*, 141, we encounter the denial of anything potential, accidental, passive or contingent in God, and the statement that in God as one infinite and eternal act all properties are *necessary*. In view of the problem of necessitarianism, we could interpret the necessity stated by Polanus as a logical necessity: it is impossible that God does not have his properties. Understood in this sense, no threat of necessity imposed on reality outside God does arise.

<sup>5</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:276, referring to Daniel Wytttenbach and Francesco Turretini.

## Doctrine of God: Attributes of the First Order

Why is it important for the Reformed orthodox to maintain the doctrine of simplicity?<sup>6</sup> This question can be answered by looking at the reasons for God's simplicity provided by the orthodox authors.<sup>7</sup> A rather complete set of eleven arguments is given by Polanus:<sup>8</sup>

1. The problem with composition in relation to God's *aseitas* is that when there are at least two different things brought together in God, there must be a cause that brought them together. Then God would indebted his existence to that preceding cause, on which he would become dependent. This is impossible, given the fact that God exists by himself. Polanus derives this basic insight from the divine name Jehovah.
2. God does not only *have* properties such as life, light and love, but he, in fact, *is* life, light, love himself. He receives these properties not from the outside, but by and from himself.
3. Polanus further appeals to God's *spiritualitas*, which not only excludes the composition out of spirit and matter, but also means that God lacks the composition that is by definition given with matter. In Polanus's metaphysical understanding, "spirit" is a non-composite entity.
4. The argument from God as *actus purissimus* means that, since God is pure act, that is, fully realized being, there can be nothing in him that allows for further development. Remarkably, Polanus merely states the *actus purissimus* as a ground for divine simplicity, without any explanation!
5. God is completely a whole, which means that God is in a total way all that he is, by his own essence. Whatever God is and does, he does so not in a partial way, but in full presence of his complete being. Polanus gives a quotation from Tertullian: "God is a 'complete eye' because he 'as a whole' sees; a 'complete ear' because he 'as a whole' hears; a 'complete hand' because he 'as a whole' operates; a 'complete foot' because he 'as a whole' is everywhere."
6. The term *primum ens* expresses the same view of God: he is, both in the logical and in the temporal order, absolutely the first. In case of composition, both the separate components and the composing cause would be prior to God.
7. In arguing from God's *perfection*, Polanus states that perfection consists in fullness of being and in remoteness from non-being. In the same line of thought, the One is considered higher than the Many, because plurality and division is "a way towards non-being." Thus, when we know that God is the most perfect being, it follows that he is one to the exclusion of all plurality.

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<sup>6</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 172.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the arguments that are found explicitly in the orthodox writers and that are listed below, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:285-287, gives an explanation in terms of the theory of properties extant in scholastic logic and metaphysics. Muller states that the so-called "transcendentals" of *unitas*, *veritas*, and *bonitas* are viewed as properties inseparable from their bearers. While this holds for all entities, God is not exceptional in possessing inseparable properties. What is unique is that God possesses unequalled properties such as infinity, omniscience and omnipotence as constituent principles. At the background of the idea of "inseparable properties," it is evident that these constituents cannot be things different from God's own being. Distinctions that can be made in respect to God are formal, modal, and rational (or conceptual) distinctions.

<sup>8</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 141-142.

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8. God is *immutable*. However, when there were composition in God, the two components could still be either dissolved or united, and that would import change in God.
9. Similarly, God's *eternity* would be contradicted by composition: in case of composition, the components are (causally and logically) prior to the composite being resulting from them. Then, God could not be without beginning.
10. Polanus's next argument is that no mode of composition can be justly ascribed to God, neither as seen in himself nor in relation to other beings. Polanus then explains how the seven modes of composition mentioned at the start of this section do not apply to God.
11. God does not have diversity or composition in himself, neither in Persons nor in operations. Polanus maintains that in the three Persons the same and total divine essence subsists, and that there is no real difference between God's essence and his will and actions; they are the same (*idem*).

As a result of this exposition, we note that God's simplicity puts him radically apart from all created beings, because he lacks all compositeness that is characteristic of creatures, and exists in a uniquely divine manner.<sup>9</sup>

One of the aspects of the doctrine of divine simplicity is the emphasis on God's unity and singularity. Although the concept of simplicity is not limited to numerical uniqueness, the *unitas singularitatis* plays an important part in the Reformed doctrine of God, and is often stated in immediate connection with God's existence and essence. Polanus notices an ambiguity in the expression "numerical unity": it can be taken either as the identification of one individual out of a common class of entities or as the indication of an absolutely unique entity. Only in the latter sense can numerical unity be ascribed to God.<sup>10</sup>

Over against philosophical and vulgar polytheism,<sup>11</sup> Reformed Orthodoxy maintains that there can be only one God. As Mastricht's separate discussion of God's unity makes clear, it must be understood primarily in terms of God's uniqueness. In a unique way, God is undivided and indivisible. Mastricht adds that the unity of God consists in the three Persons.<sup>12</sup> In arguing for this position, the Reformed orthodox do not only appeal to explicit biblical statements of God's

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<sup>9</sup> Some danger seems to be latent in the statement by the *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XXIV, that "all degrees of simplicity in nature flow from God's simplicity." It seems that this formulation makes the distinction between God and creatures to a gradual, relative distinction within a hierarchy of being. To my knowledge, most Reformed orthodox authors point emphatically at the absolute distinction in regard to simplicity. For example Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 72: "Spiritus autem est increatus, adeoque omni creato spiritu, etiam quoad spiritualitatem, perfectior, & ab eo toto genere differens, utpote Spiritus Creator, non creatus;" and cf. the apodictic statement by Muller, *PRRD*, 3:277, that "this *simplicitas* is utterly without analogy in the creature."

<sup>10</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 136, referring to Basilius Magnus, Ruffinus, and Tertullian. This compromise formula advocating the "numerical unity" in a proper sense is rejected by Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 113, and *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XXV.

<sup>11</sup> As Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 112-113 shows, pagan authors such as Homer, Plato and Sophocles were already aware of the unity of the true God.

<sup>12</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 113.

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uniqueness (Deuteronomy 6:4 and other places), but also refer to patristic and scholastic arguments.<sup>13</sup> These arguments, present already with the early Apologists and Church Fathers (Mastricht mentions Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil, Ambrose, Lactantius, Augustine, and Johannes Damascenus) but famously construed by Anselm of Canterbury and later scholastic doctors, attempt to provide rational insight in the unity of God: if an entity is properly identified as God, there can be only one such entity, since his essential properties (infinity, independence, omnipotence) exclude the possibility of a second deity.<sup>14</sup> Mastricht goes as far as to argue that nature cries out the unity of God:

- because the multitude of things can ultimately exist only due to one first principle;
- because all finite things must be enclosed by one infinite being;
- because infinite perfection must apply to only one God, as opposed to the imperfection of the many so-called gods;
- because an infinite and perfect God must be omnipotent, to the exclusion of any rival;
- because the created world is a composite whole that evidently stands under one unifying government;
- because this unifying government of the world requires one highest monarch and king.<sup>15</sup>

The doctrine of the spirituality of God (*spiritualitas Dei*) is dealt with separately by several authors.<sup>16</sup> Generally, the concept of spirituality consists of three

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<sup>13</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 111-116; Turretini, *Institutio*, 163-166; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 604-606.

<sup>14</sup> In discussing this line of argumentation, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:242, defends the Reformed scholastics against the accusation of unfaithfulness towards the Reformers. He points to the fact that early Reformation thinkers like Calvin and Ursinus accepted the Anselmian argument for the necessity of substitutionary atonement, but then qualifies in a hardly intelligible way: "Yet the rationality of the ontological argument, even adapted as we find it here, is typical of the scholastic view of God in a way that the Reformed adaptation of Anselmic atonement theory is not: for here we do not describe a necessity imposed on man by the very nature of his plight but a rational necessity devised for the description of the 'unsearchable' divine nature." This formulation is seriously flawed. First, if the necessity involved in "Anselmic atonement theory" is not a "rational necessity," Anselm would fail his own intentions, and the opposition to his reasoning "*remoto Christo*" would be pointless from the outset. Second, it took a whole tradition of scholastic thinking up to John Duns Scotus to arrive at the insight that the necessity of atonement is a hypothetical necessity based on a decision of God's will (see the exposition of Scotus's revision of the Anselmian argument discussed in part III, section 17.2.2 below). Third, the argument for the unity of God has nothing to do with describing or penetrating the "unsearchable" nature of God (an activity which especially Calvin would abhor), but merely spells out the logical implications of employing the Christian concept of God. Given what Scripture tells us about God and his properties, it is logically inconsistent to conceive of a second deity next to God.

<sup>15</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 112-113. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 136-137, who adds arguments from God's sufficiency and ubiquity.

<sup>16</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 98-107 (spirituality foundational for simplicity);

elements: incorporeality, invisibility and incomprehensibility.<sup>17</sup> Spirit is seen as the opposite of body or matter. It is stated that God is Spirit, not only because of the scriptural testimony, but also because a spiritual being is viewed as higher than a corporeal being. Although the absence of matter poses a certain likeness between God as uncreated Spirit and created spirits (e.g., angels), the Reformed orthodox deny that all “spirits” fall in the same class or *genus*. The likeness is merely a specification of Reformed scholasticism’s procedure of analogical predication, that does not blur but indeed maintains the strict ontological distinction between God and creature.<sup>18</sup> The denial of corporeality in God is directly linked to the doctrine of simplicity: when God has a body, he is composed of members and parts. In principle, this would mean that God could be divided and would be perishable. The interpretation of spirituality as incorporeality is firmly maintained against the so-called Anthropomorphites: an ancient Christian sect teaching that God has a body. Opposition to the Anthropomorphites is, beyond being an obligatory element of traditional theology, urgent for Reformed Orthodoxy, as similar ideas were brought forward by Vorstius, the Socinians, Spinoza, and Thomas Hobbes. Consequently, biblical texts that speak about God in bodily terms, ascribe parts of a body to God and mention bodily actions by God, are interpreted as anthropomorphisms: a manner of speech accommodated to human understanding, in which figurative speech is used that should not be taken literal.<sup>19</sup>

God’s incorporeality immediately leads to his invisibility: only material bodies can be seen. There is also the reverse way of arguing: whereas Scripture states that God is invisible (e.g., 1 Timothy 6:16), it follows that God has no body. An interesting theme in Reformed orthodox theology is the *visio Dei*.<sup>20</sup> In the prolegomena, a distinction between knowledge of vision, of union and of revelation is rather common (cf. section 4.3). Heidegger distinguishes four forms of “seeing God”:

- a. in the incarnation God became “visible” in his Son;
- b. the Bible mentions several theophanies, in which God made himself somehow “visible”;
- c. by God’s revelation we receive true knowledge;

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Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 29; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 45-47 (as a transition from essence to attributes). Cf. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 73 for the argumentative connection between simplicity, spirituality, invisibility, and incomprehensibility.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 72-73. Heidegger reminds us of the “total difference” between God as a Spirit and created spirits. A fourth element is added by Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 470: God’s spirituality includes his life-giving power. Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 33, sums up six elements: God is a living substance, He is incorruptible, incorporeal, intangible, invisible and indivisible.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:300-301.

<sup>19</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 564-571; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 73; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 99. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:303, who does not mention Spinoza in this context.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 165-166, who mentions Antonius Walaeus as an exception to the general Reformed orthodox denial of an essential vision of God. See Walaeus’s contribution to the *Synopsis*, disp. LII th. 11-26. For Voetius, see Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 186-189. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:303-308, reviews some debate on God’s invisibility, but does not explicitly deal with the question of the *visio Dei*.

d. after the Last Day we will directly see God's glory, though not his own inner essence.<sup>21</sup>

Vermigli sums up three sorts of knowledge of God: knowledge by faith, natural knowledge, and the vision of God.<sup>22</sup> Polanus speaks rather positively about the vision of God. He considers this vision as the first and most important part of happiness which consists of the fruition of God as the highest Good (*fruitio summi Boni*). Polanus describes the vision of God as the knowledge of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, bestowed on the minds of intelligent creatures by the Holy Spirit by means of the supernatural light, by which they are vivified in an everlasting life. In short, it is the perfect action of knowing God face to face. Polanus distinguishes between the total vision of God by the human mind of Christ (due to its union with the divine *Logos*) and the partial vision of God by the angels in heaven. Concerning human vision of God, he states that the vision of God is a necessary part of happiness, connected to the biblical concept of wisdom (*sapientia*). This vision is obscure during the soul's dwelling in a mortal body, but it will be clear after death and resurrection. Polanus is emphatic in stating that the faithful receive the vision of God from Christ, as the Head of a body that consists of members. The mode of knowledge is explained by Polanus by the terms abstractive and intuitive knowledge (*notitia abstractiva – intuitiva*). Intuitive knowledge sees the object as present and knows it immediately by itself. On the other hand, abstractive knowledge is based on an image (*species*) abstracted from the thing itself; it concerns the existence, but not the presence of the object. From Polanus's expressions it can be deduced that he means by *visio Dei* a knowledge of God's essence, although he is aware of the remaining distance between the infinite being of God and the finite understanding of man.<sup>23</sup>

The doctrine of invisibility in turn leads to the doctrine of incomprehensibility: not only is it impossible to see God with corporeal eyes, it is even impossible for the human mind to know his essence directly. For Heidegger, the frequent biblical description of God as inscrutable, dwelling in inaccessible light etc., is an important motive for asserting God's incomprehensibility. God exceeds all human knowledge: only God himself can perfectly know his essence, plans, and works. The superiority of God shines in all God's works of creation, judgment and grace, primarily in Christ. Heidegger concludes that whatever God reveals (for example, that he is One in Three) we can only believe, not understand completely.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 74. Cf. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 142, who divides the vision of God into five parts: first, God is "seen" by everyone in creation; second, He was seen in figure and images by the patriarchs; third, He is "seen" in faith; fourth, He was visible in the flesh, by the incarnation of Christ; fifth, He will be seen in eternal life (though not immediately and perfectly).

<sup>22</sup> Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 7, cf. 14-22.

<sup>23</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 9-11. Polanus gives as a parallel set of terms for intuitive and abstractive knowledge: *notitia visionis – simplicis intelligentiae*, thus anticipating the distinction in God's knowledge (see section 7.2). When dealing with God's invisibility in connection with his simplicity, Polanus briefly states that God cannot be seen with corporeal eyes, but only with the mind (*mente*); *Syntagma*, 142.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 74. Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 472, connects God's incomprehensibility with his infinity: God can not be circumscribed, neither by place and space nor by

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

A rather independent account of God's spirituality is given by Bernard Pictet. He interprets this attribute as God's being a thinking substance (*substantia qui pense*).<sup>25</sup> He seems to do this under Cartesian influence, and at least it is clear that he opposes Spinoza, who ascribed the opposite attribute of extension to God. A similar Cartesianizing element is found in Pictet's emphasis on God's perfection as "the first idea that we form in our minds concerning God."<sup>26</sup>

The Cartesian predilection for "thought" as the proper interpretation of God's being a Spirit is combated by Mastricht. As Mastricht notes, Cartesianizing theologians are less than content with the term "spirit" as it insufficiently connotes "thought" as God's fundamental attribute; for this reason, they prefer "mind" as the basic designation of God. Mastricht argues that the substitution of "mind" or "thought" for Spirit is unnecessary, since Cartesian philosophers themselves use "spirit" and "thought" as synonyms. The decisive ground for Mastricht to reject the Cartesian proposal is that in Scripture God is nowhere called "thought".<sup>27</sup>

The most critical question that can be posed to the doctrine of simplicity is how it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. Is not the existence of three Persons in God a form of composition? The Reformed orthodox writers are unanimous in their denial: the Persons do not compose, but only distinguish (*personae non componunt, sed distinguunt*).<sup>28</sup> The three Persons do not relate to each other as different beings, but as distinct modes of being (*modi subsistentiae*) or modifications. According to Mastricht, the personality of God is identical to his subsistence, and his subsistence does not differ from his essence. Consequently, the difference between essence and modes of existence is merely a rational difference in our understanding.<sup>29</sup> There is a

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terms and thought.

<sup>25</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 191. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:367: "Pictet's argument clearly reflects the logic of the Cartesian cogito from thought to existence or life," but "the philosophical point is not set forth either by or for itself but, rather, in the context of Pictet's more or less biblically determined topic. Nor is it evidence of a fully developed Cartesianism like that found in some of Pictet's contemporaries. Rather it offers evidence of the attempt, on the part of some Reformed thinkers of the late seventeenth century, not to adopt a full-scale philosophical rationalism ..., but to replace the waning Christian Aristotelianism of the past several centuries with a new philosophical vehicle."

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 241-245, on the consequences of the distinction between thought and extension as fundamental attributes of substances, and Descartes' choice for the former as constitutive of God's essence. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:273, argues that "Pictet does not follow the fully Cartesian route to the conclusion that all substance is either thought or extension, a conclusion that would have had particular ramifications for the concepts of divine spirituality and immensity." Muller's reference to God's immensity is somewhat problematic, as this would not normally be explained in terms of extension.

<sup>27</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 67; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 29; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 173; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 70 "personae sunt entia respective"; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 74; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 104-105; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 53-54 (providing, among other things, a sophisticated

tendency to interpret the divine persons as relations. The question then is: how real are these relations?<sup>30</sup> In each of the three Persons, the complete divine being is present; the living together of the Persons consists of the mutual communication of divinity. For the latter element, the Reformed orthodox can appeal to the classic trinitarian concept of *perichoresis*.<sup>31</sup>

With some authors, we find an emphatic defense of the Trinity precisely with appeal to the doctrine of simplicity. In addition to pagan polytheism, De Moor discerns tritheist tendencies within Christianity. Persons like Johannes Philiponus and Johannes Valentinus Gentilis developed theories in which the concepts of *natura*, *hypostasis* and *substantia* were rigorously identified with each other, to the result that the three Persons of the Trinity were considered as three independent beings, and then either effectively as three gods or the Father as only true God and the Son and the Spirit as subordinated persons. De Moor also refers to his contemporary Herman Alexander Roëll, who proffered views on the relation between the Father and the Son (denying the communication of the divine essence through the eternal generation of the Son) that could induce a separation of these divine persons. Against these erratic views, De Moor holds that the threeness of Persons in God does not run counter to the oneness of essence: the concept of Trinity does not ascribe a common nature to the three distinct Persons, but it “conjoins in a friendly way the threeness of Persons with the oneness of essence,” because the three Persons have one unique, singular and individual essence.<sup>32</sup>

We can conclude that, according to the Reformed orthodox, the doctrine of simplicity is perfectly consistent with a correct doctrine of the Trinity. It is precisely *incorrect* versions of the trinitarian dogma that conflict with the *proper* concept of divine simplicity.<sup>33</sup>

Another problem is the fact of the incarnation: if God became man, does not that mean that the divine nature was so united with the human nature, that in view of this event simplicity is not a tenable concept? The Reformed orthodox firmly deny this consequence.<sup>34</sup> The doctrine of simplicity implies that God’s essence is incommunicable to any created being. Here the Reformed discussion with the Lutherans concerning the union of the two natures of Christ comes into play. The Reformed emphasize the distinction between both natures: the human

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argument from Suárez); Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 187. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:289, ascribes to Voetius the insight “that the relational distinction between the persons is a *distinctio realis*.” This seems to go one step beyond what is presented here as evidence from Reformed orthodox authors. Cf. chapter 5, footnote 76.

<sup>31</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 142; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 158, 163.

<sup>32</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 606-609. De Moor’s formulations lack conceptual precision. From the latter clause quoted above, it can at least be deduced that De Moor considers the “common” essence of the triune God as a single and individual essence, which makes it impossible that De Moor would have accepted (if he had been familiar with it) the idea of multipersonal “social Trinity.”

<sup>33</sup> Cf. a clear statement by John Howe, quoted by Muller, *PRRD*, 3:280, that “God hath not by his word taught us to ascribe to him universal, absolute simplicity.”

<sup>34</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 71; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 104.

nature of Christ does not participate in the essential properties of the divine nature. The unity of Christ lies in his Person and will, not in a melting together or mutual exchange of his natures. The key term of Reformed Christology is *unio hypostatica*: union by way of one individual existence.<sup>35</sup> In this Christology, God's simplicity is not destroyed by the incarnation: the eternal Son of God remains what he was, and assumes the human nature he did not have before (*mansit quod erat, assumpsit quod non erat*).

The insights concerning the impossibility of a mixture between God and creatures could also be applied in other directions. De Moor notices that the ancient heresy of the Manicheans has revived in his days with several mystical groups. In a lengthy footnote, De Moor has the Hernhutters as his main polemical target. He shows how they rely on classical, medieval and recent mysticism based on the idea of *exitus* and *reditus* of the soul from and towards God, which ultimately leads to full identification of God and creature. De Moor also mentions Pontiaan van Hattem, who developed a mystical system after Spinozist fashion.<sup>36</sup>

On the methodological and theoretical level, the scholastic theory of relations is an important source of solving problems concerning acts and relations of God towards created reality. While the Reformed orthodox agree that God enters in such relations, they insist that relation does not bring something into God, but is merely external. When terms like Father and Lord are used for God, they do not denote something new in God, but indicate the fact that the independent, simple and immutable God stands in relation to other beings and is in that respect Father and Lord.<sup>37</sup>

## 6.2. Independence

The independence of God has different places in the various expositions of the doctrine of God. Samuel Maresius, Johann Heinrich Heidegger and Bernardinus de Moor<sup>38</sup> mention it as the first of the attributes of the first order, preceding God's simplicity. Wendelin places it directly after the preliminary attribute of spirituality.<sup>39</sup> Many theologians do not devote a separate chapter to the attribute of independence, but rather incorporate it into their discussion of the divine name YHWH, their description of God's nature, or their exposition of the attributes of simplicity, all-sufficiency, and perfection.

Philosophically speaking, God's independence is given with the description of his essence as purest act (*actus purissimus*). If God is a completely actualized being, nothing can cause change from potentiality to actuality in him. He has his existence by and from himself (*per se et a se*). This should not be understood, however, as if God were his own cause (*causa sui*), since this would bring a composition between a causing part and a caused part in God's being, contrary to the doctrine of simplicity. The correct interpretation is, that God's being is such that he has no cause at all; in scholastic language, God exists *a se* not in the positive, but in the

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<sup>35</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 614-618.

<sup>37</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 71-72; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 589-604.

<sup>39</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 51.

negative sense. Apparently, followers of René Descartes described God as his own cause. The background in Cartesian thought is that everything depends on God's free decision, including God's own being and properties. This extreme voluntarism or universal possibilism amounts to the denial of an essential nature and essential properties in God. It is no surprise to find this position rejected by orthodox authors such as Mastricht and De Moor.<sup>40</sup>

God's independence implies that he is sufficient to himself. Often, the sufficiency of God is derived from the Hebrew name Sjaddai. Mastricht points out that God's all-sufficiency is rooted in his absolute primacy, his excellence, infinity and eternity. As the source of all life, God is not in turn dependent on anything else. God's self-sufficiency does not exclude his being related to his creatures. Mastricht emphasizes that God did not create the world because of his own need, but because he willed to effuse his perfection into creatures that would in return glorify him. Moreover, God's operations in the world do not occur with necessity, but in freedom: by his constancy, God shows his abundant goodness and efficacious power. In contrast with sufficiency in creatures, God's sufficiency is not merely privative (indicating the lack of need), but absolute (indicating the full possession of all thinkable good within himself).<sup>41</sup>

De Moor distinguishes three aspects in which God is independent:<sup>42</sup>

- a. in his existence; in this respect, God's independence equals the necessity of his existence. Everything contingent (which can not-exist) is dependent on something else to bring it about; only that which exists necessarily (cannot not-exist) is totally independent.
- b. in his essence: as God is sufficient to himself and needs nothing else, he is essentially independent. De Moor points out that, because of the equation of essence and existence in God, God's independent existence entails his independent essence and vice versa.
- c. in his faculties and operations: from God's independent essence and existence follows that all he does is independently done as well. De Moor shows how God's intellect, will, and power operate independently and are not determined by created agents.<sup>43</sup> In dealing with the distinction between the absolute and ordinate power of God (*potentia absoluta – ordinata*; see below, section 7.4) De Moor inserts a discussion of the well-known passage from Matthew 3:9, where John the Baptist states that God can "make

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<sup>40</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 82-83; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 590-591. Cf. Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 249-252 for a brief analysis and evaluation of the Cartesian idea of God as *causa sui*. According to Goudriaan, this theological concept in Descartes' philosophy is motivated by the non-theological principle of sufficient explanation; the Reformed critics of Descartes (Revius, Mastricht, Leydekker) have justly insisted on the *negative* understanding of God's *aseitas*.

<sup>41</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 34; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 219-221; Amesius, *Medulla*, 10; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 51; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 26; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 467.

<sup>42</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 592-594.

<sup>43</sup> The independence of God's knowledge of things can be corroborated by appealing to Aquinas's theory that God knows externals not on the basis of externals but in and through the divine essence; Muller, *PRRD*, 3:239, referring to Ridgley.

children of Abraham out of these stones.” Against the Cartesians, De Moor argues that God’s power and will do not work at random, but respect the logical possibilities inherent in reality. According to De Moor, the “root of possibility” (*possibilitatis radix*) is not the mere determination of the deciding will, but the consideration of God’s intellect and power antecedent to any decree.<sup>44</sup>

As we can see in De Moor’s explanation, the notions of independence and necessity (or necessary existence) are closely related or even interchangeable. To be sure, the concept of necessity is not prominent in the Reformed scholastic doctrine of divine attributes. As Richard Muller notes, it functions primarily in the context of proofs of God’s existence. Moreover, it is interpreted in a strict and narrow sense, namely in respect to God’s existence; there is no suggestion that the necessity of God’s own existence (it is impossible that he does not exist) flows over into God’s external operations and their objects.<sup>45</sup>

### 6.3. Infinity

The Reformed orthodox accounts of the doctrine of God attach various values to the doctrine of infinity. Some authors treat infinity as a kind of “meta-attribute” qualifying the more concrete or positive attributes; in this sense, infinity has a function similar to that of simplicity or spirituality. Others do not expressly differentiate between “proper” attributes and “meta”- attributes, and deal with God’s infinity just as they deal with other properties.<sup>46</sup>

In the volume of theses by the Saumurian theologians, infinity is an important issue that is investigated in depth.<sup>47</sup> Infinity is understood as a quality of God’s nature. This does not mean that God’s nature is *indefinite* (the old Aristotelian implication of infinity), to the effect that no positive perfections could be ascribed to God. Infinity of nature means that there is no limit to God’s perfections. The qualitative infinity of God’s nature includes his quantitative infinity, which is elaborated in the attributes of eternity and omnipresence.<sup>48</sup> The same view is held by Polanus, who defines God’s infinity as that attribute, by which God is neither in time, nor in place, nor by any other thing limited and measured, but by his own essence and nature is (actually, simply and by himself), infinite, unmeasured and incomprehensible.<sup>49</sup> Still, Polanus opposes to the term “qualitative”: God is infinite

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<sup>44</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 594-599.

<sup>45</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:324-325.

<sup>46</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 118: God’s infinity can be understood either in its general perfection or in relation to specific attributes such as omnipresence and eternity. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:326, referring to Twisse. Strictly speaking, the difference can be eliminated since the scholastic doctrine of God implies that all God’s attributes are “predicated of each other” and thus mutually qualify each other. Cf. section 5.4.1 above.

<sup>47</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 143-146.

<sup>48</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 148. The bifurcation of infinity into eternity and omnipresence is rather common, though not universal.

<sup>49</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 144: “nec tempore, nec loco, nec ulla alia re finiri & mensurari: sed sua essentia & natura, actu, simpliciter, & per se infinitus, immensus & incomprehensibilis esse.” Cf. also Turretini, *Institutio*, 175, who distinguishes between God’s infinity *ratione essentiae*: incomprehensibility; *ratione durationis*: eternity; and *ratione circumscriptionis*:

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in substance, not in quantity or quality.<sup>50</sup> His point seems to be, that “quality” is mostly understood as additional to substance, whereas the doctrine of simplicity forbids viewing something in God as different from his very substance.

Petrus van Mastricht provides an independent discussion of God’s infinity. He speaks of God’s infinity and greatness and then distinguishes between God’s unity as his discrete quantity, and God’s infinity as his continuous quantity.<sup>51</sup> Although this distinction seems to originate in a mathematical point of view, Mastricht’s further explanation clearly advocates a qualitative rather than a quantitative understanding of God’s infinitude or “greatness.” The reason for choosing this terminology is that he finds the term “greatness” in Scripture. While acknowledging that the Bible does not explicitly ascribe infinity to God, he deduces this concept from other biblical expressions. Moreover, Mastricht gives a set of reasons for God’s being infinite: (1) as God is absolutely first, there is nothing prior to him that can limit him; (2) as God is independent, he determines everything but is not determined by anything; (3) God’s perfection implies that nothing can extend beyond him; (4) as Jehovah, God exists by himself as full actuality, and thus must be infinite; (5) God’s creating the world out of nothing requires an infinite power which belongs necessarily to an infinite God; (6) whatever occurs as imperfection and limitation in creatures is remote from God and cannot be ascribed to him. Mastricht explains that God’s infinity should not be understood in the sense of “not yet finished” or “indefinite” or “potentially infinite as to be actualized,” but in the sense of highest perfection of both God’s essence and his properties. In this final clause, we encounter the distinction between infinity understood as an immediate property of God’s essence, and as a “meta-attribute” predicated of the other divine properties.

Several distinctions are employed to make clear that God is infinite in an absolute sense. The first distinction is between being properly and improperly infinite. Improperly infinite things have limited extension but are so great as to be beyond our imagination. In this sense, children can call a very great number “infinite.” In the proper sense of infinity, however, something is not only very great, but literally without limits. The second distinction elaborates on the first: in something properly infinite, it can be distinguished between entities that have no actual limits but are intrinsically capable of being limited, and entities that can by definition have no limits. The first kind of entities is infinite in a privative sense: possible limitations are removed; the second kind of entities is infinite in a negative sense: the possibility of limitations is simply denied with respect to them. God is the only Being that is properly infinite in the negative sense.<sup>52</sup> A further

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immensity.

<sup>50</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 117-118. Following Mastricht and others, Muller *PRRD*, 3:331-334, devotes a separate sub-section to the *Magnitudo Dei*.

<sup>52</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 175-176; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 144; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 117-118, who adds a *positive* sense in which infinity can be attributed to God. In general, the discussion of God’s infinity, proceeding along the *via negativa*, arrives at remarkably “positive” statements concerning God. A difficulty in developing a fully positive account of divine infinity arises from the tendency imminent in Aristotelian philosophy to understand infinity as the endless extension of the categories of created

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consequence of the absolute infinity of God is, that comparative terms do not apply to his essence: with respect to God one cannot speak of higher/lower, before/after, outside/inside, etc.<sup>53</sup>

An intricate question is whether the infinity of God's essence implies that he contains within himself all other entities or all perfections. This is implied in the ancient philosophical principle of plenitude: all possible degrees of being and of perfection ought to be realized in the actual world. From this point of view, God's infinity can be interpreted as his coinciding with the universe of being. Turretini plainly denies the statement that God *is* equal to all substance.<sup>54</sup> Here he seems to oppose to Baruch Spinoza's slogan *Deus sive natura* (God, that is, Nature). The opposition against Spinoza is continued by Turretini when he discusses God's omnipresence: this does not lead to pantheism. Heidegger, who makes it clear that God's infinity should not be thought of in bodily terms, supports Turretini: God contains the perfections of all substance in an abstract sense, while these "perfections" are exemplified in limited created beings.<sup>55</sup> An insightful remark is made by Polanus when he emphasizes that God's infinity is fully actualized infinity, in contrast with the Aristotelian doctrine of primary matter (*prima materia*): the primary matter of Aristotle is an infinite potentiality, which can be formed to all possible patterns; God's infinity, to the contrary, is fully actualized and firmly established.<sup>56</sup>

After cutting off the pantheist misunderstanding of the doctrine of God's infinity, the orthodox explain positively how God's infinite being relates to other beings and perfections. As to the perfections, they can state that God contains them formally and eminently. By "formally" (*formaliter*) is meant that the perfections in their distinctive characteristics (i.e., the components that make up the normative definition of a perfection) exist in God: goodness, justice, beauty etc. as such are found originally in God. By the word "eminently" (*eminenter*) it is expressed that all perfections exist in God in a unique, divine manner.<sup>57</sup> This explanation is clearly thought from a realist view of the universals: the perfections are not considered to be bound inherently to the individual entities, but they are seen as abstract principles that have a super-individual existence.

Opponents of the doctrine of divine infinity might object that if God knows himself perfectly, he must necessarily be limited. For to know something perfectly implies knowing the limits of that entity. The Reformed orthodox response to this objection is to state that God's knowledge has a different structure (cf. section 7.2 below). God does not know himself by setting limits, but by perfect intuition. He does not need to proceed by *genus* and *differentia*, but in one single act knows the whole and all details at once. Besides, since there is no real difference between God's essence and his knowledge, God's knowledge of himself is just as infinite as

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beings. Instead, the Christian tradition, of which Reformed scholasticism is a conscious continuation, emphasizes God's transcending these categories. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:330.

<sup>53</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 72.

<sup>54</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 181; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145.

<sup>57</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 177. Cf. section 5.4.1 above.

God's essence is. Therefore, because of the unique mode of knowledge, God's knowing himself does not impose any limits upon his being.<sup>58</sup> By way of contrast, the doctrine of God's infinity is almost unanimously used to emphasize God's incomprehensibility: we as limited creatures are by definition incapable of fully knowing God's essence.<sup>59</sup>

The arguments for God's infinity are derived from several sources. First, some explicit texts of Scripture are quoted. In addition, some rational grounds are provided.<sup>60</sup> It is held that God's perfection necessarily implies his infinity: if God were finite, something would lack in his perfection. In that case, a being could be thought of, endowed with all other perfections that God had, but even infinite; this being would be more perfect than God would. Another argument starts from God's power (omnipotence). If God has all power, then he must necessarily be an infinite being. For if he is limited, there will be some beings and events beyond his reach, which he has no power over.

Most of the Reformed scholastics elaborate God's infinity into two further attributes: eternity as infinity with respect to time, and immensity as infinity with respect to space.<sup>61</sup>

## 6.4. Eternity

God's eternity can be seen as his infinity with respect to time or duration.<sup>62</sup> Not all Reformed orthodox writers establish this connection explicitly;<sup>63</sup> sometimes God's eternity is systematically derived from other attributes, such as independence and immutability.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 177. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 646-653, lists all the objects of God's knowledge but avoids to describe God's knowledge as "infinite," probably because of the philosophical difficulties surrounding the concept of "infinity" after Descartes.

<sup>59</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 189; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 240; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 176; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 75; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 140-143.

<sup>61</sup> *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. VI, th. XXVII; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 144-145; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 75; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 121, 127.

<sup>62</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 144; Turretini, *Institutio*, 175; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 77; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 72; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 189, who includes divine immutability into the aspects of infinity; *Syntagma thesium*, 148; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 240; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 127-128: infinity with respect to duration and existence; Amesius, *Medulla*, 14; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 30 (duration and presence); Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 6 (duration).

<sup>63</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 73-77 (eternity discussed before immutability (77-83), life (83-88) and infinity (89-138); Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 36-38; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 165-166; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 62, who omits the doctrine of infinity; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 136; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 76; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, where the treatment of eternity (138-140) precedes the discussion of infinity (140-143); Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, who treats eternity (471) before infinity (472-473).

<sup>64</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 235 (independence); Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 75 (simplicity); Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 51-62 (simplicity-immutability-immensity-eternity); Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 135-136 (aseity-immutability-eternity); Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 471 (first cause, infinite perfection).

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

There are several entrances into the definition of God's eternity. Some authors discuss the etymological differences between the Latin words *aevus* and *aeternus*.<sup>65</sup> Others sum up the biblical testimony in order to find the meaning of the ascription of eternity to God. An important role in many expositions of the doctrine of eternity is played by the definition given by Boethius: eternity is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of unending life (*Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*).<sup>66</sup> Equivalent to Boethius's more detailed definition is the description of God's eternity as "everlasting NOW" (*Nunc stans, ipsum NUNC*).<sup>67</sup> De Moor gives a more extensive quotation from Boethius that clarifies the famous definition:

Whatever lives in time, presently proceeds from past to future; and nothing exists in time that can embrace the whole space of its life at once. But tomorrow it has not yet apprehended, while yesterday it has already lost. In present life, you too do not live longer than in this mobile and transitory moment. Thus what undergoes the condition of time, even that which, as Aristotle thought concerning the world, neither ever started to be nor ceases to be, but extends its life in infinite time, still is not such that it is justly believed to be eternal. For it does not at once comprehend and embrace the whole, infinite space of its life; but the future things that have not occurred, it does not have yet. So what comprehends and possesses at once the whole fullness of never-ending life, to which nothing future is absent, nor anything past has fled away, that is justly called eternal.<sup>68</sup>

The Reformed orthodox usually state that God's eternity implies the absence of beginning, end, and temporal succession in God. They distinguish God's being eternal from other beings that in some sense can be called eternal. First, it is possible for a thing to have no beginning in time, but still to have a final moment of existence. One could think of the Aristotelian eternity of the world:<sup>69</sup> though without beginning in time, the world could be annihilated at one moment. This form of "eternity" does not exclude a temporal existence and a ceasing away. Second,

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<sup>65</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 73-74.

<sup>66</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 183 (without mentioning Boethius's name); Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 76; Scharpius, *Cursus Theologicus*, 189; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 166; *Syntagma thesium*, 148; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 129; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 76; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 62; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 31; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 76; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 140 (the quotation is given via Conradus Vorstius).

<sup>67</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145; Turretini, *Institutio*, 183; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 76; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 76; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 76 ("nunc manens," with reference to Aristotle).

<sup>68</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 638.

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 77, rejects the Aristotelian idea of an eternal world, together with the scholastic theories of an eternal "third heaven" and "imaginary spaces." One of the main problems is, that eternal beings must necessarily emanate from God's own necessary being; while Scripture clearly describes the creation of the world not as necessary emanation, but as a free act of God.

something can be called “eternal,” not because it is without beginning, but because its existence will never end. In this way, the Bible speaks of the eternal life of the faithful. Third, only God is eternal in that he has neither beginning nor end in time. In addition, God is said not to be subjected to any temporal succession: in his life, there is no before and after. This implies that all times are present with and embraced by God’s eternity continually.<sup>70</sup> It is not the orthodox’s conviction that God exists outside of time. God is in his own way connected to all parts of time, without being involved in the changing and perishing of temporal beings. Eternity contains all different times and is co-existent with all times. In advocating this view, the Reformed must explain that the co-existence of all different times with God’s eternity does not result in the extinction of temporal differences: just as the center of a circle is co-extensive with all points of the circumference, but the circumferential points are not co-extensive with each other.<sup>71</sup> Another clarification is given by Maccovius. The co-existence of “God’s eternal duration” with the moments of time is not “adequately” but “inadequately.” The infinite cannot be proportioned to the finite, let alone be adequate to it. God’s being related to time does not make a real difference for him: he “behaves” just as if time did not exist and as he will when time no longer exists. Maccovius argues that the “co-existence” of eternal duration with temporal moments does not mean that past, present and future coincide. Nor is eternity restricted by its co-existence with one temporal moment: it co-exists with infinitely many other temporal moments as well.<sup>72</sup>

The orthodox provide a set of grounds for God’s eternity. They refer to the many biblical texts that ascribe eternity to God (e.g., Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 40:28 and 57:15; Daniel 7:27; Romans 16:26) or that deny time and succession to God (e.g., Job 36:26; Isaiah 43:10; Psalm 90:2-5; 2 Peter 3:8). Furthermore, they argue from other biblically based divine attributes such as simplicity and immutability.<sup>73</sup> The doctrine of God’s eternity is also linked to the philosophical understanding of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 38; Turretini, *Institutio*, 183. Turretini notices that his adversaries, the Socinians and Vorstius, cannot deny God’s being without beginning and end in view of the clear testimony of Scripture. The real controversy, therefore, is about eternity as the lack of temporal *succession*. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:354, for the ascription of “everlastingness” instead of “eternity” to God by the Socinians.

<sup>71</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 183-184; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 76; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 31; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 76; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 642-643. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:348. Muller notices that there could be an initial difference between Thomas Aquinas’s view that past, present, and future are all present to the eternal God, and Duns Scotus’s qualification that the different moments of time are indeed present to the whole of eternity, but not simultaneously existent with any other moment of time. Muller also acknowledges the possibility that Aquinas had in mind only the simultaneous presence of all times in God’s view, and did not intend to de-temporalize reality in *our* view. For that reason, 17th century Reformed theology could deal with both theories as equivalent.

<sup>72</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 140-141. On page 139, Maccovius had, in regard to time, distinguished between its *internal* character as *duration*, and its *external* character as *measurement* of duration. The former applies in a unique mode to God as well (eternal duration), the latter does not apply to God (who cannot be measured because of his infinity). Cf. also Turretini, *Institutio*, 184.

<sup>73</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145; Turretini, *Institutio*, 183.

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world: as the first Mover of everything that happens in time, God must be superior to all temporal beings.<sup>74</sup> Turretini speaks about the world as existing in one single point of eternity (*mundus in puncto aeternitatis*). To be sure, “point” should not be understood in a mathematical or physical sense, but in a metaphysical sense as the negation of extension and divisibility.<sup>75</sup> In providing arguments for God’s eternity, Mastricht gives a powerful rational explanation:

(1) If God were not from eternity, he would not have been at all, and would not exist at present. Then we would have atheism instead of religion. For either he would have produced himself before he was, and thus would have been and not-been at once: as producing he would have been, but as produced he would as yet not have been; or an other being would have produced him, and then that other would have been prior to God. But by “God” we understand nothing but the absolutely first being, which excludes not only an other existing prior to him, but also co-eternal with him. (2) If God were not from eternity, then there would have been nothing at all. For if there is no first, then there is also no second, and so on, as we have argued above concerning the subordination of entities or causes. (3) If that which is God were not from eternity, then it would not be God: for that which is God, is a most perfect being, that is, which has all perfection that is or can be conceived of. But that which does not exist, misses that perfection; it is a non-existence, and therefore would also lack the essence, because in God existence and essence signify the same. (4) When God is supposed to be the Creator of all things and times, he is also supposed to be prior to all things and times; and that which is before all time, is eternal.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, while we all know the concept of duration, it seems suitable to ascribe to God an infinite duration. The term “duration,” to be sure, is not quite common in the Reformed orthodox accounts of the doctrine of eternity. When Turretini introduces this term into his discussion of God’s eternity, he warns that time and eternity are opposite instances of the common concept of duration.<sup>77</sup> Other writers do not speak about “duration,” but neither do they explicitly reject the word.

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<sup>74</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 75; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 471; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 138, 140.

<sup>75</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 184.

<sup>76</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 129.

<sup>77</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 185: “aeternitas et tempus sunt species durationis inter se oppositae.” Cf. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 128, 130; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 636: “Aeternitas ex adverso est duratio, absque omni mensura”; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 139-140. In Muller’s survey (*PRRD*, 3:345-362), the concept of “duration” is fundamental, obviously in order to refute the misunderstanding that the traditional concept of eternity is exclusively opposed to time and amounts to unrelated timelessness.

Polanus adds an interesting remark concerning the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. The concept of generation seems to imply a beginning in time. Polanus denies this consequence, and states that the eternal generation does not indicate a temporal beginning (*initium temporis*), but a principle of order (*principium ordinis*).<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the doctrine of eternity fits perfectly well with the doctrine of the Trinity.

The strong doctrine of eternity does not exclude all historical dynamics from the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. Eternity as God's mode of duration does not eliminate time as the created mode of duration, but rather is its ground and warrant. Even if all times are said to be co-existent with God's eternity, this does not wipe out the temporal differences themselves.

The Reformed orthodox view the eternity of God as an important source of consolation for the faithful, who experience so much instability and insecurity in their lives. As Mastricht states, God's eternal love, mercy and faithfulness comfort us when we are afflicted by our sins, by spiritual desertedness, or by disasters and fear of death.<sup>79</sup>

## **6.5. Immensity and Omnipresence**

The terms "immensity" (*immensitas*) and "omnipresence" (*omnipraesentia*) are closely related, but not synonymous. In most cases, both are clearly distinguished from God's infinity.<sup>80</sup> When a difference is made, it is stated that immensity relates to spatiality as such (empty space), whereas omnipresence indicates God's relation to concrete places (filled space). This can be expressed by the distinction between immensity as an absolute propriety of God, and omnipresence as God's disposition towards places.<sup>81</sup> Amesius provides another formula: immensity is the attribute by which God lacks all dimension of matter (*expers omnis materiae dimensionis*); omnipresence indicates that God is neither included in, nor excluded from, any place (*nullam dari ubi, unde exclusus, neque alicubi est inclusus*).<sup>82</sup> The Reformed orthodox seem to struggle with the concepts of space and place: some of them draw a clear distinction between the more abstract concept of space and the more concrete concept of place; others speak about "place" (*locum*) where abstract spatiality is meant.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145.

<sup>79</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 133-134. Similar *usus* are added by Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 471, and Polanus, *Syntagma*, 145-146.

<sup>80</sup> An exception is Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 165, who distinguishes between omnipresence on the one hand, and immensity and infinity on the other hand. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 140-143, is not quite clear on this question.

<sup>81</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 624.

<sup>82</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 182; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 121; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 78; Amesius, *Medulla*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:335, arguing for continuity between Reformation and Reformed scholasticism on the issue of omnipresence, presents his argument in a somewhat confusing formulation: "Discussion of the divine infinity is related, in many systems, to examination of the attributes of omnipresence and eternity. And although this sense of the order and progression of systematic argument is largely absent from the theologies of the Reformers and their immediate successors, the basic doctrine surely is not. Thus, the nominally philo-

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An important discussion in most Reformed orthodox accounts of the doctrine of omnipresence is, in which sense God is called “omnipresent”: does this attribute apply to God’s power and activity, or is it predicated of the divine essence itself? The question was urged by the Socinians, who held it impossible for God’s essence to be in all places, and therefore restricted God’s omnipresence to his works. An important motive behind this Socinian statement was to deny the Godhead of the Son, since he was incarnated on earth and thus was not in heaven, according to the Socinians. In reaction, most Reformed authors concede the fact that the Bible often speaks of God’s omnipresence in the sense of his power and works, but they maintain against the Socinians that omnipresence is attributed to God in an essential way. Consequently, they reject the Socinian view that God’s essence is exclusively located in heaven. The most comprehensive accounts of doctrine sum up four kinds of omnipresence: God is omnipresent by his power, his working, his knowledge, and his essence (*potentia, operatione, cognitione, essentia*).<sup>84</sup>

In this context, it is remarkable that some authors lay considerable emphasis on the omnipresence of God’s working. They argue from God as primary cause of the universe, who has to be present with all its effects, and insist on God’s immediate causal presence in addition to his operation through secondary, “physical” or “hyperphysical” causes. To use Maccovius’s phrase, God is present *ut causa conservans in suis effectis*.<sup>85</sup> In some expositions of doctrine, it is emphatically stated that God’s omnipresence does not mean that God coincides with his working or with nature (as Spinoza asserted in his dictum *Deus sive natura*).<sup>86</sup> In this respect, the doctrine of God’s independence is foundational for the view of his omnipresence.

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sophical discussion of divine infinity that can be found in the medieval debate with Aristotle and the fairly detailed discussion of infinity found in the Reformed orthodox have little parallel in the thought of the Reformers, but the doctrine of divine omnipresence (and, as we will note below, divine eternity) are found in detail in the thought of the Reformers, although the Reformers certainly held the doctrine and held it in the same basic form and content as both the medieval scholastics and the Protestant orthodox.” What Muller wishes to state is, (1) the systematic degree of order and detail seems to be absent from the Reformers’ discussion of divine infinity, but (2) the Reformers certainly held the same basic doctrine as do the scholastics (medieval and Protestant) in a more elaborate form, and (3) they did so in the same basic form and content.

<sup>84</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 146; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 37; Turretini, *Institutio*, 178-181; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 74; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 191; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 163; *Syntagma thesium*, 152; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 232; Alting, *Loci communes*, 16; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 122; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 78; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 59-60; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 31; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 142; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 77-78; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 151-152; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 472; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 95; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 624-629.

<sup>85</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 94; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 73; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 192; *Syntagma thesium*, 152 (distinction between God’s being formally present by his essence and causally present through his effects); Turretini, *Institutio*, 180; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 77-78 (explicitly rejecting the limitation by Vorstius and the Socinians of God’s operative presence to a mediate presence by physical and hyper-physical causes); Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 151-152.

<sup>86</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 181; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 192 (rejection of the idea that God is the *rerum forma*, the essential form of everything else); Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 61.

## Doctrine of God: Attributes of the First Order

In order to explain the way of God's being present to all places, the Reformed orthodox often utilize a distinction that was already common in medieval scholasticism: the distinction between circumscriptive, definitive, and repletive presence (*praesentia circumscriptiva, definitiva, repletiva*). These different modes of presence apply to distinct sorts of beings. The presence of material beings that have bodily extension can be described by circumscription, i.e., by drawing lines around their body. The presence of spiritual (non-material) beings without a body (e.g., angels) cannot be described by circumscription, but they still have a well-defined place: when they are at place A, they cannot be at place B. The third sort of presence applies only to God. Because he is a spiritual being, his presence cannot be circumscribed; but he differs from other spiritual beings in that his mode of presence is characterized by repletion: he fills every place without being bound to one particular place.<sup>87</sup> The terminology of "repletive presence" is chosen to avoid the idea of *division* of the divine being among all places, which would conflict with the doctrine of simplicity.<sup>88</sup> According to Turretini, despite the difficulties in finding appropriate expression for God's mode of presence, it should at least be avoided to conceive it in terms of "multiplication" of the divine essence or of "extension and diffusion" as if he were a quasi-material body, or of "physical contact" which applies to corporeal beings but not to the spiritual God.<sup>89</sup> Some formulations seem to stretch the limits of conceivability: in Polanus we find affirmative quotation of the philosophical *dictum* that "God is a sphere, of which the center is everywhere, the circumference nowhere" and of Chrysostom's phrase "God is nowhere and he is everywhere; for he is not in a place, and there is no place in which he is." Polanus explains these formulas by the balancing sentence: God is nowhere inasmuch as he is contained by nothing, and he is everywhere inasmuch as he contains everything.<sup>90</sup>

So far, the Reformed orthodox account of the doctrine of divine omnipresence appears to be rather massive. However, the orthodox theologians are aware of nuances in God's presence. Though it is true that God is essentially present to all places, nevertheless his presence and operation can be differentiated along several lines. This also helps to solve the difficulty how God can be fully present in different places: God's whole essence is present to all places, but not completely in a way that his essence would be "locked" by a certain place.<sup>91</sup> Zacharias Ursinus points to a fundamental distinction between the mode of God's presence inside his trinitarian life and outside of it.<sup>92</sup> This is said in other words by authors who state that God exists in himself (with a repeatedly given quotation from Augustine: God is in himself everywhere as a whole (*in se ipso ubique totus*)) or that God is his own

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<sup>87</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 146-147; Turretini, *Institutio*, 178-179 (with some hesitations); Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 73 (mentions only the repletive mode of presence); Alting, *Loci communes*, 16; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 123; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 80; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 31; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 631-632.

<sup>88</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 145; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 144.

<sup>89</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 179.

<sup>90</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 147. The quotation from Chrysostom is from his fifth *Homily on Colossians*.

<sup>91</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 153.

<sup>92</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 473.

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“place.”<sup>93</sup> A further specification can be given in several ways. J.H. Alsted distinguishes between God’s presence with all creatures, with all saints, and with Jesus Christ. A parallel distinction is the one between the presence of operation, of grace, and of union.<sup>94</sup> One can also distinguish between God’s *habitation* (in heaven, in Christ, in the soul of the believer) and God’s *manifestation* (in the whole world).<sup>95</sup> Girolamo Zanchi mentions a particular way of divine presence in the sacraments.<sup>96</sup>

Given the statement that God is by his essence present to all places and all beings, Reformed Orthodoxy must come to terms with the difficulty that reality is corrupted by sin. Does not God’s essence become contaminated by its contact with all these evil creatures? The solution of this difficulty lies in the fact that the mode of God’s presence does not consist of mixing with the creatures, but of being truly present while preserving his transcendence and holiness.<sup>97</sup>

A question that causes the Reformed orthodox some trouble is, whether God can be said to exist outside the world or outside all places. On the one hand, this seems to be implied by the statement that God is contained by nothing. On the other hand, if God exists outside all places, it could be concluded that he is nowhere, and in that case, it could be argued that he does not exist at all. Concerning the time before God created the world, it is asserted that he then existed within himself.<sup>98</sup> Most authors, when stating that God exists outside the world (*extra mundum*), add that this should be understood negatively, not positively. This means that by stating this, they assert that God’s presence is not limited to the created world; they do not intend to speculate about how God can be present outside the world, because the created universe is the limit of our thinking. A few writers discuss the question of imaginary space: is it possible to think of space outside our universe? Mastricht sketches the differentiated background of the question. First, the (medieval) scholastics introduced the concept of imaginary, infinite spaces as an auxiliary concept in order to support and explain the claim that God is omnipresent (namely, present to infinite imaginary space); they did not assume, however, that there is in fact such infinite space. Second, the Cartesians employ the concept of imaginary space in the sense of “extended bodies.” They distinguish between the “infinity of perfection” that applies only to God, and the “infinity of quantity” which they ascribe to these imaginary spatial worlds. In reaction to both views, Mastricht notes that the Reformed do not reject the scholastic account of imaginary spaces, inasmuch as it is merely a theoretical concept that does not ascribe actual infinity to the created world. Interestingly, Mastricht rejects the Cartesian theory with (among others) the arguments that “bodily extension” is not a proper definition of space, and that measurable extension is not a property of space, but of things in space. He thus anticipates a

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<sup>93</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 153; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 145; Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 6; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 166.

<sup>94</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 75; Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 103.

<sup>95</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 78.

<sup>96</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 92.

<sup>97</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 93; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 123-124; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 628.

<sup>98</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 166; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 153; Turretini, *Institutio*, 181, with reference to Tertullian, *Contra Praxeam*.

“relational” understanding of space! (cf. the discussion of divine omnipresence in section 19.4 below). The affirmative answer to the question of imaginary spaces serves to avoid the conclusion that the universe as we know it is infinite; for in that case, God would not be the only infinite being. Against Descartes, Mastricht maintains that even imaginary spaces do not amount to an infinite world, because God alone is absolutely infinite. Thus, if imaginary spaces would be actualized, they could be so only by a creative act of God.<sup>99</sup>

A matter of polemical interest is the discussion with the Lutheran theologians concerning the ubiquity of the human nature of Jesus Christ.<sup>100</sup> Especially in Early Orthodoxy, writers devote extremely large parts of their exposition to this debate, as can be seen with Polanus: out of 10 columns, more than 8 are directed against the Lutherans.<sup>101</sup> Already in one of his foundational *axiomata*, Polanus argues that ubiquity can only be grounded in essential *immensitas* which belongs only to God, not to creatures. From the start, Polanus maintains a strict distinction between the human and the divine nature of Christ: where omnipresence is ascribed to Christ, it witnesses his deity and should not be indiscriminately be attributed to his human nature and its body. In addition, Polanus gives a detailed examination of biblical texts adduced by the Lutherans in order to prove the ubiquity of the body of Christ:

- Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Polanus shows that the term “ubiquitous” is ambiguous in this connection, as the text speaks of a specific presence of Christ, not of a general presence in all creatures. Moreover, he points out that the text does not speak of Christ’s *body* but of Christ’s *person* as being with his disciples. Finally, Polanus argues that the text should be understood in view of Christ’s divine nature.
- Matthew 28:20 “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Here Polanus repeats his earlier arguments: it is not Christ’s body (which the disciples saw moving to heaven) but his personal presence in regard to his divine nature that is promised here.
- Ephesians 4:10 “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” First, Polanus points out the Lutheran interpretation of this text is self-contradictory: if Christ is said to “ascend” beyond all heavens, how can he then be ubiquitous? In addition, Polanus argues that “to fill the universe” does not

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<sup>99</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 152 (“*Obj. Natura non admittit infinitum. Ergo Deus non est infinitus. Resp. Deus non est Natura, sed author Naturae*”); Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 119, 125-126 (further referring to his *Gangraena Cartesiana*); De Moor, *Commentarius*, 633-635. Turretini, *Institutio*, 181, rejects “speculation” about imaginary spaces, and limits the language of God existing *extra mundum* to the negative sense. Cf. Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis*, 101-108, on the 17th century history of the idea of imaginary space, and Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 255-260 on Voetius’s position in this debate. The subtle discussion on imaginary spaces is absent from Muller’s survey (PRRD, 3:342-345).

<sup>100</sup> In Muller’s (PRRD, 3:337; see 338-342 for further elaboration of the controversies) summing up the opponents of the Reformed doctrine of omnipresence, it is remarkable that the Lutherans are taken together with Socinians and Cartesians!

<sup>101</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 146-151.

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mean a general ubiquity, but Christ's specific presence through his spiritual gifts to the Church as his body.

- Matthew 26:26 "This is my body." This text, from the institution of the Lord's Supper, is immediately used by the Lutherans for supporting their view of the presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. Besides pointing to internal differences of view between the Lutherans, Polanus argues that the text, seen in its context, cannot be understood in the Lutheran way: Christ continues to say that his body will be given away for his disciples. But the body that was delivered unto death was not an ubiquitous body, but a body that was taken prisoner in the garden of Gethsemane, brought to the High Priest, to Pilate and Herod, and finally hung at the cross.

In addition to these central texts, Polanus discusses some more arguments allegedly based on Scriptural evidence. Besides pointing out the formal invalidity of these arguments, Polanus insists on a precise definition of terms such as "body," "everywhere," "person," and on a precise distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ. In application to the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, Polanus expresses the Reformed view of "spiritual eating": eating Christ is nothing but partaking spiritually in the body of Christ, receiving remission of our sins and receiving righteousness, because of Christ who gave his body for us in death, and being regenerated to eternal life; this proves our closest union with Christ.<sup>102</sup>

This polemic is instructive, because it reveals (besides the standard Reformed view of Christology) important aspects of Reformed orthodox methodology put into practice: on the one hand it evidences the positive and critical role assigned by the Reformed to reason and logic in theology (the rejection of logical inconsistency), on the other hand the Reformed refutation of Lutheran "proof texts" shows a highly developed exegetical skill.

Just as some other parts of doctrine, the doctrine of omnipresence raises some questions concerning the biblical testimony. How should one explain texts where God is said to ascend, to descend, or to come nearer? These words imply movement from one place to another, and thus contradict the doctrine of omnipresence. Polanus squarely denies the implication: in his view these words are used for God in a figurative sense.<sup>103</sup> Whereas this strand of biblical texts can be explained as figurative, other passages plainly affirm God's omnipresence (e.g. Psalm 139). Besides these Scriptural grounds, which often stand in front of the argument, the Reformed orthodox adduce rational arguments and testimonies to proof that God must be omnipresent. The testimonies from pagan authors bring them to the conclusion, that the omnipresence of God is a matter of common

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<sup>102</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 150: "Est autem nihil aliud, quam participem fieri corporis Christi spiritualiter, propter Christum, qui corpus suum in mortem pro nobis tradidit, accipere remissionem peccatorum & iustitiam, ac regenerari ad vitam aeternam, unde unio nostri cum Christo artissima probatur."

<sup>103</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 147; cf. Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 233.

human experience.<sup>104</sup> An important reason for asserting God's omnipresence is that otherwise creatures would escape from God's care and government.<sup>105</sup>

## 6.6. Immutability

God's immutability is an attribute that can in several ways be derived from other divine properties. Some authors make a connection with God's simplicity: because God does not consist of parts in any sense, he cannot change from one state of being to another. For this would mean that some parts or aspects of his being were replaced or amplified by others.<sup>106</sup> Another way of arguing for God's immutability starts from his infinity: since God is infinite in essence, no change can occur that makes his being either greater or less.<sup>107</sup> Still other authors argue from God's eternity towards his immutability: while all change does take place in time (change implies different states of affairs at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ ), and God's essence is exempt from all temporal succession, God must be immutable.<sup>108</sup> A fourth argument runs from God's perfection: because God is the highest Good, he cannot grow better or worse. If he changed towards a better state, this would imply that before that change he was not perfect; if he changed towards a worse state, he would cease to be perfect; either way his perfection is destroyed.<sup>109</sup>

All these arguments for God's immutability imply that God's *essence* is considered immutable. In the Reformed orthodox view, it is not sufficient to ascribe immutability to single divine properties, actions, or decrees. In fact, both sorts of immutability are affirmed: on the one hand the immutability of God's essence, nature, and attributes; on the other hand the immutability of his will, decrees, promises, and threats. If God's essence were mutable, that would mean that at some time God is not God, which is self-contradictory.<sup>110</sup> Sometimes, other forms

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<sup>104</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 182; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 232; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 122.

<sup>105</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 179.

<sup>106</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 70-71; Alting, *Loci communes*, 16; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 57; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 78; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 619.

<sup>107</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475 (both essential infinity and spatial immensity); Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 78-79.

<sup>108</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 190 (the denial of starting and ceasing is based on the lack of temporal succession); Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 57; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 143-144; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 79.

<sup>109</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 238; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475.

<sup>110</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 35; Turretini, *Institutio*, 185; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 190; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 168 (emphasis on immutability of essence); Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 238; Junius via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 112; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 81; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 57; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 32; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 77.

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of immutability are also mentioned: immutability of place<sup>111</sup>, intellect or wisdom<sup>112</sup>, quantity and quality<sup>113</sup>, and existence.<sup>114</sup> The Reformed orthodox provide definitions of divine immutability such as: that neither his essence nor what belongs properly to it can either increase or decrease, that his nature and will cannot be changed, and that he cannot move from one place to another; that the nature and properties of God can, without coercion, not be generated or corrupted or ended, not increased or decreased or altered, and that he cannot move locally, but is always the same.<sup>115</sup>

In the arguments exposed above, some Reformed orthodox writers employ the terminologies of amelioration – deterioration and increase – decrease to indicate the possible ways of changing. The idea behind this better – worse and greater – less terminology seems to be the Platonic metaphysics of Being. Here, the entire universe is seen as a hierarchy in which the individual entities participate in Being in different degrees. The higher something is located on the stairs of being, the better and greater it is. The highest grade of being is Being itself, which is thought to be identical with the highest Good, or, in religious terms, God. It is given by definition in this system, that the divine being lacks nothing, thus is perfect and unchangeable. It is logically impossible that God, being essentially the highest goodness and perfection, is other than he is.<sup>116</sup>

Whereas the Platonic metaphysics of being accounts for a great deal of the Christian thought concerning God's immutability, the Aristotelian physics of change and movement provides another framework of explanation. From empirical experience, Aristotle noticed that everywhere in our world movement takes place. He examined the physical causes of change, and found a long chain of causation, at the beginning of which stands a First Cause that puts everything into motion but is immobile itself. This Unmoved Mover, Aristotle equated with God. Although this equation was suspicious to Christian ears, because it seemed to run counter the belief in a personal God, the term Unmoved Mover sometimes appears in the Reformed orthodox discussions of the doctrine of immutability. Behind the physical chain of movements, Aristotle discerned the metaphysical principle of potency and actuality: all entities have latent possibilities that can (and will, according to the Aristotelian principle of plenitude) be actualized. The denial of

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<sup>111</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 57; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 143-144.

<sup>112</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 57; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144. Turretini, *Institutio*, 185, sees the basic forms of immutability in respect to God's *essence* and *will*. He notices that opponents object to the orthodox doctrine of immutability because they wish to introduce mutability in God's *will*.

<sup>113</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 57-58. Wendelin and Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 143-144, mention also an immutability in regard to "accidents" (*accidentia*), but it turns out that this immutability rests on the denial of accidents in God: if God has no accidents, He cannot be mutable in them.

<sup>114</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 108. Walaeus via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 112, quotes Aristotle to introduce different forms of change: essence, quantity, quality, and place.

<sup>115</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151.

<sup>116</sup> Explicit argument in terms of God as *summe perfectum* is found in Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144.

change in God can in Aristotelian terms be supported by stating that God is “pure act” without any (passive) potentiality. Maccovius, among others, makes it clear that God cannot be changed from without, because he would then not be the first cause and independent highest being, nor from within, because then he would be compounded out of at least two internal principles.<sup>117</sup>

The Reformed orthodox do not build the doctrine of God’s immutability on philosophical grounds only. It is their conviction that the Holy Scripture clearly states that God does not change. In view of much modern criticism of the traditional doctrine and its biblical grounds, it is helpful to quote from Richard Muller’s argument against Karl Barth’s understanding of what is at stake in Amandus Polanus’s exposition of immutability. It is true, Polanus phrases one of his arguments for God’s immutability in harshly Aristotelian terms:

[God is immutable] Because he is the first principle and the first Unmovable Mover. For whatever changes, must needs have either some external cause or an internal principle of motion and change. But God cannot be moved or changed by anything existing outside him; for thus he would not be the first mover and worker of all good things in nature. He can even not be moved or changed by an internal principle. For whatever is changed by an internal principle, in it is necessarily one thing that moves and another thing that is moved, and hence it would be compounded out of different things. But his absolute simplicity, immensity, and highest perfection do not admit to state in God a composition out of different things. Therefore, there is not something mobile in him, but as himself existing wholly immobly, he is the cause of the motions of all other beings; for this reason he also is wholly immutable.<sup>118</sup>

But, Muller argues, this should be understood in its proper context:

God, in Polanus’ traditional language is “unmoved” because, unlike beings in the created and contingent order, he does not pass in and out of existence or experience any development from potency to actuality. Prior to making this point, moreover, Polanus had argued for immutability on the basis of biblical texts, citing James 1:17, Psalm 102:29, Isaiah 46:10, Romans 11, and Hebrews 6:17, understanding immutability of the divine being as necessary to the immutability of God’s will or counsel. Only then does Polanus go on to state *rationes* that demonstrate divine immutability: arguments from the divine name Jehovah, the divine aseity, simplicity, infinity, eternity, perfection, and the work of God as *principium* and first mover – so that, in context, Polanus’ argument from the identity of God as the first

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<sup>117</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 78, 89; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 475 (immobility in the sense of: without change of place); Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Junius via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 111, denies movement of God; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 110 (slightly); Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79 (contra the Flemish Anabaptists).

<sup>118</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151.

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mover was hardly the sole or even the primary reason for arguing divine immutability, nor was it stated in isolation from Scripture.<sup>119</sup>

A strong case is made for divine immutability from the divine name YHWH or its near synonym Ehyeh: I am who I am. Besides other connotations recognized in this name, it is asserted that the name expresses the essential immutability of the God of Israel.<sup>120</sup> Other texts (enumerated in the quotation from Muller, immediately above) explicitly speak about God as the Unchangeable.

However, the biblical testimony is not unproblematic. A second series of texts can be adduced, which seems to ascribe change, movement, and repentance to God. Furthermore, the facts of creation and incarnation seem to involve God into new relations, and thus to bring about a change within him. The Reformed orthodox are aware of these difficulties, but generally they maintain the strict doctrine of immutability.<sup>121</sup>

Concerning the so-called texts of repentance, it is stated that they speak figuratively, or in an anthropomorphist way (J.H. Heidegger goes so far as to say that these texts should be taken with a grain of salt, *cum grano salis*).<sup>122</sup> These texts should not be taken as properly attributing mutability to God, but rather as accommodated expressions of the way God acts with his people: when men choose a course deviating from God's precepts, God takes a step to bring them back to his initial purpose. In addition, it is stated that the changes do not take place in God's essence, but in his works, or, with respect to God's will, that the things willed by God are changed, but not his will itself.<sup>123</sup> Inasmuch as some texts about changes in God can be taken literally, it should be realized that it are changes actively produced by God, not passively undergone by him.<sup>124</sup> A related group of texts, containing promises or threats that in the end are not fulfilled, are interpreted in a conditional, not in an absolute way: God announces to do something on the condition

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<sup>119</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:309.

<sup>120</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 78; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151; Turretini, *Institutio*, 185; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 79.

<sup>121</sup> In recent theology, the ascription of "emotions" or "passion" to God has become rather common. Often a sharp contrast is sensed with the traditional denial of "affects" (*affectus*) in God. In a quite laconic way, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:317, postpones discussion of this objection to the conception of immutability by noticing that "the attribution of 'affects' (*affectus*) to God ... occurs throughout Scripture and ..., given its exegetical significance, forms a large part of the orthodox doctrine of the divine attributes." See further sections 7.3.1 till 7.3.7.

<sup>122</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 151-152; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 35-36; Turretini, *Institutio*, 186; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 169; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 217-218; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 109, 167; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 81; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 59; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 87-88; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 32; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 153; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 80; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 476; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 80.

<sup>123</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 476; Trelcatius via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 115; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 217-218; Turretini, *Institutio*, 186.

<sup>124</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 58; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 81.

## Doctrine of God: Attributes of the First Order

that his people will (not) repent.<sup>125</sup> The texts that speak about God's descending or approaching are interpreted as either signifying the fact that God does something great or new, or as indicating a change in man rather than in God.<sup>126</sup>

As to creation, the Reformed orthodox state that the act of creation produces a relation that does not affect God's essence: it is merely an external relation adding nothing to God's Being; it only has actual importance for the creatures who are dependent on their Creator. As De Moor puts it, seen from God's part the act of creation is his essence that is active from eternity inasmuch as by its power creature starts to exist in time. Thus, creation applies to God merely as an external denomination on the basis of the objects of God's activity. Turretini speaks about creation as a change on the part of creatures only, not in the "physical" sense of change (motion of an already existing entity) but in the "hyperphysical" sense of coming into being out of not-being. Basic to this insight is the statement that God has an eternal and efficacious will of creating the world, to the effect that in God's will as identical with his essence no change occurs when the act of creation is performed. With a typically scholastic distinction, it is said that "to change one's will is something else than to will something to change" (*aliud est mutare voluntatem, aliud velle alicuius rei mutationem*). The former is denied, the latter affirmed in God.<sup>127</sup>

Concerning the incarnation, the Reformed orthodox repeat the argument from Christology given in defense of divine simplicity (section 6.1 above): the eternal Son of God, when he became flesh, remained what he was, and assumed what he was not (*mansit quod erat, assumpsit quod non erat*).<sup>128</sup> Thus, they could remove all real change from the second Person of the Trinity, and leave the solution of problems concerning the unity of divine and human nature to the terrain of Christology. A slightly different strategy is employed by Maccovius: he states that *passive* change is not suitable for God, but that *active* change can be ascribed to him. The incarnation is then understood, not as God's acquiring additional (human) qualities, but as his sharing his perfection with human nature. The union with human nature does not add any perfection to God, Maccovius states, appealing to the scholastic *dictum* "there are more goods and more perfect things, but not a more perfect good than God is."<sup>129</sup>

There is some connection between the doctrine of immutability and the doctrines of divine knowledge and will. The orthodox concept of immutability,

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<sup>125</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 145; Turretini, *Institutio*, 186; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 80. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 152 refutes the argument that, if God's promises and threats are conditional, God becomes mutable upon an external condition: the mutability caused by the condition is on man's part; God, in his eternal decree, knows and decrees immutably the outcome of the conditional process. Similarly Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 476-477.

<sup>126</sup> Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 78, 88; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 80; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 153.

<sup>127</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 152-153; Turretini, *Institutio*, 185-186; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 81; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 620.

<sup>128</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 152-153; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 35; Turretini, *Institutio*, 186; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 190; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 168; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 239; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 58; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 32; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144 (incarnation as active change, *mutatio activa*); Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 80.

<sup>129</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 144.

extended to God's will and decree concerning creaturely events and actions, seems to impose necessity upon creaturely (e.g., human) actions. Turretini explains that we need not fear a "Stoic fate": the necessity arising from the decree is merely an extrinsic or hypothetical necessity based on the free will of God, which does not damage the freedom and contingency of created things. We need to distinguish strictly between freedom and mutability: God's freedom arises out of the ultimate indifference of the divine will prior to the decree and from the absence of any compulsion on God. The eternal decree is utterly free, but once decreed, immutable. God's will is free towards different objects, and God can will changes in these objects, but that does not imply that God's will itself changes.<sup>130</sup>

## **6.7. Perfection**

The idea of God's perfection was implied in much of what was mentioned before. Many of the divine attributes have the purpose of ascribing to God the highest degree of goodness in several respects. The other way around, the idea of perfection serves to safeguard the other attributes: in order to be completely perfect, God must be most simple, infinite, eternal, etc.

The concept of perfection, as applied to God, contains at least three elements:

- a. God does not need anything from without;
- b. God has in himself all perfections;
- c. God is the source of all perfection that is found outside him.

The Reformed orthodox uphold the confession of God's perfection against opponents who implicitly (Jesuits, Remonstrants) or openly (Socinians) deny it.<sup>131</sup>

Inasmuch as God's perfection is interpreted as his not needing anything from without, it comes close to his independence. The emphasis is on the fact that God's essence is so complete, that nothing can be added to it. Mastricht gives, in the final analysis, a trinitarian foundation for God's perfection and all-sufficiency: the completeness of the Godhead lies in the subsistence of the three Persons, because the mutual exchange of personal perfection and sufficiency as it were increase and reinforce the inner perfection of God. The Son is the imprint and glory of the Father, the Spirit is the bond of love between Father and Son. Moreover, Mastricht points out that the trinitarian life of all-sufficiency is abundant in that God effuses his love, grace, and communion over us, thus making us to share in his glorious perfection.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 186.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:323, with reference to Mastricht.

<sup>132</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 221. In Mastricht's account, God's perfection / all-sufficiency forms, together with God's majesty, glory, and happiness, the culmination of the whole doctrine of divine attributes. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 144

## 7. Doctrine of God: Attributes of the Second Order

In the second group of attributes, most Reformed orthodox writers discuss divine virtues that have a certain resemblance to properties of created beings, or, otherwise, describe God as he is related to created beings. They usually distinguish three fundamental attributes, analogous to the three faculties of the human soul: understanding, will, and power. These faculties are mostly taken as subdivisions of the divine life, which is treated as the basic term of the attributes of the second order. Taken together, the three attributes of knowledge, will and power are fundamental to the Reformed orthodox understanding of the relationship between God and the created world.<sup>1</sup>

The attributes of knowledge, will, and power are discussed in different sequences. Rather common is the pattern knowledge – will – power, which is by several authors based on the triad *principium dirigens – imperans – exsequens*: knowledge directs the actor towards the possible options of action; the will decides which of the possible actions should be performed; the power is responsible for the actual execution of the preceding decision of the will.<sup>2</sup> A few writers follow a different order: power – knowledge – will. The first to do this seems to be Andreas Hyperius; it cannot be decided whether Zanchi and others who do the same follow Hyperius or develop this pattern independently.<sup>3</sup> An alternative is provided by

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<sup>1</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:365-367, makes some introductory remarks that are worth noticing. To start with, he poses the *vita Dei* as the fundamental category of the second group of attributes, and then sees it divided “into the two fundamental ‘faculties’ or ‘internal activities,’ intellect and will”; thus leaving out the divine power from his initial statement. Moreover, Muller discerns an “ascending order that moves from all being, to living being, to living being that knows and wills” behind the pattern of Reformed doctrine of divine attributes. In earlier Reformed orthodoxy, Muller states, the division between essence and life is sometimes explained in terms of act (*actus*) and operation (*operatio*) or of primary actuality (*primus actus*) and secondary actuality (*secundus actus*). After Arminius, however, such distinctions raised the suspicion of forcing a division between an antecedent and a consequent will in God, with human autonomy standing in between (cf. sections 2.3 above and 7.3 below).

<sup>2</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 156; Turretini, *Institutio*, 187 (without explicitly mentioning the trias); Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 79 (who adds that God’s knowledge and will have partly internal, partly external objects; on the contrary, God’s power has only external objects); Scharpius, *Cursus Theologicus*, 193; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 170 (explicitly against other sequences); Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 197-210; Alting, *Loci communes*, 16; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 142-219; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 81-91; Amesius, *Medulla*, 15; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 65; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 33-42; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica*, 7 (knowledge – holiness – power); Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 137-159 (inserts God’s ubiquity between power and knowledge); Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 159-195 (omnipotence), 195-226 (knowledge), 242-326 (will); Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 478-481 (omnipotence – wisdom – virtues of God’s will, such as goodness, mercy, justice etc.); Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 145.

James Ussher, who first discusses God's "Understanding and Power," as together constituting his "All-sufficiency," and then treats God's "Holy Will" as a distinct category.<sup>4</sup> A final alternative is found in Johannes à Marck, followed by Bernhardinus de Moor, who replaces the traditional triad by the more biblically and "morally" qualified series of "wisdom, goodness, and justice."<sup>5</sup>

The evidence is insufficient to allow conclusions as to the significance of these variations. The most common pattern simply follows the analysis of the general structure of an act; the deviations seldom seem to have specific grounds.

## **7.1. Life and Immortality**

The life of God (*vita Dei*) is often discussed together with his immortality (*immortalitas Dei*) at the beginning of the second group of attributes.<sup>6</sup> From the biblical testimony, it is indisputable that God is the living God and can be called Life pre-eminently. According to Polanus, four elements are contained in the definition of the divine life:

- God lives actively;
- He moves all other things by himself;
- He is endowed with the power of moving everything;
- He bestows life upon all other beings.<sup>7</sup>

In this series, the first and the last element are the most important; the second and third element explain how God has in himself the origin of life that is distributed among his creatures.

The life of God goes along with his all-sufficiency: he has his life in himself, and is the source of all life. This insight entails the fullness and independence of the divine life. Several authors refer to Jesus's saying in John 5:26, that the Father, who has life in himself, has also given to the Son to have life in himself. God's self-sufficient life resides in the trinitarian relations. In connection with this trinitarian foundation, it is emphasized that God is life *in Christ*.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Reformed orthodox account of God's life makes it clear that this life is not self-enclosed and sterile, but abundant and communicating itself to creatures.<sup>9</sup>

Immediately connected with God's life is his immortality. God is so essentially the living God, that any separation of God and life is unimaginable: he cannot die. God has the principle of immortality within himself. In this respect, God's

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<sup>4</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 39: "the chief life is operative in three faculties and operations, viz. in Understanding, Power, and Will."

<sup>5</sup> À Marck, *Het Merch*, 111; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 644 (connecting the terms used by his "auctor" à Marck with the traditional triad). One reason for this replacement seems to reside in the Cartesian plea for the priority of the divine will in the sense of an extreme voluntarism. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:435, notices the omission of God's will from à Marck's discussion, but fails to see that it does appear under the heading of God's goodness.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 83-88, who deals with the life of God in his discussion of the first group of attributes, between immutability and infinity. However, the faculties adjacent to the divine life are discussed by Zanchi in the second group of attributes.

<sup>7</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 154.

<sup>8</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 154; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 80. A broad exposition of the text John 5:26 and its implications is given by Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 134-135.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:368-371, 373-381.

immortality differs from the immortality ascribed to angels and human souls: they are dependent on God for their everlasting life, while in their own nature it is not necessary that their life should never end. God's life is necessary, our lives are contingent.<sup>10</sup>

## 7.2. Knowledge

The divine knowledge is one of the most complicated parts of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. Together with God's will and power, God's (fore)knowledge accounts for God's relation to and operation in the created world, thus raising the questions of necessity and contingency, determination and freedom. Before hurrying into this controversial topic, however, we should realize that the Reformed orthodox normally start with drawing a larger picture of God's cognitive capacities, including wisdom (*sapientia*), skill (*ars*), understanding (*intellectus*), prudence (*prudentia*), and, indeed, knowledge (*scientia*). This broader approach reflects at once the Aristotelian theory of science and the width of biblical witness. One of the significant implications of the Reformed account of divine wisdom, for instance, is that it is deeply practical and tightly connected to God's essential goodness: God knows what to do in order to achieve the salvation of the world. Biblically viewed, the wisdom of God is identical with the Logos or the Son of God, Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to God's knowledge in a narrower sense, the main problem is, how God has knowledge of the events that occur in the creaturely world, and how this affects the categories of modal logic: necessity, (im) possibility, and contingency. In technical terms, it is the problem of God's foreknowledge of the future contingent events (*praescientia de futuris contingentibus*).<sup>12</sup> In the controversy over these difficulties, the Reformed stood against different parties such as the Jesuits, the Remonstrants, and the Socinians. It is remarkable that as far as Roman Catholic theology is involved, the Reformed have both allies and enemies in the Catholic camp: on the main line of Augustinian theology, differentiated in Dominicans, Franciscans and other parties, they found substantial support; the new line of Jesuit philosophy and theology, propagated especially by the great Spanish thinkers Fonseca, Molina, and Suarez, gave expression to a more modern sense of human freedom and seriously qualified divine foreknowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The foundation of the Reformed orthodox treatment of this difficulty is laid down in the general statements concerning God's knowledge.

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<sup>10</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 155; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 145 (man and angels are immortal *privative*, God is immortal *negative*); Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 80.

<sup>11</sup> For this wider context of the doctrine of divine knowledge, cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:384-391.

<sup>12</sup> As the expression *futura contingentia* is a pair of substantivated adjectives, it leaves open the interpretation as either events, entities, states of affairs or propositions. To my mind, it is not relevant for understanding the Reformed discussion of this problem to decide between these options. A historical account of the philosophical problem of the future contingents in (Christian) Aristotelianism is provided by William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> See the enumeration of opponents by Turretini, *Institutio*, 193. He notices that the Dominicans and, more recently, the Jansenist have vigorously opposed the Jesuits.

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As one of the so-called communicable attributes, the knowledge of God resembles in some respects our knowledge.<sup>14</sup> The orthodox agree, however, in emphasizing some significant differences between our way of knowing and God's knowledge. First, God's knowledge is not discursive. God does not proceed from one act of knowing to another, nor does he proceed from the unknown to the known or *vice versa*, but he knows everything intuitively by one eternal and infinite act of knowing.<sup>15</sup> This is a necessary statement, because of God's simplicity: his attributes are identical to his essence.<sup>16</sup> And since God is pure act and does not have the transition from potency to act, the same holds for his knowledge: there is no transition from not knowing to knowing. Second, God's knowledge is infinite: it comprises an infinite range of objects, running from the infinite being of God himself to the smallest creatures, and from the general categories of thought to the singular events. The knowledge of the slightest singular objects is maintained emphatically against attempts to limit God's knowledge to general and necessary objects.<sup>17</sup> Third, God's knowledge is perfect: he knows everything exactly as it is, without neglecting any aspect. Some authors state explicitly that God does not have knowledge by abstracting from the concrete things.<sup>18</sup> In presenting arguments for this doctrine of perfect and exhaustive divine knowledge, the Reformed orthodox often explicitly place Scriptural testimonies in front. Important texts include John 21:17 "Lord, you know all things"; 1 John 3:20 "God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything"; Acts 15:18 "To God all his works are known from all eternity"; Hebrews 4:13 "Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Additional biblical arguments are derived from God's predicting future, contingent events; from God's being called the "knower of hearts"; and from God's decree and work of providence.<sup>19</sup>

An important distinction is expressed by three parallel sets of terms: natural and free knowledge (*scientia naturalis – libera*), necessary and voluntary knowledge (*scientia necessaria – voluntaria*) knowledge of mere understanding and knowledge of vision (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae – visionis*).<sup>20</sup> By his natural knowledge, God

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Pictet betrays some Cartesian influence by describing God as "a thinking being" (Être pensant), *La théologie chrétienne*, 191 (explicitly against Spinoza), 197.

<sup>15</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 187.

<sup>16</sup> Explicitly by Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 157: "scire est esse."

<sup>17</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 187-188. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 157, gives an explicit refutation of the views on God's knowledge of Averroës, one of the famous Arabic Aristotelians.

<sup>18</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 170; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 144-145; Amesius, *Medulla*, 15; Wendelin, *Christiana Theologiae*, 69; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> For example Turretini, *Institutio*, 189-190. Translation of Acts 15,18 from Turretini's Latin.

<sup>20</sup> The originally different backgrounds of these terms in medieval Thomism and Scotism seem to be hardly functional in Reformed Orthodoxy. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:407-408: "In the definitions and explanations of the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, moreover, the more Thomistic language of *scientia simplicis intelligentiae / visionis* is often explained in a voluntaristic manner, yielding the more Scotistic model under the Thomistic language." This development is reflected in Muller's own description, when he defines the Thomistic *scientia visionis* as "the knowledge of all that God 'sees' or comprehends as belonging to the realm of divinely willed existence"; the words "divinely willed" here express the Scotist insight in the foundation of God's *scientia visionis*.

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knows his own being plus the whole domain of possible things.<sup>21</sup> Several authors maintain that all possibilities are contained within the fullness of God's thought, and consequently in his being. This view resembles the Platonist-Augustinian view of the Ideas as having eternal existence in the mind of God.<sup>22</sup> The natural knowledge can also be called a necessary knowledge, because if it belongs to God's nature to know himself and all possibilities in his own being, it is impossible that he should not have this knowledge. This knowledge is also called "knowledge of mere understanding," because the object of the natural knowledge does not consist of the really existent entities, but only of the entities conceived in their essential structure as possibly existing. God does perfectly know and understand whatever could be possibly in existence, although some of these possibilities are never realized. The entities inasmuch as they become reality are the object of the other form of divine knowledge, the free knowledge or knowledge of vision. The *scientia libera* does not contain the knowledge of God's own being, because this is a necessary, not a free knowledge. God knows everything outside of himself by his knowledge of vision, not as possibilities, but as really existent beings and events. Since the knowledge of vision takes things as actualized on the basis of God's will and decree, the Reformed state that this knowledge, though free, is *definite*, not indefinite. This postulation is important in understanding the Reformed rejection of the *scientia media* (see Excursus 3 below), which is based on the alleged *indeterminacy* of future contingents and the parallel *indefiniteness* of God's knowledge of future contingents.

It is concerning the knowledge of vision that the question of God's foreknowledge of the future contingents arises. It should be realized beforehand that, properly spoken, God does not have *foreknowledge* (*praescientia*), and that the future contingents are not future with respect to God: God is eternal, and to him the succession of first and last, before and after, does not apply. The terms "before" and "future" are used from our finite perspective, and imply a logical differentiation of structural moments in God's knowledge. The question, then, is, whether God has determinate and infallible knowledge of contingent events that are, from our point of view, still in the future. This question contains two related problems: a. is it possible to have determinate knowledge of contingent events that have not yet occurred? b. does not the infallible knowledge of God impose such a necessity upon the events, that they can no longer be called "contingent"?

"Contingent" can be defined in different ways. The most basic definition is: that which can be otherwise than it is. The contingent is the opposite of the necessary: that which cannot be otherwise than it is. One step further it can be asked: does the

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<sup>21</sup> *Impossible* things are not the object of God's knowledge: logically inconsistent concepts cannot be known. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 158 ; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 651. The opposite is stated by Altting, *Loci communes*, 16. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 149-150, refutes the Cartesian view that the *possibility* of things is known by God on the basis of his *will*.

<sup>22</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:397, labels this view as "Augustinian." It could, indeed, be argued that Augustine differs from Plato in that he does not give the Ideas an independent status, but places them in the divine mind. Cf. Gijsbert van den Brink, *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*, Studies in philosophical theology, vol.7 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), 93-113, 184-203, and see part III, section 19.6 below.

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possibility to be otherwise exist at the same moment at which something is so and so, or is the contingency limited to the possibility preceding the actual occurrence of an event? In the latter case, contingency is interpreted as diachronic contingency: at moment  $t_1$  it is possible that something happens one way or another, but at the moment  $t_2$ , when the event occurs, it cannot be otherwise than it actually is. Synchronic contingency, however, means that at the very moment  $t_2$ , when the event occurs one way, it is still possible to be the other way. Synchronic contingency implies a structural indeterminacy of reality and thus is a stronger form of contingency than diachronic contingency.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to establish the correct interpretation of contingency with the Reformed orthodox writers. Some elements suggest an interpretation in diachronic terms. An often quoted *dictum* of Aristotle says: Whatever is, is, when it is, necessary (*omne quod est, dum est, necesse est*).<sup>24</sup> The meaning of this slogan seems to be, that before coming into existence something is contingent, but after its coming into existence it is necessary. That is a clear example of diachronic contingency. However, the Reformed orthodox make a more subtle distinction in the concept of necessity. On the one hand, there is a causal form of necessity: the necessity of the consequent (*necessitas consequentis*). In a causal relation, if the cause works necessarily, the effect is also necessary. For example, water heated on a fire starts to boil after a certain amount of time. On the other hand, there is a logical form of necessity: the necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*). This type of necessity does not affect the things in their ontic status, but it indicates the connection between two things or events. For example, if I marry a girl, it is necessary that I am her husband. In itself, it is necessary neither that I marry this girl, nor that I am her husband. But, given the fact that I marry her, it is necessary that I am now her husband. Stated otherwise, it is impossible that of a conditional proposition, the antecedent occurs but the consequent does not occur. To return to the *dictum* "Whatever is, is, when it is, necessary," it seems plausible to construct its meaning in terms of a *necessitas consequentiae*: once something happens, it is impossible to assert that it does not happen. This interpretation avoids ascribing absolute, causal necessity to all events. But the room for freedom is not unlimited: the Reformed orthodox still speak of necessity, and even if they admit the structural, logical possibility of "counterfactuals," they remain close to the actual reality as it is determined by God's decree.<sup>25</sup>

From this survey, it is clear that Reformed Orthodoxy does not draw a straight line of necessity from God's knowledge to the actual state of affairs. Several authors discuss the question whether God's knowledge can be called "the cause of things" (*causa rerum*). They usually deny or qualify<sup>26</sup> this statement, which was

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of synchronic contingency is elaborated in A. Vos Jaczn. et al., *Contingency and freedom: Lectura I 39 by John Duns Scotus* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994). See also part III, section 17.2.2 below.

<sup>24</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 71; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 114 (as a "necessitas ex hypothesi"); Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 34; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 218.

<sup>25</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:403, mentions the idea of "necessities of the consequence," but does not explain it.

<sup>26</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 159: God's practical foreknowledge, which acts together with his will, is the cause of things; cf. Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 221-224. A qualified affirmation is given by

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defended by Thomas Aquinas. God's knowledge has the "knowable" (*scibile*) as its object; it presupposes this object as a *causa sine qua non*, but does not create it. The *scientia Dei* is the directing principle (*principium dirigens*) that leads the will as deciding principle (*principium imperans*) to its objects.<sup>27</sup>

### Excursus 3. Middle Knowledge

An important theory dealing with God's knowledge of the future contingents is the so-called middle knowledge (*scientia media*).<sup>28</sup> Developed by the Spanish Jesuits Pedro da Fonseca, Luis Molina and Francesco Suárez, it tries to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom.<sup>29</sup> Its primary application was in the doctrine of grace (how do God's election and human repentance relate?), but soon the concept became an important matter of debate in the doctrine of God and of providence as well.

The name "middle" knowledge should be understood in the context of the traditional distinction between two sorts of divine knowledge: knowledge of mere understanding (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*) and knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis*). The proponents of the *scientia media* state that these two sorts of knowledge do not satisfactorily apply to the category of future contingent things. The former knowledge deals exclusively with entities as being possible; it does not regard the actualization of things, but only the logical consistency of their essence. The latter knowledge, on the other hand, has to do with things and events as they will actually occur. According to the theory of middle knowledge, this knowledge of vision cannot comprise the future contingents, since these cannot be determinately known. The reason for this is that contingent things depend on free, creaturely choice: in given circumstances, one can either choose or reject to perform a certain act. If it is true that contingent facts depend on free choice, and that before the moment of choice they do not have a determinate truth value (i.e., it is not fixed whether they will occur or not) it follows that God cannot certainly know the outcome. A third, middle type of knowledge is needed, by which God knows the circumstances in which created beings have the possibility to choose between two alternatives.

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Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 153: the *scientia visionis* is the cause of things coming into existence, with appeal to the scholastic *dictum* "Things exist because God knows them, He does not know them because they exist." We should not interpret this as Maccovius's taking God's knowledge instead of his will as the proper cause of things, but as his claiming the priority of God over created things. Moreover, in the *scientia visionis*, the *volitional* moment is always presupposed. Cf. Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 71, who emphasizes the priority of God's will over his foreknowledge of future things, and ascribes to Martin Luther the view that God's foreknowledge is (unqualifiedly) the cause of the things foreknown.

<sup>27</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 666-667.

<sup>28</sup> For a systematic, philosophical analysis of the concept of middle knowledge, see Eef Dekker, *Middle knowledge*, Studies in philosophical theology, vol. 20 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000). See also part III, section 19.5 below.

<sup>29</sup> As Muller, *PRRD*, 3:424-430, points out, Reformed polemical theology of the seventeenth century discerned an allied frontier of Jesuits, Remonstrants, and Socinians; the latter most radically denying God's omniscience. Because of this association of positions, the Reformed combat vehemently even the more moderate positions on middle knowledge.

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Generally spoken, the Reformed orthodox reject the theory of middle knowledge.<sup>30</sup> It is important to examine their objections, in order to detect their own view of causality, necessity, contingency, and freedom.<sup>31</sup>

The first argument concerns the presupposition of the *scientia media*, that the future contingents do not have a determinate truth value, and thus cannot be known certainly by God. The Reformed orthodox hold the opposite view, that the future contingent events are determined, not in themselves, but in God's decree.<sup>32</sup> In addition, a strong view of God's eternity implies, that all things in the course of history are present to God.<sup>33</sup> So the Reformed orthodox deny the claim, that the future contingents are not knowable (*scibile*). They hold that the two types of divine knowledge, natural and free knowledge, contain all possible objects, and that a third type is superfluous. Turretini puts it precisely:

The *scientia naturalis* and the *scientia libera* comprise all knowable things; and entities should not be multiplied without necessity. For there is nothing in the nature of things that is not either possible or (actually) future; nor can "conditioned future things" constitute a third category. For they are such *either* in virtue of a merely possible and potential condition which will never come true, *or* in virtue of a condition that is certainly future and decreed (by God). In the former way, they do not egress the nature of possible things, and belong to the *scientia naturalis*; in the latter way, they are future and decreed by God, and relate to the *scientia libera*.

The more profound reason for the claim that all (actually) future things are decreed by God, is the insight that nothing in the created world can exist or act without the divine *will*. If God does not will a contingent human act, this act cannot be performed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is accepted by Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 97 (as a knowledge that precedes God's act of will, but still sees something as future on presupposition of this act); Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 175-176 (who argues from the mutability of contingent causes and from the transition from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace, but reckons the *scientia media* to the *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*). Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 148, seems to include the possible future events in their causal relations (normally claimed as the object of the *scientia media*) in the *scientia libera*. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:420, who includes Gomarus in the small row of Reformed theologians accepting a "hypothetical" knowledge of God prior to his decree.

<sup>31</sup> The listed arguments are based on the most extensive refutations of *scientia media* by Turretini, *Institutio*, 188-197; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 34-36; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 82-86; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 158-166.

<sup>32</sup> The Reformed even point out that precisely the theory of middle knowledge, invented to defend human freedom, results in a sort of "Stoic fate": since God knows the hypothetical sequences of events including free human choices previous to his decree, and then decides which of these sequences is to be actualized, the chain of events thus chosen becomes necessary in itself and does no longer contain true alternativity. Contrary to that, the Reformed argue that our acts and events depend directly on God's will; see Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 163-164.

<sup>33</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 647, appeals to the presence of future contingents for God's knowledge because of God's eternity.

<sup>34</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 193-194. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:422, mentions the criticism of Richard Baxter on this point (cf. Excursus 3 above): according to Baxter, "it is a misconception and

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The second argument provides a subtle distinction of necessity and contingency. It is admitted that the future contingents are contingent if considered in their causal relations, on the level of secondary causes. However, in relation to God as the First Cause, the same future contingents are said to be necessary: it is impossible that they happen otherwise than God has determined in his decree. Turretini here distinguishes between the way of production (*modus productionis*), which is contingent, and the certainty of the outcome (*certitudo eventus/ futuritionis*), which is necessary. In Turretini's view, the certainty of knowledge depends on God's will and decree; if the outcome remained uncertain, God would not be able to know perfectly, and consequently would not be able to act.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Reformed orthodox employ a crucial distinction in explaining the combination of necessity and contingency: the distinction between the divided sense (*sensus divisus*) and the compounded sense (*sensus compositus*). For example, "the bones of Christ could be broken and not broken" in the divided sense, but in the compounded sense, taking into account God's decree, they could not be broken.<sup>36</sup>

This position can be made stronger by stating that God as the First Cause is actively involved in and behind the causation on the secondary cause level. Fundamental for the Reformed orthodox view of future contingents is the confession that God is the independent Creator and that all creatures depend for all their acts on him. One implication of God's independence is, that the nature of his knowledge does not depend on the modal status of its objects: the contingency of things does not make God's knowledge contingent.<sup>37</sup> Another implication is, that created beings can have freedom with respect to other created beings, but they are never absolutely free in relation to God. Otherwise, man would be independent of

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hardly a refutation of the idea of middle knowledge to claim that 'no futurition can be known but as *Decreed*'. ... After all, sin is not decreed directly or absolutely by God, nor does middle knowledge at all concern necessary events: 'The sense of the question *de Scientia Media*, is not *de conditionatis necessariis*, as 'If the Sun set, it will be night' ... But of such conditionals as have some *reason* of the *Connexion*, and yet leave the will in an *undetermined power* to act or not. But we know no difference between these *ex parte Dei Scientis*, but only *denominatione extrinseca ex parte objecti*. ... Therefore, the doctrine of Gods knowledge of such *Conditional propositions*, and *contingents* as so circumstantiated, seemeth *True materially* (that They are the objects of Gods knowledge); but *false efficiently* as if there were *any Causes* of his knowledge, (which hath no Cause); but only extrinsecal denominators of it in that act.'" It seems that Baxter on the one hand rejects the Molinist assumption that our free decision is the cause of God's knowing which events will become actual, but on the other hand accepts the Molinist presupposition that *free acts of the human will* cannot positively be *willed by God*.

<sup>35</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 188-191.

<sup>36</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 165; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 87.

<sup>37</sup> Put exactly, there is an *implicative* necessity between God's knowing a fact to occur and the occurrence of this fact. It is impossible that something happens without God's knowing it. This leaves open a contingency of God's foreknowledge in a different respect: concerning contingent facts, it is not *absolutely* necessary that God knows them. If that were the case, the absolute necessity of God's foreknowledge would indeed transfer to the things known by him, and all creaturely freedom would be excluded. Cf. Turretini, *Institutio*, 191. Within Reformed Orthodoxy, there seems to be an uneasy relation between the fundamental statement that all God's attributes are essential, none accidental (and, since God exists necessarily, his attributes are necessary) and the crucial insights in the contingency of reality and of God's knowledge and will.

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God, and God would be dependent on human decisions. This objection seems to cover the strongest religious difficulty with the theory of middle knowledge.

The fourth argument elaborates on the third: the theory of middle knowledge removes God's sovereignty over free creaturely acts. This is especially damaging, since "free creaturely acts" is exactly the category which the doctrine of grace and salvation deals with. The effectiveness of God's grace and vocation is at stake.<sup>38</sup> If God cannot determine the human conversion, the certainty of salvation is lost. Middle knowledge induces an external cause into God's decree of predestination, and thus compromises God's aseity.

Finally, the Reformed orthodox attempt to refute the appeal to biblical texts by proponents of the *scientia media*. Sometimes, God's knowledge of future events seems to be conjectural and conditional on free human decisions (for example: God warning David for the residents of Keilah, 2 Samuel 23; Christ speaking about the conversion of Tyrus and Sidon, Matthew 11:21). The Reformed scholastics reject the rigidly literalist exegesis of these passages, and show how these Scriptural statements have a rhetorical intention. This rhetorical interpretation intends to do justice to the serious appeal by God to his people: in order to bring them to conversion, God sometimes had to pretend ignorance or to put promises and threats in conditional terms.<sup>39</sup>

The Reformed orthodox must of course answer the question, how God's infallible knowledge of future contingents relates to their contingency and freedom. It should be realized, that human freedom is not their main emphasis: they wish to guard God's sovereignty and grace. However, their view of primary and secondary causality enables them to distinguish carefully between different levels of freedom. Although they defend the necessity of things from the perspective of God's decree, they maintain the contingency of things in their own nature. Several Reformed orthodox writers state explicitly that the infallibility and immutability of God's *praescientia* do not change the nature of things. God's knowledge is an external cause, concerning the outcome, which does not affect the intrinsic contingency of events.<sup>40</sup>

The Reformed orthodox fiercely deny the allegation that their doctrine of God's immutable foreknowledge implies that God is the author of sin. The argument of their opponents is, that if God infallibly knows in advance that mankind will fall into sin, it is thereby necessary that man sins, which makes God ultimately responsible for it. Here the Reformed orthodox maintain the strict distinction between the two levels of causality: even if God for his part knows certainly that sin will come into the world and decides to allow it, it still remains the full responsibility of man as a free agent to sin or refrain from sin. In short, the necessity of infallibility (*necessitas infallibilitatis*) does not entail necessity of coercion (*necessitas coactionis*). God does not effectively produce, but rather permit

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<sup>38</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 650, points to the calling of the pagan peoples as the immediate context of the strong claim "that all God's works are eternally known to him" (*Acts* 15,18; my translation from De Moor's Latin), while this process of calling and conversion includes many free human acts and decisions!

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 86; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 164-165; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 664; Turretini, *Institutio*, 191-192.

<sup>40</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 191-192.

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and ordain sinful acts of men. In addition to the distinction between God's direct, effective will and his indirect, permissive will, several authors define evil as consisting in a lack of good (*privatio boni*). This entails that God knows evil not directly and as such, but by way of negation of the corresponding good.<sup>41</sup>

As a final point it should be made clear that the Reformed orthodox view of divine foreknowledge is not exclusively intellectualist. An intellectualist reading of God's foreknowledge implies that the necessity of things is derived from God's knowing them as such. The Reformed orthodox account of the *scientia visionis*, however, gives a decisive role to the divine will.<sup>42</sup> It holds that the transition from God's knowledge of mere understanding (concerning the realm of possibilities) to God's knowledge of vision (concerning the realm of actuality) is formed by God's will and decree. There is no implicative relation between a thing's being possible and its becoming actual; God is, by his will, utterly free in choosing the states of affairs and the events to become actual.<sup>43</sup>

### 7.2.1. Truth

Truth or veracity (*veritas/veracitas*) is an attribute with both intellectual and volitional aspects. The Reformed orthodox often attach it to the exposition of God's knowledge. Four aspects can be discerned in God's veracity. First, God is true in his essence. God is totally and perfectly God. There is no failure or inconsistency in his being. In this regard, God's veracity, faithfulness and constancy come close to his immutability. Here Polanus points to the "convertibility" of the classic "transcendentals" *ens* and *verum*: God as the highest, perfect, fullest, and independent being cannot fail to be true.<sup>44</sup>

Second, God's knowledge is infallible. He knows things exactly as they are. In fact, one encounters the reversal of this proposition in Zanchi's exposition of the doctrine of God's truth. According to Zanchi, God's knowledge is prior to the

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<sup>41</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 191; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 83; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 34; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 109; Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 68; Amesius, *Medulla*, 27; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 145; Trelcatius via Hoornbeek, *Institutiones*, 79; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 202; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 170.

<sup>42</sup> After reviewing the debates on the *scientia Dei*, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:432, concludes: "The Reformed orthodox doctrine of the *scientia Dei* represents, at very least, a vast elaboration of the premisses of the Reformers concerning the knowledge of God. ... The development of Reformed doctrine on the point belongs to an attempt to maintain the soteriological monergism of the Reformation over against various synergistic theologies – this is not a 'speculation' brought on merely by the advent of scholastic method, nor is it an attempt of academic theologians to penetrate the recesses of the Godhead out of pure curiosity." In addition to Muller, it could be made explicit that the debates on God's *knowledge* are in fact elaborations of the Reformation insight in the crucial role of God's *will* and *decree*, which is particularly evident in John Calvin's theology.

<sup>43</sup> Quite pointedly, Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 157-158, argues that God's act of understanding entities as possible (this is the *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*) is not their "exemplary cause," as if their existence would directly represent God's own essence. The fundamental distinction between Creator and creature is maintained by the insight that the latter are "produced" by the free act of God's will.

<sup>44</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 183. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:511, points to the connection between the *veracitas* and the *immutabilitas Dei*.

existence of things. By his intellect, God perfectly knows the essence of all things. By the act of creation, things are brought into existence in accordance with God's knowledge of their essence. So the first step is the "exequation" (*exaequatio*) of all things to God's mind. Second, our knowledge of things consists in "adequation" (*adaequatio*) of our mind to the essence of the things.<sup>45</sup>

Third, God is true in his words. He always fulfils his promises and threats. Some authors cite the story of Genesis 22, where God commands Abraham to kill his son Isaac, to explain that even such a demand that finally is retracted by God is no simulation, but is truly and sincerely given by God. This truth of God's words is a ground to trust him; it is also an example for the believer to speak the truth in all circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

The fourth aspect of God's truth is the veracity of God's will and deeds. God's will is constant, and his deeds are in accordance with his nature, wisdom, words, and will. Polanus, dealing with God's veracity as consequent on his justice, specifies the truth of God's deeds into his internal and external works. God's internal works or operations is a term for the relations between the three Persons of the Trinity. By his statement, Polanus means that God is not metaphorically but truly Father, Son, and Spirit, without a hidden deity lingering behind the three Persons. Under the external works of God, in Polanus's terminology, fall his will, words, and deeds. Polanus speaks of the *fides Dei* and the *constantia Dei* to circumscribe God's veracity in this respect.<sup>47</sup>

### 7.3. Will

In several respects, the doctrines of the divine knowledge and will are closely related. As we have seen in the previous section, God's will and decree play a decisive role in establishing the transition from God's knowledge of mere possibilities (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*) to God's knowledge of actual entities and events (*scientia visionis*). The other way round, many Reformed orthodox authors describe God's will as a rational or intellective faculty, to the effect that a conflict between these two faculties is precluded.<sup>48</sup> There are, however, some structural differences between God's intellect and will. Turretini argues that the intellect contains the object in itself, the will is brought towards the object.<sup>49</sup> Mastricht states that the importance of the doctrine of the divine will is that it guarantees the contingency of facts in reality: if there was only God's knowledge of possible and actual things, reality would be necessarily such as it is. God's free will

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<sup>45</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 228; similarly about God as the archetype and Idea of all things, Polanus, *Syntagma*, 183.

<sup>46</sup> On these grounds, Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 242, rejects the so-called white lie (*mendacium officiosum*). The same emphasis on God's absolute veracity, excluding simulation, is found in Polanus, *Syntagma*, 184.

<sup>47</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 183-184.

<sup>48</sup> The will is defined as an *appetitus intelligens* which can by definition not be allogical, Alting, *Loci communes*, 16-17.

<sup>49</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 199.

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indicates that God is not bound to one course of events, but can freely choose which state of affairs to actualize.<sup>50</sup>

The Reformed orthodox provide different definitions of God's will, which emphasize different important aspects. At the outset, a distinction is made between the faculty, act, and object of will. Whereas in the human will there is a structural difference between faculty and act (the capacity of willing differs from a concrete act of willing), in God faculty and act are one.<sup>51</sup> According to James Ussher, God's will means that "of himself and with one act he doth most holily will all things: approving or disapproving whatsoever he knoweth."<sup>52</sup>

This very compact definition contains six elements:

- a. God's will is independent: he wills "of himself" and is not induced by others to will whatever he wills;
- b. God's will consists of one, indivisible act: because of God's simplicity and his will being identical with his essence, there cannot be different acts of willing in God;<sup>53</sup>
- c. God's will is holy, it has the highest moral quality, so that God can never will anything wrong;
- d. the object of God's will are "all things": nothing takes place without an activity of God's will;<sup>54</sup>
- e. God's act of willing consists in approving or disapproving;
- f. the act of approval or disapproval is directed towards the objects of God's knowledge: whatever God wills is previously<sup>55</sup> known by him.

Other definitions lay emphasis on the good as the proper object of God's will (distinguished in God as the highest good, and besides him the natural, moral, and spiritual good),<sup>56</sup> or on God's willing both the good as end and the other things as means towards the end.<sup>57</sup> These definitions continue the Christian-Aristotelian tradition of analysis of the faculty of will (Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas).

It can be asked whether God's will is free in all respects, or is necessary in some respects. In an early stage of Reformed Orthodoxy, Zacharias Ursinus gave a fundamental account of God's freedom. Ursinus's definition has a large scope, including God's being free from any guilt or misery, any constraint or obligation, but then focusing on the freedom of God's will,

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<sup>50</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 158. Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 209 denies that from God's knowledge and wisdom alone follows absolute necessity.

<sup>51</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 160; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 84. A slightly different distinction between faculty, act, and decree, is made by Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 54; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 197. According to Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 92, God's will is not a faculty, but an act.

<sup>52</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 50.

<sup>53</sup> This implies the immutability of God's will, cf. Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 209.

<sup>54</sup> Parallel to the assertion that God's knowledge has all singular things as its object, Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 185, states that God has an act of will concerning all singular things.

<sup>55</sup> "Previously" in a logical, not temporal sense.

<sup>56</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161; Turretini, *Institutio*, 197;

<sup>57</sup> Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 82

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by which God without any necessity has decreed from eternity the universal order of creation, conservation, and governance of all things, and executes it [the fore-mentioned order] without being in any way coerced or bound by other causes, still in such a way as not to deviate from his own righteousness.

After a list of biblical evidences for this statement, Ursinus makes it clear that the philosophers are unable to conceive of God's freedom, because of their ignorance of the biblical doctrine of the creation of the world. The polemical target of Ursinus in this issue are the Stoic philosophers, who describe God as an immanent Mind of the world, which cannot act otherwise than the natural causes do. Again, a series of biblical witnesses is adduced by Ursinus to prove that God can do more and other things than he actually does. Ursinus's analysis and refutation of four objections by Stoic philosophy shows even more clearly that he has a clear conception of the differences between absolute necessity, hypothetical necessity, and contingency. Among Ursinus's arguments, one is interesting because it sheds unexpected light on his understanding of God's immutability: while his opponents assume that the immutability of God's goodness excludes any freedom on God's part, Ursinus points out that, in contrast with coercion, immutability of the divine nature does not conflict with freedom, because the freedom of the will in choosing the good increases by the firm and constant movement it has towards the object.<sup>58</sup>

In later Orthodoxy, we find a refinement of this basic position. Turretini states that God's act of willing is eternal, but not absolutely necessary: it is necessary seen from its origin and principle, as it is identical with the divine essence; but it is free with regard to its "termination" in a certain object.<sup>59</sup> Next, the Reformed orthodox distinguish within the objects of God's will: inasmuch as God wills himself as the highest good, this is necessarily so. It is impossible that God does not have a positive act of will concerning himself.<sup>60</sup> Of course, this is not a necessity of coercion, but a metaphysical necessity: given the fact that God is the *summum bonum*, and that the good is the proper object of God's will, he necessarily wills himself. Parallel to this statement, it is said that God wills the good as an end necessarily, but the means towards the end freely.<sup>61</sup> Turretini states that this necessity arises from God's complacency in his own essence.<sup>62</sup> Concerning the

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<sup>58</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 487-488. On the idea of God's will as the "mind" or "soul" of the world, cf. also Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 266.

<sup>59</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 199.

<sup>60</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 182. As a specification, Polanus, *Syntagma*, 160, states that the will of God does not precede his internal operations, i.e. the mutual relations of Father, Son, and Spirit. In the context of Trinity, we note in passing that several authors make an initial distinction between the essential (common) and the personal will by which each of the divine Persons wills the others. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:453, who briefly states that the personal will is always understood as a necessarily operating will.

<sup>61</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161; Turretini, *Institutio*, 198; Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 36. Cf. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 158, who holds that the end is chosen by the "practical intellect"; this reveals a close interconnection between the doctrines of intellect and will.

<sup>62</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 197.

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other objects, God's will is free. There is no necessary connection between the *possible existence* of something and its *being willed* by God. Moreover, there is no external cause necessitating God to will or not-will a certain object; God's will is the proper cause of everything else.<sup>63</sup> According to Heidegger, freedom is more suitable to God's absolute perfection than absolute necessity. The co-operation between God's intellect and will does not diminish the freedom of God's will: although the will follows the intellect, God does not "feel" nor really is determined by anything, but acts solely out of himself.<sup>64</sup>

### Excursus 4. Indifference in God's will?

Turretini goes one step further in explaining the kind of freedom God has towards created things: he distinguishes between freedom of spontaneity and freedom of indifference (*libertas spontaneitatis – indifferentiae*). The freedom of spontaneity signifies the possibility of acting without coercion, in accordance with one's own assent. The stronger form, freedom of indifference, indicates that the object of the will contains no grounds for preference, but that the will is equally inclined towards either opposite.

Freedom of indifference means that a choice depends solely on the decision of the will, without external principles directing it somehow. In relation to human free choice, the Reformed orthodox normally reject freedom of indifference. But in the doctrine of the divine will, it seems appropriate to ascribe the strongest form of freedom to God: rather than blaming God with arbitrariness, it enables to praise him for his independence.<sup>65</sup>

Some other theologians hesitate in describing the freedom of God's will in terms of *indifferentia*. To start with, Polanus reminds us that once something is willed by God, it is necessary by supposition of God's willing it; from then on, God's will concerning a certain object is immutable.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, several authors argue that in respect to the "good" involved in possible objects of God's will, there is a certain

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<sup>63</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 197; Amesius, *Medulla*, 30;. Although God's willing something is not caused by something else, the things willed do of course have a (secondary) cause, Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 86; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 198. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:433-434, points to the strange fact that on the one hand Reformed scholastic theology is accused of creating "a rigid, metaphysical determinism" by critics who claim that "the identity of the divine decree or will with the divine essence, taken together with the definition of God as fully actualized (*actus purus*), yields the notion of a God who is not free in relation to externals but must create the world, must create it in a particular way, and must also be unable to relate to the individual acts and wills of creatures," while on the other hand the same critics claim "that Reformed recourse to scholastic 'voluntarism,' specifically to the concept of *potentia absoluta*, in their doctrine of God led to highly inconsistent theological positions, including the problem of positing a God 'at odds with himself' who 'wills from necessity and freedom, but not always both.'" Contrary to these allegations, Muller argues that a correct understanding of the Reformed doctrine of the divine will avoids precisely these two aberrations.

<sup>66</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161. Similarly, Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 86, with an appeal to the infallibility of God's decree. Amesius, *Medulla*, 33, distinguishes between necessity and certainty: God's will is without necessity concerning things outside of him, but his willing things is absolutely certain.

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necessary inclination towards them. In scholastic terminology, this is not an absolute necessity, but a relative necessity (*necessitas secundum quid*). Due to this “moral” dimension, God wills one thing more than another, although he could prefer the other thing.<sup>67</sup>

Heidegger’s discussion of this question<sup>68</sup> reveals that he has in mind a specific concept of indifference, which obviously stems from Cartesian philosophy. Heidegger refers to people who state that God is, of course, not indifferent in respect to himself, but indeed is indifferent in respect to created nature, to the result that God can make it true that  $2 \times 3$  does not equal 6; that a triangle has four angles; that a body is a thinking substance, and a spirit an extended substance, etc.<sup>69</sup> Heidegger lists a number of arguments to refute the claim that God is indifferent to these truths:

- It brings a contradiction into God’s mind, as opposites are true at the same time: a triangle is not a triangle, a body is not a body, etc. Even worse, God himself would at the same time be the purest act and extended matter, infinite and finite mind. Heidegger sticks to the classic scholastic statement that the “essences” of all things, comprised by the divine mind, are eternal and cannot change.
- Indifference of either God’s intellect or God’s will conflicts with the divine nature. For in God, to be and to know and to will are identical in the real sense. Therefore, if God is not indifferent in regard to being, neither can he be indifferent in regard to knowing or willing.
- The possibility of an opposite will implies that there is a change in God from one volition to another. So, in the case of indifference, either there arises a new volition in God, which is excluded by his eternity, or the one, eternal will of God includes contradictory volitions, which was already refuted.
- A changing will, open to contradictory objects, cannot be essential, but must be an accidental property of God that alternates between occurring and not-occurring. As we have seen above (section 5.4.1), the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God excludes accidental properties of God.
- If God is indifferent to created reality, the belief that the most wise God acts in the best possible way, loses ground.
- Indifference arises from ignorance: only because we do not fully know a thing, we hesitate to accept or reject it. Ignorance, both in the sense of lack of understanding and in the sense of uncertainty concerning purpose (God’s own glory) and means to achieve this end, is to be denied in God. God is pure reason, and cannot act regardless of reason. Although we cannot fully understand the reasons why God created the world as he did, we must maintain that his eternal judgment concerning reality is right and cannot be annulled.

Balancing the Reformed orthodox about the interpretation of God’s freedom in terms of either spontaneity (and lack of coercion) or indifference (without any kind of necessity), we can express the shared conviction in the following two statements: (1) freedom of indifference can be affirmed in the sense of God’s not being obliged to do any of his free acts, even in view of their quality of “good”; (2) freedom of

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<sup>67</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 17; Alting, *Loci communes*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 93-94.

<sup>69</sup> This is a clear reference to the two fundamental principles of Cartesian metaphysics: *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. It is funny to notice that Heidegger makes precisely the wrong connection between body and *res extensa*, spirit and *res cogitans* in this context.

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indifference should not be understood as if God's will is arbitrary and separated from his wisdom and goodness.<sup>70</sup>

The most important questions concerning the doctrine of the divine will are, first, how God's will is related to evil, and second, how it is related to the wills of other rational beings. Concerning the first question, it is obvious from the given definitions that Reformed Orthodoxy cannot ascribe to God a positive willing of evil. God's will is holy, and the good is its proper object. On the other hand, the Reformed orthodox are eager to maintain that nothing, not even evil, occurs without God's will.<sup>71</sup> Some authors go even further to explain how God can have an act of will concerning evil.<sup>72</sup> They state that God wills the evil under the aspect of good (*ratione boni*). A distinction within evil is made between evil as a punishment and evil that makes one guilty (*malum poenae* – *malum culpae*). In turn, the *malum culpae* consists of different aspects. The ontological ground or basis (*subjectum*) of any evil action is a creaturely act, dependent on God as Creator and First Cause. This act, abstracted from its moral quality, is good. The moral quality of an evil act (in Aristotelian terms its *forma*) is of course evil; rather than *forma* it should be called *deformatas*. Thirdly, there is the aspect that an evil act makes one guilty (*reatus*) and gives a sense of guilt; this is an adequate, and thus good, consequence. Finally, an evil act can be the punishment (*poena*) for another sin, and as such it is adequate and good. This distinction shows that there are aspects of a sinful, evil act that have the character of good and can be positively willed by God. As Creator and First Cause of all things, God is involved in the causation of all created acts. Given the fact of sin, it is good for God to will the appropriate sense of guilt and the punishment of one sin by another. In summary, both the creaturely *substratum* and moral consequences of sin are good in themselves, and positively willed by God. On the other hand, the decisively evil aspect of sin, its deformity, is not the effect of God's will, but of corrupted human will. Some authors can even state that it is good that there be some evil, and that God allows evil for the sake of his own glory.<sup>73</sup>

The relation between God's will and evil being thus elucidated, a whole series of distinctions is used to cover both the relation between God and evil and the relation between God's will and created wills.<sup>74</sup> Of these distinctions, the first three

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:446-450. In the first instance, Muller seems to see freedom of spontaneity only (this emphasis is important in the polemics against the Jesuit claim of absolute indifference in both God and man); in the second instance, it becomes clear that he discovers freedom of indifferences as well in the Reformed orthodox discussion of God's will.

<sup>71</sup> "non praeter quod contra," Polanus, *Syntagma*, 160.

<sup>72</sup> The following description is based on Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161-162.

<sup>73</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 51, 60.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:432-433, who starts his exposition of the doctrine of God's will by signalling that "the older orthodoxy ... recognized as fully as did the medieval doctors that the discussion of the divine will was necessarily complex, given, as Peter Lombard had long before noted, that the biblical references to divine *voluntas* were so varied that they could not be understood apart from a series of distinctions in the divine willing. Or, to make the point more positively, given that Scripture uses the word will in a variety of ways, ... a series of distinctions concerning the divine will are implied in the text itself and must be

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are generally approved of, and they circle around the same insights. Two other distinctions are viewed very critically, and a final distinction is generally rejected by the Reformed orthodox. It should be realized in advance, that the distinctions do not intend to ascribe different wills to God, but rather to emphasize different manners of God's willing different objects.<sup>75</sup>

The first group of distinctions points towards a difference between God's internal will and his external communication of his will.<sup>76</sup> A famous distinction, stemming from Hugo of St. Victor, is between God's will of complacency and God's will of the sign (*voluntas beneplaciti* – *voluntas signi*). The *voluntas beneplaciti* refers to what God has decreed and properly willed concerning the course of events. The *voluntas signi* indicates the "outward" signs or notification of God's will towards his creatures. The difference between the two is often demonstrated by the example from Genesis 22: God commands Abraham to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice for Yahweh, but in the end he forbids the killing of Isaac and provides a ram instead. From the outward sign (God's command to kill Isaac) it seems that God willed Abraham to kill his son; but it turned out to be God's proper will, not to have Isaac killed, but to test Abraham's faith. According to Turretini, it should be realized that the *voluntas signi* rests on a divine decree as well, namely God's decree to make known his will with a certain purpose.<sup>77</sup> Walaeus states that the *voluntas signi* is part of the *voluntas beneplaciti*; this implies that the *voluntas beneplaciti* is the proper will of God.<sup>78</sup> An extreme consequence is drawn by Maccovius when he states that the *voluntas signi* is improperly spoken the will of God.<sup>79</sup> M.F. Wendelin goes exactly in the opposite direction by asserting that the

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made explicit simply for the sake of rightly understanding the text of Scripture itself. Far from being an excessively 'speculative' doctrine in the modern sense of the term, the orthodox discussion of the divine will was deeply rooted in the redemptive and historical elements of Christian theology and indicative of the a posteriori character of much Reformed theology in the era of Protestant scholasticism: for the distinctions made by the orthodox concerning the divine willing were not a matter of rational speculation but rather a result of the examination of biblical texts and traditional discussions of the *voluntas Dei*, the latter with respect to the needs or concerns of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone." Cf. on pages 443-444: the divine will "is the most exhaustive and detailed category of attributes in many of the systems. ... The sheer size and detail of the doctrine does not necessarily suggest either excessive 'speculation' or departure from the framework of thought identified among the Reformers. On the one hand, the orthodox retain the Reformers' interest in the direct relation of the doctrine of the divine will to issues of salvation. ... On the other hand, the orthodox do draw Reformed doctrine into a far more consistent dialogue with the scholastic past .... The size of the exposition has more, certainly, to do with the difficulty of appropriating the materials, with the numerous 'affections' belonging to the will, and with the debates of the age between the Reformed and Arminian, Lutheran, Jesuit, and Socinian theologians on all of these issues than it does with a pure metaphysical interest in will."

<sup>75</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 54; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 217-218; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 89; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 159, 162-163.

<sup>76</sup> In the discussion by Muller, *PRRD*, 3:456-469, these distinctions stand under the heading "The Ad Intra – Ad Extra Distinctions."

<sup>77</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 203.

<sup>78</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 179.

<sup>79</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 183, 212-214.

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*voluntas signi* always is also the *voluntas beneplaciti*: in opposition to Martin Luther's separation of the revealed and the hidden God, he maintains that there is no simulation in the signification of God's will.<sup>80</sup>

Largely parallel to the first distinction is a distinction between the decreeing and commanding will of God (*voluntas decernens – praecipiens*).<sup>81</sup> Another formula for this distinction is derived from Augustine: there is a difference between what God wills concerning us (*de nobis*) and what he wills from us (*a nobis*).<sup>82</sup> Antonius Walaeus judges this opposition of terms to be more adequate than the *voluntas signi – beneplaciti* distinction: whereas the latter allows the suggestion of a gap between God's internal will and his external communication, the former merely indicates two distinct sorts of activity of the divine will.<sup>83</sup> The relevance of the distinction between the decreeing and the commanding will of God lies especially in the question of universal or particular salvation. Proponents of universal salvation appeal to biblical texts where God is said to will not the death of sinners, but their repentance and salvation. The Reformed orthodox use the *voluntas decernens – praecipiens* distinction to point out that God truly wills the repentance and salvation of all mankind in the sense that he offers salvation to everyone with the demand of faith and repentance, but still has truly decreed that not everyone will accept the gospel offer and thus not everyone will be saved.<sup>84</sup>

A different aspect of the same matter is indicated by the third distinction, between God's hidden and revealed will (*voluntas arcana – relevata*). God's decisive and proper will is in large parts hidden to us; God has revealed his will to us in the form of promises, demands, and threats. This is not a watertight distinction, since God has revealed the fact that he has an eternal decree concerning the salvation of particular men, though the concrete content of this decree remains hidden.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 72-73; cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 184: the command to Abraham in Genesis 22 is no simulation.

<sup>81</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 199-200.

<sup>82</sup> The explicit reference to Augustine is made by Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 139; cf. also Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 198. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 161, uses the *de nobis – a nobis* distinction in the context of the difference between God's legal and evangelical will: by his legal will, God wills from us (*a nobis*) obedience; by his evangelical will, God wills salvation concerning us (*de nobis*) and faith and resipiscence from us (*a nobis*). Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 207-208, uses another terminology to cover the same conceptual distinction: God's will is either "arbitre" or "legislateur"; the former is the proper will of God and comprises both his ordaining and his permitting things. Leonard Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 86, places the *decernens – praecipiens* distinction in the context of a larger distinction between God's *voluntas realis* (will concerning real things) and *voluntas moralis* (will concerning moral actions).

<sup>83</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 179; similarly Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 89. The concentration on different activities of God's will becomes clear in the formulations of Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 37, who distinguishes between the *voluntas jubens* and the *voluntas ordinans* (including the *voluntas efficiens* and the *voluntas permittens*).

<sup>84</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:460, speaks of the "fundamental identity of the decretive and preceptive will," which "does not, however, always conform to human perception of the case and needs to be argued by the orthodox." The required explanation is mainly in terms of God's either willing or not willing all people to be saved, a question that is occasioned by several passages in Scripture.

<sup>85</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 91. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:438-441, for the acceptance of the

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After these generally approved distinctions comes a pair of distinctions that is evaluated very critically by the Reformed orthodox. The fourth distinction, found in the medieval scholastic tradition, is between God's absolute and conditional will (*voluntas absoluta – conditionalis*). The problem with the distinction is that it seems to allow pelagianizing or arminianizing abuse, if the conditional will is taken to be decisive of the actual course of events, and if the human free will is allowed to fulfill or not fulfill the posed conditions. Maccovius lists no less than ten arguments against the conditional will of God:

1. It makes God's will dependent on an external cause, contrary to the nature of the First Cause;
2. It presupposes something in creation that is prior and superior to God;
3. It brings "passive potency" and accidents in God;
4. It makes temporal events prior to the eternal will of God and results in a twofold decree of God, one eternal, one temporal;
5. It makes God's will indefinite, confuse and universal, without precision;
6. If God's will is limited to *concursus* with free human acts, God either wills or nills this *concursus*; if he wills it, that will is not conditional, if he does not will the *concursus*, he cannot (conditionally) will the event as well;
7. God wills the end (salvation) together with the means (grace, faith);
8. If God is uncertain in willing the definitive salvation of all people, nothing remains of his universal love towards mankind;
9. In respect to both God's own will and of man's will it is impossible that the end (salvation) is attained without God's determinately willing also the means to occur;
10. The theory of conditional will leads to an infinite regress of conditions, which can only be stopped by stating that God definitely wills an event to occur.<sup>86</sup>

It turns out that three things are crucial in this discussion: first, the fact that the question of universal salvation was behind the introduction of God's "conditional" will; second, the insight on Maccovius's part that God's will is always effective, and can never be frustrated; third, the insight that God never wills an end apart from the means and vice versa.<sup>87</sup>

A few Reformed orthodox see limited room for the distinction between absolute and conditional will, if it is used to indicate that God establishes conditional relations between the different objects of his will. Maccovius holds a slightly different distinction, between God's absolute and definitive will (*voluntas absoluta – definitiva*): God's absolute or ultimate will concerns the good in itself without selecting its individual instantiations, God's definitive will follows his decree and is related to all actual things and events.<sup>88</sup>

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distinction between God's hidden and revealed will by Reformation authors such as Musculus and Calvin.

<sup>86</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 184-188.

<sup>87</sup> After refuting similar distinctions between an "antecedent" and "consequent" will (189-195) and a "approbative" and "effective" will (195-197), Maccovius ends up with the statement that no will of God is ineffective (*Nulla Voluntas Dei inefficax est*), *Loci communes*, 197.

<sup>88</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 182.

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A similar problem with the relation between God's will and created free will arises with the fifth traditional distinction, between the preceding and following will of God (*voluntas antecedens – consequens*). This distinction is, in Reformed orthodox view, wrong, if it assumes the possibility of intervention by the human will; it is acceptable inasmuch as it points to a temporal or logical order in the objects of God's will.<sup>89</sup> As Reformed proponents of a sound interpretation of the distinction, theologians like William Twisse, Antonius Walaeus, and Petrus Molinaeus are mentioned.<sup>90</sup> In the sense proposed by Catholics and Arminians, this distinction injures God, according to Turretini, for five reasons: (1) it ascribes contrary wills to God, especially in relation to the (non)salvation of all mankind; (2) the difference between antecedent and consequent will implies the ascription of ignorance, lack of wisdom, impotency, and mutability to God; (3) the *voluntas antecedens* is not a proper will, but a mere wish, void, ridicule, and never fulfilled; which is scandalous to ascribe to God; (4) God is subjected to man, since the *voluntas consequens* is dependent on man's decision on which God has no influence; (5) applied to the question of election and reprobation, the distinction runs against the Gospel, which teaches that God only wills to save by Christ the elect and faithful, not simply all people.<sup>91</sup>

After the nuanced but critical review of the *voluntas absoluta – conditionalis* and the *voluntas antecedens – consequens* distinctions, a final distinction is squarely<sup>92</sup> rejected: between an efficacious and inefficacious will of God (*voluntas efficax – inefficax*). In Reformed orthodox ears, it sounds blasphemous to ascribe inefficacy to God. Moreover, if God's will were inefficacious, it would no longer properly be his will (*voluntas*), but mere wishing (*velleitas*). An inefficacious will would contradict God's omnipotence and make him dependent on the agreement of other actors, which damages God's *aseitas*.<sup>93</sup> J.H. Heidegger qualifies the rejection of this distinction by stating that God's *commanding* will can remain inefficacious (people can refuse to obey God's command), but that his *decreeing* will is always efficacious.<sup>94</sup> When it comes to the question of man's conversion, Maccovius argues

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<sup>89</sup> Alting, *Problemata*, 28-29; Turretini, *Institutio*, 204.

<sup>90</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 164-165. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:465-466, who cites Rutherford, Cocceius, Heidanus, and Heidegger as advocates of a legitimate interpretation of the distinction. "To Rutherford's mind, Scotus and Durandus evidence the correct scholastic use of the distinction – namely, not as a reference to an antecedent will in the Godhead itself (*non in se & immediate*), but as a divine will resident 'in the antecedent causes from which an effect follows, but not necessarily; so that God antecedently wills that all people be saved, insofar as he gives to all the natural capacity to be saved and in no way impedes the sufficiency of the means; and God wills consequently that which he wills not in the causes but in himself, namely, that believers be saved.'"

<sup>91</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 205-206.

<sup>92</sup> With exception of Alsted, *Theologica Scholastica didactica*, 83. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:470 notes the hypothetical possibility that the distinction "will stand if it refers the effectual will of God to the decree and the ineffectual will to the divine precepts, the former being incapable of resistance and the latter resisted successfully by all evildoers," but gives no evidence for this suggestion.

<sup>93</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 195-197.

<sup>94</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 91; cf. Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 88, who in addition

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that God's will operates here not in a moral way (by merely persuading man's will) but by way of "physical motion," immediately bringing about a change in man's will.<sup>95</sup>

Related to the question of God's willing evil things, an alternative formula is allowed by most Reformed orthodox authors: God has an effective will concerning the good, and a permissive will concerning the evil. A possible elaboration of the term "permission" is the idea that God wills to withdraw his graceful assistance, to the effect that human beings commit sin. "Permission" does not imply an "ethical" allowance but merely the "physical" act of not-impeding the occurrence of evil. It does not make God the author of sin!<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, some Reformed orthodox emphasize that God's permission is no passive suspension of will, but an active will to permit.<sup>97</sup>

Behind the different distinctions just discussed,<sup>98</sup> the fundamental question is whether God's will can in some relevant respect be "caused," "determined" or "influenced" by other factors. Turretini gives a separate treatment of this question.<sup>99</sup> With the whole tradition of the Church (including Augustine, Peter Lombard, and "the Scholastics"), he denies that God's will can have a cause. If God is independent and the First Cause, there cannot be a secondary cause (co)determining him. Turretini does not deny that there is a causal order within the things willed by God: God wills something to happen because of some other thing (*velle hoc propter hoc*), but it is not so that God wills one thing because of another thing (*propter hoc velle hoc*). Interestingly, in this connection Turretini makes a distinction between "absolute" and "respective" properties of God: the former are based merely on God's absolute and supreme dominion, such as his power and authority; the latter function towards their objects in view of a certain quality, such as justice presupposing sin, and mercy presupposing misery. Still, in the latter case the sinfulness or misery of man is not a proper cause of God's just

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distinguishes between an efficacious, successful will (*efficax*) and an effective, actively involved will (*efficiens*) (similarly, Turretini, *Institutio*, 207). Concerning the evil things, God's willing permission is efficacious, but God is not the efficient cause of evil.

<sup>95</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 198.

<sup>96</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 205-212.

<sup>97</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 91. Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 199, rejects the term "permission" because of its passive sound. Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:441-442, on the qualified acceptance of the permission theory by Musculus and Calvin.

<sup>98</sup> In addition to the most common distinctions, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:469-473, lists eight further distinctions: *voluntas de futuris – de praesentibus*; *voluntas discernens sive efficax – praecipiens sive moralis*; *voluntas efficax – inefficax*; *voluntas efficiens sive effectiva – permittens sive permissiva*; *voluntas efficiens & effectiva – approbans & approbativa*; *voluntas ordinans – gubernans*; *voluntas obligationis sive praecepti – euaestias sive approbans*; *voluntas legalis – evangelica*. Several of these distinctions overlap with the previous ones; others are of no structural importance to the doctrine of divine will. It is somewhat curious to hear Muller, following Richard Baxter, state that "a distinction must be made, therefore, between the divine decree or decrees that determine all things in their necessity, contingency, and freedom, and the volition of God that actualizes specific temporal effects in the present" (page 469). It would not come to most Reformed orthodox's minds to ascribe the identification of things as necessary or contingent to the divine decree.

<sup>99</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 209-210.

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and merciful will (then *all* creatures should be punished): in the final analysis, God's elective will is the ground of his mercy.

### *Excursus 5. Will(s) in Christ*

A polemical supplement of the doctrine of God's will is formed by the statement, that the divine will is not communicated to the human nature of Christ. This is obviously a reaction to the Lutheran position on the *communicatio idiomatum*.

In addition to the refusal to attribute the *voluntas Dei* to Christ's human nature, Polanus positively points out that there is a trinitarian and personal dimension in God's willing.<sup>100</sup>

Zanchi dates the discussion back to the Early Church debate between monotheletism and duotheletism: the question whether in Christ there was one will or two wills. If it is rightly stated that God and man are united in Christ as one Person, does it then follow that this one Person has one, divine will? Zanchi points out that the official statements issued by the Church in this controversy follow the Chalcedonian qualifications of the unity of the two natures in Christ: human and divine will are truly united in Christ, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. Zanchi rejects the thought of a mixture or unification between divine and human will in Christ, which is incorrect in two respects: first, it would detract from the true humanity of Christ if he had only a divine will; second, it would violate the rule that no properly divine attribute can be communicated to any creature. Both natures retain their essential properties: the uncreated, eternal, infinite will of God can never be changed into a created, temporal, finite human will, and a human nature without a will is no longer human.

Zanchi argues that a distinctly human will is necessary for Christ's willful obedience and thus for our salvation. Emphasizing the duality of natures and wills, Zanchi maintains the unity of Christ's person. In this unity of person, and given the righteousness of Christ's human will, it is unthinkable that the divine and human will are contrary to each other.

It is remarkable that Zanchi performs the debate merely in extensive interaction with heretics, Church Fathers and Councils from the Early Church. He nowhere refers to Lutheran Christology, and only has one reference to the Anabaptists, who denied that Christ had a true human nature and instead stated that the person of the Logos took only a human body.<sup>101</sup>

Valuing the Reformed orthodox account of the divine will in its various operations, Richard Muller concludes:

God's will is a great comfort to believers in the midst of adversity: since God's will is free and not bound to temporal things, nothing can happen to believers apart from the good pleasure of their heavenly Father. ... The will of God, in turn, corresponds with his holy nature. This determination of the relationship of will and justice, placing as it does primacy in the

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<sup>100</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 160.

<sup>101</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 306-326. Similar discussions are given by Zanchi in view of the divine essence (54-63) other divine attributes, such as simplicity (very briefly, 72-73), immensity (106-137; an extensive refutation of Lutheran arguments in favour of ubiquity, without explicit mentioning of Lutheran authors), omnipotence (168-172), knowledge (224-226).

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will of God, manifests a Scotist or nominalist rather than a Thomist element in the Reformed conception of the divine nature, but it does not, as often claimed in older scholarship, indicate an utter arbitrariness on God's part. It is precisely this pronounced sense of the continuity between God's intention and will and the execution or revelation of God's intention and will that allows the Reformed orthodox to include a strong a posteriori element in their doctrine of the divine attributes.<sup>102</sup>

In Reformed Orthodoxy, it is rather common to attach some further attributes directly to the divine will. Sometimes these are called "affects" (*affectus*); others prefer to speak of "effects" (*effectus*) or "virtues" (*virtutes*) of God's will. The choice of the exact terms is somewhat difficult here: while theologians such as Walaeus and Amesius frankly use the word "affects,"<sup>103</sup> others think this is not appropriate, because God cannot be affected by something from without.<sup>104</sup>

It is helpful to consider some introductory comments by Richard Muller to the issue of the divine "affections" or "passions." Muller notices that various theologians such as Polanus, Amesius, and Venema understand the affections as figuratively rather than properly attributed to God. That is to say:

The affections are, therefore, either inward and inalterable dispositions of the divine will or figurative attributions based on *ad extra* manifestations.

The figurative understanding of the affections

in no way lessened the Reformed interest in the topic – nor did it in any way undermine the discussion of the divine affections in the works of popular piety written during the era of orthodoxy. It is even possible to argue the opposite, that the Reformed orthodox reading of the biblical language of divine affections as not indicating alterations of the divine essence but, nonetheless, as descriptive of genuine patterns of relationship between God and his creation, enhanced the interest of theologians, pastors, and authors of treatises of popular piety in the divine affections: in other words, these authors emphasize the constancy of divine love and mercy toward the righteous and the inevitability of divine hatred of sin and anger against the wicked.

In continuity with the Reformers, the Reformed scholastics treat the affections of the divine will on analogy of human affections, "with the major qualification that, unlike human affections, the divine affections do not indicate essential change in God and that they are permanent rather than transient dispositions." Because of

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<sup>102</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:474. Muller's disclaimer against "older scholarship" could have occasioned him to differentiate more carefully between the "Scotist" and the "nominalist" understanding of God's will.

<sup>103</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 183; Amesius, *Medulla*, 15.

<sup>104</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 94.

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this difference, the terms “affection” and, more strongly so, “passion” are rejected in favor of “virtue.”<sup>105</sup>

The theologians differ in the further classification of these attributes. J.H. Heidegger views God’s holiness as the foundation and spring of God’s moral virtues, and treats his righteousness, goodness and justice as subordinate virtues.<sup>106</sup> Many other authors place God’s goodness and its adherents (love, grace, mercy, patience, etc.) in front.<sup>107</sup> Still another possibility is chosen by Turretini and Rijssen, who follow the order: justice, goodness, and dominion.<sup>108</sup>

### 7.3.1. Goodness

As we have seen, God’s will has God as the *summum bonum* as its primary object. Consequently, God’s essential goodness is a fundamental attribute to be elaborated in the context of the divine will. The confession of God’s complete goodness is important against systems of dualism that state an evil principle on a par with a good God (Marcion, the Manicheans).<sup>109</sup>

Whereas it is hard to fixate the precise meaning of “good,” the Reformed orthodox are clear about different aspects of God’s goodness. First of all, they discuss two elements<sup>110</sup> contained in God’s goodness: his essential goodness as a quality of his being, and the goodness he communicates towards his creatures.<sup>111</sup> God’s essential goodness indicates that God is in the highest degree and in the greatest fullness good. This infinite and perfect goodness does not origin from something or somewhere else, but God is essentially good by and of himself. Again, God’s simplicity is fundamental: God’s goodness is identical with his essence. Given the fact that God is God, he is by implication the highest good.

The second element of God’s goodness is his bestowal of good on his creatures. According to Polanus, it belongs to the nature of the good to communicate itself to

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<sup>105</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:552-553.

<sup>106</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 95-96; the same choice is made more briefly by Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 7; similarly, God’s veracity is placed first by Alting, *Loci communes*, 17.

<sup>107</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 183; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 210; Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 105; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 161-162, 170, 177-184; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 79; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 212-228; Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 90-96.

<sup>109</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 482.

<sup>110</sup> Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 105, mentions three ways of God’s being good: efficiently, essentially, finally (*efficienter, essentialiter, finaliter*).

<sup>111</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:506, points out that while both the essential *ad intra* goodness and the manifestations of goodness *ad extra* are contained in the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God’s goodness, “it is certainly the latter and not the former point that receives emphasis in the Reformed systems, as indicated by the placement and use of the *bonitas Dei* in such Reformed thinkers as Wendelin, Leigh, Brakel, Pictet, and Venema. This point is significant inasmuch as there is some correspondence in definition between the Reformed and Thomas Aquinas, but there is very little in terms of the function and location of the doctrine of the *bonitas Dei*: in this *locus*, certainly, the Reformed, unlike Aquinas, are less interested in the absolute Being of God and its transcendent properties than they are in the character and the egress of the divine willing. ... This affective or volitional understanding of divine goodness and related attributes also points away from a Thomistic toward a more Scotistic and *via moderna* Augustinian accent in Reformed orthodoxy on this particular point of doctrine.”

others.<sup>112</sup> The primary mode of communication is within God's own essence, between the Persons of the Trinity.<sup>113</sup> The secondary mode of communication is directed towards the created world. Some Platonic features appear in the relation between God's essential goodness and the goodness of creatures. Polanus explicitly refers to Plato as evidence for the statement that God as the Idea of good contains all good in himself.<sup>114</sup> Created goodness is good, not originally and fully, but by participation and partly. Zanchi states that the creaturely good is not only a participation of God's goodness (*divinae bonitatis*), but also a participation of God's being (*divini Esse*).<sup>115</sup> It reveals and reflects God's goodness. As an extreme consequence of this thought, Zanchi calls even the devil good, inasmuch as he is a created being and is ornated with various gifts.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to the fundamental distinction between God's internal and external goodness, several other distinctions are used by Reformed orthodox authors. A distinction that dates back to Anselm of Canterbury is between the "good of profit" (*bonum utile*), the "good of pleasure" (*bonum iucundum*) and the "good of honesty" (*bonum honestum*).<sup>117</sup> Starting from his own good-pleasure, God bestows goodness to the benefit of creatures; moreover, he is the supreme norm and source of goodness.

A distinction is made between different degrees of goodness bestowed on creatures. The first degree is God's general goodness in which all creatures participate. The second, highest degree is God's special goodness towards the elect: in eternal life they will enjoy the perfect knowledge of and participation in God as the highest good.<sup>118</sup>

A few authors see a connection between the good and the beautiful. From ancient Greek philosophy, transmitted to the Reformed scholastics through patristic and medieval Christian philosophy, it is common to assume the convertibility of being, good, true, and beautiful (*ens – bonum – verum – pulchrum*). Most Reformed orthodox writers do not explicitly refer to this basic ontological statement; Wendelin links goodness and beauty by saying that God, who is perfect and desirable in himself, is the origin of all good and desirable things.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 162: *boni actio est se communicare*. In other words, by Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 99, God's goodness consists in the ability to communicate itself to others. Cf. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 177: *bonum est communicativum sui*. We should notice the slight but decisive difference between these Reformed formulas and the ancient Greek principle of *bonum est diffusivum sui*: it is proper to the good to diffuse itself. In Greek philosophy, goodness in the "created" world is a direct and necessary *emanation* of the Ultimate Good. In Christian theology, God distributes his goodness by way of *communication*, which is a conscious act of God's own will, and thus free, not necessary.

<sup>113</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 80.

<sup>114</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 162. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:507, describes the "philosophical language adopted by orthodoxy" as "an originally Aristotelian language filtered through Augustine's Neoplatonism and measured against the biblical text."

<sup>115</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 201; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 328.

<sup>116</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 210; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 329.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:508.

<sup>118</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 162.

<sup>119</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 79. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 668, mentions the connection

### 7.3.2. Love

From the goodness of God follows a series of other virtues, the first of which is his love. According to Turretini, by his love God communicates himself to the creature and wills to unite with and do good towards it.<sup>120</sup> More broadly, God's love can be distinguished into benevolence, beneficence and delight. It comprises a positive "attitude" as well as its concrete expression and the enjoyment of it.<sup>121</sup>

Polanus makes a basic distinction between the intra-trinitarian love and the outward love of creatures. The love within the Trinity is natural, eternal and necessary: there is no possibility of the three Persons in the Trinity not loving each other. Interestingly, Polanus rejects the thought, based on Augustine, that the Holy Spirit is specifically the principle of love within God: he emphasizes that the intra-trinitarian love is mutual and equal.<sup>122</sup> Whereas the trinitarian self-love is essential and natural, God's love towards creatures is voluntary and free.<sup>123</sup> In his creatures,

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between *bonitas*, *amabilitas*, and *appetibilitas*, but argues that the most important aspect of God's goodness is his benignity. Similarly Polanus, *Syntagma*, 4: God as *summum bonum* is also *summe desiderabile*. Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 328, accepts the equivalence of goodness and beauty, and then refers beauty primarily to knowledge, goodness to will.

<sup>120</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 218.

<sup>121</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 361; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 96.

<sup>122</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 171. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:561, discerns "three profoundly trinitarian ways" in which the love of God is understood: "First, it appears in the discussion of the *ad intra* relationship between the Father and the Son, defined primarily as love, and its *ad extra* manifestation that provides a foundation for the love of God for all of the redeemed, often with reference to John 17:22-24. Second, understood as the primary affection of the divine will, the *amor Dei* also serves, in some of the Reformed orthodox, to explain the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, echoing some of the medieval elaborations of the inner trinitarian relations. Third, as a development of the discussion of the love of the Father for the Son, the love of God serves as a fundamental concept in the Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis*."

<sup>123</sup> The discussion by Muller, *PRRD*, 3:565, raises two questions here. First, he distinguishes between two aspects of God's self-love: "The former aspect, the concept of the necessary love of divine Being for itself, belongs to the doctrine of the essence and attributes, whereas the latter aspect of the *amor naturalis* belongs largely to the doctrine of the Trinity, and to the occasional reflection of the traditional Augustinian and scholastic view of the Spirit as the 'bond of love' between the Father and the Son." Besides the fact that in most scholastic thought "necessary" and "natural" coincide in respect to God, Muller here misses a chance to integrate the doctrines of God and of Trinity on the basis of the insight that God's essence is constituted by the personal relations between Father, Son, and Spirit. Second, Muller comments that "the distinctions employed are similar to those noted in Scotus, but are used quite differently, not reflecting the Scotistic reference of the *amor complacentiae* to the divine knowledge of all possibility." Unfortunately, Muller gives no documentation from Scotus (some indications are found in his earlier exposition, page 79), nor does he explain what the reported "Scotistic reference of the *amor complacentiae* to the divine knowledge of all possibility" implies. The reader is, therefore, unable to construe a meaning of this contention. My guess would be that God's *amor complacentiae* and his *scientia naturalis* are structurally similar because both are necessary, not contingent.

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God loves the good; at the same time he hates the adjacent evil that stems from sin.<sup>124</sup>

The doctrine of simplicity and aseity seems to render impossible the ascription of emotion-like, passionate attributes to God. On the other hand, Scripture is clear in ascribing love as a fundamental characteristic to God. The Reformed orthodox try to uphold the reality of God's love, and meanwhile to maintain that it is not an affect implying that God is influenced from outside but an effect that stems exclusively from his own good and holy will.<sup>125</sup>

An important aspect of the doctrine of divine love is to relate it to Jesus Christ. To start with, Pictet indicates Christ as the primary object of God's love. In addition to God's eternal, trinitarian love of the Son, Christ incarnated is the specific beloved of God.<sup>126</sup> Relevant for the doctrine of atonement is the question, whether Christ's sacrifice is the cause or the effect of God's love. The view that it is the cause of God's love towards sinners emphasizes the need of satisfaction of God's justice and may lead to the idea of "Umstimmung": prompted by the death of Christ on behalf of sinners, God changes his attitude from anger to love. Polanus explicitly holds the opposite view: Christ's sacrifice is the effect and demonstration of God's love that causes him to save sinners.<sup>127</sup>

Given the primary direction of God's love towards his creatures, the question rises whether God loves all his creatures in the same way. The Reformed orthodox answer is "No." There is indeed a general love of God towards the whole of his creation. Zanchi can even speak of God's love as the motive for his creating the world. However, it is a fact that God's love is rejected by many of his creatures. So there is a second form of God's love, directed towards the elect. Strictly spoken, this love is the ground for their election. It is an eternal, great and constant love that is demonstrated by many gifts and that will result in eternal enjoyment. Whereas this second form of love does not apply to the reprobate, God still loves them as his creatures.<sup>128</sup>

### **7.3.3. Grace**

God's goodness and love is specified in relation to sinful creatures as his grace. From all parts of the doctrine of God, the doctrine of grace bears most clearly the traces of the debate between Rome and Reformation on justification and the merits of good works.

The starting point of the Reformed orthodox exposition of the doctrine of divine grace is a clear distinction between God's essential graciousness (*prima gratia, in Deo residens*) and its effects upon creatures (*secunda gratia, a Deo data*). There is a primarily biblical motive for describing God as "by his own nature most gracious,

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<sup>124</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 65.

<sup>125</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 171; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 65; Turretini, *Institutio*, 218; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 201.

<sup>126</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 211.

<sup>127</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 173.

<sup>128</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 362; Polanus, *Syntagma*, 171, 173; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 66; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 201-202; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 210-211; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 179-180; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 81-82; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 96.

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and grace himself," namely the famous self-declamation of Yahweh in Exodus 34:6. Because of God's simplicity, God's grace is identical with his essence.<sup>129</sup>

### Excursus 6. Controversies on God's Grace

In early Reformed orthodox theology, we find reverberations of the Reformation debates on God's grace. After a brief exposition of positive, fundamental statements, Polanus elaborates at length on this theme in a discussion of the views of Robert Bellarmine, an important Roman Catholic theologian and controversialist.<sup>130</sup> In the first place, Polanus rejects the idea that the grace which makes us favorable and acceptable to God (*gratia Deo gratum atque acceptum faciens*) is a quality infused to us (*qualitas nobis infusa*) or something created and inherent in us (*aliquid in nobis creatum & inhaerens*) or finally our love towards God or any other virtue (*charitas qua nos Deum diligimus; aut ulla alia virtus in nobis*). On this statement follows a lengthy discussion of biblical passages adduced by Bellarmine in order to prove that salvific grace is an "infused quality."

In a typically scholastic fashion, Polanus provides a detailed analysis and refutation of Bellarmine's argument. Whereas Bellarmine shaped his argumentation from Scripture in the form of syllogisms, Polanus endeavors to show that the premises are false; the conclusion does not follow because it extends beyond the premises; the point of comparison in biblical texts is missed; key terms are falsely interpreted; etcetera.<sup>131</sup>

Along with this formal argumentation, Polanus develops substantial insights with help of conceptual distinctions. For example, he distinguishes between the "efficient cause" (*causa efficiens*) of our being sinners, which is the inobedience of Adam, and the "formal cause" (*causa formalis*), which is not the deed of inobedience by Adam itself, but God's imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to us. This distinction is supported with a "federalist" understanding of the relation between Adam and us: Adam sinned as our "principle and head," not as a private person.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 163. Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 177, makes this connection *via* the essential goodness of God, of which grace and mercy are specifications.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Bellarmine (1543-1621) was appointed by pope Gregory XIII to deliver lectures at the newly established Collegium Romanum; out of these lecture grew the voluminous series *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei adversus hujus temporis haereticos* (1586-1593). As Bellarmine's disputations constituted a massive defence of Catholicism and a major attack on protestant theology (cf. Dietrich, *Theologie der Kirche*), several Reformed theologians throughout Europe felt the need to refute the Cardinal's arguments. The most significant works against Bellarmine were written by David Pareus of Heidelberg, William Whitaker and William Ames in England (see on the controversy between Ames and Bellarmine: Eef Dekker, "An Ecumenical Debate"), Daniel Chamier in France, Amandus Polanus in Switzerland, and Sibrandus Lubbertus in the Netherlands (on Lubbertus, see C. van der Woude, *Sibrandus Lubbertus: Leven en werken, in het bijzonder naar zijn correspondentie* PhD thesis Free University of Amsterdam (Kampen: Kok, 1963), 66-109).

<sup>131</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 163. The discussion of this first point of debate on the basis of seven biblical texts (Romans 5:19; John 4:14; Romans 5:15; Titus 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 2:21-22 and 5:5; 1 John 2:27 and 3:9) runs from pages 163-165 (two columns of dense print on each page). On page 164, Polanus notices that Bellarmine makes an affirmative conclusion in the "second figure" (*in secunda figura*), which runs against the rules of syllogistic logic.

<sup>132</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 163. For the concept of imputation, Polanus refers to Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Nicholas of Lyra, Cardinal Cajetan, and Bellarmine himself!

## *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*

Another important substantial point is that the source of regeneration is not something created that is infused in us, but the Holy Spirit as God in person<sup>133</sup> In addition, Polanus points out that Scripture speaks in two distinct ways of the love of God as the cause of salvation: first, it is the essential love of God himself which he grants to us, and this is the proper foundation of our salvation; second, it is our love of God as the effect of God's initial love, and this is not the cause but rather the effect of salvation.<sup>134</sup> In brief, we are not favorable to God by something that resides in us, but merely by God's own essential grace which he freely bestows on us in his Son and through the Holy Spirit.

In Bellarmine's formulations, we encounter the (Tridentine) Catholic idea of "faith operating through love" (*fidem per charitatem operantem*), or, as Polanus quotes from Bellarmine in accordance with the Tridentine Council:

Grace that makes favorable is not really distinguished from the habit of love. ... Grace is either in no way or merely conceptually distinguished from love" (*Gratiam gratum facientem re non distingui ab habitu charitatis. ... Gratiam à charitate, aut nullo modo, aut sola ratione distingui*).

Polanus takes great pains to refute these claims, partly by pointing to formal errors in Bellarmine's argumentation (for example, creating a "four-legged" syllogism due to a key term that has two different meanings), partly by insisting on a correct understanding of the relevant biblical texts. In this way, Polanus refutes no less than ten arguments offered by Bellarmine.<sup>135</sup>

After having defeated the claim that salvific grace is a quality infused in us, Polanus offers a second axiom that positively identifies the source of salvation:

The grace of God by which we are saved, by which we are chosen and called, by which we are justified and regenerated, is in God alone: for it is that favor and benevolence of God, by which he makes us in Christ favorable for and accepted by himself, Ephesians 1:6.

This crucial insight is denied by Bellarmine, allegedly supported by five arguments of which Polanus again gives a detailed analysis and refutation. Besides the technical diagnosis of logical fallacies committed by Bellarmine, we find Polanus accuse Bellarmine of following Aristotle more than is suitable in theology, and of playing a sophist rather than a theologian. Polanus also attempts to show that Bellarmine's position differs from normative fathers and doctors such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>136</sup>

The same opposition is directed against the Protestant theologian Andreas Osiander (1496-1552), who developed the doctrine that the believers participate in

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<sup>133</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 164.

<sup>134</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 164-165.

<sup>135</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 165-167. The discussion is interlarded with exegetical remarks on a number of texts. On page 166, we find a highly technical philological remark, when Polanus explains that a Greek verb (*ἀφέωνται*) in Luke 7:47 is not a present tense, but "a second aorist medium, in the Ionic dialect in stead of *ἀφῶνται*, from the root *ἀφίημι*." Another ironic detail of Polanus's argument is that he describes the Tridentine Council as "the little council of Trent" (*de conciliabulo Tridentino*), referring to the public decision of the protestant German princes and cities not to participate in the Council.

<sup>136</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 167-170.

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the divine nature of Christ.<sup>137</sup> In Reformed orthodox view, Osiander makes basically the same mistake as did the Roman Catholics: they assume something in the objects of God's grace, in stead of taking God's essential attribute of grace as the foundation of salvation. To be sure, the precise type of confusion in Osiander's theology differed from the misunderstanding permeating Roman Catholic thought: Osiander insufficiently distinguished between God's essential justice as an attribute that is proper to himself, and the justice he grants to us through the meritorious suffering and death of Christ.<sup>138</sup>

An important aspect of the doctrine of grace is the connection with the person and merits of Jesus Christ. He is the way by which God's essential grace comes to fallen mankind. Over against the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace as a habit (*gratia gratum faciens*), Polanus defends that only Christ makes us acceptable to God. Metaphorically, the righteousness of Christ is our bridal dress (*vestis nuptialis*).<sup>139</sup> The distinctive feature of this grace is, that God gives something good (eternal life) to sinful creatures, regardless of any possible merits of their own and in spite of much actual demerit.<sup>140</sup>

Maccovius gives a detailed ongoing ramification of the different "modes of operation" of God's grace:

- first*, there is eternal grace by which God has loved us before all times and temporal grace by which he shows us his love and brings us to salvation;
- second*, temporal grace is distinguished in "giving grace" (*gratia gratis dans*) and "given grace" (*gratia gratis data*): the former is the undeserved favor of God by which he executes in time what he decreed in eternity, the latter comprises the means of grace and the benefits of salvation;
- third*, the "given grace" in turn consists of external vocation and internal justification through the merit of Christ;
- fourth*, the internal operation of grace is either "moving" or "habitual";
- fifth*, as moving within us, grace is either "prevenient" or "subsequent" to the effect that the whole process of conversion is decisively accompanied by grace;
- sixth*, habitual grace is understood as grace taking shape in our lives either in the "ordinary" form of faith, hope and love or in the "extraordinary" form of the special spiritual gifts.

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<sup>137</sup> On Osiander, see M.J. Arntzen, *Mystieke rechtvaardigingsleer: Een bijdrage ter beoordeling van de theologie van Andreas Osiander* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), and Claus Bachmann, *Die Selbstherrlichkeit Gottes: Studien zur Theologie des Nürnberger Reformators Andreas Osiander*, Neukirchener Theologische Dissertationen und Habilitationen, vol. 7 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996).

<sup>138</sup> See Polanus, *Syntagma*, 180: "Justice is taken either as God's essential attribute, or as God's just deeds, or as the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believers, or as that which God prescribes, or as the spiritual newness of life, or as the form of God's governing properly." It is Osiander's fault, according to Polanus, that he does not recognize this distinction, and thus understands by "justice" everywhere the essential attribute of God. A brief reference to Osiander is found in Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 55, where he addresses the false opinion of Osiander that "justice which is from God" should be understood in the sense of material identity between God's essential justice and the justice of the believer.

<sup>139</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 163, 167.

<sup>140</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 219: "citra ullum meritum, non obstante demerito."

We should notice that in this exposition the practical operations of grace in our lives are constantly connected back to the eternal love of God for his elect.<sup>141</sup>

Whereas God's grace as it comes to his creatures is primarily interpreted as salvific grace, the Reformed orthodox acknowledge that there is also a more general bestowal of grace on all creatures. This common grace means that God, after the fall, continues to give life and other good things to creatures who deserve nothing than eternal punishment. Common grace is limited in its scope: it does not result in repentance and eternal life for everyone. The salvific grace is given to the elect only, and this grace lasts eternally. Interestingly, Polanus follows the medieval scholastic distinction between graciously given grace (*gratia gratis dans*) and grace making gracious (*gratia gratum faciens*) precisely to point to the difference between God's bestowal of favor to all his creatures without their being eternally saved and God's special grace that makes the elect the heirs of eternal life.<sup>142</sup>

### 7.3.4. Mercy, Patience, Clemency

The Reformed orthodox deal with the further adjacents of the divine goodness, love, and grace under different names. The most important is his mercy (*misericordia*): the attribute by which God is strongly inclined to succor those who are in misery.<sup>143</sup> Traditionally, a preliminary problem in ascribing *misericordia* to God is that it has the strong suggestion of God's being affected by the misery of others. The Reformed orthodox generally reject the option to consider mercy as an improper attribute; instead, they argue that the impulse to help the miserable does not come from outside, but from God's own essence. With an appeal to Augustine, Zanchi explains that the word *misericordia* does not mean that God's heart becomes miserable, but that the misery of his creatures goes him at heart. By this move, the suspicion of ascribing affections to God is avoided, but the reality of his mercy is saved.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 176. Note that Maccovius's mentioning of "habitual" grace does not entail the idea that grace is (partly) in man's own hand, but expresses the insight that God's graceful work of salvation really affects our lives and takes shape in it. Maccovius's affirmation of "prevenient grace" is surprising since he was engaged in debate with William Ames on the "preparation for regeneration": Ames stated that prior to regeneration there could be some "dispositions" preparing man for regeneration. Maccovius rejected this position and allowed merely for a "preparation for conversion." See A. Kuyper jr., *Johannes Maccovius*. Leiden: Donner, 1899, 339-352.

<sup>142</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 170. Cf. Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 38, who accepts the distinction, though "alio tamen sensu quam Pontifico." De Moor, *Commentarius*, 671, has a sharp distinction between "nature" and "grace," and describes "common grace" in terms of the external calling by the Gospel. According to Muller, *PRRD*, 3:572, "the modern conception of 'common grace' finds its root more in the period of Reformed orthodoxy than in the era of Calvin and his contemporaries, given that many of the orthodox theologians were willing to define the *gratia Dei* as a bounty or graciousness extending to all creation."

<sup>143</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 175.

<sup>144</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 371-374. Cf. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 675: man's misery is not the cause, but the *conditio sine qua non* of God's mercy. According to Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 486, and Polanus, *Syntagma*, 172, God's mercy should not be associated with sadness or weakness (*dolor, aegritudo*).

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An interesting qualification concerning the essential status of God's mercy is offered by Maccovius. His opponents stated that God's mercy is accidental because it rests on two conditions: first, the existence of miserable creatures; second, God's decision to have mercy on them. As divine mercy is inconceivable apart from these conditions, the opponents argue that mercy cannot be an essential attribute. Maccovius appeals to the distinction he introduced earlier (cf. section 5.4.1 above) between "absolute" and "relative" properties of God. Mercy, he says, is a "related" attribute which cannot be seen apart from creature, be it present or future or even only possibly future (here Maccovius makes the strong claim that even if a possibly miserable creature *could* exist, God would have mercy). Maccovius's opponents then attempt a different strategy: if mercy is an essential (or natural) attribute of God, it must operate constantly and indiscriminately towards all creatures. In reaction, Maccovius states that God's mercy is at once essential *and* voluntary. This is a spectacular move! While his opponents suggest that essential properties and natural (= necessary) operation are equivalent, Maccovius disentangles the bond between essentiality and necessity that was transmitted from ancient Greek philosophy. While mercy is an essential divine property, God's will is crucially involved in it.<sup>145</sup>

The doctrine of divine simplicity plays a significant role in the circumscription of God's mercy. The Reformed orthodox deny that God's mercy is caused by an external fact. God's simplicity implies that God's mercy never conflicts with other attributes such as his justice and anger. Mercy and justice are concerned with different aspects of the fallen creature: God's mercy looks at the misery in which mankind has thrown itself, God's justice deals with the offense committed against God by human sin.<sup>146</sup> Besides the differences between mercy and justice, there is also a positive connection between the two. In Ursinus's words,

The fact that God does not receive us in grace but by interposing the satisfaction by his Son for our sins does not impede his mercy towards us to be wholly gratuitous. For both the satisfaction itself and its application comes forth from him: because God both has given us his Son as Redeemer and works out by his election and by the gift of the Holy Spirit that we accept him in faith, by no other cause but his gratuitous mercy.<sup>147</sup>

Again, many Reformed orthodox distinguish between *general* and *special* mercy. On the one hand, God's mercy extends to all his creatures. On the other hand, those who seek God in repentance are the special object of his mercy: he gives extra care and love to them and sustains them in their misery. The two sorts of mercy differ not only in scope, but also in intensity: God's mercy towards all his creatures is more limited and "superficial" than his mercy towards his elect.<sup>148</sup> A remarkably

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<sup>145</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 178.

<sup>146</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 175.

<sup>147</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 486; cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 173 (with literal quotations from Ursinus).

<sup>148</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 175.

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strict view is defended by Maccovius. In response to the question how “temporal goods” are related to God’s grace and mercy, Maccovius states:

These “temporal goods” are considered either as they belong to the children of God, and thus they are effects of God’s mercy, or as they are given to strangers outside the Church, and thus they are the effect of God’s mercy no less than stolen things which someone possesses are the effect of something good. According to political right such people possess those goods, but not according to spiritual right. For they are not heirs, but merely usurpators, and it would be better for them not to have any goods at all. For in the ultimate judgment they will have a very hard case for these things.<sup>149</sup>

Ursinus lists seven “degrees” in which God’s mercy is manifested:<sup>150</sup>

- first*, God has no delight in the perdition of anyone, but in the salvation of all;
- second*, God differentiates, mitigates and alleviates punishment, inviting all to conversion by his tolerance;
- third*, God devotes himself to relieve our infirmity by internal and external auxiliaries such as his Spirit, Word, oaths, sacraments, and miracles;
- fourth*, God embraces his elect with a singular love in order to liberate them perpetually from sin and all evil, and to console them in affliction;
- fifth*, God willed to deliver his only-begotten Son to incarnation and death for our liberation;
- sixth*, God promises and works out all these things out of his gratuitous goodness;
- seventh*, he does so in regard to sinners who are not only unworthy, but even are his enemies.

Two questions concerning God’s mercy are the subject of polemical sections against the Roman Catholic theology. The first is the question, whether someone can receive God’s mercy during and after a stay in the Purgatory. The Reformed orthodox answer is negative: God’s mercy is given only during the life on earth; after death there is only the final judgment according to previous belief or unbelief, no further space for mercy.<sup>151</sup> Secondly, some Roman Catholics stated that God’s mercy can be merited by good works. The Reformed orthodox squarely deny this: mercy and merit are contradictory terms.<sup>152</sup>

Related, but slightly different, terms are patience and clemency. Whereas God’s mercy indicates a helping attitude towards miserable creatures, God’s virtues of patience and clemency regard the mode of his punishment: God can delay or temper the just punishment of sinners. The term “patience” (*patientia*) causes some troubles, as it has the connotation of divine passion, which is generally rejected.

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<sup>149</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 181.

<sup>150</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 485-486.

<sup>151</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 176; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 379-393.

<sup>152</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 176-178. As Polanus’s refutation of Bellarmine’s arguments in this connection makes clear, the questions of the Purgatory and of the combination of mercy and merit are interrelated.

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Polanus explains that, indeed, the term is less suitable, but that the virtue signified by it belongs properly to God.<sup>153</sup>

In some expositions, the attribute of patience comprises both the delay and the temperance of punishment.<sup>154</sup> Other authors identify patience with delay, and clemency with temperance. In both cases, God withholds the execution of his judgment in the fullest extent.

Patience and clemency do not conflict with God's justice; they do not entail that God's justice is not satisfied. Jesus Christ has borne the full anger of God, so that God can wait to exert his punishment on the unbelievers.<sup>155</sup>

### 7.3.5. Justice

The attribute of justice (*iustitia Dei*) covers a variety of aspects. First, it can be distinguished between God's justice as an essential property, justice as a quality of God's works<sup>156</sup>, God's justice as it was ultimately expressed in Jesus Christ, and justice as the moral quality of human deeds in obedience to God's commands. By giving this basic distinction, Polanus tries to differentiate in the biblical language of justice, and to avoid the misunderstanding of Andreas Osiander, who interpreted the justification of the believers as the infusion of God's essential justice into them (see *Excursus 6* above).<sup>157</sup>

In the doctrine of God, God's essential justice is of course the most relevant part of the biblical testimony to be discussed. Justice clearly is an attribute belonging to God's will.<sup>158</sup> This attribute divides into universal and particular justice (*iustitia universalis – particularis*). God's universal justice refers to God's own being: in all respects, God is according to what he "ought" to be; he fulfils the norm of righteousness.<sup>159</sup> This description comes close to the attribute of holiness (to be discussed in the next section, 7.3.6). From this universal righteousness follow God's benignity, beneficence, constancy and fidelity.<sup>160</sup> The particular justice of God indicates how God deals with different creatures. It can be distinguished into the disposing and the distributing activity of justice (*iustitia disponens – distribuens*).<sup>161</sup> The *iustitia disponens* is God's righteous governance of the world. For the *iustitia*

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<sup>153</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 179.

<sup>154</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 179.

<sup>155</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 180.

<sup>156</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 71, adds that God is just in his will, his Word, and his works.

<sup>157</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 181.

<sup>158</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 202f: *voluntas qua iuste vult, vel qua ad suum cuique tribuendum est propensus*. In view of the discussion on God's punitive justice, mentioned below, one should be cautious in defining God's justice in terms of either his nature or his will.

<sup>159</sup> Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 91: *Deus sine ulla iniquitate est omne quod est*. Rijssen's formulation is an example of a consequent application of the doctrine of simplicity to the other attributes. Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 482, describes God's essential justice as his accordance with his own law.

<sup>160</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 212. Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 203, mentions integrity as one of the aspects of this universal justice.

<sup>161</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 181; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 72. Turretini, *Institutio*, 212, points to the fact that the third type of justice known from the Aristotelian tradition, commutative justice (*iustitia commutativa*), does not apply to God: there can be no exchange of rights and duties between God and his creatures on the basis of equality.

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*distribuens*, several of the Reformed orthodox use the Aristotelian *dictum* “*ius suum cuique tribuit*”: God gives to everything its own right.<sup>162</sup> The assumption is, that everyone deserves his own legitimate portion, and that God’s justice distributes this to everyone. As a consequence, God’s justice rewards the good and punishes the bad.

Remarkably, however, several authors make significant qualifications to Aristotle’s definitions. De Moor notes that *iustitia universalis* and *iustitia commutativa* do not apply to God. Strictly speaking with regard to the *iustitia distributiva*, the *ius suum cuique tribuere* assumes a proportion between work and reward. De Moor denies the occurrence of “geometrical proportion” in God’s distribution of rewards and punishments.<sup>163</sup> Mastricht affirms this proportion concerning sin and its punishment, but denies it between good work and reward: God’s reward of good works done by the believers always exceeds the goodness of these works.<sup>164</sup> Maccovius makes a spiritually and pastorally important point when he states that the relation between sin and punishment, good work and reward, is irreversible: one can never conclude from reward or punishment to good work or sin.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, the *ius suum cuique tribuere* might suggest that there is a pre-established order of justice to which God is subject. Reformed orthodox authors who deal explicitly with this issue, deny that God is subject to any given order, and that God’s will itself is the fundamental rule of justice.<sup>166</sup> To complicate the matter, Turretini gives a distinction concerning the question whether God’s will is the rule of justice. Turretini states that intrinsically, as regards God’s own being, it is not God’s will, but his goodness and holiness that is the rule of justice. Otherwise, if God’s will were the ultimate rule, this could lead to blasphemous arbitrariness in God. According to Turretini, one can speak of a duty to which God is obliged. On the other hand, extrinsically, for us as creatures, it is indeed God’s will that is the rule of justice: if God wills us to do something, this is by definition just.<sup>167</sup> Pictet emphasizes the sovereignty of God in his justice, by stating that God is not a private person, but the Judge of the entire world.<sup>168</sup>

The Reformed orthodox are eager to maintain that there is no conflict between God’s justice and his mercy. From the history of salvation it is argued that justice and mercy go together in Jesus Christ. Christ both bore God’s punishment against men’s transgression of God’s law and positively fulfilled all God’s justice. God’s demanding and punishing justice so being fully satisfied in Jesus Christ, God shows his mercy towards all who belief in Christ. This is what Polanus calls the justice of grace (*iustitia gratiae*). In addition, the justice of grace contains the

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<sup>162</sup> The adherence to Aristotle’s interpretation of justice is explicitly rejected by Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 39; he gives a tripartite distinction of God’s justice: *iustitia divina* – *iustitia dominica* – *iustitia iudiciaria*. Cf. also Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 97.

<sup>163</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 675, 679.

<sup>164</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 194, 196.

<sup>165</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 174.

<sup>166</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 181; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 70; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 483: “Deus nulli obligatus est.”

<sup>167</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 210-212. Cf. Altting, *Loci communes*, 17, and *Problemata*, 35, who states that God’s nature is the rule of justice.

<sup>168</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 222.

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remuneration of the good works done by the believers. There is also a justice of anger (*iustitia irae*), which has two aspects: first, it is a disciplinary exercise of justice (*iustitia castigans*) aiming at correction; second, it is a punitive exercise of justice (*iustitia vindicans*) to avenge the evil of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Mastricht asserts that the avenging justice of God is an essential property.<sup>169</sup>

### *Excursus 7. Debate on God's Punitive Justice*

Around the "distributive" justice of God, especially his punitive justice, arose one of the major controversies *within* Reformed theology of the seventeenth century (cf. also section 7.3.7 below on God's anger). Beyond the specific point of dispute, the different approaches to God's justice reveal differences in the overall estimation of the structuring insights in the doctrine of God as well. For this reason, the debate over "punitive" or "vindicative" justice deserves more detailed attention.<sup>170</sup>

Whereas most debates are held with external opponents, here proponents of Reformed Orthodoxy stand over against each other on fundamental issues. To be sure, the controversy was in part occasioned by external discussion with the Arminians and Socinians, who argued that God's punitive justice is not an essential property, but merely a free and accidental exercise of his will. The point of this controversy lies in their denial of the necessity of satisfaction and atonement by the death of Jesus Christ. In response to this heterodox view, however, the Reformed differed among themselves.

Early in Reformed orthodoxy, we see Jerome Zanchi argue for the essential character of God's hatred against sin.<sup>171</sup> This strict line of thought is maintained in the later debate by, among others, Piscator, Wendelin and Pictet. Other theologians, notably the British divines Twisse and Rutherford, maintained the possibility that God, seen from his "absolute power," could forgive sins without satisfaction. They followed the Scotist critique of the Anselmic theory of atonement, a critique already present in Calvin, when he states that there is no absolute necessity to Christ's person and work of atonement, but that it rests only on a heavenly decree on which man's salvation depends.<sup>172</sup> As William Twisse argues, there is no necessity on God's part that sin be forgiven or that sin be forgiven in a particular way. There is no utter determination of God's will toward any particular secondary object, namely toward a particular solution to the problem of sin. God can decide not to forgive sin anyway, or decide to forgive it without receiving satisfaction. Twisse's statement should be understood in the "divided sense" (*in sensu diviso*): God punishes sin, and it is possible that God does not punish sin; not in the "composite sense" (*in sensu composito*): it is possible that God at once punishes and not punishes sin. Twisse's motive is to maintain that there is no *formal* obligation or necessity urging God to punish sin or to forgive it only after receiving satisfaction; there is nothing in sin itself that creates such a necessity.

The same problem is discussed at length by Maccovius in the chapter of his *Loci communes* on the punishing justice of God. He opposes the doctrine of the Socinians, who hold that the punishment of sins is not a necessary effect of God's nature, but

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<sup>169</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 475; also Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 84-85; Turretini, *Institutio*, 217; De Moor, *Commentarius*, 683.

<sup>170</sup> For the context and background of the debate, I draw on Muller, *PRRD*, 3:490-496.

<sup>171</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 405-408, 417-418. Cf. section 7.3.7 below.

<sup>172</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xii.1.

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an arbitrary decision of his will. Maccovius maintains that God's hatred of sin is essential, although God does not continuously produce acts of hatred and punishment. The fundamental property behind the punishing justice of God is his holiness or purity. God punishes sin not because of his good-pleasure, but out of his righteousness. The fact that God punishes man's sins in Jesus Christ is not against his justice: whereas the punishment as such is necessary in virtue of God's holy nature, substituting Christ for us belongs to God's freedom of execution.<sup>173</sup>

Second, Maccovius discusses the opinion of his contemporary, the British Reformed theologian William Twisse.<sup>174</sup> Twisse appeals to God's omnipotence to argue that, absolutely spoken, God is not obliged to punish sin. In his view, God loses his freedom if he cannot but hate evil. Moreover, Twisse refers to Duns Scotus, who had argued that nothing in the object of God's will (i.e. evil things) can prevent God from being able to will the contrary; and, if God can will either of two opposites, he can *justly* will either of the two, so that his justice does not oblige him to decide for one of both.<sup>175</sup> In response, Maccovius concedes that there is no compulsory cause in the object, that forces God to punishment; but there is a necessity in God's nature, which does not damage God's external freedom. Once God has decreed to allow sin to enter into his creation, it is necessary that he hates and punishes it. This does not make sin or punishment necessary facts in themselves.<sup>176</sup>

In 1653, John Owen, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, published a *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, intended to refute Twisse's and Rutherford's views and to provide an alternative account of God's punitive justice.<sup>177</sup> In his Preface, Owen already notices that the subject of the disputation is

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<sup>173</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 166-171. On page 169, Maccovius quotes a distinction from political theory between personal and real guilt which seems to anticipate the distinction between personal and non-personal relations made by Vincent Brümmer (see section 18.1 below). As Maccovius says, a personal offence can be condoned without punishment or compensation, but a real guilt has to be satisfied (this also holds for situations in which a third party, e.g. one's wife or children, is involved). Remarkably, on page 170 Maccovius does not recur to the real guilt requiring compensation, but argues directly from God's personal value to the indispensable requirement of punishing sin.

<sup>174</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 171-175. In this context, Maccovius also briefly mentions Conradus Vorstius, who was suspected of Socinian sympathies. This reference suggests that Maccovius saw Twisse approach the heterodox position of Vorstius. On Twisse's exceptional position, especially concerning the necessity of satisfaction, see also Turretini, *Institutio*, 214-217.

<sup>175</sup> We can trace in Twisse's position the development from the Scotist emphasis on freedom and contingency to the more extreme Ockhamist consequences of a principal arbitrariness in God's judgment of good and evil. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 689, mentions Twisse together with John Calvin as proponents of the view that the necessity of punishment draws on God's decree only, and could be otherwise in view of God's *potentia absoluta* (the inclusion of Calvin is remarkable here, as he elsewhere rejected the *potentia absoluta – ordinata* distinction; but cf. the reference to *Institutes*, II.xii.1 given in footnote 172 above).

<sup>176</sup> As Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 99, states it: there is a necessary *nexus* between sin and punishment.

<sup>177</sup> Owen, *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *Works* vol. 10, 481-624. This is a fairly literal translation of the Latin original, leaving intact the technical scholastic language and mode of argumentation.

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intimately connected with many, the most important articles of the Christian doctrine, concerning the attributes, the satisfaction of Christ, and the nature of sin, and of our obedience, and that it strikes its roots deep through almost the whole of theology.<sup>178</sup>

Owen constantly approaches his subject from what is in his view decisive: the death of Christ as satisfaction for our sins.<sup>179</sup> And he complains about the fact that theological writings, catechetical, dogmatical, exegetical, casuistical, and polemical, have increased to such a mass that the "world can hardly contain the books that have been written";

while on the other hand, he asks,

how sparingly, for instance, yea, how obscurely, how confusedly, is the whole economy of the Spirit towards believers ... described by divines in general! or rather, by the most, is not it altogether neglected? In their catechisms, common-place books, public and private theses, systems, compends, etc.; ..., concerning the indwelling, sealing testimony, unction, and consolation of the Spirit, - Good God! ... there is almost a total silence; and with regard to union and communion with Christ, and with his Father and our Father, and some other doctrines respecting his person, as the husband and head of the church, the same observation holds good.<sup>180</sup>

Entering into the substantial discussion, Owen acknowledges that all people consent in ascribing justice as an essential property to the Deity. In contrast to Aristotle's division of justice into universal, and particular, distributive and commutative,<sup>181</sup> Owen develops his own definitions, "more suited to our purpose." Being fundamental to the subsequent discussion, these definitions are given in full:

I say, then, that the justice of God may be considered in a *twofold manner*: ...

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<sup>178</sup> Owen, "Preface," *Works* vol. 10, 487.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Owen, *Dissertation*, *Works* vol. 10, 560

<sup>180</sup> Owen, "Preface," *Works* vol. 10, 490-491. Owen continues (page 492) his complaint: "For while they are warmly employed in disputing whether theology be an art or a science, and whether it be a speculative or practical art or science; and while they attempt to measure it exactly by those rules, laws, and methods which human reason has devised for other sciences, thus endeavouring to render it more plain and clear, - they find themselves, to the grief and sorrow of many candidates for the truth, entangled in inextricable difficulties, and left in possession only of a human system of doctrines, having little or no connection at all with true theology." Here, we find a fundamental disagreement within Reformed theology over the scientific status and the proper approach of theology, and its relation to piety. Precisely starting at the opposite point, Gisbertus Voetius complained about "practical authors" expositing in great detail the adventures and experiences of faith without providing a sound analysis of the fundamental concepts. See Voetius, *Disp. sel.* II, xxxiii, p. 496-511 (translation and commentary on this disputation is given by C.A. de Niet and C.J.J. Clements in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *De scholastieke Voetius: Een luisteroefening aan de hand van Voetius' Disputationes Selectae* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995), 116-157).

<sup>181</sup> Cf. the start of section 7.3.5 above.

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First, The justice of God, *absolutely* considered, is the universal *rectitude and perfection* of the divine nature; for such is the divine nature antecedent to all acts of his will and suppositions of objects towards it might operate. ...

Secondly, It is to be viewed with respect to its *egress and exercise*. And thus, in the order of nature, it is considered as consequent, or at least as concomitant, to some acts of the divine will, assigning or appointing to it a proper object. Hence, that rectitude, which in itself is an absolute property of the divine nature, is considered as a relative and hypothetical attribute, and has a certain habitude [= relation] to its proper objects.

That is to say, this rectitude, or universal justice, has certain egresses towards objects out of itself, in consequence of the divine will, and in a manner agreeable to the rule of his supreme right and wisdom ... And these egresses are twofold: -

1. They are *absolute* and perfectly free, - namely, in *words*.

2. They are *necessary*, - namely in *actions*. ...

1. For the first, it has *absolute egresses in words* (constituting, and, as it were, creating an object to itself); as, for instance, in words of legislation, and then it is called *equity*; or in words of declaration and narration, and is then called *truth*. ...

2. There are respective egresses of this justice in *deeds*, and according to the distinctions above mentioned; - that is to say, it is exercised either in the government of all things according to what is due to them by the counsel and will of God, or in judgments rewarding or punishing, according to the rule of his right and wisdom .... In respect of these [= the latter, the "egresses of judgment"], I call the egresses of the divine justice *necessary*, and such that they could not possibly be otherwise; ... and this is the same as saying that vindicatory justice is so *natural* to God, that, sin being supposed, he cannot, according to the rule of his right, wisdom and truth, but punish it. But antecedent to this whole exercise of the divine justice, I suppose a natural right, which indispensably requires the dependence and moral subjection of the creature, in God, all the egresses of whose justice, in words, contain an arrest of judgment till farther trial, in respect of the object.<sup>182</sup>

Owen does not assume different kinds of divine justice, but conceives of one universal justice or rectitude of God, which is exercised on different objects. Moreover, he points out that God does not exert his justice as a *private* person, but as a *ruler and judge*.<sup>183</sup> After these remarks, he formulates the state of the question as follows:

Whether it be natural to God, or an essential attribute of the divine nature, - that is to say, such that, the existence of sin being admitted, God must necessarily exercise it, because it supposes in him a

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<sup>182</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 498-500.

<sup>183</sup> The importance of this insight becomes evident when Owen refutes the Socinian argument, that God can to withhold his punitive justice because it is equal to his universal dominion. Owen's answer is that the exercise of justice is part of God's governing and judging office, not of an absolute dominion; see Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 565.

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constant and immutable will to punish sin, so that while he acts consistently with his nature he cannot do otherwise than punish and avenge it, - or whether it be a free act of the divine will, which he may exercise at pleasure?<sup>184</sup>

Owen's fundamental concern in maintaining the necessity of God's punitive justice is that it provides a strong cause for the death of Christ in satisfaction of our sins. The Socinians, as one group of his opponents, openly deny this necessity of satisfaction consequent on their denial of the necessity of punitive justice. Because of the Socinian danger, Owen is worried about Reformed thinkers such as Rutherford, who defend the same systematical position, though with different motives.<sup>185</sup>

Owen introduces a further series of distinctions regarding the attributes of God:

1. There are some attributes of Deity which, in order to their exercise, require no determined object antecedent to their egress; of this kind are *wisdom* and *power*. These attributes, at least as to their first exercise, must be entirely free, and dependent on the mere good pleasure of God only; so that antecedent to their acting, the divine will is so indifferent as to every exercise of them, on objects without himself, that he might even will the opposite. ... There are, again, some attributes which can in no wise have an egress or be exercised without an object predetermined, and, as it were, by some circumstances prepared for them. Among these is punitive justice, for the exercise of which there would be no ground but upon the supposition of the existence of a rational being and its having sinned; but these being supposed, this justice must necessarily act according to its own rule.

2. But that rule is not any free act of the divine will, but a *supreme, intrinsic, natural* right of Deity, conjoined with wisdom, to which the entire exercise of this justice ought to be reduced. ... God does not punish to the utmost *extent of his power*, but so far as is *just*; and all modes and degrees of punishment are determined by the standard of the divine right and wisdom. ...

3. But the existence of a rational creature ... being supposed, the first egress of this justice is in the constitution of a penal law .... For if such a law were not made necessarily, it might be possible that God should lose his natural right and dominion over his creatures, and thus he would not be God; or, that right being established, that the creature might not be subject to him, which implies a contradiction .... Hence arises a *secondary right of punishing*, which extends to every amplification of that penal law, in whatever manner made. But it has a second egress, in the infliction of punishment.

4. And here it is to be remarked, that this justice necessarily respects *punishment in general*, as including in it the nature of punishment, and ordaining such a vindication of the divine honour as God can acquiesce in: not the *time* or *degrees*, or such like circumstances of punishment ....

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<sup>184</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 505.

<sup>185</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 507-508.

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5. But, again, though we determine the *egresses of this justice* to be necessary, we do not deny that God exercises it freely; for that necessity does not exclude a *concomitant liberty*, but only an *antece-dent indifference*. This only we deny, - namely, that supposing a sinful creature, the will of God can be indifferent (by virtue of the punitive justice inherent in it) to inflict or not inflict punishment upon that creature, or to the volition of punishment or its opposite.<sup>186</sup>

In fact, we have Owen's position fully developed here; the remainder of the *Dissertation* gives additional evidence and argumentation in confrontation with Socinian and Reformed opponents. It is important to notice that, according to Owen, God can be called

both a necessary and free agent, - necessary in respect of all his actions internally, or in respect of the persons of the Godhead towards one another. ... But in respect of the acts of the divine will which have their operations and effects upon external objects, he is an agent absolutely free .... But of these acts there are two kinds; for some are absolute, and admit no respect to any antecedent condition. Of this kind is his purpose of creating the world, an in it rational creatures, properly adapted to know and obey the Creator, Benefactor, and Lord of all. ... But this decree of creating being supposed, the divine will undergoes a double necessity ...: for in respect of the event, it is necessary, from the immutability of God, that the world should be created; and in respect of the manner of doing it, that it should be done omnipotently, because God is essentially omnipotent .... There is another kind of the acts of the divine will which could have no possible existence but upon a condition supposed. This kind contains the *egresses* and exercise of those attributes which could not be exercised but upon a supposition of other antecedent acts, of which we have treated before. Of this kind are all the acts of the divine in which justice, mercy, etc., exert their energy.<sup>187</sup>

Owen then makes a remarkable distinction between God's justice and God's mercy; a distinction that bears considerable consequences in the discussion with Twisse and Rutherford:

But these attributes of the divine nature are either for the purpose of preserving or continuing to God what belongs to him of right, ... or for bestowing on his creatures some farther good. Of the former kind is *vindictory justice*; which, as it cannot be exercised but upon the supposition of the existence of a rational being and of its sin, so, these being supposed, the supreme right and dominion of the Deity could not be preserved entire unless it were exercised. Of the latter kind is *sparing mercy*, by which God bestows an undeserved good on miserable creatures; for, setting aside the consideration of their misery, this attribute cannot be exercised, but that being supposed, if he be inclined to bestow any undeserved good on

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<sup>186</sup> Owen, *Dissertation*, Works vol. 10, 508-510.

<sup>187</sup> Owen, *Dissertation*, Works vol. 10, 510-511.

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creatures wretched through their own transgression, he may exercise this mercy if he will.

In brief, God is bound by his essential justice to punish sin, but he is free to show his mercy. Owen hastens to add that the “necessity” involved in punitive justice is not an absolute, but a conditional necessity.<sup>188</sup>

The general framework concerning God’s justice thus being constructed, Owen proceeds with a penetrating analysis of sin as the proper object of God’s anger and punishment. From Scripture it is evident, Owen argues, that God cannot but hate sin. This is not denied even by Twisse and Rutherford. Now Owen continues by claiming that sin can never be something else but sin; therefore, God must immutably detest it. The persistent character of sin requires the necessity of punishment.<sup>189</sup> Appealing to the distinction between justice and mercy, Owen states that, while nothing obliges God to bestow undeserved goodness on his creatures,

It is absolutely necessary that God should preserve his glory entire to all eternity; but sin being supposed, without the infliction of the punishment due to it he cannot preserve his glory free from violation: therefore, it is necessary that he should punish it.

This necessity arises from justice itself, but also from God’s holiness and dominion, of which God cannot resign. Moreover, Owen claims the necessity of punishment as providing the “sufficient and necessary cause of the death of Christ.”<sup>190</sup>

In Owen’s analysis of sin, he makes it clear that sin is not merely an injury or a debt, but a guilt. To understand sin as injury or hurt is to think in terms of private relations; but God acts as a judge.<sup>191</sup> The interpretation of sin as a debt was offered by Socinus:

That God is our creditor, that our sins are debts which we have contracted with him, but that every one may yield up his right, and more especially God, who is the supreme Lord of all, and extolled in the Scriptures for his liberality and goodness.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 511-512. In a later context (page 562), Owen even states that “justice is attributed to God *properly* and by way of habit, mercy only *analogically* and by way of affection.” The evidence adduced by Owen for his view of God’s natural justice and its “egresses” comes from Scripture (pages 512-517), the universal consent of mankind, including heathens (pages 517-524), the nature of sacrifices, both in Scripture and in pagan religion (pages 525-541; besides examples from diverse pagan peoples, he discusses at length the case of Jephtha’s daughter), God’s work of providence (pages 541-546), and the ultimate revelation of God’s glory in Jesus Christ (pages 546-549).

<sup>189</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 549-554.

<sup>190</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 554-556.

<sup>191</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 588: “The forgiveness of man only respects the *hurt*; the forgiveness of God respects the *guilt*. Man pardons sins so far as any particular injury hath been done himself; God pardons sin as the good of the universe is injured. Secondly, Neither is it in the power of every man to let sins pass unpunished, yea, of none absolutely to whom the right of punishing is competent; for although a *private person* may recede from his right, which for the most part is of charity, yet it is by no means allowed to a *public person* to renounce his right, which is a right of government, especially if that renunciation should in any way turn out to the hurt of the public.”

<sup>192</sup>The quotation from Socinus is given in Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 574.

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Owen shows that the (financial) debt-metaphor is insufficient to account for the full weight of sin: sin is to be understood in legal, moral, and relational categories.<sup>193</sup>

After the confrontation with the Socinians, Owen proceeds to the debate within Reformed theology, raised by William Twisse and Samuel Rutherford.<sup>194</sup> Owen notices that, against Arminius and the Socinians, he has common ground with Twisse in the insight “that punitory or sin-avenging justice is natural to God, or that it is an essential attribute of the divine nature.” But, Owen asks, if the

learned gentleman, then, grants that an immutably constant will of punishing every sin is natural to God: how, then, is it possible that he should not punish it? for who hath opposed his will?

Owen’s examination of Twisse’s arguments, though in large part determined by his positive views exposed above, reveals important structural insights in the doctrine of God.

Twisse’s first argument runs like this:

If God cannot forgive sins without a satisfaction, it is either because he cannot on account of his justice, or because he cannot by his power; but neither of these can be affirmed.

Owen’s first remark is a rejection of the differentiation of God’s attributes by Twisse:

what God cannot do in respect of one attribute, he can do in respect of none; or, in other words, that which cannot be done because of any one essential property, cannot be done because of them all.

This statement reflects a very strong understanding of divine simplicity. Owen realizes that, in free acts of God’s will, there is no necessity of God’s doing or not doing something. But this is not relevant to the debated question: “But the objects presented to any attribute of the divine nature admit not of various respects, but are in their own kind absolutely necessary.”<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, Twisse had argued that there is no contradiction in the “formal terms” of sin being not-punished. Against this, Owen maintains that the “non-punishment of sin implies a contradiction, - not, indeed, formally and in the terms, but virtually and eminently in respect of the thing itself,” which he explains by stating that the relationship between God as Lord and Creator and man as

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<sup>193</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 567: “What is purely a debt may be forgiven; for that only takes place in those things which are of an indifferent right, the prosecution of which neither nature nor justice obliges. There is also a debt, though perhaps improperly so called, the right of which it is unlawful to renounce; but our sins, in respect to God, are not debts only nor properly, but metaphorically so called.” In a brief concluding statement (page 619), Owen states that “Sin opposes the divine nature and existence.” It is remarkable that he does not consider the possibility that sin precisely opposes God’s *will*; an option that might agree with the emphasis found with Twisse and Rutherford on God’s will in punishing sin.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:490-496. The discussion is rather subtle and intricate. It could be argued that there is a common ground between Twisse and Owen, since both maintain the essential character of God’s justice as a “basic” property, and both allow for a serious kind of freedom in God’s exercising his justice toward sin. It seems that Samuel Rutherford went a step beyond Twisse, by neglecting the foundation of God’s free exercise of justice in his essential justice.

<sup>195</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 586-587.

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dependent creature would be violated by non-punishment of sin, and that it is impossible (for God) to hate sin and at the same time not to punish it.<sup>196</sup> In support of his first argument, Twisse had also quoted Duns Scotus:

The divine will is not so inclined towards any secondary object by any thing in itself that can oppose its being justly inclined towards its opposite in the same manner, as without contradiction it may will its opposite; otherwise, it may will absolutely and not justly, which is inconsistent with divine perfection.<sup>197</sup>

Owen opposes on two grounds, both extremely significant for the whole doctrine of God. The first point of dissent is that Owen refuses to argue from God's will alone, but insists on starting from God's nature: "We maintain that God from his nature cannot do this [= not-punishing sin], and, therefore, that he cannot either by his power or his justice." This sentence repeats Owen's strong view of simplicity.

The second issue is the relation between God's attributes (i.e., will and justice) and its objects. To the statement from Scotus, Owen answers:

The divine will may incline to things opposite, in respect of the egresses of all those attributes which constitute and create objects to themselves, but not in respect of those attributes which have no egress towards their objects but upon a condition supposed. As, for instance: God may justly speak or not speak with man; but it being supposed that he wills to speak, the divine will cannot be indifferent whether he speak truth or not.<sup>198</sup>

We have to recall here Owen's earlier remarks on the two kinds of divine acts: some acts, like creating the world and creating free rational creatures in it, are entirely free because they constitute their own objects; other acts, like exerting justice or showing mercy, are not in this way free, because they are conditional on previous acts and events: justice deals with righteousness and transgression, mercy deals with misery. The previous constitution of the objects determines the operations of God's will on them. The remarkable thing of this position is, that while in general the Reformed tradition tends to emphasize the role of God's will and freedom in the "relational" attributes, Owen restricts this freedom precisely in the most concrete relational attributes.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 587. A similar rejection of "formal" terminology in favour of an "eminent" and "virtual" explanation is found on page 614: "It hath been clearly proved already that the supposition of pardon of sin, without an intervening satisfaction, implies a contradiction, though not in the terms, in the very thing itself." As Muller, *PRRD*, 3:490-496, points out, the respective usage of "formal" and "virtual or eminent" reflects the Scotistic resp. Thomistic background of thought. This is confirmed by the different positions concerning God's simplicity: Owen follows Thomas Aquinas in a strong denial of any difference in God, while Twisse teaches a "formal distinction" between the attributes. It seems that the debate over God's avenging justice is the place where the difference between Scotism and Thomism has the most far reaching doctrinal consequences.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted via Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 588. Note that in comparison to Twisse's twofold argument (God's power *and* justice), Scotus wisely limits his statement to God's justice: the possibility of the opposite is included in God's *justly* willing to punish or not. Note, also, that Scotus is consistent in understanding justice as an attribute of God's will, which excludes that it operates "automatically" or "absolutely," without alternatives.

<sup>198</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 588-589.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. also Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 610: the necessity of punishing sins "arises not

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Twisse's second argument runs as follows: "If God cannot let sin pass unpunished, then he must punish it from an absolute necessity; but this no one can maintain consistently with reason." In response to this contention, Owen invokes the distinction between absolute and hypothetical or conditional necessity. The "necessity arising from a supposed condition" does indeed exclude an "antecedent indifference", but does not deprive "the agent of a concomitant liberty."<sup>200</sup> Owen anticipates an objection from his readers:

"But that necessity," you will say, "of what kind soever it be, flows from the nature of God, not his will or decree; but all necessity of nature seems to be absolute." I acknowledge, indeed, that all necessity of nature, considered in the first act and thing signified, is absolute in its kind; but in the second act, and in its exercise, it is not so.

Using the terms "first act" and "second act" from Aristotle's logic, Owen's answer repeats the fundamental duality between God's essence or nature and his "egress" and "exercise" towards the world.<sup>201</sup> While his opponent argues that, if God punishes sin from necessity, he must like a "consuming fire" burn every sinner at full power, Owen states that "although God be 'a consuming fire,' he is an intellectual one."<sup>202</sup> This qualification means that God does not act blindly, but with conscious consideration and decision.

The third argument offered by Twisse is a precarious one: "God can inflict a milder punishment than sin deserves; therefore, he can by his absolute power suspend the punishment altogether." Note that Twisse formulates from the standpoint of God's absolute power (*potentia absoluta*); he does not suggest that this possibility is or will be actualized. The force of the argument rests on the supposition that God's punishment of sin can be seen as a quantitative continuum, which can by gradual diminution be reduced to zero.

Owen's reaction precisely denies this quantitative explanation of sin-punishment: in regard to disobedience to God's natural dominion, punishment cannot "admit of degrees, either milder or more severe." Owen allows, however, for gradual and temporal differences in God's "manifestation of his glory." Moreover,

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from a decree, but from things themselves particularly constituted." And on page 611: "There are certain attributes of the Deity which have no egress but towards certain objects particularly modified, for they do not constitute or create objects to themselves, as other divine attributes do; but these objects being once constituted by a free act of the divine will, they must necessarily, - for such is their nature and manner, - be exercised."

<sup>200</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 589.

<sup>201</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 589.

<sup>202</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 590. On pages 603-604, the terminology of "consuming fire" reoccurs in Owen's review of Johannes Piscator's discussion with Vorstius. It seems that Piscator assumed a "natural necessity" of God's punishing sin in analogy of fire consuming combustible objects. To this understanding, Owen reacts with a statement (page 605) that implies at once the affirmation of God's will as decisive constituent principle of reality and the denial of the "principle of plenitude": "I say, then, God punishes according to what is due to sin by the rule of his right, not to what extent he is able. As, for instance: God does not use his omnipotence from an absolute necessity of nature; but supposing that he wills to do any work without himself, he cannot act but omnipotently. Neither, however, doth it hence follow that God acts to the utmost extent of his power, for he might have created more worlds."

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he repeats his statement that the relation between sin and punishment is not equal to the relation between merit and reward: God may give reward beyond merit, but will not punish below the guilt of sin.<sup>203</sup>

Another important point in the discussion is the “infliction of punishment on an innocent person”: is that consistent with God’s justice? Twisse argued that God’s punishing our sins on Christ who was innocent, shows that there is no necessary connection between sin and punishment: God may decide to punish an innocent man. Owen’s reply comes from the deeply christological roots of his theology:

God may inflict the punishment due to one on another, after, - in consequence of his own right and the consent of the other, - he hath laid the sins upon that other on account of which he inflicts the punishment. He might punish the elect either in their own persons, or in their surety standing in their room and stead; and when he is punished, they also are punished: for in this point of view the federal head and those represented by him are not considered as distinct, but as one; for although they are not one in respect of personal unity, they are, however, one, - that is, one body in mystical union, yea, *one mystical Christ*; - namely, the surety is the head, those represented by him the members; and when the head is punished, the members also are punished. Nor could even he himself be called a surety absolutely innocent: for although he was properly and personally innocent, he was imputatively and substitively guilty; for “God made him to be sin for us;” He “laid on him the iniquity of us all.”<sup>204</sup>

God justly punished Christ in our place for two reasons: first, because Christ is our “surety” and “federal head” who represents us “in court”; second, this representation involves the real transmission of our guilt on Christ, so that he can no longer absolutely be called “innocent.”

The final pages of Owen’s *Dissertation* contain dense sentences reflecting the crucial insight developed earlier in the treatise. In order to sense what is at stake for Owen, it is useful to conclude our examination of the debate with a lengthy quotation from these final pages:

That justice is not a free act of the divine will, which God may use or renounce at pleasure; nor is sin only a debt of ours, which, as we were unable to pay, he might forgive by only freely receding from his right: for what reason, then, could be assigned why the Father of mercies would so severely punish his most holy Son on our account, that he might, according to justice, deliver us from our sins, when, without any difficulty, by one act of his will, and that too a most free and holy act, he could have delivered both himself and us wretched sinners from this evil? But it [= justice] exists in God in the manner of a habit, natural to the divine essence itself, perpetually and immutably inherent in it, which, from his very nature, he must necessarily exercise in every work that respecteth the proper object of his justice; for sin is that ineffable evil which would overturn God’s whole right over his creatures unless it were

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<sup>203</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 592-593.

<sup>204</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 598. On pages 608-610, the issue recurs in Owen’s debate with Samuel Rutherford.

punished. As, then, the perfection of divine justice is infinite, and such as God cannot by any means relax, it is of the last importance to sinners seriously and deeply to bethink themselves how they are to stand before him.<sup>205</sup>

### 7.3.6. Holiness

Franciscus Gomarus calls God's holiness<sup>206</sup> the center of the positive (communicable) attributes.<sup>207</sup> Accordingly, J.H. Heidegger considers God's holiness, together with his justice and goodness, as the norm of his will. Whereas God's will is the ultimate rule for created beings, God's holiness means that God is his own law, and that he is upright in his words and deeds.<sup>208</sup> A similar insight is voiced by Maccovius, in calling God's holiness the rule of good and justice in the absolute sense.<sup>209</sup> The definition provided by Ussher considers holiness as a "meta-attribute" qualifying God's other properties, and in addition points to God's concentration upon himself.<sup>210</sup> Most descriptions point towards the normative, regulative aspect of God's being in itself. God's holiness means that God himself is the ultimate norm by which everything is measured and to which all God's actions are directed. The emphasis in the discussion of God's holiness is on its immanent character: it is not primarily related to beings outside God, but to God himself. Holiness is an essential property, proper to all three Persons in God.<sup>211</sup>

A slightly different approach is found in Scharpius and Ursinus, who use the term "chastity" (*castitas*) or pureness in stead of holiness.<sup>212</sup> The difference is quite

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<sup>205</sup> Owen, *Dissertation, Works* vol. 10, 623.

<sup>206</sup> L. Doekes, *Der Heilige. Quadoš und Hagios in der reformierten Theologie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Franeker: Wever, 1960), examines the usage of the terms "holy, holiness" in the exegetical and dogmatical literature of Reformed Orthodoxy. On pages 231-234, he concludes that Reformed orthodox theologians used different meanings of "holiness": separation, pureness, rectitude, perfection, dedication; in Doekes's judgment, the Reformed failed to develop a coherent, Scripture-based concept of holiness, which should emphasize the aspect of destination for the service of God. In understanding Doekes's analysis, one must recognize the contemporary context of his study, the conflict in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland during the 1930's and 1940's about covenant, regeneration, and baptism.

<sup>207</sup> Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 7.

<sup>208</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 95. While maintaining that for creatures God's will is the highest norm of justice and holiness, Heidegger points out that this divine will in turn is rooted in the intrinsic goodness and holiness of the divine nature. For this reason, it is impossible that, if God commands something intrinsically good, He could as well command the contrary. Otherwise, God would deny himself.

<sup>209</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 166-167. Cf. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 675-679, who strongly identifies God's justice, holiness, veracity, and fidelity in his essence, words, and deeds.

<sup>210</sup> Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 61: "the generall attribute in regard of all speciall properties, in respect whereof he most justly loveth, liketh and preferreth himself above all."

<sup>211</sup> A trinitarian emphasis occurs in Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 202. The ascription of essential holiness to God implies that no creature can in this absolute sense be called "holiness": Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 204-205.

<sup>212</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 205; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 484. Cf. Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 219, who calls God a "nature tout pure," but continues by treating God's holiness as the norm for his actions. Doekes, *Der Heilige*, 10-11, identifies the patristic antecedents of

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clear in Van Mastricht. Mastricht states that God's nature is seen from a metaphysical perspective as his goodness, from a "physical" perspective as his justice, and from an ethical perspective as his holiness. Furthermore, he views justice as a relational attribute, describing God's normative activity towards others, and holiness as the absolute inclination towards pureness and abhorrence from impurity of God's nature.<sup>213</sup>

An important question is how God's holiness affects other beings. Although the primary reference is to God's own being, several writers point out that God's holiness is both in his essence and in its outward effects. Thus, God's essential holiness implies that he loves purity in others and is the cause of it.<sup>214</sup> Ursinus, who discusses the relevant issues under the heading "chastity," interprets this property in both cognitive and marital terms; consequently, the holiness of God expresses itself in the true knowledge of God over against the lies of the devil, and in the covenantal bond between God and the church. God's holy, pure, and exclusive love calls for a similar response. Not only between the church and her heavenly groom, but also within the church there must be purity and chastity. Ursinus states that moral impurity is a sign of heresy.<sup>215</sup> God's holiness is the motive for our sanctification, as several authors point out under reference to Leviticus 19:2 and 1 Peter 1:16. Moreover, we are called to sanctify or glorify God in his holiness.<sup>216</sup>

Concerning our understanding of holiness, Mastricht argues in the reverse direction: not from God's essential holiness to its effect in our lives, but from creaturely holiness towards God's holiness. Holiness in general is the moral goodness of a rational being. In the biblical language, Mastricht discerns different meanings of holiness: covenantal holiness, by which the people of God is distinguished, habitual and actual holiness, by which people live according to God's will, and relative holiness, by which persons, things, and places are separated for a specific service of God. God's holiness reflects these aspects: God is severed from everything unholy, he is devoted to himself, he is in perfect accordance with his own law.<sup>217</sup>

### **7.3.7 Anger**

God's anger or wrath or hatred indicates the negative side of his justice and holiness. Because God is perfect and holy in himself, and acts according to his goodness and holiness, it is necessary that he hates and punishes everything contrary to it. The Reformed orthodox are eager to argue that God's anger is not

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the emphasis on purity.

<sup>213</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 201-202.

<sup>214</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 185.

<sup>215</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 484-485.

<sup>216</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 201, 206-207.

<sup>217</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 202-203.

excessive and emotional, but an appropriate and measured reaction to sin.<sup>218</sup> Some authors explicitly describe God's anger as an effect of his will.<sup>219</sup>

A systematically important question is, whether anger and hatred belong to God properly and essentially, or merely accidentally (cf. for a similar discussion Excursus 7 in section 7.3.5 above). On the one hand, it seems to harm God's perfection when such a "negative" virtue belongs to him essentially. Moreover, as his anger and hatred react to the historical occurrence of sin, they could be a later addition to his eternal and essential goodness and love. On the other hand, the orthodox doctrine of God excludes principally the existence of accidental properties: whatever is in God, is God. Zanchi deals explicitly with this difficulty. He judges the cautious position of Thomas Aquinas, that God's hatred is to be understood improperly as God's not-willing and not-loving certain things, to be insufficient, and argues that hatred belongs properly to God. The main reason is that the absolute goodness of God's nature leaves no room for his *not* hating and punishing evil. This does not mean that God is externally forced to react this way: it is a necessity arising from his own nature, which preserves God's freedom in willing and acting.<sup>220</sup>

It is important to notice that God's hatred of sin does not coincide with a hatred of sinners: God hates sin absolutely, because it is evil; he hates sinners not in themselves but because of their evil, while he loves them inasmuch as they are his own creatures.<sup>221</sup> A more severe account is given by Mastricht, who states, in direct application of the relevant biblical texts, that God hates sinners unto their eternal damnation.<sup>222</sup>

## 7.4. Omnipotence

The omnipotence of God (*omnipotentia/potentia Dei*) is affirmed by all Reformed orthodox writers. It is seen as the executive faculty of God, by which he does whatever he wills.<sup>223</sup> Several of the Reformed orthodox explicitly reject the Lutheran view that this attribute was communicated to the human nature of Christ.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Vermigli, *Loci communes*, 87; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 72-73: God's hatred is not a passion, but it consists of the denial of salvation, the decree to punish sin, and the expression of God's displeasure. God's hatred of evil is the necessary complement of his love for the good. In the terms of Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 84, it is an *affectus secundum effectus*.

<sup>219</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 202; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 214.

<sup>220</sup> Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 405-408, 417-418; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 197; Turretini, *Institutio*, 213; Alting, *Loci communes*, 17; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 187. This evidence runs against Muller's contention (PRRD, 3:584) that anger, hatred and the like are "attributed to God 'metaphorically' or by 'anthropopathy,' as belonging to him not 'properly' but 'improperly'."

<sup>221</sup> Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 202.

<sup>222</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 180.

<sup>223</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 220; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 145. As Muller, PRRD, 3:525, points out, authors such as Edward Leigh identify the infinity and perfection of God's own essence as the (argumentative) ground for his infinite and perfect power, thus showing "no interest in the nominalist line or argument here – namely, that the divine omnipotence cannot be logically demonstrated – nor even a Thomistic inclination to derive omnipotence from the identification of God as first efficient cause. The derivation from divine perfection echoes the

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A few aspects of the doctrine of omnipotence are subject of discussion in Reformed Orthodoxy. In order to understand these discussions, it is helpful to notice their background in medieval scholastic thought. As Richard Muller states, the doctrine of divine power and dominion had been elaborated and debated at length by the medieval doctors and had been developed in several directions, as represented in general by Thomistic thought or the so-called *via antiqua* on the one side, and by Scotist or nominalist thought, identifiable as the *via moderna*, on the other.

In addition, the exegetical tradition of patristic and scholastic theology had labored through a great number of texts bearing different connotations and had developed a background of exegetical discussion for the more philosophical or logical queries of the scholastics.

Muller notices both a “general doctrinal agreement of virtually all theologians that God is omnipotent” and the occurrence of “questions of the actual extent of divine power over the order of creation established by God and over all possibilities, including those not realized within the order and those at variance with its laws.” The Reformation shows, on the one hand, a tendency “to disdain the formalized structures of scholastic theology and to declaim against speculative discussion of scholastic distinctions concerning the power of God,” but on the other hand “the Reformers did have quiet recourse to such distinctions and did tend to frame their thought in relation to the terms of the received doctrine.” Muller demonstrates this ambivalent attitude by the examples of Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Calvin.<sup>225</sup>

Moving to the era of Reformed orthodoxy, Muller states that it agrees in substance with the teaching of the Reformers, drawing, as the writers in both eras did, on the exegetical tradition and on the doctrines and distinctions of the patristic and scholastic past. ... The early orthodox thinkers, however, did draw out the scholastic distinctions inherent in the received doctrine at greater length and in greater positive detail than did the Reformers. And this movement toward metaphysical cohesion continued into the high orthodox era, where the biblical, philosophical, and religious elements of the doctrine remained in a rather delicate balance despite the obvious difficulties brought by an increasing text-critical exegesis and a vast reorientation of philosophy.<sup>226</sup>

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older sensibilities of Anselm and the early scholastics.”

<sup>224</sup> Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 42; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 215-216; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 228; Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 182; Zanchi, *De natura Dei*, 168.

<sup>225</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:517-518 (quotations); 518-524 (Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Calvin).

<sup>226</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:524-525. The final remark on a “delicate balance” in view of “text-critical exegesis” and “philosophical reorientation” is documented by a reference to Voetius, *Disp. sel.*, I, xxii-xxv.

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A first structural point in the Reformed orthodox doctrine of divine omnipotence is the distinction, advocated by several authors, between the power (*potentia*) and authority (*potestas*) of God.<sup>227</sup> Heidegger emphasizes the need of keeping the two together: power without authority is tyranny; authority without power resembles a king in exile.<sup>228</sup>

Second, there is discussion about the question of how far divine omnipotence extends. Three possible answers are given:

- a. God can do whatever he wills;<sup>229</sup>
- b. God can do what is logically possible and does not imply a contradiction;<sup>230</sup>
- c. God can do what is in agreement with his nature.<sup>231</sup>

As will appear from the quotations given in the footnotes, most theologians choose to combine two or three of these possible answers. This demonstrates that the three options are not mutually exclusive, but that they represent different emphases. The statement that God can do whatever he wills reveals a voluntarist outlook. This allows for two different, in fact contrary, interpretations: first, it can secure the view of omnipotence from extreme speculations by binding it to God's will as established in the decree; second, it may be meant as emphasizing the sovereign freedom of God as excluding his being bound to laws of logic. This difficulty of interpretation is related to the distinction between absolute and ordinate power (see below). A modification of this opinion is provided by Ursinus, who states that God can do whatever he can will. Here God's omnipotence is bound not to his actual will, but to his possible will.<sup>232</sup> The second option, which takes the logically possible as the object of God's omnipotence points to God's truthfulness: God would be a liar if he performed self-contradictory acts that would entail his saying yes and no to one and the same proposition.<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, according to the Saumur theologians, the consequence of God's doing contradictory things is that he would perform the pure nothingness (*purum nihil*); the contradictory cannot exist, because its components neutralize each other.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 40; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 91; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 91; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 209 (power and justice); Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 231; Walaëus, *Loci communes*, 181.

<sup>228</sup> Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 102.

<sup>229</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 228; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 214; Amesius, *Medulla*, 22; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 137; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 101; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 146; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 478.

<sup>230</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 148; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 230; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 216; Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae*, 91; Amesius, *Medulla*, 23; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 86; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 41; Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 139; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 102; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 146; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 479.

<sup>231</sup> Walaëus, *Loci communes*, 182-183; Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 230; Altting, *Loci communes*, 17; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 211; Rissenius, *Summa theologiae*, 91; Amesius, *Medulla*, 23; Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 86; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 41; Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 7; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 101; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 479.

<sup>232</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 478: "quae posset velle, posse etiam efficere"; cf. Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 90: "Deus efficere potest quod vult & velle potest."

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 139; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 102.

<sup>234</sup> *Syntagma thesium*, 148.

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However, this line of argument runs the risk of subjecting God to the laws of logic and of establishing a logical possibility independent of God. Therefore, several authors state that God's power is the root of possibility and not the other way round.<sup>235</sup> The most comprehensive view is that, by which the object of God's power is seen as being in agreement with God's nature. Here divine simplicity is the decisive point of view: all his attributes together form the criterion for what God can do. In this connection, the question is dealt with whether the exclusion of certain acts from God's omnipotence does not detract from God's power. In response, the Reformed scholastics argue that the inability to do impossible or morally abject things is not a sign of weakness, but rather of highest perfection. Maccovius scorns the blindness of people who can think up the idea that "nothing" is something worth to be done by God.<sup>236</sup>

Third, the distinction between absolute and ordinate power (*potentia absoluta – ordinata*) is discussed. The distinction became famous partly due to Calvin's rejection in his *Institutes*.<sup>237</sup> It is remarkable that soon after Calvin the distinction became reevaluated in Reformed doctrine, sometimes with explicit reference to Calvin's opinion.<sup>238</sup> Despite this general acceptance, the distinction is used with some qualifications. Andreas Hyperius, Calvin's contemporary, emphasizes that God's omnipotence should always be taken together with his wisdom and will so that his potency can never be called "absolute" in the most extreme sense.<sup>239</sup> Altling points to the fact that the absolute and the ordinate power have different objects: the absolute power is concerning all possible things; the ordinate power only concerns the real future things.<sup>240</sup> This would suggest that the distinction runs

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<sup>235</sup> Gomarus, via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 93; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 211; Amesius, *Medulla*, 23. Concerning the "root" or "source" of possibility, Muller's remarks (PRRD, 3:526) are less than crystal clear: "as many of the orthodox declare, the *potentia Dei* is the source of all possibility, as the *voluntas Dei* is the source of all actuality, there can be no possibilities beyond the divine *potentia*: Heidanus specifically rejects the Scotist identification of the *intellectus Dei* as the source of possibility, grounding possibility in the divine *potentia*, perhaps an Ockhamist solution to the problem, although, equally so, it could be derived from Albert the Great." Besides the attribution of the "*potentia* solution" to both Albert the Great (firmly before Scotus) and William Ockham (after Scotus), the identification of the Scotist position is dubious. It is true, possibilities are related by Scotus to the divine intellect or knowledge, but not in the sense of God's knowledge creating or grounding the possibility, but of God knowing or "seeing" the logical possibility of things. Scotus developed the idea of *possibile logicum* or *compossibile*: an entity is logically possible, if its definition does not contain contradictory terms. It does not make sense to declare that God's knowledge is the source of this logical possibility. Muller gave some additional evidence in his earlier exposition, PRRD, 3:78.

<sup>236</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 147.

<sup>237</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.2; *Sermons sur le livre de Job*, in *Calvini Opera* 34, 331-344. Cf. David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God," in *Calvin in Context*, 40-52.

<sup>238</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 146: Calvin's denial is wrong (*perperam*); Turretini, *Institutio*, 221: Calvin's rejection should not be taken absolutely, but *secundum quid*, namely because of the abuse of the *potentia absoluta* by Scholastics who claimed that God could do whatever we can think of, even evil and contradictory things.

<sup>239</sup> Hyperius, *Methodus Theologiae*, 140; cf. Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 230.

<sup>240</sup> Altling, *Loci communes*, 17.

parallel to the distinction in God's knowledge between the knowledge of mere understanding and the knowledge of vision; but Junius states that the range of the knowledge of mere understanding is larger than that of the absolute power.<sup>241</sup> Maresius provides a neat description of the absolute and the actual (*actualis*, an synonym of *ordinata*) power of God: by his actual power, God irresistibly does whatever he wills, by his absolute power, God can do more than he actually does.<sup>242</sup> Wendelin states, that from the absolute power no conclusion can be drawn concerning the real existence of things.<sup>243</sup>

Fourth, some authors explicitly speak of God as the principle of action in other beings.<sup>244</sup> This is connected to the fundamental view of God as the highest being, who is in the highest degree active (*actus purus*). Implied in this view is the thought of the world as a causal system, wherein everything is dependent for its existence on God as the first cause. This might seem to lead to determinism, but Pictet makes it clear that the omnipotence of God does in fact imply contingency: because God in his freedom does personally act upon his creatures, the world is not subjected to a blind fate, but stands in a relationship to its supreme cause wherein its relative freedom of action is safeguarded.<sup>245</sup>

Fifth, it is asked how the term "potency" can be attributed to God, given the basic definition of God as pure act (*actus purus*), where act is contrary to potency. The question was urged by Conrad Vorstius, who argued that God is "receptive" of properties such as being the Creator, Lord, etc. Another area where the question of "passive potency" arises is the doctrine of the Trinity: is the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit to be described in passive terms from the perspective of Son and Spirit respectively? The Reformed orthodox answer is that *potentia* is ascribed to God not in a passive, but in an active way. The relations into which God enters, do not affect his own essence and thus cannot account for "passive potency"; the relations between the Persons of the Trinity are to be understood either as "active potency" or as merely descriptive relations without a causal-genetic order.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Junius, *Theses theologiae*, disp. IX "De Attributis Dei," th. 6, in (A. Kuyper, ed.) *Opera selecta*, 130. The reason is that God's knowledge of mere understanding comprises also evil things, which do not fall under God's (direct) omnipotence.

<sup>242</sup> Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 41.

<sup>243</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 87. On the absolute – ordained power distinction, see also Muller, *PRRD*, 3:532-537. Referring to Maastricht, Muller points to various deviant views to which the Reformed opposed: "first, the Socinian claim that God simply cannot do contradictories, on the ground of the finitude and limitation of the divine essence; second, the Weigelian fanatics, who argue that God can do absolutely anything, including contradictories; and third, 'Descartes and his colleagues,' who 'suspend all possibility and impossibility on the will of God' and who misuse the distinction 'between impossibilities *ex parte Dei* and *ex parte rei*.'"

<sup>244</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 186; Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 478; Junius via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 90; Amesius via Hoornbeeck, *Institutiones*, 92.

<sup>245</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 231.

<sup>246</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 186; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 49; Turretini, *Institutio*, 221; Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus*, 206 (who denies *potentia activa* strictly spoken, but affirms *potentia activa*); Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 181; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 210, 213; Amesius,

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Sixth, some orthodox theologians explicitly mention the difference between the philosophical idea of omnipotence and the Christian, biblical belief in an almighty God. Zacharias Ursinus, for example, explicitly connects God's omnipotence with his salvational purpose.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, the philosophers of the Aristotelian tradition cannot allow for the biblical *creatio ex nihilo*, that should be included in any Christian account of God's omnipotence.

Seventh, the omnipotence of God has a moral dimension in application to God himself. Scripture repeatedly states that God "cannot" do certain things, such as lying, denying himself etc. The Reformed orthodox explain that performing such acts is not a perfection, but instead a lack of perfection. Therefore the absence of the possibility to do so is sign of God's abundant perfection, not a restriction of his power. The moral dimension became especially urgent in reaction to Descartes' theory of the divine deception: Descartes stated that God could deceive us, if he wanted to; in fact he does not lie, because he does not want to. Following Witsius and Mastricht, De Moor argues that the sheer possibility of a divine lie is excluded by God's holy nature.<sup>248</sup>

### 7.4.1. Dominion

In the discussion of God's dominion (*dominium/potestas*), previous aspects of the doctrine of God reappear. It is obviously connected to the doctrine of omnipotence: as God has all power, he also reigns as the Lord of the universe. Moreover, God's dominion expresses his independence and autonomy from his creation. Turretini distinguishes between the essential dominion (*dominium essentiale*) exercised by God, and the economical dominion (*dominium oeconomicum*) exercised by Christ after his resurrection. The former regards the universal governance of God over the world (providence), the latter is concentrated on the ruling of the church (predestination).<sup>249</sup>

Another connection is between the dominion and the justice of God: God's sovereignty implies that he is the supreme Judge. In the exercise of justice, one can distinguish between God's absolute, natural right (*ius absolutum/naturale*) to act as pleases him, and the ordinate right (*ius ordinatum/liberum*) he has willingly and freely established.

On this issue, Reformed Orthodoxy shows some differences in approach. Turretini states that the absolute right of God is not against the law, as God's good and righteous nature is the source of justice.<sup>250</sup> Wendelin emphasizes the bond between power and justice, and warns for the idea of absolute dominion.<sup>251</sup>

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*Medulla*, 22 (*potentia active attribuitur, non potentia activa proprie dicta*); Wendelin, *Christianae Theologiae*, 88-89; Maresius, *Collegium theologicum*, 41; Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 145-146 (denial of active potency strictly spoken). Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:529.

<sup>247</sup> Ursinus, *Loci theologici*, 479; cf. also Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 229. Zanchi concludes his treatment of the doctrine of omnipotence with an exposition of the Apostle's Creed, which makes clear that God's being omnipotent pervades all his actions, *De natura Dei*, 191-194.

<sup>248</sup> De Moor, *Commentarius*, 599-601.

<sup>249</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 226.

<sup>250</sup> Turretini, *Institutio*, 226-228; Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, 95; cf. Alting, *Problemata*, 35-37, on *iustitia absoluta – ordinata*.

<sup>251</sup> Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, 91.

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Maccovius, on the other hand, emphasizes God's absolute authority and superiority over his creatures. He lists seven examples of what God could do on the basis of his absolute authority:

- require from man what he did not give man the ability for (e.g., rendering perfect and permanent obedience);
- permit man to fall into sin by withdrawing the assistance of grace;
- oblige creatures to do what is impossible, and punish them if they fail;
- inflict temptation on creatures without their deserving it;
- subject innocent people to eternal torture;<sup>252</sup>
- predestine people to such eternal torture;
- impute someone's sins to another person.

Maccovius argues that such acts do not imply injustice, because God is the Lord over life and death and thus has the right to dispose of us as he likes. Behind these statements is the need to refute opposition against the Reformed doctrine of eternal reprobation.<sup>253</sup>

### **7.4.2. Glory**

Polanus distinguishes five aspects of the biblical use of the word "glory" (Hebrew *kabod*, Greek *doxa*): God's majesty; its recognition by creatures; the ark of the covenant as the special seat of God's presence; the radiance of God's being; and Jesus Christ as its personification. Systematically spoken, God's glory is the total of all his virtues. The confession of God's glory expresses God's excellence above all beings, and provides the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God with a strong sense of God's utter incomprehensibility apart from his own gracious revelation. According to Heidegger, it belongs to God's glory to be manifested to his creatures; the center of this manifestation is the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ.<sup>254</sup>

An important aspect of God's glory is that it identifies God as the final cause of everything, both of his own actions and of his creatures' life. This aspect is elaborated not only in the doctrine of God, but it is a significant part of many Reformed orthodox preliminary statements on the nature of theology (see section

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<sup>252</sup> For this example, Maccovius refers to Twisse, who argued that if three or four undeserved tortures are consistent with God's justice, infinite expansion into eternal torture is consistent as well.

<sup>253</sup> Maccovius, *Loci communes*, 147-150. To put Maccovius's utterances on balance, we should compare them to his position on the punishing justice of God (see *Excursus 7* above). In that connection, the insight that God cannot resign from his dominion over creatures urges Maccovius to defend the essentiality of God's punishing justice. We are tempted to spot an inconsistency in Maccovius, as in the latter context (*Loci communes*, 171-175) he rejects William Twisse's statement that God can do things (e.g., forgive sin without punishment) out of his absolute power which He cannot do out of his justice; a position that seems fairly consistent with Maccovius's own views presented in the text above.

<sup>254</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 189-190; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 225-227; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 103; Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 103. As Muller, *PRRD*, 3:541, comments, "the attributes of blessedness and felicity, the divine majesty and glory are seldom given lengthy separate exposition in the doctrinal works of the Reformers but are treated, instead, in considerable depth exegetically." As the references to Polanus and Mastricht show, this situation continues in Reformed orthodoxy.

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4.3 above). God is fully delighted and content with himself. Mastricht gives this insight a trinitarian color by pointing to the mutual self-glorification of the three Persons in God.<sup>255</sup>

God's majesty and glory is elaborated by the Reformed scholastics not only as an inward property, but with great emphasis also on its outward manifestations. The fact that God shows his glory in his works of creation and salvation, and aims at being glorified by his creatures, indicates that God includes us in his glory. It is not a majesty solidly residing within, but a creative, seeking and sharing glory.<sup>256</sup>

From a slightly different vantage point, God's glory has the aspect of happiness or beatitude (*beatitas/beatitudo*). This term gives the second order of divine attributes a conclusion similar to that of the first order.<sup>257</sup> God is both happy in himself and is the source of happiness of others. Just as we have seen in the discussion of God's goodness, here it is stated that God's happiness is overflowing towards God's creatures. This thought provides a strong connection between the generally stated twofold goals of theology: God's glory and human salvation.<sup>258</sup> God's internal beatitude comprises three central aspects: first, his being free from everything evil or imperfect; second, his possessing everything good; third, his perfect knowledge of his own happiness.<sup>259</sup> The first two aspects explicate the two sides of God's being the highest Good. By his absolute goodness, God is even immune from evil: sin does not diminish the happiness he finds in himself.<sup>260</sup> The specific emphasis of God's happiness is that he finds rest in his goodness.<sup>261</sup> The third aspect points to the necessary connection between happiness and knowledge: a happiness that remains unconscious is less perfect than a happiness one is fully aware of. Some authors draw on Aristotle's theory of happiness for their account of God's beatitude, which views happiness as the soul's action in perfect virtue.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 240; Ussher, *Body of divinitie*, 34; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 227.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:546-551.

<sup>257</sup> Gomarus, *Opera theologica*, 7: God's perfection and beatitude follow from all his attributes.

<sup>258</sup> Pictet, *La théologie chrétienne*, 199; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 232.

<sup>259</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 155-156.

<sup>260</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 232-233; cf. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 103: God cannot be unhappy.

<sup>261</sup> Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 170.

<sup>262</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, 156; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 102; cf. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 232. To the contrary: Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 103.



## 8. Conclusions

The preceding survey of Reformed orthodox method and doctrine of God makes it hard to draw generalizing conclusions. The complexity of theological and philosophical antecedents, the interaction with different contemporary philosophical movements, and the variety of positions within Reformed Orthodoxy should make us cautious in answering the question of the connection between method and content in this era of theology. However, it is possible to draw a few contours. I will first point out the most significant aspects of Reformed orthodox method as applied in the doctrine of God, then summarize the main components of doctrine of God itself, and finally address the question of the relation between both. In the statements that follow, not all elements are supported by all authors examined in the previous chapters. Besides indicating main lines of argument common to all Reformed orthodox, I point toward elaborations found with one or more authors that have a systematic interest for answering the main question of this study.

### 8.1. Methodology

In addition to the analysis of Reformed orthodox statements of method (section 4.5), I give some observations taken from the practical application of method in the doctrine of God.

First, we can notice that in the substantial argumentation the scholastic techniques of question and syllogism are applied. Especially in the polemical parts of their writings, the Reformed orthodox utilize logic (e.g., syllogisms, theory of fallacies) as an auxiliary instrument. The employment of philosophical instruments includes the appeal to (standardized) Aristotelian patterns of classification in terms of the Categories, *genus* and *species*, essential and accidental properties, etc. In this respect, two things leap to the eye. First, the Reformed scholastics have a keen awareness of the limitation and inappropriateness of applying the categories to the doctrine of God. It is a commonplace to note that God cannot be defined, and that he does not “fall” into a classifying *genus*. Moreover, several attributes ascribed to God have the implication of breaking through the normal patterns of thought. In this respect, the frequent identification of certain concepts or arguments as “Platonic” or “Aristotelian” should be viewed with some reserve. In the preceding chapters, I have sometimes used these labels to typify aspects of Reformed orthodox theology. While it should be acknowledged that, for example, the conceptions of “participation of being” or the “eternal existence of the ideas” have a Platonic background, they function in Reformed orthodox theology in a way that agrees with fundamental Christian insights in the nature of reality and in the relation between God and creatures. And when Aristotelian categories are employed (form – matter; act – potency; genus – differentia, etc.), they are precisely declared inapplicable to God. In brief, we should not too easily conclude from the occurrence of these “Greek” conceptions to a dominance of Greek thought over Reformed orthodox doctrine. The second remarkable issue is the acceptance of “mixed articles” in the body of Reformed doctrine. As we have seen (sections 4.4 and 4.5),

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the Reformed held that sometimes doctrinal statements need to be made which contain both a philosophical and a biblical premise. The Reformed maintain the validity of philosophical truth in theological issues, and at the same time insist on the decisive function of biblical revelation: Scripture tells us whether something is the case, and reason then helps us to spell out the implications, which we have to accept as truly entailed by the biblical statement.

Next to rational, scholastic techniques of argumentation, the internal traditional organization of doctrine is an important guide of Reformed orthodox theology. Classifications, distinctions, and evidences often derive from a tradition all the way back to Augustine, via Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus and later theologians. This demonstrates that Reformed orthodox theology did not understand itself as a complete innovation, but stood consciously in the Catholic tradition. In this respect, we should reckon with several factors. First, medieval scholastic theology did not autonomously create its highly technical and systematic shape, but arose on the basis of a perennial tradition of reading Holy Scripture and of commenting on biblical books and themes. From the Early Church onward, a conscious hermeneutics provided room for a multi-layered explanation and elaboration of the biblical text. The doctrinal structures of the *locus de Deo* intend to reflect the Scriptural revelation. The development of theological “systems” in the 16th century shows a reprise of this movement from the reading of Scripture toward the formulation of doctrine: the “systems” arose out of *loci communes* gathered during the exegesis of biblical books. In this procedure, Reformation theologians interacted intensively with the exegetical tradition of Church Fathers and medievals. Second, the projects of medieval scholasticism and of Post-Reformation theology have in common the motive of “faith seeking understanding.” In both cases, faith and revelation provide the basis, and afterwards some rational elucidation and justification is attempted at. This multiple continuity with the theological predecessors is not always visible at the surface due to polemical and confessional interests: the Reformed had to profile themselves against the Roman Catholics, and were careful to base the doctrines on Scripture instead of tradition. Below the surface, however, many distinctions and arguments extant in the theological tradition were recognized as profoundly biblical and as indispensable in the sound exposition of doctrine. The adherence to traditional patterns is understandably rather strong in the early, formative period of Reformed scholasticism, when Reformed thought had to find its way to full doctrinal formulation. In the course of time, it developed a tradition of its own, and the interaction with patristic and medieval sources at once became more relaxed and was paralleled with the results from contemporary discussions.

Third, a most distinctive feature of Reformed orthodox method is the place it assigns to Holy Scripture. This is clearly expressed in the prolegomena on the source and norm of theology; it is elaborated in the *locus de sacra Scriptura* over against the Roman Catholic doctrine of tradition; and it is put in practice by the frequent appeal to biblical texts in the course of the doctrinal expositions. The consistent appeal to Scripture often gives occasion to a critical reception and a biblical substantiation of traditional definitions and distinctions.

## Conclusions

The three components of Reformed orthodox method (rational inquiry, employment of traditional material, and frequent appeal to Scripture) are bound together by the conviction that in the final analysis truth is one.<sup>1</sup> From this basic trust, the Reformed orthodox can frankly utilize both the (pagan) philosophy and the tradition of the Early Church and Middle Ages. For a methodical analysis, the combination of Scriptural, rational, and traditional elements poses the problem of discerning from what source a specific thought is derived. The presentation of arguments in Reformed orthodox works does not always facilitate the discernment of the relation between Scriptural, traditional, and rational arguments: the order in which the arguments from these three sources are given varies, and sometimes Scriptural data is counted among the *rationes* instead of among the *testimonia*. While this indeed witnesses the strong view of the unity of truth, it poses some limits on my analysis.

The difficulty in identifying the decisive sources holds especially for the contents of the doctrine of God as a whole: while it is clear that the Reformed orthodox intend to build this doctrine on Scripture, it seems that they have received a standard set of attributes from the tradition. The question is whether they succeeded in expounding a truly biblical doctrine of God in the framework of these traditional definitions and distinctions.

### 8.2. Doctrine of God

The Reformed doctrine of God as described in this study presents several important steps.

First, the doctrine of the divine names provides the starting point and serves as an elementary theory of the “knowability” of God. It is stated that we can know God only because he reveals his name(s) in Scripture. The biblical names of God are interpreted as signifying either God’s essence or his properties. Among the biblical foundations, the revelation to Moses of the divine name YHWH (Exodus 3 and 6) and the divine self-portrait in Exodus 34 stand out as sources of revealed insight in God’s being. The Reformed orthodox theory of “knowing God” consists of two complementary insights. First, they point to the inadequacy of our knowledge of God due to our limited capacity of understanding. The difference between Creator and creature, increased by human sinfulness, makes it impossible for us to have full and adequate knowledge of God. On the other hand, the Reformed orthodox reject religious agnosticism and advocate a positive knowledge of God on the basis of gracious, supernatural revelation. The combination of these two insights yields a significant position in the question how creaturely concepts can be predicated of God: the way of predicating terms of God is neither equivocal nor univocal, but analogous. There is both a decisive difference and a certain similarity in the application of terms to God and creatures. Most Reformed orthodox authors do not dwell extensively on the foundation of this analogy. Sometimes, the terminology suggests affinity to the Catholic *analogia entis* or to a Platonizing metaphysics of original and participative being. But most authors do not recur to the ontological foundation of analogy, and merely accept it as a device

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Muller, *Dictionary*, 97-98, s.v. ‘duplex veritas’, who argues that in general Protestant Orthodoxy rejected the idea of a double truth.

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on the basis of God's (free, not necessary) self-communication to us. In response to later criticism (most prominently worded by Karl Barth), it is important to notice that the concept of analogy functions in a *theory of predication*: granted that we use words to speak about God, in what manner are words used both for God and for creatures? This usage in the sense of predication need not bear the burden of an ontological system placing God and creature on a par in respect to "being." On the other hand, it stands as a question for further evaluation whether the choice for "analogy" provides sufficient basis for truly knowing God by means of our concepts: is not "univocity" required in order to speak meaningfully about God?<sup>2</sup>

Second, the Reformed orthodox reflect on the existence and essence of God. In general, they hold the existence of God to be self-evident. In the context of the 16th and 17th centuries, theoretical atheism as the deliberate denial of (the possibility of) God's existence was not a live option. The proofs for the existence of God mostly presented by the Reformed orthodox are taken from causality, order, and universal consent. This emphasis shows the influence of Renaissance philosophy and culture, which preferenced a more anthropological and rhetorical approach above the metaphysical and logical of medieval philosophy and theology. In combination with the causal argument, medieval argumentations in more ontological and modal terms (Anselm, Duns Scotus) are reiterated as well. The occurrence of Cartesian philosophy occasioned some distrust in the ontological argument, as Descartes seemed to found the evidence of God's existence on the (subjective) occurrence of the Idea of God as a postulate in the human mind. The Reformed orthodox discussion of God's existence shows that they had to face new philosophical and cultural movements (Socinianism, Cartesianism, Spinoza, Hobbes) that openly or implicitly undermined the former universal consensus on this point. While the affirmation of a "natural theology" seemed indispensable in this context (and indubitable from the biblical testimony), it is seriously limited in scope and importance.

In discussing the essence of God, the Reformed orthodox maintain the importance of the term "essence" or "nature," although they acknowledge that no complete definition of God's essence can be given. Part of the urgency for Reformed Orthodoxy to maintain the "essence" language is the confrontation with the Socinians, who effectively dissolved the divine essence into its separate operations and effects, with apparently two motives: first, to create room for rational and moral freedom on man's part, by dissecting attributes like justice and knowledge from God's inner being; second, to undermine the classic doctrine of the Trinity with its statement of the Son being *homoousios* with the Father, perhaps again in service of a humanization of doctrine. The descriptions given by Reformed orthodox authors mostly include a trinitarian formula, the enumeration of basic attributes such as uniqueness, spirituality, simplicity, eternity, wisdom, goodness, and power. In some cases, this "definition" includes the most important works of creation and reconciliation, thus extending the description to salvation history. If we take the Reformed orthodox at their word, we have reason to question the allegation that they held an abstract definition of the concept of God, widely remote from Trinity and salvation.

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<sup>2</sup> This latter option is defended in the Utrecht School; see part III of this study.

## Conclusions

Third, the doctrine of the divine attributes elaborates the statements on God's essence. At the start of this elaboration, it is made clear that no real distinction can be made between God's essence and his attributes. As a consequence, the different attributes are emphatically said not to differ in reality from each other; the distinction of attributes and essence and of the attributes among each other is needed because of our limited capacities. Still, Reformed Orthodoxy shows some variety on this point. Besides authors that hold a strict view of divine simplicity allowing for no distinctions (an extreme understanding of Thomas Aquinas' nuanced discussions), or who account for the differences mainly in terms of effects or objects (*eminenter / virtualiter*; a modified Thomist position advocated by Cajetan) we find authors arguing for at least a conceptual or formal distinction (the attributes are different concepts or differently defined properties) which is grounded in the reality of God's being (*distinctio formalis a parte rei*; *distinctio rationalis cum fundamento in re*; this line of thought, occurring in Thomas Aquinas already, was further elaborated by Duns Scotus and his followers).<sup>3</sup>

The doctrines of divine simplicity and aseity appear to be utterly important in the structure of the doctrine of God. They influence the way in which other attributes are described; especially the doctrine of simplicity has a strong unifying power. Several attributes are related by some authors to the doctrine of the Trinity; however, one cannot say that the Reformed orthodox account of the attributes is dominated by the trinitarian point of view.<sup>4</sup>

The denial of real differences within God's essence does not prevent Reformed Orthodoxy from discussing God's attributes in mostly two (sometimes three or four) groups. In many expositions, the groups of attributes form a traditionally received whole, while other authors show more originality in supplying biblical material and structural insights. Whereas different terminology is used to qualify these groups (incommunicable – communicable; absolute – relative; negative – positive), the body of the two groups is remarkably identical throughout Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. With Richard Muller, we can point out a distinction between an *ad intra* and an *ad extra* dimension in the exposition of the divine attributes.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the distinction that is, in one way or another, made between two or more groups of attributes, we can sometimes notice some uneasiness with the strict denial of any "accidental" dimension in God's essence (*in Deum non cadunt accidentia*). The Reformed orthodox maintain that every property in God is essential and identical with God's essence, but they are on the other hand aware of the historical relatedness of several attributes, such as God's grace, justice, and dominion. This leads to the cautious position that God's relational properties are essential and necessary inasmuch as they are founded in some absolute divine

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<sup>3</sup> For a survey of the various medieval antecedents of the Reformed scholastic doctrine of divine simplicity, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:38-44, 53-58, 70-76. For a systematic exposition, cf. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 232-245, and Vos, *Philosophy*, 249-261, 274-282.

<sup>4</sup> This remark is made in view of the comparison and evaluation to be performed in the final chapter. As was indicated on several points in the above exposition, the distinct or separate discussion of the doctrines of Trinity and of divine attributes need not have a substantial impact if it is understood as primarily a matter of efficient work division.

<sup>5</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:passim.

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property (e.g., goodness), but are, as it were, accidental and contingent inasmuch as they “terminate” in created objects that are of a contingent nature.

The first sort of attributes (incommunicable) circumscribes the essence of God as different from created reality. God is free from the compositions that characterize creatures; he is not dependent on anything outside himself; he is without limits and thus free from temporal and spatial boundaries; he is not subject to changes; he is, in one word, perfect. Although the formal outlook of this part of the doctrine of God is negative (the negations of created properties dominate), it results in fact in a highly positive concept of God as a Being that is superior to all classifications and limitations we can think of. Remarkable in the discussion of these attributes is that they turn out to be largely equivalent to each other: in a somewhat circular structure of argument, several attributes are related to or derived from each other. This circularity, being consistent with the foundational thesis of divine simplicity, need not be valued negative as if the Reformed orthodox doctrine is a massive whole; judged according to its own intentions, it expresses the awareness that our words fail to describe God adequately and that a number of complimentary terms is required to say what is to be said about God. In addition, we see the Reformed orthodox break through their normal conceptual boundaries precisely in discussing these attributes: they struggle with concepts such as causality, essence and existence, incomprehensibility, space and time. The subtlety and apparently “speculative” character of these discussions should not prevent us from seeing that Reformed orthodoxy strove to maintain at once the ontological independence of God in all respects and the genuine relatedness and involvement of God with the world. It would be wrong, for example, to understand the accounts of divine eternity and omnipresence as if God merely exists “outside” time and space. A final observation concerning the first group of properties is that statements like simplicity, aseity, immutability, etc. should be understood in a very strict sense in regard to God’s essence: God cannot consist of “things” alien to himself, or be dependent on something that would then be superior to him, or be something other than God. These and similar statements do not propose a “fixated ontology of God,” but intend to work out the consequences of the biblical confession that there is only one true God.

The second group of attributes (communicable) consists of divine properties that in some degree resemble qualities in creatures. To be sure, most authors make the qualification that what is “communicated” from God to creatures is not the property itself, but the similitude and effect of God’s property. Thus, it is guaranteed that the statements in the doctrine of God are uttered uniquely of God. Besides the aspect of similarity with created properties, an important function of the second group is to express the way in which God relates to the world outside himself. The initial attribute of this group often is the life of God, the analysis of which provides the subsequent trichotomy in knowledge, will, and power. The prominent inclusion of God’s life among the attributes of the second group reflects the biblical emphasis of Reformed Orthodoxy: in the biblical “picture” of God, features such as life, activity and relations are more prominent than the somewhat “abstract” properties of the first group. Moreover, the ascription of life to God has important christological and soteriological overtones (following, e.g., the gospel of John).

## Conclusions

The analysis of God's life into the three "faculties" of knowledge, will, and power, follows a long tradition of theology that applies the Aristotelian division of the human (psychological) faculties to God. Basic to this theory is the elementary insight that God knows, wills, and can do things. These concrete acts presuppose a threefold capacity which God always has at his disposal.<sup>6</sup> Each of these has some attributes added to it; especially the "affects" or "virtues" adjacent to God's will receive considerable attention. The extensive discussion of these "affects" shows at once the strong motive to incorporate into the doctrine of God all elements of the biblical testimony concerning God and the soteriological motive to describe the attributes of God that directly affect man in the course of salvation (justice, grace, mercy). Moreover, it is precisely over these relational attributes that controversy arose with both Roman Catholic theology (on grace) and with the Socinians (on justice, mercy, etc.). The Reformed orthodox exposition of this part of doctrine attempts to maneuver between asserting the seriousness of these divine properties as essential to God, and maintaining that the relatedness of God to creatures implied in these "affects" does not diminish or change God's own glorious being. A common result of this twofold concern is that statements on God's joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, etc. are anthropomorphisms that should be understood in a way suitable to God. Our final evaluation will raise the question whether the interpretation in terms of anthropomorphisms satisfactorily explains the biblical testimony with regard to God's "emotion-like" reactions.

The structure of the second group of attributes is complicated. On the one hand, Reformed Orthodoxy is faithful to its conviction that the attributes do not differ really from each other. The implication of this theory of simplicity is that the attributes of the second group are qualified by the preceding properties, especially simplicity, aseity, and immutability. On the other hand, as stated already, the second group intends to express God's outward activity and relations. The reality of this activity and these relations is nowhere denied. The combination of these two different interests yields a nuanced series of distinctions and insights that should be carefully balanced. At the highest structural level, Reformed Orthodoxy has some difficulty in determining the modal status of God's "relational" properties. On the one hand we find the insight, inherited from medieval theology, that God has no accidental properties but merely essential attributes identical with the divine being. By this doctrinal rule, it seems excluded that there can be accidental or contingent elements in the attributes of the second group. On the other hand, Reformed orthodox authors have (in different degrees: Maccovius, Twisse, Voetius, and Turretini are very sharp in this respect) the conviction that God's being involved with creatures does not eliminate contingency and freedom in created reality. Stated more technically, they deny that from the necessity and immutability of God's own essence follows the necessity and changelessness of whatever is known, willed, decreed, and done by God. In this respect, we find careful indications pointing toward a distinction between an essential, necessary dimension in God and an accidental, contingent dimension in God's being active towards the world. The effect is that in the Reformed orthodox view the operations

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<sup>6</sup> The word "faculty" (*facultas*) is derived from "easy" (*facile*): by the inherent capacity, an act can be "easily" performed.

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of God's knowledge, will, and power are genuinely related to the created beings that form their objects, but are at the same time entirely under God's own control, to the result that God is not in his own essence influenced or changed by creatures. A further basic concept in the discussion of the relation between God and human freedom is the dual causality model: on the secondary cause level, freedom and contingency are warranted; at the same time the whole secondary cause network is in all relevant ways dependent on God. Together with the aforementioned upholding of a contingent aspect in God's knowledge, will, and power, the dual causality model helps to explain how creaturely entities and events can be contingent in their own right, and still be certainly and determinately known and decreed by God. The necessity established by God's foreknowledge and decree is not an absolute necessity, but a hypothetical necessity. Because of this nuanced conception of necessity and contingency, the Reformed orthodox see no reason to adopt the idea of *scientia media* developed by their Jesuit contemporaries. Quite the contrary, they argue that the *scientia media* does not solve the problems it is intended to cope with, and undermines God's sovereignty in favor of human autonomy.

It is hardly possible to find an exclusive intellectualism or voluntarism in Reformed Orthodoxy. The emphasis on God's simplicity prevents a one-sided concentration on one of the mental faculties; moreover, the mutual connections between God's knowledge and will are demonstrated. In the exposition of the respective faculties, we encounter parallel distinctions between *scientia simplicis intelligentia* – *scientia visionis*, *voluntas necessaria* – *voluntas libera*, and *potentia absoluta* – *potentia ordinata*. This points to a common conceptual structure centered around the notions of possibility – impossibility and necessity – contingency. It can be argued that, while the terminology used in describing God's knowledge and will sounds mostly Thomistic, the actual conceptual structures reflect insights developed in the Scotistic school of thought. The Scotistic emphasis on the central role of God's will in the actualization of the world agrees well with the Reformed, Calvinist zeal for God's sovereignty manifest in his decrees of providence and election. We will return to this observation in the final evaluation (section 22.2.4).

The relation between necessity and contingency caused some tension *within* Reformed orthodoxy. As we have seen, a fierce debate was fought out about the necessary or free character of God's punitive justice. It seems that the view of people such as Maccovius and Owen, who held that it is natural and thus necessary for God to punish sin, won the battle; the opposite view as defended by Twisse and Rutherford, while seemingly elaborating more consistently the common Reformed emphasis on the central role of God's will, was not acceptable to most of their brothers. To be sure, the dominant consensus voiced by Maccovius and Owen did not advocate an absolute necessity of God's punishing sin (which would eliminate God's essential freedom from obligation), but merely a hypothetical necessity: given that God loves good and hates evil, the occurrence of sin necessarily leads to God's punishing it. Fundamental motifs behind this position are the insight that God is faithful to himself, and the recognition that the deliverance of God's own Son to suffering and death reveals a very strong urgency in God.

### 8.3. Relation of Method and Content

Concerning the relation between method and content of the doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The Reformed scholastic method is a variegated phenomenon that allows for divergent applications. Basic elements are a set of orientations (Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical and theological tradition, Aristotelian philosophy in a very broad sense) and instruments (logic: *quaestio*, syllogisms, distinctions). Within this framework, the Reformed orthodox could flexibly argue for or against a certain position. Examples are the discussions of the absolute–ordinate power distinction and of the distinctions in the will of God. In this respect, method cannot be fully determinative of the doctrinal content. The combination of philosophical, traditional, and Scriptural components is legitimized by the conviction that in the final analysis the truth is one, and that faith is not in conflict with (true) reason.

The internal structure of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God shows that it was not limited to the logical and metaphysical boundaries of Aristotelian system. The tendency of this doctrine is rather to argue that God exceeds the requirements of classification (the doctrine of simplicity magnificently exemplifies this) and governs the laws of possibility and necessity. At the same time, basic structures of reality in terms of possibility, consistency, necessity, and contingency, are firmly maintained as constituents of reality that cannot at random be changed by God. The religious interests of Christian faith were clearly safeguarded by the Reformed doctrine of God, and they were defended against contemporary opponents. The use of distinctions helped to escape conceptual difficulties. In this respect, the Reformed orthodox theologians continued on the lines drawn by their medieval predecessors: medieval scholasticism had already developed a distinct Christianized form of Aristotelianism.

On the other hand, the philosophical framework imposed some limitations on the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God by the kind of questions it urged to pose and the concepts it offered to answer these questions. For example: Reformed Orthodoxy felt obliged to discuss the *essence* of God, although it had to acknowledge that no proper definition of God could be given. The conceptual approach, focusing on questions of essence and attributes, prevented the deployment of what we would label a “narrative” account of the doctrine of God.<sup>7</sup> We should acknowledge, however, that significant tendencies moving toward a more salvation-historical, dynamic and relational approach to the doctrine of God are found within Reformed orthodoxy itself. Not only the “federal” theologians in the line of Bullinger and Olevianus up to Cocceius and his followers, who can be viewed as somewhat marginal in Reformed theology, but also firmly doctrinal authors such as Ursinus, Heidegger and Mastricht pay consistent attention to the concrete biblical material in which they encounter God in his attributes and operations.

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<sup>7</sup> An attempt toward a “narrative” doctrine of God is made by Bert Loonstra, *God schrijft geschiedenis: Disputaties over de Eeuwige* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003). The observation stated above does not imply a (positive or negative) judgment of the validity of a “narrative” doctrine of God.

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The conflation of Scriptural, traditional, and rational arguments in the doctrine of God makes it hard to analyze the origin of a certain thought. This holds for the contents of the doctrine of God as a whole: it is clearly intended as an explanation of the biblical teachings on God, but it takes a conventional form that is indebted to the patristic and medieval tradition, and it frequently seems to argue from a preconceived concept of God. It can also be discerned in separate attributes such as simplicity, immutability, and omnipotence: the relation of philosophical conceptuality and biblical content is extremely complicated, and as a result the systematical implications are hard to point out. Another consequence of the harmonistic approach of the different sources is a “dogmatic” way of interpreting biblical texts (e.g., the anthropomorphisms and the repentance texts in relation to the doctrine of immutability). From these complexities results a serious problem of evaluation: we can neither easily reproach Reformed orthodoxy with unbiblical philosophizing nor accept without qualification all its statements as fully biblical. Any reappraisal of the Reformed tradition in the doctrine of God should pose itself at least two questions in this regard: first, how can we construe a conception of God that is convincingly based on Scriptural revelation and does at once sufficiently account for the conceptual connections and implications of biblical God-language? Second, to what extent and in what manner can Reformed theology incorporate modern approaches to biblical exegesis and biblical theology in investigating the doctrine of God? It is evident that the results of much recent biblical theology run against the older positions. These traditional positions, in turn, were intended to reflect careful exegesis as listening to God’s own Word. How can we get out of this conflict?

In some areas, the substantial importance of theological insights resulted in the creative construction of philosophical models. An example is the theory of dual causality, in relation to the sophisticated view of necessity and contingency. The Reformed orthodox concentration on the sovereignty of God, the structural emphasis on the divine will and decree, and the rejection of an independent freedom of man led to a distinctive theory in opposition to, for instance, the Molinist theory of *scientia media* and *concursum*. The conceptions stored in a distinctly Reformed ontology might help modern Reformed theology to cope with religious and philosophical difficulties concerning necessity and contingency, determinism and autonomy, time and eternity, free will and predestination, Arminianism and “open theism.”

The Reformed orthodox application of scholastic methods (which were flexible already) shows a vivid interaction with substantial Christian and biblical convictions. While some influence and limitation from philosophical conceptions can be discerned, Reformed orthodoxy largely succeeded to adapt conceptual and argumentative instruments to its own theological concerns. The result is a high-profile statement of God’s ontological independence and superiority, which is principally supportive of God’s genuine relation to the world in the history of creation and salvation.

PART II.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN

THE THEOLOGY OF KARL

BARTH



## 9. Introduction

### 9.1. Importance

In the context of this study, Karl Barth's account of the doctrine of God is worth investigating for several reasons.

First, Barth is considered to be the most important Protestant theologian of the 20th century. Some even celebrate him as a Church Father of the 20th century, an honor which Barth deliberately denied to Schleiermacher for the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> His theology marks an epochal turn away from the 19th century liberal theology and the adherent *Kulturprotestantismus*, which is, at the same time, a return to the theology of the Reformation and to the Bible. Although it is a matter of discussion to what extent Barth is a biblical and evangelical (in the sense of Reformation-oriented) theologian,<sup>2</sup> and although the theological developments alongside with and after Barth have been diverse, the fact remains that no serious survey of 20th century doctrine of God can pass by the contribution of Barth. Moreover, after the "traditional" and immediate Barth reception until the 1960's and 70's, we have seen in recent years a new, postmodern reading of Barth. Apart from the question of legitimacy of this postmodern Barth revival, it is an intriguing fact that Barth's theology appears to be fresh and actual in a totally different context, and that his thinking seems to anticipate important elements of the postmodern condition.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Barth is not only an interesting object of historical study, but can also be a source of inspiration for theology at the start of the 21st century.

A second reason to include Barth in this study is his explicit standpoint concerning the method of theology. As we will examine in more detail below, Barth is a strong adversary of what is called "natural theology." His attack on any synthesis

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), xi, 1. Barth's refusal to entitle Schleiermacher as the Church Father of the 19th century: CD I/2, 610 (KD I/2, 682). References to and quotations from Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* are given from the English version *Church Dogmatics*, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, and published by T & T Clark (Edinburgh) from 1935 till 1975. In brackets, references to the original German edition are added.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis is expressed in the title of Thomas Torrance's *Karl Barth. Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*.

<sup>3</sup> A postmodern reading of Barth is promoted by among others: Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Leddy Karelse, *Dwalen: Over Mark C. Taylor en Karl Barth* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999). Less explicitly postmodern interpretations, highlighting aspects of Barth's theology that resemble postmodern themes such as narrativity and freedom: David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics,"* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, vol. 27 (Frankfurt / Bern: Peter Lang and Herman Lang, 1981); Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth against Hegemony, Christian Theology in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

between God's revelation and parts of our "natural" reality has drastically changed the basis of all subsequent discussions of the possibility of knowing God. After Barth, it is no longer possible to hold unproblematically the assumption that one can have some true knowledge of God from nature or history without the special revelation of God in his Word. This is not to say that natural theology has come to an end, but that any defense of natural theology has to confront Barth's objections. Barth's position on natural theology is not only relevant as a factor in contemporary theology, but also as a reaction to the tradition of medieval and Protestant scholastic theology.

The relation between Barth's theology and the older Protestant tradition is a third reason for investigating Barth's doctrine of God. An important objective of this chapter is to clarify the way in which Barth utilizes and reinterprets the Protestant scholastic doctrine of God. Within the overall plan of this study, it is important to evaluate both Barth's criticism of Reformed (and Lutheran) Orthodoxy and his own proposals to amend the weak spots of the traditional doctrine of God. In advance, we should be aware of the multidimensional character of Barth's attitude towards the older Protestant theology.

The fourth and final important aspect of Barth's theology in this context is his encapsulating the doctrine of God in a complex of the doctrines of Trinity, Christology, and election. By this means Barth gives his doctrine of God a markedly Christian profile in accordance with his own rejection of a neutral and general concept of God as it functions in natural theology. Moreover, Barth includes both the relation between God and man and God's salvific actions into the proper doctrine of God. With Barth, the doctrine of God is less than ever a separate locus; to the contrary, it is an integrated part of the whole revelational-salvational story of God.

### **9.2. Complications**

Several factors complicate the task I have set myself in this part of my study. The first complication is quantitative: the relevant parts of Barth's theological oeuvre occupy up to 3,000 pages and can consequently be dealt with only in a non-exhaustive fashion. In addition, Barth's theology has evoked a mass of secondary literature all over the (theological) world. Somewhat surprisingly (and, for this study, fortunately), the doctrine of God as such has received less attention in Barth interpretation than have other themes of his theology. Still, in drawing the lines of Barth's full theological method and in putting the doctrine of God in its systematic context, we will touch upon issues largely discussed in the literature on Barth. Within the limits of this study, references to secondary literature will be selective. I must be so bold as to propose my own interpretation of Barth in the frame of my research question. Interaction with other authors will take place mainly in the footnotes, and, if constitutive for my own argument, in the main text.

A more substantial complication resides in the enormous variety of perspectives on Barth's theology. From the outset, Barth's theology has provoked squarely different reactions. Behind the acceptance or rejection of his claims, different interpretations of the actual meaning and implications of his theology can be discerned. Typical of most of the early reception of Barth is that it saw urged to immediately take position toward Barth's challenges to both traditional and

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modern theologies. The “positional” understanding of Barth often clearly shows the confessional background of the interpreter: Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, liberal Protestant. From the end of Barth’s life, and increasingly after his death in 1968, a more “detached,” scientific investigation came to the fore. In Barth research since the 1960’s, Christophe Freyd distinguishes three significant directions in assessing the philosophical, historical, and political backgrounds of Barth’s theology:<sup>4</sup>

- The “ontological interpretation,” by, among others, E. Jüngel and W. Härle, searches for the ontological structure of Barth’s theology, which can, in Härle’s words, be identified as an “ontology of grace.” Through the decree of election, God’s being is determined toward communion with man, and man is predestined to unity with God. In this line of interpretation, it is emphasized that the “ontology” of Barth’s theology cannot be a general, *a priori* metaphysical position, but is a specific ontology that is implied in God’s self-revelation.
- The “political-socialist” interpretation is propagated by H. Gollwitzer and F.-W. Marquardt. The controversial monograph on Barth by Marquardt interprets Barth’s assertion of the universality of Christ in social and political terms, and explains Barth’s doctrine of God from his socialist practice and interests. While it can be acknowledged that Marquardt and Gollwitzer add a significant biographical and contextual dimension to our understanding of Barth, there is a near-complete consensus on the fundamental inadequacy of a socialist-marxist model of interpretation of Barth’s theology.
- The “history of science interpretation” is advocated by a circle of scholars around T. Rendtorff. This “Munich approach” places Barth’s theology in the larger context of the development of Protestant theology in the 19th and 20th centuries. A central concept is “modernity” (*Neuzeit*), which is in turn elaborated in terms of human autonomy and the relation to culture as central issues Christian theology has to deal with in the present era. Rendtorff *cum suis* claim that Barth, while apparently dismissing the project of modernity, in fact incorporated it in a different key within his dogmatic theology. According to the “Munich circle,” Barth’s emphasis on the “subjectivity” and “independence” of God is an attempt to extol and exceed the modern ideal of human subjectivity and autonomy, which, ironically, retains the marks of modernity. While exclusively claiming God’s autonomy, Barth unjustly – so the Rendtorff group argues – reduces human freedom to man’s obedience to God.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1980’s, we can discern an additional strand of Barth interpretation or appropriation: a post-liberal or, more widely, postmodern understanding (cf. footnote 3).

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<sup>4</sup> Christophe Freyd, *Gott als die universale Wahrheit von Mensch und Welt: Die Versöhnungslehre Karl Barths im Lichte der Religionsphilosophie Hegels*, PhD thesis Hamburg (Typescript Stuttgart 1982), 19-23.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg’s interpretation and evaluation of Barth’s theology can be viewed in close affinity with the “Munich circle” (in fact, Pannenberg taught in Munich). In comparison to Rendtorff c.s., Pannenberg’s discussions of Barth focus more on the philosophical and dogmatic presuppositions and implications, and should be understood from the background of Pannenberg’s own project of systematic theology.

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While this is not the place to address the question of historical and systematic adequacy of all different approaches, we can draw two important lessons for the usage of secondary literature on Barth:

It is highly probable that the different approaches all contain an "element of truth," or, in other words, all point to aspects of Barth's theology that tend to be overlooked in other perspectives. For a full understanding of Barth, it can be helpful to consider contributions from different angles of the interpretational debate.

We must be aware of the interaction between an author's own systematic position and his or her proposed Barth interpretation. Description, analysis, praise and criticism of Barth are in part determined by a person's preferences concerning themes, conceptions, questions and answers. This is inevitable and does not disqualify any interpretation at the outset. It should make us careful, however, in accepting any specific claims concerning what "is really at stake" in Barth's theology.<sup>6</sup>

To the diversity of perspectives on Barth corresponds a variety of formulations and conceptions extant in Barth's own oeuvre. As Heinzpeter Hempelmann puts it:

Es ist ein Problem jeder möglichen Kritik des Barthschen Entwurfes, dass alle angemahnten Aussagen sich irgendwo in seinem opus maximum finden lassen. Soll die Fülle der bei Barth vorliegenden dogmatischen Aussagen nicht dadurch zur Bedeutungslosigkeit vorkommen, dass eben alles und darum letztlich nichts, weil nichts Bestimmtes gesagt wird, wird jeder um eine Klärung der Barthschen Theologie bemühte Diskussionspartner sich auf den Grundsatz verstehen wollen, zunächst die Weichenstellungen aufzuweisen, so die Struktur der Kirchlichen Dogmatik zu erfragen und im Rahmen des solchermaßen erarbeiteten Koordinatensystems den jeweiligen Ort eines Aussagekomplexes anzugeben, der sein Profil wesentlich durch den Zusammenhang erhält, in dem er steht.<sup>7</sup>

Hempelmann then identifies the doctrine of election (*Gnadenwahl*) as the most important determinant of the doctrinal structure of the *Church Dogmatics*.

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<sup>6</sup> The interaction or even interference of Barth interpretation and one's own position becomes especially clear when authors criticize other interpretations. As an example, I point to Ulrich Barth's lengthy article "Zur Barth-Deutung Eberhard Jüngels," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 40 (1983): 296-320, 394-415. The interference of interpretation and position is evident on two levels: first, Ulrich Barth diagnoses Jüngel's understanding of Karl Barth's theology as standing in service of Jüngel's own theological program which is not identical with Karl Barth's *per se*; second, Ulrich Barth's criticism of Jüngel is based on philosophical and theological axioms which are not shared by Jüngel but still are presented as self-evidently rational. In an interpretational debate, two radically opposed positions and agenda's collide.

<sup>7</sup> Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Unaufhebbare Subjektivität Gottes? Probleme einer Lehre vom concursus divinus an Hand von Karl Barths Kirchlicher Dogmatik* (Wuppertal: TVG Brockhaus, 1992), 129.

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In the course of this study, we will have to bear in mind this problem. Anticipating my subsequent findings, I note the following aspects of the methodological problems in this area:

As Barth's *Church Dogmatics* has a rich, even abundant, style containing several different registers, we should carefully distinguish between: (a) the main thrust of the argument which is often worded in a rhetorical, sweeping, suggestive mode, (b) the role played by crucial statements (especially the *Leitsätze* in front of each section) in the constructive sequence of the whole of doctrinal exposition, (c) the polemical overtones of Barth's formulations, and (d) the technical elaboration of Barth's doctrinal conceptions, largely presented in the small letter excurses throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. In this study, I will focus —more than is often done —on the technical conceptuality developed by Barth.

Is there indeed one dominant structuring principle in Barth's theology? And if so, which is this principle. It is dangerous to establish such a "central dogma" in advance. This warning holds especially in view of the doctrine of God, which contains elements that, at first sight, do not fit so easily with the central tenets of Barth's "system." While it is far from implausible that Barth did create a unified system, we should at least give him the opportunity to protest and to make his own statements on, in this case, the doctrine of God. In view of Hempelmann's remark that almost any statement (even contradictory statements) can be found in the *Church Dogmatics*, this means that we attempt to put Barth's statements together into a meaningful and coherent whole without forcing them into a narrow system that violates the flexibility and nuance of Barth's thought.

The philosophical allegiances and antecedents of Barth's positions are notoriously difficult to establish. As we will see in section 10.3.1. The Prolegomena, Barth is principally indifferent toward philosophical affiliations, and he seems to consciously hide the philosophical roots of some of his conceptions by claiming that they derive from God's own revelation. On the one hand, we should not blindly trust these claims; on the other hand, some reserve is needed in labeling Barth's theology as "Hegelian," "Neo-Kantian," etc. We will return to the localization of Barth in the history of thought in section 15.3.2. Place in the History of Thought.

A final difficulty in view of the interpretation of Barth's theology concerns the Reformed confessional standpoint of this study. While Karl Barth explicitly presents himself as a Reformed theologian, the reception of Barth in Reformed theology has been diverse. T.F. Torrance, for one, has applauded and accepted Barth's version of the Reformed faith. G.C. Berkouwer, after critical reactions in the 1930's, gave a sympathetic analysis of Barth's theology in *De triomf der genade*. K. Schilder treated Barth as an opponent of true Reformed theology, especially on the basis of Barth's earliest dialectical theology. In the United States, Cornelius van Til gave a strongly critical analysis of Barth as a "modernist in disguise." In general, it can be stated that, in the more orthodox and conservative Reformed denominations, the attitude towards Barth and barthianism was largely negative, while in the larger "mainstream" churches of Reformed signature Barth's theology gained wide acceptance. The latter fact, in turn, fueled, to some extent, the distrust in Barth as a Reformed theologian in the "conservative" churches.

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In this study, I want to follow a suggestion by Gordon H. Clark in his almost neglected study on *Karl Barth's Theological Method*. Clark notices the different perspectives from which Barth's theology is analyzed and evaluated (American fundamentalism, modernism or liberal theology, Roman Catholicism, Calvinism), and then argues that the Calvinist or Reformed standpoint is the most suitable point of view for judging Barth on his own merits:

It is the standpoint of Barth himself. ... Barth clearly claims to be Reformed. He frequently refers to his theology as Evangelical; and when Lutheranism is chiefly in view, he explicitly uses the term Reformed.

Clark further argues that the standpoint from which Barth is viewed affects the interpretation: the "benefit of the doubt" given to Barth on disputable points will depend on one's own systematic position. While assuming a common Reformed ground between Barth and oneself brings along a risk of assimilating and distorting Barth's meaning, the commonality of fundamental principles yields the greatest probability of an adequate and fair discussion.<sup>8</sup>

For my investigation in Barth, this means that all voices in the choir of interpretation will be heard, but that first of all "the master's voice" will be understood as the voice of a Reformed fellow. This will not prevent us from noticing deviations from the confessional Reformed path. But it can help to understand Barth's theological intentions and efforts most properly and to gain optimal profit from this study for the further development of Reformed theology.

### **9.3. Outline**

The overall question of this part is how method and content are connected in the doctrine of God by Karl Barth. The features of Barth's dealing with the doctrine of God, as roughly indicated in section 9.1 above, suggest that there is a strong connection between method and content in Barth's theology. The purpose of this part is to elaborate this hypothesis by a concrete analysis. Parallel to the procedure in the description of Reformed Orthodox theology, I will describe the main lines of Barth's method and his account of the doctrine of God. I cannot reasonably deal with all details, although I attempt to select some significant details that point to the determinants of Barth's theology. The primary sources of my analysis of Barth's doctrine of God are volumes II/1 and II/2 of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (from now on: *Church Dogmatics*). The section on Barth's method focuses on the *Christliche Dogmatik* of 1927, the Anselm-book *Fides quaerens intellectum* of 1931, and volumes I/1 and I/2 of the *Church Dogmatics* (1932, 1938), supplemented by some of his earlier essays and books.

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963), 2-6.

## 10. The Development of Barth's Theological Method

In the title of this chapter, the term “development” is deliberately chosen. It goes without saying that Barth did not find out his definitive method at once. More important is, in my opinion, the fact that all different stages of Barth's theological development remain relevant in the subsequent phases. A popular formula like “from dialectics to analogy” may suggest that Barth left behind his earlier, dialectical thinking when he had come towards his mature, analogical theology of the *Church Dogmatics*. In this section, I hope to substantiate the claim that this suggestion is deceiving.<sup>1</sup> It does make sense to distinguish several phases in Barth's theology until and even during the writing of his *magnum opus*. But we should be aware of different *strata* and probably even tensions in Barth's final theological method.

Periodization is a dangerous enterprise. This holds good for Barth's theology as well. Cutting the ongoing process of learning and of shaping views into neat chronological pieces is arbitrary and sometimes misleading. However, it is at the same time necessary to fixate the shifts of interest and emphasis, even changes of thought that take place in the course of years. Bruce McCormack has convincingly argued that the decisive turn in Barth's theology is his farewell to his liberal theological masters starting around 1915. Among the later shifts and changes, none attains the same significance. The move from paradox to analogy takes place within the framework of a continuous and consistent theological program.<sup>2</sup>

Chronological divisions often reflect the interests of systematic inquiry. Barth himself is exemplary in emphasizing changes when entering into a new stage of his thinking: he viewed his *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* as a break with the dialectical theology of *Romans II* and as a turn to regular, dogmatic theology; a few years later he felt compelled to replace the *Christliche Dogmatik* by the project of the *Church Dogmatics*, a new start occasioned by Barth's study of Anselm. Barth's first full biography by Eberhard Busch takes the changes of Barth's civil position (from

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<sup>1</sup> The thesis of a development from dialectics to analogy was worked out by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, 2nd ed. (Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1962). An interpretation of the development from the perspective of Barth's confrontation with Søren Kierkegaard is provided by Eberhard Jüngel in his article “Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons,” in *Barth-Studien* (Zurich / Gütersloh: Benziger/Mohn, 1982), 127-179. The dialectics – analogy thesis is rejected by McCormack (see footnote 2) and by Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie, vol. 96 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1985), 11-20. Cf. also Barend Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden: Het uitgangspunt van de christologie en de problematiek van de openbaring, nagegaan aan de hand van ontwikkelingen bij Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer en Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Kampen: Kok, 1999), 183-187.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 1-28, 464-467.

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minister to professor, from Germany to Switzerland) as its dividing principle.<sup>3</sup> C. van der Kooi provides a fairly detailed division of Barth's early theology in four stages: from 1909 till 1914, from 1914 till 1919, from 1919 till 1924, and from 1924 till 1927.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of his continuity-thesis, Bruce McCormack labels all of Barth's theology after 1915 as "dialectical," and derives his subdivision from the material doctrines that occupied Barth subsequently: process eschatology (1915-1920), consistent eschatology (1920-1924), pneumatocentric anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology (1924-1936), christocentric anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology (1936 and following).<sup>5</sup> For our purposes, focusing on Barth's "method," the following periodization is suitable: the first sub-section extends to 1921/22 and discusses Barth's moving away from his "liberal" teachers into a "dialectical" theology. In the second sub-section, I will investigate Barth's development of a "dogmatical" theology during his professorates at Göttingen, Münster, and Bonn until the definitive settlement of his method by the 1931 book on Anselm. The third sub-section examines the final methodical position and its elaboration in the *Church Dogmatics* from 1932 onward.

### **10.1. From Liberal Theology Towards Dialectical Theology**

There is an almost complete consensus concerning the radical character of Barth's departure from his theological roots around 1915, a consensus to which Barth himself contributed substantially. In this sub-section, I will outline both the contours of the theology and philosophy developed by Barth's teachers (including the famous but hardly accessible Marburg Neo-Kantianism) and the constitutive factors and elements of Barth's emancipation from it. We will be specifically aware of factors that remain relevant to Barth's later theology.

#### **10.1.1. Barth's Farewell to His Liberal Teachers**

It is commonly known that Barth's favorite theological teacher was Wilhelm Herrmann. Therefore, we cannot insert the complete legacy of late 19th century German theology into Karl Barth's education, but we have to concentrate on the distinctively Herrmannian type of theology. Wilhelm Herrmann stood in the tradition of Albrecht Ritschl, who attempted to found Christian faith on the historical life of Jesus. Hereby, the Ritschlians sought to free theology from both the subjectivism inherent in Schleiermacher's theology and the rationalist attacks from philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Wilhelm Herrmann endeavored to remove the last heterogeneous elements of Ritschlian thinking by placing all emphasis on the connection between Jesus and

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<sup>3</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf: Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1976), 7.

<sup>4</sup> C. van der Kooi, *De denkweg van de jonge Karl Barth* (Amsterdam: VU Boekhandel, 1985), 1.

<sup>5</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 20-23.

<sup>6</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 49-51. We should realize that Barth was directly acquainted with important German theologians, notably F.D.E. Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl. In fact, the Herrmannian theology, embraced by Barth in his early years, can be seen as determined by both Schleiermacher and Ritschl. In his book *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), Barth provides a historical evaluation of 19th century German theology.

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the believer by means of experience (*Erlebnis*). This experience is concerned, not so much with the historical facts of the life and teachings of Jesus (as Ritschl held it), as with the "inner life" of Jesus, his religious awareness. (In this respect, Herrmann moves back from Ritschl to the awareness-religion of Schleiermacher.) According to Herrmann, Jesus is exemplary of the communion with God of which religion consists. Important for Barth's reception of Herrmann is the negative attitude the latter took towards "natural theology." Herrmann treated revelation as something that happens from outside. Similarly, the "historical" events on which religion is based, are not historical in the positivistic sense, but they point to a transcendent spiritual reality that moves history. The effect is that, for Herrmann, religion is self-authenticating: it cannot be reduced to another phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

In his earliest years as a pastor, Barth worked along Herrmannian lines. With the start of his new theology around 1915 came his farewell from Herrmann. The immediate inducement was the reaction of Barth's former teachers, including Herrmann, to the outbreak of the First World War: the celebration of the "Kriegserlebnis" of the German people as a religious experience made the whole category of *Erlebnis* (experience) suspect and obsolete to Barth. Some 10 years later, Barth clarified his attitude towards Herrmann's theology in more theological terms by his 1925 essay "Die dogmatische Prinzipienlehre bei Wilhelm Herrmann."<sup>8</sup> His intention is to give both a fair exposition of Herrmann's views on the foundations of theology, and an interpretation that does more justice to Herrmann's deepest motives than Herrmann ever realized himself.<sup>9</sup>

According to Barth, four elements are characteristic of Herrmann's position: (a) the *universality* of religion, consisting primarily of the commonality of its basic experience, and secondarily in the explication of religious thoughts (dogmas), (b) the *particularity* of religion, by which it is sharply distinguished from rational knowledge, psychological experience, epistemological or ethical postulates, and Schleiermacherian "feeling of absolute dependence", (c) the emphasis on the both historically and individually *experiential knowledge* of the divine power over our lives, and (d) *the unique place of Jesus Christ* as the instantiation of superior humanity, to whose inner life we are connected by a chain of religious witnesses.<sup>10</sup>

Barth's congenial criticism of Herrmann sets off at an apparent inconsistency in Herrmann's utterances on freedom and authority in religion. The dominant line in Herrmann's thought is the emphasis on the individual self: no one can come to faith on the ground of outward authority, but only by means of experiencing the religious oneself. Therefore, Herrmann is most furious against the idea of propositional revelation and dogmas functioning as a law of teaching. However, there is a marginal line in Herrmann that prevents him from changing his *Dogmatik* into a *Glaubenslehre* after Schleiermacherian fashion.<sup>11</sup> Barth utilizes this marginal

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<sup>7</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 52-63.

<sup>8</sup> Published in: Karl Barth, *Die Theologie und die Kirche: Gesammelte Vorträge 2. Band* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1928), 240-284.

<sup>9</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 240-243; Barth compares his attitude towards Herrmann with the relation between Origen (the master) and Gregorius Thaumaturgus (the independent disciple).

<sup>10</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 244-260.

<sup>11</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 260-264.

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line in order to establish a reinterpretation of Herrmann's thought, pointing toward a genuinely divine activity as the foundation of human religion. Barth notices a shift of emphasis in Herrmann's latest work: here Herrmann stresses the fact that religion needs to start and end with humiliation before God and with acknowledgment of God's superior subjectivity as the triune God. According to Barth, the trinitarian approach should have moved Herrmann towards another foundation of theology. Barth elaborates this suggestion of a reworking in five points:

- a. The universality of religion should start with the event of revelation (*Deus dixit*) which provides the transsubjective starting point of religious experience.
- b. The alleged independence of religion is compromised by Herrmann's insistence on historical and individual experience as ground of religion, which makes religion vulnerable to non-religious, scientific interpretation. To repair this damage, one must assume a true object of religion transcending the subjective experience.
- c. Herrmann focuses too much (in a pietistic way) on the subjective coming to faith in the soul of man, whereas he should have pointed to the grace of God that is expressed in the Word.
- d. Herrmann's Christology is defective, as it denies the truly divine nature of Christ (the *Logos*) in favor of a divinization of the human nature (the inner life).<sup>12</sup>
- e. Herrmann would have defended human freedom more adequately by simultaneously<sup>13</sup> acknowledging the authority of the divine Word and the doctrine of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

As a conclusion, we can state that Barth gave theology a direction squarely opposite to Herrmann's position: divine revelation, not human individual religion is the starting point. Within this totally different framework, Barth retained some notions he learned from Herrmann: the self-authenticating and irreducible character of faith, the emphasis on revelation as Self-revelation, the rejection of natural theology and of apologetics on the basis of it.<sup>15</sup>

Although Wilhelm Herrmann was Barth's most important teacher, he also studied with Adolf von Harnack. Harnack was not only the leading dogma historian; he moreover represented the dominant liberal view of systematic

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<sup>12</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 274-278. Barth here alludes to his newly developed "anhypostatic-enhypostatic" Christology, which ascribes the personality of Christ to the second Person of the Trinity, namely the Logos. On page 276, Barth gives his famous example describing the difference between a classical and a liberal Christology: "Die orthodoxe Christologie ist ein aus der Höhe von 3000 m steil abfließendes Gletscherwasser; damit kann man etwas schaffen. Die Herrmannsche Christologie, so wie sie dasteht, ist der hoffnungslose Versuch, eine stehende Lagune mittelst einer Handpumpe auf dieselbe Höhe zu treiben. Das geht eben nicht."

<sup>13</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 281: one should uphold both freedom and authority.

<sup>14</sup> "Prinzipienlehre," 260-284

<sup>15</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 66-68.

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theology.<sup>16</sup> During the winter semester of 1906/1907 in Berlin, Barth was almost immersed in Harnack's theological approach. This experience withheld Barth of following the so-called "positive" theology of his father Fritz Barth, and drove him towards the Schleiermacherian-Ritschlian theology of Wilhelm Herrmann.<sup>17</sup>

It is a widely known fact of Barthian biography, that Barth's lecture concerning "Biblische Fragen, Einsichten und Ausblicke" (Aarau, 1920) provoked an astonished and frontal reaction by the old Harnack.<sup>18</sup> A few years later, a public discussion settled the cleavage between Barth and his former teacher.<sup>19</sup>

The discussion contains important elements for understanding and judging Barth's position over against liberal theology.<sup>20</sup> Harnack opens the battle by directing fifteen questions to "the despisers of scientific theology among the theologians."<sup>21</sup> A central motive in Harnack's attack is his insistence on historical knowledge and critical thinking. He opposes to a massive assumption of unity in Bible and revelation. Moreover, he objects to a sharp distinction between religious experience and experience in general, between God and world, faith and culture, theology and philosophy. In Harnack's view, there is a harmonious, though dialectical, relation between these pairs. Because God is love, the knowledge of God should be connected with general goodness, beauty and truth.<sup>22</sup>

In his first response, Barth protests against Harnack's identification of the liberal, historic-critical theology as *the* scientific theology. Subsequently, he answers Harnack's fifteen questions. He points out that the scientific character of theology, including historical knowledge and critical thinking, consists of the acknowledgement of God's revelation and of God as the primary subject. Barth considers subjective attitudes and scientific operations equally important and unimportant in understanding the Bible: through the Holy Spirit the contents of the Bible is understood. Against Harnack's harmony of God and world, faith and culture, etc., Barth insists on the principal distance based on the difference between Creator and creature, which is fully expressed in the cross of Jesus. Therefore, a

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<sup>16</sup> On the significance of Harnack as a theologian and scientist, see *Adolf von Harnack. Theologe, Historiker, Wissenschaftspolitiker*, ed. by Kurt Nowak and Otto Gerhard Oexle, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol 161 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Busch, *Lebenslauf*, 50-52.

<sup>18</sup> Busch, *Lebenslauf*, 127-128. The lecture was published in Karl Barth, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie. Gesammelte Vorträge*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1924, 70-98.

<sup>19</sup> The discussion appeared in *Die Christliche Welt*, 1923. A republication is given in: Karl Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten: Gesammelte Vorträge 3. Band* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), "Ein Briefwechsel mit Adolf von Harnack," 7-31.

<sup>20</sup> On the development of Barth's conflict with Harnack, see: Hartmut Ruddies, "Evangelium und Kultur: Die Kontroverse zwischen Adolf von Harnack und Karl Barth," in Nowak and Oexle, *Adolf von Harnack*, 103-126. A thorough analysis of the public discussion between Barth and Harnack is provided in H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> In his second article, Harnack admits that these questions were primarily addressed to Barth: Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 13.

<sup>22</sup> Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 7-9.

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continuous growth of religion, morals and culture is impossible. Christian faith is as much barbarous as it is cultural. Concerning the scientific, rational character of theology, Barth concludes that the truth of God's Word is not available to natural, human capacities, but is completely dependent on faith as God's gift. Therefore, theology is not bound to contemporary science, but to the Word of God.<sup>23</sup>

Harnack's reply makes it clear that the cleavage between the two theologies is profound. Harnack insists on the scientific character of theology: the task of theology is identical with the task of science as such. He accuses Barth of subjectivism and spiritualism: he counters Barth's appeal to the Holy Spirit by controlled, historical-critical investigation. Harnack displays genuine pathos in maintaining the bond between God and humanity: he refuses to accept Barth's "either-or" between God's truth and our truth. He discerns the shadow of Marcion over Barth's thinking. Harnack reminds Barth of Augustine's conversion story: in flashback, Augustine recognized the elements of truth scattered throughout his life, although they only fit together after his conversion. For the same reason, Harnack cannot accept Barth's confusing paradoxes: in his view, the teachings of Jesus and Paul aim at comfort and assurance, which Barth can never provide. The forgiveness of sins is, for Harnack, the ground of assurance; he sees Barth undermining this ground with psychological and metaphysical dialecticism.<sup>24</sup>

Barth's final response affirms the gap between Barth and Harnack: Barth did not answer the questions Harnack considers relevant, and thus Harnack's conclusion must be negative. Barth insists, however, on investigating the questions he and his friends have started to pose. These are not merely new questions: Barth appeals to older Protestant theology to corroborate his statement that theology is concerned with the Word of God. Theology is not restricted to what the historical-critical method permits, but has to cling to its own theme. God's revelation is exclusively God's way towards man; there is no corresponding way from our human possibilities towards God. In addition, Barth introduces the important category of reality (*Wirklichkeit*): the fact of incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The New Testament testifies this reality, and does not, contrary to Harnack's view, provide comforting and pedagogical parables. Faith is not concerned with the historical Jesus, but with the resurrected Christ. Faith is not a human capacity, but a divine gift that raises man from spiritual death. In reaction to Harnack's reference to Marcion and Augustine, Barth states that our world relates to God as the relative to the absolute: our experiences, ideas, and capacities can refer to and witness of God, but there is no direct link between these signs and the reality of God. The relation between God and world is no mere opposition, but a dialectic relation in the perspective of eschatological solution. "Hope versus possession," is the final formula Barth uses to describe the gap between him and his former teacher.<sup>25</sup>

A brief epilogue by Harnack concludes the discussion. He indicates that the issues under discussion deserve further consideration, and restricts himself to two remarks: (1) he considers Paul and Luther, as well as Barth, as *objects* of scientific theology, and maintains his strict distinction between science and preaching, and

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<sup>23</sup> Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 9-13.

<sup>24</sup> Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 13-17.

<sup>25</sup> Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 18-30.

(2) he judges "revelation" as an unscientific term, easily leading to biblicism and dialecticism, but unable to found a religious community. Harnack invites Barth to recognize that his theology is but one among many alternatives.<sup>26</sup>

### 10.1.2. The Influence of Marburg Neo-Kantian Philosophy

The importance of the philosophy of Neo-Kantianism for the interpretation of Barth's early theology is controversial. Biographically, Barth's stay at Marburg 1908-1909 was formative for his theological education. He entered into a climate of discussion between his theological teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann, and the Marburg Neo-Kantian philosophers, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. From the beginning, the issue of Neo-Kantianism has been raised by Barth-commentators. The Neo-Kantian influence was reduced to different sources: the Marburg School leaders, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, and Barth's philosopher-brother, Heinrich Barth. Since the 1960's, it is a matter of nearby consensus that Barth, though directly acquainted with the Marburg leaders' writings, received the decisive Neo-Kantian impulses through his brother, Heinrich Barth.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the opinions diverged concerning the impact of the Neo-Kantian elements: some interpreters considered them fundamental for at least Barth's early theology (up to *Romans II*), others even see Neo-Kantian concepts carried over into Barth's mature theology, while a final group thinks Barth, from the beginning, produced an independent theology in which some formally "Neo-Kantian" notions were radically revised.<sup>28</sup>

The central objective of the Marburg Neo-Kantian philosophers was to clarify the different types of knowledge. They furthered the transcendental criticism of Immanuel Kant, who had built his philosophy on the distinction between the *noumenal* (the thing *in itself*) and the *phenomenal* (the thing *as it appears*), and who had argued that the subjective forms of thought are co-constitutive of our knowledge of the objects. The specific situation to which the Neo-Kantian philosophy reacted is the rise of the natural sciences during the 19th century, which induced a strongly realistic, positivist view of scientific knowledge. The Neo-Kantians established a "scientific" philosophy focusing on the theoretical foundations of scientific knowledge. They distinguished themselves from both dogmatic idealism and materialist, naturalist empiricism. The proper objects of philosophy, according to Neo-Kantianism, are the general laws of thinking.<sup>29</sup>

In the work of the founder of the Marburg School, Hermann Cohen,<sup>30</sup> two fields can be discerned: logic and philosophy of religion. The notions of Cohen's

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<sup>26</sup> Harnack/Barth, "Briefwechsel," 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> See the survey in Johann Friedrich Lohmann, *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im "Römerbrief" und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, vol. 72 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 5-32.

<sup>28</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 36-52.

<sup>30</sup> In my basic exposition of the Marburg Neo-Kantianism, I limit my summary to Cohen's views, since these contain the main elements that influenced Karl Barth. The philosophy of Paul Natorp is not separately discussed here. As Karl Barth was immediately influenced by his brother Heinrich, the latter's elaboration of Neo-Kantian concepts will be investigated below.

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philosophy that influenced Karl Barth are found on the field of logic (largely taken as the theory of knowledge and science). A first issue is the question of *data*: Cohen claims that Kant's *Critique of pure reason* still shows the rest of an empiricist view of sense experience as the basis of knowledge. According to Cohen, a theory of knowledge has to start with pure thinking, which has its origin (*Ursprung*) in itself. Reason produces its own object of knowledge, and is not dependent on empirical *data*.<sup>31</sup> Barth's use of the concept of origin will be discussed later; concerning the *data* problem, it is clear that in his dialectical phase he rejects any direct appeal to a "given." *Romans II*, in particular, is full of statements of God's unintuitability. In Barth's view of the possibility of knowing God, he remains an opponent of any direct foundation on experiential *data* (see section 11.2 below).

Secondly, Cohen's claim that reason is self-originating does not imply an *a priori* idealism. Quite contrary, Cohen emphasizes the objectivity of thinking. Formally speaking, thinking consists of separation (analysis) and unification (synthesis). Thinking is a dynamic process that is always open to the future. But it is not empty and indefinite. Although the object of knowledge is never fully grasped, it functions as a counterpart (*Gegenstand*) that governs the movement of thinking.<sup>32</sup> Both aspects, the dynamic and the objective, can be found in the theology of Karl Barth. In his first phase, the dynamic, actualist side prevails; later, he develops an explicit theory of the objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of God.

A third point of contact between Cohen and Barth is the former's emphasis on the "scientific fact" (*Faktum der Wissenschaft*) as the proper object of philosophy. Reason is not concerned with immediate things or states of affairs but with their scientific representations. Philosophy does not aim at direct knowledge of things but at clarifying and purifying the ways in which science describes reality. Philosophy judges the validity of scientific knowledge by reference to its origin (*Ursprung*) in pure reason.<sup>33</sup> Similar statements are found with Karl Barth: in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, he takes Christian talk of God as the concrete object of dogmatics; this talk should be tested by reference to the Word of God. Barth's further development of his theological method in *Fides quaerens intellectum* and the *Church Dogmatics* brings along an objectification of this view: Christian speech is viewed as codified in the church's Creed.

A central, if not most important, notion of Cohen's logic is the idea of origin (*Ursprung*). The concept of origin has two fundamental aspects: (a) it states that, initially, reason is self-originating in the sense that it is not derived from something else, and (b) it formulates as a criterion for all subsequent thinking that it should consistently reduce to the principle of origin. Cohen's claim is that reason produces (*erzeugt*) that which counts as being. The procedure by which reason comes from nothing (*Nichts*) to something (*Etwas*) is the so-called infinite or limitative

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<sup>31</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 67-70.

<sup>32</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 70-72. Parallel to the combination of dynamics and objectivity is Cohen's account of the Self as Imperative: one's individual personality is not an *a priori* given, but takes shape during the process of life; see Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 118-122. Cohen's emphasis on objectivity is even strengthened by his younger colleague, Paul Natorp; see Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 156-160.

<sup>33</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 72-77.

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judgment: by adding a negative, limitative qualifier to the “nothing,” reason creates room for thinking something. On this negative basis or origin, positive knowledge can be constructed.<sup>34</sup> The presupposition that validates the step from negation to position is, in Cohen’s philosophy, the principle of continuity: on the level of thinking, contrary to the realm of reality, there is a *continuum* from strict negation, *via* infinity and limitation, to position. This raises the question of the true foundational principle of Cohen’s philosophy: origin or continuity? The apparent ambiguity of Cohen’s concept of origin was later solved by Karl Barth’s brother Heinrich.<sup>35</sup> What interests us now is the fact that Cohen, in a posthumous writing on religion, equated the origin principle with God. He interprets the creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by analogy to the logical concept of origin. The creation of the world does not contradict God’s absolute unity, but instead follows from it as the infinite starting point of everything.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of origin was mediated to Karl Barth through his philosopher-brother Heinrich. As a professional philosopher, Heinrich Barth worked on the line from Plato to Descartes to Kant. He attempted to construct a critically idealist philosophy, strongly based on the Marburg Neo-Kantianism. The foundation of reason in itself (the origin concept) is central in Heinrich’s early philosophy. In his 1919 lecture on “Gotteserkenntnis” (knowledge of God), which decisively influenced Karl Barth in that phase of his thinking, Heinrich Barth used the notion of origin as a medicine for the crisis of that time, just after World War I. The recourse to the origin of reason means the deconstruction of all given certainties, and provides the starting point for a new way of thinking. Remarkably, Heinrich equates the Neo-Kantian *Ursprung* with the Platonic *Idea* and with the *Divine*. Knowledge of, and belief in, God is the only rescue for a wrongly oriented mind and life.<sup>37</sup> Compared to the Marburg school leaders, Heinrich Barth gives the notion of origin a more fundamental function: it is not only the basis of logic but the foundational principle of all life. By his insertion of the Platonic Idea of the Good, Heinrich gives the origin concept a strongly ethical character. Both thinking and acting are grounded in the transcendental Idea. The origin concept is radicalized by making it transcendent to the finite, human subject. According to Heinrich Barth, the origin after Cohenian fashion is still a product of a finite mind, and therefore cannot provide the infinity required for the absolute starting point of reason. Only the transcendental concept of God can do. The appeal to transcendence solves the ambiguity between origin and continuity in Cohen’s thought: the Archimedic point lies outside human thinking and does not rest on an immanent principle of reason.<sup>38</sup>

In *Romans II*, Karl Barth utilizes the origin philosophy as an instrument to formulate the radical distance between God and man: as the origin of all, God is transcendent, and there is no direct connection between God and man. In a specific form, Barth identifies the cross of Christ as the origin from which the knowledge of

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<sup>34</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 100-109.

<sup>35</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 110-112.

<sup>36</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 112-117.

<sup>37</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 164-181.

<sup>38</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 182-198, 203-205.

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God springs.<sup>39</sup> After *Romans II*, however, the origin language seems to disappear, as Barth develops a stronger notion of the subjectivity of God and of divine revelation.

Besides the Neo-Kantian logical concepts that influenced Karl Barth, a few more general features are important. Barth inherited from the Marburg teachers an antipathy towards psychologism and historicism.<sup>40</sup> In their view, empirical psychology fell short of the scientific standards of both theoretical and ethical reason. Therefore, it had its own right as a descriptive science, but it should not claim any regulative power over other domains of life. The Neo-Kantians objected in particular to the inherent naturalism of the pan-psychological approach.<sup>41</sup> A similar reproach is made to the historicist tendency to raise historical facts to the status of superior knowledge. Quite contrary, according to Cohen, a good account of history has to start with a good philosophy. On these grounds, Cohen defends a rational interpretation of historical philosophy, by which it is possible to understand a philosopher of the past better than he understood himself.<sup>42</sup> The same interpretative procedure is followed by Karl Barth in his *Romans* commentary. However, concerning the whole question of historicism, Barth's position is more complicated, and involves his confrontation with Ernst Troeltsch and Franz Overbeck.

### **10.1.3. Barth between Troeltsch and Overbeck**

Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) was not among Barth's theological teachers. As we have seen before, Barth grew up in the school of Wilhelm Herrmann and the Marburg Neo-Kantians. By studying with Adolf von Harnack, he was immersed in historical criticism. During his vicariate in Geneva (1910), Barth once confronted himself with Ernst Troeltsch. His reaction at that moment staid firmly within Herrmannian lines: Barth rejected Troeltsch' fusion of faith and knowledge, religion and history.<sup>43</sup>

A more profound confrontation with Troeltsch' approach of theology took place in 1920. Barth then published a review of *Christentum und Kultur*, a posthumous collection of notes by the Basle Professor of New Testament and Early Church History, Franz Overbeck. The title of Barth's review article, "Unsettled Questions for Theology Today" (*Unerledigte Anfragen an die heutige Theologie*), reveals Barth's fascination by Overbeck's attack on the mainstream theology of his days.<sup>44</sup> Before discussing Barth's position on Troeltsch and Overbeck, we will first glance at the characteristics of Ernst Troeltsch' theology.

Starting as a disciple of Albrecht Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch soon developed in a different direction. Ritschl aimed at an ethical interpretation of the Christian faith, thus claiming a safe area for religion against rationalist and historical criticism. After Ritschl's death, his School split into different factions: one group around

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<sup>39</sup> Van der Kooi, *Denkweg*, 110-112, 173-174.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. his defence of an independent dogmatical theology between historical and practical theology, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 8-10.

<sup>41</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 122-127.

<sup>42</sup> Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, 128-129.

<sup>43</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 73-77.

<sup>44</sup> The article was later published in Barth, *Die Theologie und die Kirche*, 1-25.

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Wilhelm Herrmann focused on the ethical-religious influence flowing from the "inner life" of Jesus and ascribed little urgency to the historical questions. The other wing of Young Ritschlians aimed at a synthesis of history, religion and ethics. This History of religion school (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), as they were called, consisted of, among others, Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel and New Testament scholar Wilhelm Bousset, while Ernst Troeltsch became the leading systematic theologian.<sup>45</sup>

Troeltsch's program is, in brief, to acquire *normative* knowledge through *historical* study of religion. Starting with the comparative study of religions, Troeltsch aimed at establishing the absoluteness of Christianity as it had taken form in history. Troeltsch believed that this "absolute" religion was not dependent on a (Ritschlian) value judgment of faith, nor that it could be found in an arbitrary, contingent event, but that it was the objective truth of history. Troeltsch's ambition to establish the absolute truth of religion through historical study instead of dogmatic judgment provoked sharp criticism from the other wing of Ritschlians, and led to Troeltsch being charged with Hegelianism. In Troeltsch's own view, the main difference with Hegel was that the latter assumed the realization of the absolute principle in his own days, while Troeltsch expects it from the future. Troeltsch also differed from Adolf von Harnack, who propagated the historical method but, in Troeltsch's eyes, stopped too early in order to insert a dogmatically chosen basic truth of Christianity. Troeltsch insisted on taking a universal standpoint and working through a philosophy of religion and a philosophy of history towards a historically proven absolute religion. The search for the absolute implied a fundamental relativism towards all positive forms of religion: the manifestation of absolute truth is to be awaited from the future, and meanwhile we have to strive for the best approximations of the absolute. The task of theology, then, is to construct directives for religious and ethical life on the basis of historical examinations of religion's approximations of the absolute.<sup>46</sup>

The broader background of Troeltsch's philosophy of religion is formed by the difficulties arising from Kant's philosophy and later German Idealism. Kant's epistemological criticism seems to induce a dualism of secular and religious reality. Against both materialist monism and ethicist dualism, Troeltsch insisted on the unity of religion, ethics, and metaphysics. Hence, he objected to an all too easy appeal to a religious *a priori* that would serve as the starting point of religious epistemology. According to Troeltsch, there is a religious *a priori*, but this is equal to man's openness towards freedom from naturalistic determinism. Man is placed *sub specie aeternitatis*, hoping for the reconciliation of spirit and nature. Religion is concerned with the goal of history, and at once empowers man to anticipate on this future. Thus, Troeltsch combined a teleological view of religion with a strong emphasis on ethics.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mark D. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13-45.

<sup>46</sup> Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch*, 45-74.

<sup>47</sup> Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch*, 75-137.

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Part of Troeltsch' theological program is to examine and understand the forms of life in modern culture. Troeltsch claimed that the great eras of Christianity (Early Catholic Church, medieval Catholicism, and Protestantism) all developed a synthesis with contemporary culture, based on some unified vision of reality. According to Troeltsch, after the 18th century Enlightenment such a unified vision has broken down. In his own proposal for a new synthesis, Troeltsch emphasized the role of individuals: the traditional structures of the Church are no longer vital to religion. Against socio-cultural developments that threatened individuality, Troeltsch asked for religious and ethical responsibility. Human behavior should not be determined by arbitrary decisions, but by rational, historically informed deliberations.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas Ernst Troeltsch most consequentially and positively embedded Christian religion in history, Franz Overbeck (1837-1905) drew exactly the opposite conclusion.<sup>49</sup> Although he abandoned Christian faith in his early youth, Overbeck held a position as professor of New Testament and Early Church History in Basel from 1870 until his retirement in 1897. As a colleague and friend of Friedrich Nietzsche, Overbeck worked on a historical-critical reconstruction of Christianity, designed to prove its obsolescence. Although Overbeck scarcely published his views, his rich *Nachlass* provides sufficient evidence of his investigations and theories. Overbeck was profoundly aware of the stage of transition in which the culture and religion of his days had come. Against any comfortable synthesis of modern culture and traditional Christianity, he offered a radical critique of the Christian faith by means of historical study.<sup>50</sup>

Foundational to Overbeck's criticism of contemporary Christianity is his view of true religion. Overbeck draws a sharp distinction between original Christianity and its subsequent existence as a religio-cultural movement. Typical of original Christianity is its world-renouncing character, based on the living expectation of the return of Christ. With the delay of Christ's return, Christian believers started to shape a historical entity. Gradually, the world renunciation gave way to a positive engagement of the Christian church in society and culture. Overbeck views the historization and enculturation of Christian faith as a betrayal of its *Urgeschichte*. True Christian faith is a unique and unrepeatable experience of consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

Underlying Overbeck's view of original versus historical Christianity are some presuppositions concerning the nature of science and the relation between reason and experience. In line with Enlightenment thought, Overbeck saw a sharp contrast between religion and rationality. The specific form of rational inquiry in which Overbeck is engaged, is historical investigation. Overbeck holds that the religious claims of the Christian faith cannot stand the test of historical study. Historical knowledge is highly valued by Overbeck as a means to free oneself from

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<sup>48</sup> Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch*, 138-186.

<sup>49</sup> On Overbeck, see Martin Henry, *Franz Overbeck: Theologian? Religion and History in the Thought of Franz Overbeck*, European University Studies, Series XXIII Theology, vol. 536 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 1-34.

<sup>51</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 35-61.

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Christianity as a historical entity. It is typical of scientific knowledge that, once an object is understood, one is no longer bound to it. But beyond this negative, critical function, science can serve to open the road to a positive engagement in human existence and experience. Finally, Overbeck's zeal and ardor is directed to this utter experience. In this highest sense, science substitutes traditional religion. This substitution goes with a sense of loss of the subjective religious experience.<sup>52</sup>

In Overbeck's view, it belongs to historical study that one is at a distance from one's objects. History helps to clean culture from the remains of the past. This does not mean that the past has no significance or that only the future matters. Overbeck is intensely interested in the origins, *die Urgeschichte*, especially concerning Christianity. The point is that, for Overbeck, the New Testament texts are no historical documents of a fixed religion but literary testimonies of a life experience. To this life experience, historical science has no access. The true meaning of Christian faith is outside history.<sup>53</sup>

Overbeck shared the 19th century emphasis on change in history, but rejected the Hegelian spiritualization or divinization of history: it remains utterly human. History as a process has a negative power: it consists of attrition and decay, away from initially significant events. The originating phase of any phenomenon, *Urgeschichte* in Overbeck's terms, is essentially immutable; history, on the other hand, is essentially mutable. The two are incompatible. Overbeck views the *Urgeschichte* as both pre-historical and a-historical.<sup>54</sup>

The fundamental dichotomy between *Urgeschichte* and history determines Overbeck's judgment of Christianity. The New Testament writings reflect the living memory of Jesus. Later Christian believers, however, started to fall back on these records without experiencing the same. All processes of canonization and codification are condemned by Overbeck as destructive of the essence of the Christian faith. In his contemporaries, he scorns the substitution of true religious experience by an inauthentic and secondary "historical faith." Overbeck's thought contains a fundamental ambiguity, as he cannot explain how the authentic experience of Christian *Urliteratur* can be transmitted to modern times without losing its substance. The ambiguity is caused by the fact that, in spite of the emphasis on experience, rational consciousness is at the heart of Overbeck's anthropology. This ambiguity is common to Romanticist thinkers, from Herder onwards. While the creative, original past is located in a lofty darkness, modern man has to go through critical understanding to gain access to existential experience. Overbeck is fairly radical in sensing this apory, leading him to a strong fascination with death as the ultimate experience.<sup>55</sup>

From all these presuppositions, it comes as no surprise that Overbeck sustains a devastating criticism of Christian theology. Whereas the Christian religion is already a degeneration of original Christian faith, theology as a scientific, literary and cultural enterprise is to be distrusted even more. Here the fatal transition from faith to knowledge is overtly made. Moreover, the cultural assimilation of theology

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<sup>52</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 65-111.

<sup>53</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 113-152.

<sup>54</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 153-170.

<sup>55</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 171-202.

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is a betrayal of the original, world-renouncing character of the Christian faith. Severed from its true, original experiences, contemporary theology has become parasitical on other sciences, such as history, psychology and economics. According to Overbeck, the theologians of his days are faithful neither to Christianity nor to the cultural values they allegedly adhere. Modern theology is deficient in both experience and intellect: it does not possess the experience to which it appeals and it postulates an unverifiable idea of revelation. An important underlying motive is that, for Overbeck, the famous Schleiermacherian "sense of absolute dependence" leads to a denial of human dignity. Where religion is based on fear of the divine, humanity is destroyed by it. The only unconditional value for Overbeck is human existence. Finally, this value can be attained only by laying down one's life, as Jesus did. Death, not as an event in itself, but as the supreme act of self-denial, is the summit of humanity, and therefore of Christianity.<sup>56</sup>

In his article "Unerledigte Anfragen an die heutige Theologie," Karl Barth reports his reading experience of Overbeck's posthumously published *Christentum und Kultur*. In the first two pages, a series of raging questions expresses Barth's perplexity about the lack of attention paid to Overbeck by mainstream theology during the final decades of the 19th century. Moreover, Barth states that Overbeck's theological program is apocalyptic, and catastrophic to most of contemporary theology. In Barth's view, Overbeck shows that modern theology is caught in impossibilities, thus clearing the way for a restart of true theology.<sup>57</sup>

According to Barth, Overbeck can be justly called a skeptic and an enthusiast at once. This strange duality rests on Overbeck's fundamental insight that the history of this world takes place between *Urgeschichte* and death. Concerning normal history, Overbeck insists on rational and immanent objectivity. But the mysterious origin and end of our lives remind us of the transcendent dimension of reality. In Barth's words, a drop of "Schwärmerei" vivifies Overbeck's stern rationalism.<sup>58</sup>

Barth's next step is to confront Overbeck with Ernst Troeltsch. He puts emphasis on Troeltsch's sociological analysis of the church, grounded in Troeltsch's conviction that Christianity is to be found in history. By a series of quotations from Overbeck, Barth argues against Troeltsch that Christianity is in essence an *unhistorical* entity. Precisely the historical traits of church and religion endanger the truth of Christianity. The true place of Christianity is, in Barth's view, in the *Urgeschichte*, in the transcendent dimension. The message of the Christian faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ, exceeds the bounds of history. Only by relating Christianity to the last things, to death and judgment, we can discover its true meaning.<sup>59</sup>

Barth realizes that Overbeck has no positive relationship with Christian faith. To be sure, Barth points to the complete lack of a relation between Overbeck and Christianity. Overbeck attempts to maneuver between acceptance and rejection of Christian religion, and thus touches the line between immanent and transcendent reality. Barth even goes so far as to locate Overbeck himself in the *Urgeschichte*, at

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<sup>56</sup> Henry, *Franz Overbeck*, 205-283.

<sup>57</sup> Barth, "Unerledigte Anfragen," 1-4.

<sup>58</sup> Barth, "Unerledigte Anfragen," 4-8.

<sup>59</sup> Barth, "Unerledigte Anfragen," 8-13.

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the *Ursprung* between above and below. He mentions the expectation of the *parousia* of Jesus as Overbeck's central concern in true Christianity. From this eschatological point of view, the historical form of both ancient and modern Christianity is made fundamentally relative. Barth views Overbeck's negative, critical use of eschatology as the reverse side of the positive eschatology propagated by, among others, Christoph Blumhardt. Interestingly, Barth adopts Overbeck's diagnosis that the problem of modern Christianity is that it maintains a seemingly orthodox "outside" without a true "inside." In that respect, pietism is a better recipe against modern, atheist culture.<sup>60</sup>

Consequent on Overbeck's verdict of modern Christianity is his judgment of modern theology as a mere camouflage of the acceptance of modernity. Although Barth considers some of Overbeck's attacks on modern theologians to be unduly fierce, he accepts the statement that true theology can only exist contrary to modern theology. The lesson Barth draws from his lecture of Overbeck is that theology has to make a new start, from a standpoint *sub specie aeterni*. Overbeck has led Christian theology into the desert; the new task is to move towards the promised land. For Barth, Overbeck's merit is to have halted modern theology. This halt cannot be the final word, but opens new possibilities.<sup>61</sup>

We need not assess the adequacy of Barth's interpretation of Overbeck's writings.<sup>62</sup> The significance of Barth's dealing with Overbeck for his own theological method lies in several points. First, it confirmed Barth's farewell to the liberal synthesis of Christianity and culture. Barth followed Overbeck in viewing Christian faith as an essentially unhistorical entity, and thus refused to have it mingled with cultural factors. Moreover, his perception of Overbeck led Barth beyond the Herrmannian dualism between faith and knowledge, religion and history. Barth now developed a dialectical approach of the relation between what he called history and *Urgeschichte*. This is combined, in the third place, with an eschatological emphasis partly derived from the Blumhardt movement. From Overbeck, Barth learned to use the eschatological point of view critically; a line broadly elaborated in the second editions of Barth's *Romans* commentary (see section 10.1.4 below).

We have to realize that Overbeck's influence on Barth was one voice in a choir singing the same song. The apostle Paul, the Blumhardt movement, Neo-Kantian philosophy of origin and, indeed, Overbeck, all contributed to the elaboration of Barth's theme: God is God; world is world. Still, it remains significant that Barth singled out Franz Overbeck in his confrontation with liberal theology.

### **10.1.4. Romans I and II**

Barth's theological breakthrough came with the publication of his *Römerbrief* in 1919. Barth's discontent with his initial theology and with religious socialism had urged him to study the apostle Paul's letters. He gave expression to his newly

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<sup>60</sup> Barth, "Unerledigte Anfragen," 13-18.

<sup>61</sup> Barth, "Unerledigte Anfragen," 19-25.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 226-235; Eberhard Jüngel, "Die theologischen Anfänge," in *Barth-Studien*, 62-83.

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formed views by means of a commentary to Paul's letter to the Romans. Since there is a considerable difference in theological approach between the two editions of the commentary, we will review both of them.

Barth's procedure in explaining Paul's letter is remarkable. After a translation of his own, he circumscribes the content of Paul's words in highly actual terms. The preface of *Romans I* justifies Barth's deviation from the common, historical-critical exegesis of biblical literature. Barth acknowledges the right of establishing the difference between then and now.

Aber der Zweck der Beachtung kann nur die Erkenntnis sein, dass diese Unterschiede im Wesen der Dinge *keine* Bedeutung haben. Die historisch-kritische Methode der Bibelforschung hat ihr Recht. ... Aber wenn ich wählen müsste zwischen ihr und der alten Inspirationslehre, ich würde entschlossen zu der letztern greifen: sie hat das grössere, tiefere, *wichtigere* Recht, weil sie auf die Arbeit des Verstehens selbst hinweist, ohne die alle Zurüstung wertlos ist. Ich bin froh, nicht wählen zu müssen zwischen beiden. Aber meine ganze Aufmerksamkeit war darauf gerichtet, durch das Historische *hindurch* zu sehen in der Geist der Bibel, der der ewige Geist ist.<sup>63</sup>

Barth's intention is to reformulate the thoughts presented in the letter to the Romans as the apostolic message to his own age. On several occasions, he goes so far to speak in the first person singular, thus continuing Paul's voice.

Central in Barth's interpretation of Paul is the difference between God and world or God and man. Paul does not speak on his own, human authority; he brings the Word of God. In Jesus Christ, God has brought a new era and has created a new humanity. Barth describes God as the origin (*Ursprung*) to which we are led back by salvation.<sup>64</sup> This truth of the gospel is not generally known, but must be accepted by faith. Throughout his exposition, Barth emphasizes that salvation is only God's work. It cannot and should not be replaced or completed by any human activity. Barth is highly polemical against psychological, historical, ethical and religious identifications of faith. The only thing that counts is to take God's party and to trust him. Against all Idealism that proclaims a highest thing to strive after, Barth states the reality of God and his works. Salvation is an objective, divine fact. We are incorporated in God's redemptive action. We only have to become aware of what is already real in Christ.

Typical of the first edition of *Romans* is its speaking in organic, collective terms. The difference between God and world does not lead Barth to stating an absolute antithesis. Instructive is Barth's discussion of the relation between "old" and "new" history (*Geschichte*). There is a fundamental distinction between world history and God's history. According to Barth, the failure of the Jews of which Paul accuses them in Romans 2 is to absolutize their religious-moral stand in world history with God's salvation history. Such inner worldly positions do not count for

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<sup>63</sup> *Römerbrief*, V.

<sup>64</sup> The term *Ursprung* (with its cognate *das Ursprüngliche*) occurs often (82 times) in *Romans I*, mostly as a predicate of God. In this phase, Barth does not reflect on its specific meaning as elaborated in Neo-Kantian philosophy (see section 10.1.2 above).

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God.<sup>65</sup> Indeed the so-called history is obsolete, and the true and proper history is ruled by its own criteria. But the "new" history is not a next entity of the same kind; it is absolutely different precisely by revealing and realizing the meaning that was intended in "old" history. As a longitudinal section through all times, God's history brings out all divine possibilities of time. The so-called history is the necessary transition point of the proper history. Barth's argument is directed against both historicists and psychologists who reduce God's history to immanent phenomena, and against spiritualists who deny all connection between God's history and our history. God's history, in Barth's words, is a reality that wants to *grow*.<sup>66</sup> In a brief formula, Barth describes the relation between God's history and our history as vertical or diagonal (*senkrecht oder diagonal*).<sup>67</sup> Salvation starts with God, but lands in our world and then changes it radically. Concerning the Pauline passages on election/predestination, Barth states that the eternal, absolute decree of predestination operates as the immanent law following the things in time.<sup>68</sup>

As an organic reality, God's work of salvation includes the whole universe and all humanity. The believer participates in the organic life of Christ, and is taken up in the collective of the people of God. Barth emphatically denies that salvation is a mechanic mutation, and insists on its organic growth out of God as the origin of the new life.<sup>69</sup> The combination of organic and collective terminology is structural, not only in Barth's discussion of the election chapters (9 to 11), but also in his exposition of the final chapters (12-16) in which the life of the Christian community is described.

The second edition of Barth's *Romans* commentary differs strongly from the first in many respects. As Barth states it in his preface, no stone remained upon another. Barth also mentions the sources of inspiration that account for these changes; we will sketch the characteristics of *Romans II* in relation to these sources.<sup>70</sup>

The first source is the continued study of Paul and his other letters. As Van der Kooi points out, we have to think especially of Barth's examination of 1 Corinthians 15. The central importance of the resurrection and the radical discontinuity that it places between present and future life makes this chapter an exegetical source for a recurrent theme of *Romans II*.<sup>71</sup>

In the second place, Barth points to Franz Overbeck, whom he calls a remarkable and exceptionally pious man (cf. section 10.1.3 above). The influence of Overbeck is primarily present in Barth's strong emphasis on eschatology: Christianity is not a historical entity, but brings us at the "line of death"

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<sup>65</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, 27-28.

<sup>66</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, 41-45.

<sup>67</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, 84.

<sup>68</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, 270-271.

<sup>69</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, 123-124; 164-165.

<sup>70</sup> *Römerbrief*<sup>f</sup>, V-VI. Van der Kooi, *Denkweg*, 109-110 justly warns for an overinterpretation of Barth's alleged sources. Barth was a typical "Selbstdenker" who integrated impulses from other thinkers into his own thought process. Moreover, the influences from different sources are not always clearly distinguishable in Barth's writings, and are often merged together.

<sup>71</sup> Van der Kooi, *Denkweg*, 113-114. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 216, completely overgoes the first factor mentioned by Barth.

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(*Todeslinie*), the border of eternity. Man is not a religiously capable subject, but an “empty place” (*Hohlraum*) which is overwhelmingly filled by revelation. Still, Barth is not anti-historical in his eschatological emphasis: divine revelation does encounter history, but this is no way a human possibility.<sup>72</sup>

The third factor in Barth’s change of thought is a better apprehension of what is at stake in the philosophies of Plato and Kant, due to the writings of his brother Heinrich Barth, combined with increased attention for Kierkegaard and Dostojewski. The influence of his brother Heinrich is fundamental, mediating to Barth a sharper view of the philosophy of origin (*Ursprungsphilosophie*) and its application in Christian faith. For Heinrich Barth, the origin interpreted as God functions as a critically negative principle of knowledge. It is precisely this critical potential that attracted Karl Barth in the notion of origin. God is not a thing next to or opposite to other things but the pure origin of all in a typical combination of negation and grounding of the whole of reality. Barth does not speak about God in terms of a personal subject but as a transcendent, critical category.<sup>73</sup> It is remarkable that Barth even makes some statements pointing to the idea of a *deus absconditus*, which he would later reject (see sections 11.2., 12.2.2 and 12.3.2. below).<sup>74</sup>

Concerning the influence of Søren Kierkegaard, its extent is a matter of debate.<sup>75</sup> It is clear that Barth sensed a parallel between Kierkegaard’s protest against secular Christianity and his own farewell to liberal theology and *Kulturprotestantismus*. Moreover, Kierkegaardian language is everywhere present in *Romans II*: Barth owed a style of “indirect communication” and paradoxicality to Kierkegaard. However, as Bruce McCormack argues, Barth’s key concepts were already developed before he was acquainted with Kierkegaard’s thinking. Barth does not share some of Kierkegaard’s most important intentions. Although he has some affinity to Kierkegaard’s sense of existential urgency,<sup>76</sup> Barth’s emphasis is not on human subjectivity and existence but on God’s subjectivity in revelation. His

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 226-235.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 218-226.

<sup>74</sup> *Römerbrief*, 309: “Ich werde sein, der ich sein werde!” (Ex. 3,13-15), der Unbekannte, der Unanschauliche, der Ewige ist ihr Berufer und gerade als solchen lieben sie ihn.” 355: “In ihm [Jesus Christus] offenbart sich Gott rücksichtslos als der verborgene, durchaus nur indirekt zu erkennende Gott. Hier verhüllt er sich endgültig, um nur dem Glauben offenbar zu sein.” 380: “Die Einheit Gottes, die Identität des Zürnenden mit dem Erbarmer, des Deus absconditus mit dem, der Jesus Christus von den Toten erweckte, des Gottes Esaus mit dem Gotte Jakobs, mit einem Wort: die Einheit Gottes, die sich in ihrer vollen Unanschaulichkeit und Unerhörtheit im Kreuze Christi offenbarte, sie ist unsere Hoffnung.”

<sup>75</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 235-240. A different appraisal is provided by Jüngel, “Von der Dialektik zur Analogie.” Van der Kooi, *Denkweg*, 116-118, sees the most substantial Kierkegaardian influence in the idea of the hiddenness of revelation: God is never directly intuitable; he appears incognito.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Römerbrief*, 516/517: “Die Theologie hat es mit der Gnade zu tun, mit dem “absoluten Moment,” mit der gefräßigen Dialektik von Zeit und Ewigkeit. ... Denn nur diesem ihrem Wesen als dem notwendig zu wagenden letzten Wagnis, als dem ausserordentlichen, irregulären, revolutionären Vorstoss verdankt sie ihr geschichtliches Dasein und so auch ihre Stellung in der universitas litterarum. ... Wissenschaftlichkeit bedeutet Sachlichkeit. Sachlichkeit in der Theologie ist der unbedingte Respekt vor der Einzigartigkeit des hier gewählten Themas: der Mensch in seiner letzten Not und Hoffnung, der Mensch vor Gott.”

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allegiance to the philosophy of origin makes him more sympathetic towards a final synthesis of the strongly accentuated opposites. Barth's theology of crisis, the dialectics of Yes and No, is embedded in and sublated by the divine dialectics in which the Yes is the final word.<sup>77</sup> A similar tendency is clear in Barth's exposition of Paul's doctrine of election. Barth corrects his former statements in *Romans I* on election as an immanent law, and restates election in terms of an immediate connection to God as the Origin. This implies that there is no continuous line from the elect to God. Election and rejection are described as two sides of this connection: the intuitable (Jacob) and the unintuitable (Esau) side. The duality of election and rejection is united and overcome in God alone.<sup>78</sup>

The combination of insights gained from Heinrich Barth, Franz Overbeck, and Søren Kierkegaard makes *Romans II* a document of a dialectical theology, a theology of crisis. The terms of organic growth and continuity in God's Kingdom, prevalent in *Romans I*, are radically denied. Barth consistently uses opposite pairs of terms (eternal-temporal, unintuitable-intuitable, immediate-mediate), and paradox formulas (we are what we are not, impossible possibility, not-knowing is knowing, etc.). Michael Beintker points out that there is a plurality in Barth's dialectics: it takes different forms and does not conform to a preconceived definition of dialects. Still, the common feature is that within a closed system a contradiction occurs that destroys the system. Barth's usage of dialectical thought forms serves both to endure and to overcome it on a higher level. Barth does not provide clarity about his position concerning the logical law of non-contradiction. Often, his contradictory statements are more rhetorical than strictly logical.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, Barth has further developed his views in confrontation with the critical reception of *Romans I*. In this respect, the praises he received from some reviewers have meant more in stimulating his self-criticism than the negative reactions. Barth especially regrets the fact that some readers were invited to "edifying religious experiences" by the book. He hopes that *Romans II* will not have this effect, but will merely provide some astonishing insights.

Barth clarifies and defends his explanatory procedure, which has remained basically the same: he does theology in working out the theological themes of Paul's letter to the Romans. To the accusation that he is an enemy of historical criticism, he replies with the famous exclamation: the historical critics should be

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Römerbrief*, 307: "Denn er, der Gott Liebende, steht als solcher dort, wo die beiden Negationen, eben in ihrer ganzen Schärfe offenbart und gesehen, sich aufeinander beziehen, sich gegenseitig aufheben, wo hinter ihnen, über ihnen, in ihnen die überlegene Position sichtbar wird: Jesus Christus, die Auferstehung und das Leben." 388: "Gottes Nein ist nur die diesem Menschen in dieser Welt unvermeidlich zugekehrte Kehrseite, von Gottes Ja."

<sup>78</sup> *Römerbrief*, 311-312; 333-344. Cf. 409: "Hier ist der verborgene, der unbekante, der unbegreifliche Gott, dem kein Ding unmöglich ist, Gott der Herr, der als solcher unser Vater ist in Jesus Christus." 411: "Direkte Erkenntnis dieses Gottes? Nein! Mitwirkung bei seinen Beschlüssen? Nein! Möglichkeit, ihn zu fassen, zu binden, zu verpflichten, in ein reziprokes Verhältnis zu ihm zutreten? Nein! Keine "Föderaltheologie!" Er ist Gott, er selbst, er allein. Das ist das Ja des Römerbriefes."

<sup>79</sup> Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der "dialektischen Theologie" Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik,"* Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie, vol. 101 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1987), 21-24.

more critical! He means that exegetes should not be content with a primitive tentative description of the meaning of the biblical text, but should engage in substantial understanding of what Scripture says. Barth discovers an “inner dialectics” in the Romans letter, summarized in Kierkegaard’s phrase of “the infinite qualitative distinction” between God and man, or in Barth’s quotation from Ecclesiastes: God is in heaven and you are on earth!<sup>80</sup>

## **10.2. From Dialectics to Dogmatics**

In the preface of his *Christliche Dogmatik* (1927), Barth defends his attempt of developing a dogmatical theology. He reacts to reproaches by theological friends and allies who fear that Barth runs the risk of betraying the original Reformational message and lapsing into scholastic and orthodox slopes. In reply, Barth makes it clear that he cannot bear a self-chosen prophet’s mantle, and that he is but an ordinary theologian who has to speak, not from heaven, but on earth. Therefore, the working out of a regular dogmatics is the task he sets himself. In passing, he notes that he has overcome the antipathy against orthodox, scholastic theology.<sup>81</sup>

The turn of which the statements mentioned above are the expression, was prepared in a number of steps. An external reason was Barth’s appointment as an extraordinary professor of Reformed theology at the University of Göttingen. In preparing his lectures, he came upon the *Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* by Heinrich Heppe, a compilation of quotations from Reformed Orthodox authors on all *loci* of Reformed dogmatics. In working through this “dusty” collection, Barth received a sense of the vividness and permanent value of this type of theology: he learned to appreciate its catholic breadth and scientific accuracy.<sup>82</sup>

### **10.2.1 “Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie”**

As early as 1922, Barth had addressed the “Freunde der Christlichen Welt” at Elgersburg with a lecture entitled “Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie.”<sup>83</sup> Its overall structure is governed by the famous, dialectical sequence of three short theses:

Wir sollen als Theologen von Gott reden. Wir sind aber Menschen und können als solche nicht von Gott reden. Wir sollen Beides, unser Sollen und unser Nicht-Können, wissen und eben damit Gott die Ehre geben.<sup>84</sup>

Barth proclaims the necessity to start in theology with God. Theology should not be constructed from below, from the human questions and needs, but from above, from the answer that God has given in his Word.

In explaining his second thesis, concerning the inability of speaking properly about God, Barth describes three possible ways or methods of theology: the dogmatical, the critical, and the dialectical way. This distinction is important, as it

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<sup>80</sup> *Römerbrief*, VIII-XV.

<sup>81</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, VIII-X.

<sup>82</sup> Barth, “Zum Geleit”, III-IV. Cf. part I, section 2.2.2 above.

<sup>83</sup> Published in: Barth, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, 156-178. Cf. for a more detailed analysis: McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 307-314.

<sup>84</sup> “Aufgabe,” 158.

anticipates Barth's positioning his own thinking during the 1920's. Typical of the dogmatical way is that, in Barth's eyes, it trusts to find the answers to man's needs in Bible and doctrine, and that it elaborates the christological, soteriological, and eschatological implications of the gospel. Barth prefers this method to the historicist attempt to find the religious-ethical core of Christianity. He shows sympathy of the older orthodox theology, since it deals with the truly supernatural essence of the Christian faith; the problem with orthodoxy is not the substance itself, but the tendency to grasp the truth unproblematically and to objectify it.<sup>85</sup>

The critical way rejects all objectification of the gospel. It emphasizes that nothing in our reality can be directly identified with God. Man is posed under God's negative judgment and nothing humane is left untouched. Barth approves of the just criticism of the alleged human possibilities. But his objection against the critical way is that it merely enlarges the existential incapability of man into gigantic proportions, without pointing to the solution to this need. What the critical way denies is the "positivity" of God (*Positivität Gottes*). It leads to pure negativity, not to appropriate speech about God.<sup>86</sup>

According to Barth, the third, dialectical way is both the Pauline-reformatory and the substantially superior one. It presupposes the elements of truth in both the dogmatical and the critical method, and moreover relates these truths to each other. Barth states that the common foundation of the positivity and the negativity of God is the incarnation: truly God (distance) becomes truly man (nearness). However, the theologian can never provide a direct and static account of the connection between Yes and No in God; he can only move in the right direction and expect a revelation from God. The theologian is not a neutral spectator, but an involved witness of revelation. Even as a witness, the theologian remains human and can never claim divine authority for his words. God's truth cannot be attained by any theological method; it reveals itself when God decides so.<sup>87</sup>

As a conclusion, Barth maintains both the necessity and the impossibility of speaking properly about God. Theology has to fulfill its task under the promise that God will speak. The best way to do theology is to study Scripture as the witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup>

### **10.2.2. Christliche Dogmatik**

During the first two years of his professorate, Barth confined himself to exegetical and dogma historical lectures. In December 1923, he conceived the plan of a course "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion,"<sup>89</sup> which he actually started to deliver at May 2, 1924. Barth did not publish these Prolegomena, but they served as the preparatory stage for the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik*: Barth read them once again as a professor in Münster, and then launched them into publication.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> "Aufgabe," 167-169.

<sup>86</sup> "Aufgabe," 169-171.

<sup>87</sup> "Aufgabe," 171-175.

<sup>88</sup> "Aufgabe," 175-178.

<sup>89</sup> "Instruction in Christian religion," the same title that John Calvin gave to his *Institutio*.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 331-378, who gives a detailed survey of the so-called *Göttingen Dogmatics* (337-374), and claims that this earliest account of Barth's dogmatics contains already most of the fundamental decisions which control even the definitive *Church*

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The position developed in the *Christliche Dogmatik* can be briefly outlined as follows: dogmatics is concerned with inquiring after the legitimacy of Christian speech about God. It is a secondary activity on the basis of the fact of the proclamation of the Gospel in the Church.<sup>91</sup> Barth's thesis is that in the human proclamation, God speaks himself. Dogmatical theology has to test the relation between the preaching of the Church, the Holy Scripture, and God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.<sup>92</sup> This critical, eschatological relation between God's Word and our words ("dogmata" – plural) is what Barth calls "dogma" (singular).<sup>93</sup> The object of dogmatics is not the subjective experience or awareness of faith or a historical account of the genesis of religion, but the Word of God itself, taken indirectly in its relation to the churchly proclamation.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the methodical requirement of theology is to start, continue, and end with God's Word.<sup>95</sup> Barth's epistemological presupposition is that to know God equals to be known by God. He realizes that this implies a *petitio principii*, but he sees no other way.<sup>96</sup>

Barth elaborates a doctrine of the Trinity as a basis for his doctrine of the Word of God. In a short formula, Barth interprets the doctrine of the Trinity as the explanation by subject, predicate and object of the sentence *Deus dixit* (God has spoken), or, alternatively, as an explanation of the sentence "Gott offenbart sich als der Herr" (God reveals himself as the Lord).<sup>97</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is deduced by Barth, not from individual biblical texts, but from the *fact* of revelation.<sup>98</sup> In this phase, Barth's doctrine of the Trinity has a dialectical outlook: the God who has reconciled the contradiction (*Widerspruch*) between him and us does, in his own essence, transcend all contradiction. The event of revelation, which means our reconciliation with God, has its basis and pre-reflection in God's existence as Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>99</sup>

In his account of the incarnation, Barth further develops his ideas on revelation as *veiling* and *unveiling*. As the doctrine of the Trinity guarantees the absolute subjectivity of God, it seems to render impossible the knowledge of God: God as the absolute subject cannot be the object of our knowledge. Barth utters paradoxical statements here: revelation is not-revelation; God is hidden precisely in the absoluteness of his revelation. These paradoxes are legitimate since God is Lord over the law of non-contradiction. The assumption of humanity by the Son of God is the concrete solution to the problem of revelation: by becoming man, God can become something different and at the same time remain what He is.<sup>100</sup> The

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*Dogmatics* (375). Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis*, grounds the main part of her analysis (140-225) on the (by-then-yet-unpublished) *Göttingen Dogmatics*.

<sup>91</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 1-3, 21-24.

<sup>92</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 38-47.

<sup>93</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 122.

<sup>94</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 82-101.

<sup>95</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 109.

<sup>96</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 102-106.

<sup>97</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 127-132.

<sup>98</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 168.

<sup>99</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 176, 188-192, 201-203.

<sup>100</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 215-219.

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reality of the man Jesus Christ is the objective possibility of revelation.<sup>101</sup> But the humanity of Christ is not the direct revelation of God; rather, it is the veiling, the clothes, through which God reveals, unveils, himself. Again, the connection between God and man is dialectical: the flesh that the Word of God assumes is the fallen human nature that rebels against God. Therefore, Barth sees the event of incarnation as revelation and reconciliation at once.<sup>102</sup>

The saving knowledge of God based on God's trinitarian self-knowledge and made possible by the incarnation is realized in our lives by the Holy Spirit by means of faith.<sup>103</sup> In this context, Barth opposes the neo-Protestant view of "religion" as the appropriate reaction to revelation. In the final analysis, human religion is an attempt at self-maintaining against God.<sup>104</sup> True faith means that one is included in the event of revelation, it is obedience to God and his Word, exceeding one's own capacities. Faith means that we know our unity with Christ.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, Barth gives a concrete account of how dogmatics should work in the field of Scripture, Church, and preaching. Barth affirms the divine character of Scripture, but he refuses to give external evidences for it. The classical theory of verbal inspiration is, according to Barth, a dangerous objectification of God's Word. Instead, Barth understands inspiration as the old human word actually becoming God's Word for us.<sup>106</sup> As a concrete method of reading the Bible, Barth commends: (a) to understand the text in its historical context, (b) to formulate the message in one's own forms of thought, and (c) to give an actual, prophetic account of the message.<sup>107</sup> Scripture, thus read, is the criterion by which dogmatical theology has to judge the preaching of the Church. Dogmatics remains dialectical, and has to proceed by continuously returning to God's Word as its object (*Gegenstand*).<sup>108</sup>

The theology of the *Christliche Dogmatik* is clearly a theology of revelation and marks a turn to a realist view of God and his Word. However, there remain some auxiliary lines that Barth would afterwards abandon or modify.

First, we encounter in it a considerable amount of dialectics and paradoxes. Barth maintains that speaking about God is *a priori* impossible, both on God's part and on our part.<sup>109</sup> Knowing God is, according to Barth, synonymous to *docta ignorantia*.<sup>110</sup> Only the Word of God can overcome this impossibility, but even the Word is not objectively real.<sup>111</sup> Another example of dialecticism is Barth's view of dogma: it is not a fixed thing, but the dialectical relation between God's Word and

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<sup>101</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 256. NB: Barth often operates with combinations of "objective/subjective" and "possibility/reality/necessity."

<sup>102</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 223, 257-260, 267.

<sup>103</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 285.

<sup>104</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 302-317.

<sup>105</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 319-321, 330.

<sup>106</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 344-363.

<sup>107</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 401-408.

<sup>108</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 429-449.

<sup>109</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 56-57.

<sup>110</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 61.

<sup>111</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 60, 63.

the human words of the Church.<sup>112</sup> At a fundamental level of Barth's theology lies the dialectics of manifestation and concealment. This paradox is not due to our limited understanding but is based on God's inner essence as the absolutely revealed God. As the absolute subject, God cannot be an object that is fully understood and known. Again, the apparent contradiction is solved, not by a general principle, but by the particular event of incarnation.<sup>113</sup>

Second, Barth utilizes an existentialist philosophical approach to clarify aspects of Christian God talk. The most pregnant use of existentialist language is found where Barth identifies human existence as the great question in which the answer by God is heard. Barth would later distance himself from this analysis and blame his former friends, Brunner, Gogarten, and Bultmann, for taking the existential need as a starting point; although, it should be noticed that, already in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, Barth maintains the logical priority of the answer before the question.<sup>114</sup>

Third, in explaining the ground of knowing God in our being known by God, Barth refers to the Hegelian theologian Philipp Marheineke. Marheineke taught a positioning of God in our mind (*Position Gottes in der Vernunft*), and apparently Barth considered this a suitable expression of his own view.<sup>115</sup> This precise Marheineke quotation does not appear later in the *Church Dogmatics*, but in the initial development of his doctrine of the analogy of faith, Barth still mentioned Marheineke with approval,<sup>116</sup> and showed himself in the vicinity of the 19th century Idealist philosophy.

### 10.2.3. Fides Quaerens Intellectum

A final clarification and solidification of Barth's theological approach is found in his 1931 *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*.<sup>117</sup> In this book, which he later considered to be a if not the key to the theology of the *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>118</sup> he develops his view on the possibility of knowledge of God by means of an exegesis of the famous so-called ontological argument for the existence of God designed by Anselm of

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<sup>112</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 122-123.

<sup>113</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 216-220.

<sup>114</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 70-74. On Barth's reproaches against his former allies, see Christof Gestrinch, *Neuzeitliches Denken und die Spaltung der dialektischen Theologie: Zur Frage der natürlichen Theologie*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, vol 52 (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1977), 31-34 (Brunner), 49-53 (Barth's reversion of the Law – Gospel order), 140-142 (Gogarten), 273-280 (Bultmann).

<sup>115</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 102.

<sup>116</sup> CD I/1, 243-244 (KD I/1, 257). Cf. section 10.3.3 below.

<sup>117</sup> Here I use the edition by Eberhard Jüngel and Ingolf U. Dalferth in the *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe* (1981).

<sup>118</sup> According to Barth, this is in the preface to the second edition, *FQI*, 6. Cf. also Barth's explanation for the delay of the projected *Christliche Dogmatik*: "the need for my little work on Anselm of Canterbury was so pressing, that I could not pay any attention to the gradually increasing chorus of friendly or ironical enquiries as to what happened to the second volume, nor even think of continuing on the level and in the strain of the initial volume of 1927," CD I/1, xi (KD I/1, VI).

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Canterbury. Barth was urged to deal with Anselm by the philosopher Heinrich Scholz, whom he encountered several times during his professorate in Münster.<sup>119</sup>

Barth's interest is not primarily in the "proof" as such but in the function it has in Anselm's theological program. From the start, Barth emphasizes that Anselm does not aim at proving (*probare*) but at understanding (*intelligere*). Understanding includes providing the rational grounds, but it consists also of joy and desire after unification with God's will. Understanding is secondary to faith, which can thus exist without full understanding. Although in Anselm faith is predominantly a matter of the will, in the genetic order it is primarily a matter of knowledge. Barth points to an eschatological emphasis in Anselm's view of understanding: it is posited between faith and hope, and it will be perfected in the beatific vision.<sup>120</sup>

For Anselm as well as for Barth, it is important that faith is never irrational. In implicit polemics against his former teacher Wilhelm Herrmann (see section 1.1.1 above), Barth highlights the elements of knowledge (*notitia*) and acknowledgement (*assensus*). The rationality of faith is grounded upon the character of the divine Word: as word signifying a thing (*vox significans rem*), it is open to understanding (i.e., explaining the relation between *vox* and *res*).<sup>121</sup> Another significant presupposition is the givenness of the contents of belief, exemplified in the *Creed* of the Church. Theological understanding does not start in a void, but it takes the Word of God and the authoritative formulation of its doctrine by the Church as a starting point.<sup>122</sup> Hence, Barth interprets Anselm's program of "faith seeking understanding" as a quest for coherence, not for rational foundation. Faith precedes understanding, and understanding equals *thinking after* the contents of faith. Consequently, the Anselmian formulas *sola ratione* and *remoto Christo* are interpreted in a limited way: the point is that in the activity of *intelligere* an appeal to the authority of Scripture or Church does not hold; here, in thinking after the

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<sup>119</sup> *FQI*, VIII. The Barth-Scholz story is interesting, as they came from totally different presuppositions and, without ever coming to an agreement, constructively influenced each other. Most extensive is Barth's confrontation with the requirements of scientific theology as proffered by Scholz. (*CD I/1*, 8-9 (*KD I/1*, 7); see section 10.3.1. below.) At a few other points, Barth refers to Scholz' philosophical analyses of religion *CD I/1*, 17-18, 195 (*KD I/1*, 17, 203) and love ( *KD IV/2*, 837-842). Heinrich Scholz, in turn, paid tribute to Barth in the 1956 *Festschrift*: "Warum ich mich zu Karl Barth bekenne," in *Antwort: Karl Barth zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956*, ed. by Ernst Wolf et al., 865-869 (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956). An extensive analysis of Scholz' thought is provided by A.L. Molendijk, *Aus dem Dunklen ins Helle: Wissenschaft und Theologie im Denken von Heinrich Scholz; Mit unveröffentlichten Thesenreihen von Heinrich Scholz und Karl Barth* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991). A recent exposition of Barth's ongoing discussion with Scholz is given by Arie L. Molendijk, "'Klopfen an die Wand': Die Auseinandersetzung mit Heinrich Scholz," in *Karl Barth in Deutschland (1921-1935). Aufbruch – Klärung – Widerstand*, Beiträge zum Internationalen Symposium vom 1. bis 4. Mai 2003 in der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden, ed. by Michael Beintker et al. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 245-265.

<sup>120</sup> *FQI*, 13-19, 24.

<sup>121</sup> *FQI*, 21, 23.

<sup>122</sup> *FQI*, 22, 25-27.

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rational connections and implications of revelation, one has to proceed by reason alone.<sup>123</sup>

A fundamental distinction in Barth's interpretation of Anselm is between three sorts of reason (*ratio*): (a) the human capacity of judgment, (b) the inner ground of rationality in the object of knowledge, and (c) the ultimate foundation of truth (*ratio veritatis*, i.e. God). In order to be rational, our understanding must conform to the divine truth. Barth emphasizes that the decision about rationality is taken by God, the Lord.<sup>124</sup> According to Barth, there is a direct parallel between rationality and necessity: when the rational ground of an object is known, it is at the same time known as necessary. In Anselm's demonstration, the supreme rationality, the *ratio veritatis* of God, is axiomatic. Applied to credal statements, this means that its "that" is presupposed, and that merely the "in how much" is asked for.<sup>125</sup>

The introductory exposition of Anselm's program is followed by an extended discussion of the so-called ontological argument produced by Anselm in the *Proslogion*. It is not only interesting as an explication of Barth's fundamental theological method, but also as an anticipation of his doctrine of God. Barth's starting point is the "definition" of God that plays a central role in the whole argument: *Id quo maius nihil cogitari potest* (abbreviated as *IQM*).<sup>126</sup> It is Barth's thesis that both the existence and the essence of God are proved on the basis of this definition. The predicate *maius* in *IQM* holds in different directions, but it primarily refers to the mode or grade of being. Barth is emphatical in claiming that *IQM* is not an empty definition, but a revealed name. As such, it serves as a rule for speech about God, and it forbids conceiving of God otherwise. The fundamental error of Anselm's opponent Gaunilo is that, in Barth's view, he neglects this positive character of the definition. *IQM* is a proposition of faith, and it needs to be filled in by the contents of God's revelation.<sup>127</sup>

Central in Anselm's argument, according to Barth, is the question of the existence of God. Barth constructs a triad similar to the threefold rationality: first, something can be in truth; second, it can have actual existence; third, it can be thought of.<sup>128</sup> Barth denies that Anselm deduces God's existence directly from his (perfect and therefore necessarily existing) essence. He states that the existence of God is on the level of existence generally speaking. But God is unique in that he is the only one whose existence can be demonstrated. Everything else is dependent on God for its existence; only God exists by himself. This makes the proving of

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<sup>123</sup> *FQI*, 40-43.

<sup>124</sup> *FQI*, 44-47. The terminology of "decision" and "Lordship" seems to be more Barthian than Anselmian. As Michael Beintker, " ... alles Andere als ein Parergon: Fides quaerens intellectum," in *Karl Barth in Deutschland*, 99-120, points out, these formulations have unjustly occasioned a scholar like Jan Rohls to accuse Barth of "decisionism" (109, footnote 48).

<sup>125</sup> *FQI*, 60-61.

<sup>126</sup> In fact, as Barth realizes, Anselm uses several, slightly different versions of the definition. For the sake of clarity, we confine the analysis to the standard version that is commonly known by the abbreviation *IQM*.

<sup>127</sup> *FQI*, 75-83.

<sup>128</sup> *FQI*, 94.

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God's existence necessary to establish faith.<sup>129</sup> The formula *IQM* is a necessary condition for God's being an object of understanding. But that does not imply that, as an object of understanding, God can be comprehended. The truth of *IQM* can be apprehended, although God's actual being is never fully understood.<sup>130</sup>

In what sense, then, does Anselm "prove" the existence of *IQM*? Barth states that it is only a negative proof by which the denial of *IQM* is shown absurd. To put it more exactly, God's existence can in fact be denied, but it can never be proven impossible. To the contrary, if we assume that *IQM* exists in such a way that it is only in our intellect and not in reality, but that still it is thinkable that it exists in reality, this *IQM* is less (*minus*) than an *IQM* that really exists. This involves a contradiction. The conclusion is that, once the revealed name *IQM* is accepted, the actual existence of God necessarily follows. This does not imply, however, that God's existence is positively and directly proven.<sup>131</sup>

In a final part of his treatise, Barth discusses some misunderstandings of Anselm's proof. Anselm's opponent Gaunilo interpreted the argument as based on subjective certainty: a concept that is in my mind must be real. His counter argument denied precisely this consequence. But Barth (following Anselm) shows that this is mistaken: the *Proslogion* is not about any concept but exclusively about God. Only *IQM* cannot be thought as non-existent. This distinguishes Anselm from the Cartesian/Leibnizian proofs of God, and makes it invulnerable to Immanuel Kant's criticism.<sup>132</sup> As the criterion and source of all other existence, God has the highest form of existence, which is the necessary one. Otherwise God would not be *IQM*. The only thing theology in Anselm's fashion does is to understand the given ontic necessity of God.<sup>133</sup> Again, Barth emphasizes that *IQM* is a name that is ascribed personally to God. Therefore, Anselm does not philosophize *a priori*, but aims at understanding on the basis of faith. His thought is bound to its place as a creature under the Creator.<sup>134</sup> It is a thinking that acknowledges the bond between concept (*vox*) and thing (*res*). To deny this bond and, consequently, to deny God's existence is exactly what the Bible calls foolishness.<sup>135</sup>

How are we to value Barth's position in the Anselm book? In this context, I leave aside the question of the historical accuracy of Barth's Anselm interpretation, and focus on the constructive, systematic contribution of this modest book to the development of Barth's theology.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *FQI*, 95-102.

<sup>130</sup> *FQI*, 105-117.

<sup>131</sup> *FQI*, 120-132.

<sup>132</sup> *FQI*, 140-141, 174.

<sup>133</sup> *FQI*, 144-146.

<sup>134</sup> *FQI*, 153-155.

<sup>135</sup> *FQI*, 166-168.

<sup>136</sup> Beintker, " ... alles Andere als ein Parergon," 103-107 argues that Barth has quite well grasped the argumentative thrust and theological intentions of Anselm's *Proslogion*, and that the full significance of Barth's discussion of Anselm comes to the fore only through constant simultaneous consultation of Anselm's original text alongside with Barth's exposition.

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According to Manfred Josuttis, Barth develops an ontological thought form in *Fides quaerens intellectum*.<sup>137</sup> Although Barth remains free towards ontology, his interpretation of Anselm marks his transition from transcendental to ontological thinking: being precedes consciousness. God is beyond both being (*Sein*) and knowing (*Akt*). Typical of Barth's thought form is that the existence of God cannot be deduced from being in general, but is given through revelation. Therefore, the rationality of faith consists of clarifying the inner coherence of the revealed propositions. The *reality* of God in his revelation governs its logical *possibility* and *necessity*.<sup>138</sup> On the one hand, the objectivity of God (*Gegenständlichkeit Gottes*) paves the road to Barth's later doctrine of analogy. On the other hand, Barth maintains a noetic reserve within an actualist theory of knowledge: God is Lord over his revelation. The connection between both insights is Barth's statement that God is known by means of other objects: his objectivity is clothed with signs.<sup>139</sup>

Josuttis states that Barth's ontological position is disputable. Barth's claim that the knowledge of God decides over the knowledge of reality is refuted by Josuttis. Moreover, in Josuttis's view the mixture of ontology and actualism is problematic in Barth's account. The argument from God's works to God's being is not completely conclusive. Barth's theology shows a permanent tension between eternity and time, being and becoming, which damages both sides.<sup>140</sup> The distinction between *ontic* and *noetic* endangers the realist and decisive character of faith, according to Josuttis. The ontological thought form, though filled in christologically, tends to remove the dynamics of law and gospel, proclamation of the Word and faith.<sup>141</sup>

This is not the place to finally judge Barth's Anselm book and Josuttis's criticism. We will first have to analyze the elaboration of Barth's doctrine of God and election, in order to see how the ontological thought form functions in it.

### **10.3. The Method of the Church Dogmatics**

It is almost impossible to describe *the* method of the *Church Dogmatics*. To start with, Barth's *magnum opus* was written over a period of almost thirty years (1932-1959) and covers an enormous range of topics. More important is the fact that in Barth's theology, the subject matter dictates the method: this is the consequence of Barth's view of the *Sachlichkeit* of theology that is constant in his thinking from 1916 onward. The objective of the *Church Dogmatics* is to unfold the propositions of the Christian faith in their internal coherence. The project is built upon the methodological foundation laid in the Anselm book (see section 10.2.3. above).

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<sup>137</sup> Manfred Josuttis, *Die Gegenständlichkeit der Offenbarung: Karl Barths Anselm-Buch und die Denkform seiner Theologie*, *Abhandlungen zur Evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 3 (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1965), 5. The most recent contribution to the understanding and appraisal of Barth's book on Anselm is provided by Beintker, " ... alles Andere als ein Parergon." Beintker honors Josuttis as one of the main interpreters of Barth's position in regard to Anselm.

<sup>138</sup> Josuttis, *Gegenständlichkeit*, 14-38.

<sup>139</sup> Josuttis, *Gegenständlichkeit*, 40-60.

<sup>140</sup> Josuttis, *Gegenständlichkeit*, 80-106.

<sup>141</sup> Josuttis, *Gegenständlichkeit*, 117-134, 146-156.

Still, the practical execution of the project reveals some other interesting developments in Barth's method. The prolegomena of volumes I/1 and I/2 show considerable changes if compared to the *Christliche Dogmatik*, and develop more fully the doctrines of Trinity, revelation and Scripture as the basis of doctrine. These themes are discussed in section 10.3.1. Another significant aspect of Barth's method is the so-called christological concentration. It finds a decisive expression in the doctrine of election (see extensively chapter 13 below), but is further elaborated in the subsequent volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. (This methodical device is reviewed in section 10.3.2.) The third relevant issue is the question of analogy. We will encounter it in the context of the doctrine of God (see section 11.2. below). The later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* give some additional coloring of Barth's understanding of analogy, which will be outlined in section 10.3.3.

### 10.3.1. The Prolegomena

In the preface to *Church Dogmatics* (henceforth CD) I/1, Barth explains the change from the projected *Christliche Dogmatik* to the then-started *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.<sup>142</sup> From Barth's "own standpoint at any rate this change of plan has been forced on me by the pressure of outer and inner necessities!" A rather trivial factor is that he felt compelled to deal in greater detail with "the biblico-theological presuppositions and the historico-dogmatic and polemical relations" of his statements. Of more importance is the change of adjective from "*christlich*" to "*kirchlich*." Not only does Barth refrain from a lighthearted usage of the term Christian, he also wants to express the insight that dogmatics is "not a free science," but "is bound to the sphere of the Church" and can, as such, be only a scientific enterprise.

In the preface we find the famous denunciation of the *analogia entis* as "the discovery of the antichrist" and the only legitimate reason for not being a Roman Catholic. It occurs in a passage where Barth regrets his earlier use of existentialist philosophical thought as auxiliary to Christian doctrine. Apparently, Barth now senses that an existentialist foundation of theology is merely "a resumption of the line which leads from Schleiermacher by way of Ritschl to Herrmann" and can be no serious alternative to the Catholic idea of *analogia entis*.

The rejection of the *analogia entis* does not withhold Barth from frankly claiming a positive relation to "scholastic" theology. For grasping the programmatic intentions of Barth's CD, his utterances on scholasticism deserve full attention. In Barth's view, the hostility towards scholastic thought ("speculation") springs from an "ethicism" that

fails to see that not merely the most important but also the most relevant and beautiful problems in dogmatics begin at the very point where the fable of "unprofitable scholasticism" and the slogan about the "Greek thinking of the fathers" persuade us that we ought to stop.

And Barth continues to point out that scholastic theology is a good medicine against the

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<sup>142</sup> CD I/1, xi-xvii (KD I/1, VI-XII).

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increasing confusion, tedium and irrelevance of modern Protestantism, which, probably along with the Trinity and the Virgin Birth, has lost an entire third dimension ... with the result that it has been punished with worthless substitutes, that it has fallen the more readily victim to such uneasy cliques and sects as High Church, German Church, Christian Community and religious Socialism, and that many of its preachers and adherents have finally learned to discover deep religious significance in the intoxication of Nordic blood and their political *Führer*.

This ecclesiastical, scholastic character of dogmatics has also consequences in the opposite direction: the evangelical church should understand that doctrine is its proper task. Barth hopes to break through the contemporary obsession with church policy and politics. In his view, the Church is up to date precisely in doing its own (theological) business.

I believe that it is expected of the Church and its theology ... that it should keep precisely to the rhythm of its own relevant concerns, and thus consider well what are the real needs of the day by which its own programme should be directed. ... I believe in fact that, quite apart from its ethical applications, a better Church dogmatics might well be finally a more significant and solid contribution even to such questions and tasks as that of German liberation than most of the well-meant stuff which even so many theologians think in dilettante fashion that they can and should supply in relation to these questions and tasks.

The *Leitsatz* of the first section of *CD I/1* formulates the task of dogmatics: "As a theological discipline dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God." Dogmatic theology is committed to the confession of the Church and its proclamation of the Word of God. In dogmatics, the Christian Church puts its own speaking about God to the test. The criterion by which it is tested, is Jesus Christ as the Church's proper ground of being.<sup>143</sup>

Remarkable is the fact that Barth calls dogmatics a "scientific self-examination." However, he does not insist on the scientific character of theology as such, but argues from a practical necessity for theology as explicit reflection on the contents of faith. Barth denies any specific key of understanding, ground of knowledge or field of object to theological science. Strictly speaking, all sciences could serve the Christian speech about God. There is only a "relative and factual necessity" of theology as a special science. There might well be a *philosophia christiana* serving the true talk about God; however "There never has actually been a *philosophia christiana*, for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*."

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<sup>143</sup> *CD I/1*, 3-5 (*KD I/1*, 1-3).

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The positive implications of theology being a science are: (1) theology is "a human concern with a definite object of knowledge," (2) it proceeds through a "definite and self-consistent path of knowledge," and (3) it must "give an account" of its claims and its "path of knowledge." Barth rejects any external requirements concerning the scientific character of theology.

A special challenge was posed to Barth's view of theology by Heinrich Scholz. This philosopher claimed that theology should meet the regular standards of science: consistency of its propositions, coherence of its theories, controllability of its evidence, concordance with empirical reality, lack of prejudice, and deducibility of its statements from their foundations. Theology principally cannot meet these standards, according to Barth. Not even the minimum requirement that theology should avoid contradictions is sustainable: theology is about "the free activity of God," which exceeds logical consistency. Theology is not a field of knowledge that is accessible for all; it presupposes the will to believe. In brief, to treat theology as a science cannot mean to "accept the obligation of submission to standards valid for other sciences." In solidarity with the other sciences as a human enterprise, theology "makes a necessary protest against a general concept of science which is admittedly pagan." The academic world must be reminded "that the tradition which commences with the name of Aristotle is only one among others, and that the Christian Church certainly does not number Aristotle among its ancestors."<sup>144</sup>

Barth views dogmatics as the human asking for the divine answer. His earlier critical-dialectical view of dogma is maintained, but is complemented by the insight that in the search for the divine Word, true knowledge can occur. Barth rejects the Roman Catholic idea of the dogma as a fixed system of truths: dogmatics moves between past revelation and future revelation. Barth also rejects the idea that dogmatics is identical with biblical theology: on the basis of Scripture, theology has to think through God's revelation and to witness it in actual forms.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> CD I/1, 5-11 (KD I/1, 3-10). For a critical, philosophical review of Barth's discussion of the scientific requirements stated by Scholz, Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 53-71. In reaction to Barth's hesitation concerning the validity of the law of non-contradiction, Clark states: "Freedom from internal self-contradiction is the *sine qua non* of all intelligibility." Interesting is Clark's position on Scholz's sixth and final norm, which he labels "axiomatization." Barth rejected this norm out of hand, with the comment that theology "absolutely cannot regard itself as a member of an ordered cosmos, but only as a stop-gap (*Lückenbüßer*) in an unordered one." In contrast, Clark argues that "From any professedly Christian point of view it is difficult to maintain that the cosmos is unordered; and for a Reformed theologian this is about the poorest reply possible. Calvinism strenuously insists upon the eternal all-comprehensive plan of God, in which neither a hair of one's head nor a dead sparrow lies outside the foreordained. Equally impossible in Calvinism is the notion that theology is a stop-gap, a makeshift, a temporary expedient to be discarded at the first opportunity. And if God orders the world, and if the world is as God orders it to be, then the science of physics ... must be subsumed under theology in an ideally unified system." While acknowledging that "the arrangement of true propositions into a system of axioms and theorems has never been accomplished in theology," Clark insists that "axiomatization is a norm" and that "the actual failure to axiomatize theology does not exclude it from the general concept of science."

<sup>145</sup> CD I/1, 11-17 (KD I/1, 10-16).

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Barth insists on dogmatical theology being an act of faith. This should not be understood as providing a human, religious starting point: faith is a free gift of grace, a divine act in us. This implies that theology can be exercised only in prayer.<sup>146</sup>

Concerning the issue of dogmatical prolegomena, Barth explicitly denies that they are of apologetic interest. He criticizes modern Protestant theology for laying an ontological, anthropological foundation under Christian doctrine. Here we encounter also signs of Barth's breach with his former allies, Emil Brunner and Friedrich Gogarten. In Barth's view, prolegomena serve to clarify its way of knowledge in face of the inner conflict between faith, heresy and unbelief. This clarification is already a first part of doctrine in which the fundamental insights are dealt with by anticipation.<sup>147</sup>

The first step of Barth's prolegomena is to claim the Word of God as the criterion of dogmatics. The concrete starting point of theology is the proclamation of the Church. Barth states a relative binding of the speech about God to the Church as a sign of God's speaking in the world. Not all churchly speaking (for instance, prayer, instruction, theology) is proclamation of the Word. Proclamation is human speech in and through which God speaks himself and which should be received in faith as the divine decision over life and death, as judgment and liberation, as law and gospel. The identity between human proclamation and divine Word is not in the Church's hands: it is in God's freedom to speak in and through human speech. Whereas the preaching of the Church must be repetition of God's Word, it must not consist of mere repetition of words of Scripture, but in faithfulness to Scripture give an actual witness to God's promise. Although Barth recognizes a duality of the proclamation in preaching and sacrament, he rejects a preference for sacramental proclamation in both a profanizing, modern Protestant form (Tillich) and a sacralizing Roman Catholic form. The Word of God does not enter into immanent causal relations but is the living promise that calls for living faith.<sup>148</sup>

As a human enterprise, the proclamation of the Church is subject to failure and correction. Dogmatical theology is concerned with this *rectitudo* of the Church's speech about God. This legitimization and justification is not executed in face of the world's needs and ideas, as Paul Tillich holds it. Theology cannot talk "atheologically." The only criterion to which the Church's proclamation is bound is the Word of God which it intends to be. Dogmatics has a direct relation to the proclamation of the Church, and an indirect, secondary relation to the Word of God.<sup>149</sup>

Just as in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, Barth states that the Word of God has a threefold shape: in the primary sense, it is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, to

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<sup>146</sup> CD I/1, 17-24 (KD I/1, 16-23).

<sup>147</sup> CD I/1, 25-44 (KD I/1, 23-43). In this context, Barth debates Brunner's view of *Eristik* as "the other task of theology." The explicit discussion with Gogarten is found later on, KD I/1, 128-136. On the different positions of "dialectical" theologians on the foundation and task of theology, see Gestrich, *Neuzeitliche Theologie*, passim.

<sup>148</sup> CD I/1, 47-71 (KD I/1, 47-73). Discussion of Tillich's conception of "sacrament" is found on pages 62-64.

<sup>149</sup> CD I/1, 71-87 (KD I/1, 73-89).

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which the secondary form of Scripture and the tertiary form of proclamation give witness. Barth emphasizes the importance of the Word's codification in Scripture: it warrants the authority of God over against the Church. Still, both Scripture and proclamation stand in an actualist relation to the Word: they are not in a definitive, objective sense identical with the Word, but must again and again become the Word of God. Barth consistently uses the category of witness to indicate this relation. According to Barth, the actualism in this relation is not due to our understanding or experience, but to the freedom of God's grace. God's revelation consists, not in any given reality, but in the act of unveiling, in the event of the Incarnation of the Word.<sup>150</sup>

Barth's description of the essence of God's Word (*Das Wesen des Wortes Gottes*) contains some elements that are especially significant for the method of his theology. First, he rejects all attempts to define the Word out of any earthly reality, be it anthropology, creation, or existential analysis. Fundamentally, the Word of God is speech, which implies that it is (1) spiritual and rational, (2) personal, and (3) intentional and free at God's disposal. Moreover, the Word has an actual and historical character: it is an event. It consists in a "contingent contemporaneity," which means that all historical situations must be related to Jesus Christ as the centre of revelation. Its historical character is dependent on its being God's decision: the Word is not absorbed in normal reality and rests on God's gracious choice. The insight that God's Word is not objective is enforced by the dialectics of revelation and hiddenness which safeguards the mystery of God's Word. We know God indirectly, and we cannot synthesize his manifestation and concealment, his Yes and his No under one single category. Only through the Holy Spirit we can hear the Word of God; there is no method leading to this understanding.<sup>151</sup>

In a special discussion on the possibility of the knowledge of God's Word, Barth again rejects attempts to ground it in any human capacity. The factuality of God making himself known is the ground of our knowledge of God; any attempt to base this knowledge on a general theory of knowledge leads to the Cartesian inversion of certainty. In brief, knowledge of God is faith in God. Faith is a relation to Jesus Christ. It creates an analogy or conformity with God in us through our union with Christ. The object of faith, God in Christ, determines our existence.<sup>152</sup>

As was indicated above, Barth holds a dialectical view of the *dogma* (singular): it is not a given system of truths, but the eschatological concept of correspondence between the churchly proclamation and the truth of God's revelation. Barth acknowledges the *dogmata* (plural) in their relative authority, but views them as subject to the constant quest for truth. Scientific dogmatical theology is necessary for the church, and in his time Barth expressly pleads for *regular* dogmatics as

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<sup>150</sup> CD I/1, 88-120 (KD I/1, 89-124). On pages 120-124, Barth further circumscribes the mutual relations between the three shapes of the Word as an analogy to the Trinity, and blames the older Protestant theology for unjustly objectifying the relation between Word and Scripture.

<sup>151</sup> CD I/1, 125-186 (KD I/1, 128-194). In this section, Barth is in serious debate with his fellow-theologians Gogarten (127-131, 170-174) and Tillich (138, 183-184).

<sup>152</sup> CD I/1, 187-247 (KD I/1, 194-261). After the indignant refutation of the *analogia entis* in Barth's preface, it comes as a surprise that he here uses positively the idea of an analogy between God and us (238-247).

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distinct from the *irregular* theology of Kierkegaard, for instance. In clarifying the route of knowledge, the dogmatical *prolegomena* have to provide before all a doctrine of revelation. Barth states that the concept of revelation is found in the concrete fact of revelation: God reveals himself. The analysis of this fact is the task of the doctrine of the Trinity, further elaborated in Christology and Pneumatology. These fundamental doctrines will lay bare the inner structure and relations of the three shapes of God's revelation.<sup>153</sup>

Just as in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, Barth understands the doctrine of the Trinity as the answer to three questions:

1. Who is the God who reveals himself?
2. How does He reveal himself?
3. What is the effect of this self-revelation?

Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity expresses the irreducible combination of unity and diversity of God.<sup>154</sup>

Barth emphatically places the doctrine of the Trinity in front of his dogmatics, before the doctrines of Scripture and God. Whereas the tradition has always confessed the fundamental character of this doctrine, it still started the exposition of doctrine with the *principium cognoscendi* (revelation/Scripture) and the *principium essendi* (God). According to Barth, this obscures the insight that Christian theology deals with the triune God, and derives its knowledge from only his self-revelation.<sup>155</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity expresses the fact that God's revelation is its own ontic and noetic ground. This means that God is free and independent in his revelation. The sentence "Gott offenbart sich als der Herr" is the root of the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is a legitimate and necessary interpretation of the event of revelation. As such it is also an interpretation of the revealed God and a fundamental part of the doctrine of God.<sup>156</sup>

We need not review the whole of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity, but select a few points that are significant to his theological method. First, Barth does not base this doctrine on isolated, explicit biblical texts, but on the whole of Scripture's account of revelation. Thus, he concludes that the Son is the concrete shape in which God is distinguished from himself, that the Father guarantees that God does not coincide with this shape, and that the Spirit takes care of the historical realization of revelation to men. (Note that in German, Barth uses the word *geschichtlich* instead of *historisch*, to indicate the work of the Spirit falls outside the realm of empirical, earthly history.)<sup>157</sup>

The second relevant feature is Barth's critical discussion of the idea of *vestigia trinitatis*: patterns in our reality that should reflect and resemble the trinitarian

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<sup>153</sup> CD I/1, 248-292 (KD I/1, 261-310).

<sup>154</sup> CD I/1, 295-300 (KD I/1, 311-316).

<sup>155</sup> CD I/1, 300-304 (KD I/1, 316-320).

<sup>156</sup> CD I/1, 304-312 (KD I/1, 320-330).

<sup>157</sup> CD I/1, 312-333 (KD I/1, 332-353). Later on (363), Barth uses the parallel triads veiling (*Verhüllung*)-unveiling (*Enthüllung*)-self-impartment (*Selbstmitteilung*), and Creator-Conciliator-Redeemer.

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existence of God. The danger of this procedure is that it can be understood as the attempt to make plausible the confession of the triune God. As it fails to do justice to the specific relation of unity and diversity in God, the doctrine of *vestigia* is not a legitimate interpretation of revelation but merely a superfluous illustration. On the methodical level, Barth discerns the just intention to let the language of revelation take into service the language of creature. But in practice, the opposite takes place. Therefore, Barth wishes to restrict the term *vestigium trinitatis* to the threefold shape of the Word of God.<sup>158</sup>

Third, an important term of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is repetition (*Wiederholung*), to which his preferred concept "mode of being" (*Seinsweise*) instead of "person" corresponds. The idea of repetition implies that there is no alteration of the Godhead when it is respectively attributed to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is not thrice another God but thrice one and the same God. Still, the unity of God is not an unqualified monotheism but the specific unity of the three interrelated modes of being, which guarantees the absolute otherness of God. Consistently, Barth links the threefold repetition in God to the triad of concealment-manifestation-self-communication or Revealer-Revelation- Revealedness.<sup>159</sup>

Fourth, Barth's discussion of the distinct divine Persons makes clear the strong connection between the doctrines of Trinity, revelation and salvation. The confession of God the Father implies the dependence of our existence on the God who condemned the world in the Cross of Jesus. The confession of the Son means that God entered into our rebellion and contradiction against him and overcame this contradiction by enduring it unto death. The confession of the Holy Spirit expresses the fact that God becomes subjective reality in us. In all these passages, Barth rejects an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of natural theology.<sup>160</sup>

A significant addition in the *Church Dogmatics*, if compared to the *Christliche Dogmatik*, is the largely elaborated doctrine of revelation and Scripture in CD I/2.

In the first section of CD I/2, Barth gives some methodological clarification. His consistently dialectical viewpoint is expressed in the statement that there is a fundamental contradiction between God and man. Therefore, revelation is not in the mode of *direct communication*, but in the mode of witness. Barth rejects the apriori method of theology in which reason poses its own axioms concerning the possibility of revelation. He acknowledges that Anselm utilized a seemingly apriori method, while in fact his rational axioms were derived from God's revelation. After the neo-Protestant aberration, however, the Anselmian procedure should not be followed: theology must decidedly start with Jesus Christ.<sup>161</sup>

Fundamental, then, for Barth's doctrine of revelation is the event of incarnation. Barth describes the incarnation as the exclusive form of God's freedom for us. Nothing in the cosmos can cause God to be free for us. There is no *analogia entis* behind the incarnation; it is not nature but grace. Still, on God's part, there is the

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<sup>158</sup> CD I/1, 333-347 (KD I/1, 353-367).

<sup>159</sup> CD I/1, 348-363 (KD I/1, 369-388).

<sup>160</sup> CD I/1, 384-489 (KD I/1, 404-513).

<sup>161</sup> CD I/2, 1-25 (KD I/2, 6-31).

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possibility to assume humanity as analogy, as the “visibility” of revelation. This possibility rests on the Logos’s being the instrument of creation. The term “flesh” characterizes man as he stands before God: created out of nothing, dependent on God’s grace, subjected to God’s judgment. Only in Jesus Christ can the original goodness of man, as his receptiveness for God’s revelation, be viewed.<sup>162</sup>

Central in Barth’s exposition of incarnation as revelation is the concept of time. When God reveals himself, he has time for us. In the event of revelation, our time becomes God’s time. Barth emphasizes that time is an important theme in the Bible. Through the Fall, our time is no longer identical to time as God created it. After the Fall, time is qualified as covenant time and time of grace. The New Testament speaks about the “fulfilled time”: the time of Jesus Christ is the real time. Barth rejects the distinction between “general” and “special” history; biblically viewed, there is only “old” and “new” time. Therefore, revelation can never be a predicate of history. To the contrary, history can become a predicate of revelation. All history before and after the incarnation must be related to Jesus Christ as the centre of history. For our Christian existence, our “being in Christ,” this implies that it is of eschatological nature: we live in hope of our resurrection.<sup>163</sup>

The other side of revelation, our reception of it, is based on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, we *are* in the truth; we *are* in Christ. Barth here warns against a distortion in terms of subjective experience. The concreteness of salvation in our lives cannot be fixated. The decisive act of revelation, both objective and subjective, remains God’s act. Still, it assumes form in our existence in the phenomenon of religion.<sup>164</sup> Here Barth enters into a critical discussion of religion. God’s revelation is *hidden* in the world of religion. The development of the religion concept in Protestant orthodoxy shows a fatal decay after 1700. By that time, the biblical revelation is relinquished and natural religion becomes dominant. This means that in modern religion, man starts to speak without having heard. Religion is unbelief of the godless man. Moreover, religion is structurally moralistic and nomistic. It lacks the true sense of the unity of law and gospel. Barth emphasizes that true revelation requires repentance and entails reconciliation. True religion is only possible in analogy of the justification of the sinner: through God’s judgment and remission. Inasmuch as there is true Christian religion in the Church, it rests on continuous creation and election by God. It must constantly be renewed in communion with Jesus Christ. True religion finds its internal expression in loving God and its external expression in praising God.<sup>165</sup>

After laying the foundations of the general doctrine of revelation, Barth provides a special discussion of the doctrine of Scripture. The first sentence in the *Leitsatz* of this section is: God’s Word is God himself in Holy Scripture. In his elaboration, Barth uses the term witness to explain the relation between God, his Word, and Scripture. “Witness” implies on the one hand non-identity, as it indicates the humanity of Scripture over against the divinity of revelation; on the other hand, it does imply identity, as it has God’s revelation as its grounds and

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<sup>162</sup> CD I/2, 25-44 (KD I/2, 32-48).

<sup>163</sup> CD I/2, 45-121 (KD I/2, 50-131).

<sup>164</sup> CD I/2, 203-279 (KD I/2, 217-305).

<sup>165</sup> CD I/2, 280-361 (KD I/2, 307-423).

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content. The identity between witness and revelation is not a direct one, but is founded in God's action: the becoming revealed of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Scripture's divinity is not grounded in accessible reasons, but in itself. Scripture shows the combination of divine perfection and human fallibility. In line with his earlier criticism (see section 10.2.2 above), Barth views the old Protestant doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture as an unjust objectification. Positively speaking, inspiration has a number of aspects. It means that God is Lord over the Bible and that the Bible springs from an actual, miraculous deed of God. In the Bible, we encounter true humanity, and we stand in a presence between remembrance and expectation of God's revelation. The inspiration of Scripture is God's free decision that calls us to obedience. Inspiration points to the actual presence of the text and at once requires the exegesis of the text. Finally, through inspiration the Bible is independent of our agreement. Barth affirms the statement "the Bible is God's Word" as an analytical statement, grounded in the *autopistia* of Scripture.<sup>166</sup>

Characteristic of Barth's turn towards the *Church Dogmatics* are the sections on the authority and freedom of the Church. Barth is cautious of any dominance of human authority over God's authority in the Church. In obedience to God's own Word, the Church receives authority, but this will never be divine authority. The connection between God's and the Church's authority runs via the apostolic authority as embodied in Scripture. The otherness of the Word in the concreteness of Scripture safeguards a constant counter authority in the Church. Within these qualifications, Barth gives a positive account of tradition and confession. Confession means that different voices in the Church are united in service of the Church's proclamation of the Word. As such, the confession has authority over my private convictions. Barth emphasizes the decision character of confession: in the actual situation, the Church is urged to formulate its Creed on the basis of Holy Scripture. In addition to the authority of the confessing Church, Barth acknowledges the authority of fathers and teachers of the Church in understanding Scripture and doctrine. Their authority is at once limited and substantial: inasmuch as they are *doctor Sacrae Scripturae*, and serve the responsible confessional proclamation of the Word, they deserve our respect. Barth realizes that the confession of the Church in its concrete form is determined and limited by the actual situation in which it was formulated. This makes all confessional statements provisional. Still, as necessary expressions of faith, they justly have ecclesial authority. In the confession, the truth of God's Word is at stake.<sup>167</sup>

The other side of the authority of the Church is the freedom of the Church. In one of his rare allusions to the actual political situation (the German *Dritte Reich*), Barth pleads for a combination of authority based on the Word, and freedom through the Spirit. Still, the Word has its own freedom which prevents it from being entangled in attempts of synthesis with human wisdom. The basis of the Church's freedom is the passive reception of the free Word of God. The correspondent basic form of Christian freedom is prayer. The condescendence of God's Word in human words occasions our freedom to investigate the Word. For

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<sup>166</sup> CD I/2, 457-537 (KD I/2, 505-598).

<sup>167</sup> CD I/2, 538-660 (KD I/2, 598-740).

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the doctrine of Scripture this means that Scripture is given to the Church in need of responsible explanation. Again, this presupposes our subordination to God's Word that comes to us through the words of prophets and apostles. Barth realizes that our own, philosophically influenced thoughts play a role in understanding Scripture. He argues that we should not deny our presuppositions, but should be aware of them and should consider them as no more than hypotheses. Philosophy can never claim an independent right in the interpretation of the Bible. Thinking *about* Scripture must consist of thinking *after* Scripture. True understanding of Scripture arises from the whole of *explicatio – meditatio – applicatio*. The latter term, application, indicates that we cannot end up with a cleavage between theory and practice: understanding Scripture implies simultaneity, congeniality, and indirect identification with the witness of Scripture.<sup>168</sup>

In the final part of *CD I/2* on the proclamation of the Church, Barth comes to a more concrete description of the task and method of dogmatic theology. Parallel to the *Leitsatz* on Holy Scripture, Barth here formulates: God's Word is God himself in the proclamation of the Church of Jesus Christ. Given the *indirect identity* between God's Word and human words, Barth says that preaching is under attack, not by human adversaries, but by God's judgment.<sup>169</sup>

The fact that the final judgment over the Church's preaching falls from God's side does not extol the necessity of the Church's own quest for pure doctrine. The actual proclamation of the Church must be tested and criticized. Barth points out that "doctrine" is no "theory," but is concerned with concretely directing people towards God's salvation. Both proclamation and sacraments aim at the rectitude of our lives. Barth describes the task of the theological disciplines of biblical, practical and dogmatic theology as investigating respectively the foundation, the form, and the content of the Church's preaching. Barth insists on the unity of these three disciplines and on the significance of dogmatics for the whole of the Church's life.<sup>170</sup>

The work of dogmatic theology is different from the work of preaching. Dogmatics is an auxiliary service to the end that, in the concrete situation of preaching God's Word, will sound. Dogmatic theology is scientific; it need not have bad conscience when confronted with modern standards of empirical science since it is closely engaged with the Word of God as the substance (*die Sache*) of theology. Typical of dogmatic work is that it consists of questioning, thinking, defining, distinguishing and schematizing. Still, Barth does not approve of unfocused and unlimited human questioning; dogmatic theology is not an *advocatus diaboli*, but must deal with the questions that are necessary for the proclamation of the Church.<sup>171</sup>

The material for dogmatic theology is the whole of key-words and fundamental outlines of the Church's speech about God. This totality is transmitted through the historical continuity of the Christian tradition. Dogmatics does not take this heritage for granted, but treats it as the starting point of asking for the right speech

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<sup>168</sup> *CD I/2*, 661-740 (*KD I/2*, 741-830).

<sup>169</sup> *CD I/2*, 743-758 (*KD I/2*, 831-848).

<sup>170</sup> *CD I/2*, 758-769 (*KD I/2*, 848-857).

<sup>171</sup> *CD I/2*, 769-782 (*KD I/2*, 857-871).

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about God. Barth pays special attention to the relation between dogmatics and ethics. In the history of theology, ethics has often been separated from dogmatic theology. The hidden presupposition of this separation is that ethics is not founded on the revelation of God in Christ but on a general anthropology and a general idea of goodness. Barth shows that the separate treatment of the two often results in a negative accent on dogmatic theology: it is seen as an idle, almost superfluous enterprise, merely prelude to the proper, ethical task of theology. For Barth, it is impossible to separate ethics from dogmatics. In his view, ethics concerns the field of human existence, not in its own right, but as it is claimed and directed by God's Word. In ethics, man is not the subject but the object (*Gegenstand*) of the Word of God.<sup>172</sup>

The proper function of dogmatics, in Barth's view, is to invite the Church to listen again to the Word of God. Barth rejects the distinction between an *ecclesia docens* and an *ecclesia audiens*. In order to teach, the theologian must ever again start to listen. Dogmatics is on the way from the ambiguous fact of preaching to the unambiguity of pure doctrine. The success of this way depends on God's promise to reveal himself; dogmatics can only strive towards this transcendent event. The objective possibility of pure doctrine rests in God. Still, the Church's struggling for pure doctrine finds expression in concrete doctrinal forms. A specific task of dogmatics is to guard against heresy. In order to prevent heresy, dogmatic theology must be alert in the pre-heretical stadium when subtle doctrinal deviations occur. The objective of fighting heresy is not to disqualify certain people and movements but to discover the heretic tendency in one's own heart and to call the Church to a new decision of faith.<sup>173</sup>

Although dogmatic theology consists of human words, it is not a conversation of the Church with itself: dogmatics reminds the Church to the Word of God as the sole norm of proclamation. In dogmatics, there is no place for autonomy without theonomy or heteronomy. This normative setting asks for a threefold attitude of the dogmatician. First, he needs a *biblical* attitude. His primary loyalty is with God and his Word, with the questions and answers stemming from God. This does not imply that the dogmatician can operate from a systematic prejudice or with absolute, exclusive pretensions. Moreover, the biblical attitude does not mean that dogmatic theology should repeat and explain biblical texts. The range of dogmatic questions can sometimes be wider than the immediate scope of biblical texts. Still, the dogmatician is urged to constant Bible exegesis. The second requirement is a *confessional* attitude. The belief in *una sancta catholica et apostolica ecclesia* does not exclude the need of taking a concrete standpoint in a relatively determined confessional horizon. The different confessions should not be viewed as specifications of a common *genus*, but as opposite claims of truth. Barth clearly sets off against the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and neo-Protestant positions: the only true dogmatics is "evangelical" dogmatics. Within the "evangelical family," Barth describes the Lutheran and Anglican confessions not as non-Churches, but as erring parts of the Church. He emphatically states that he can only practice Reformed dogmatics and view the Reformed confession as the truly Evangelical

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<sup>172</sup> CD I/2, 782-796 (KD I/2, 871-890).

<sup>173</sup> CD I/2, 797-812 (KD I/2, 890-908).

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one. In dealing with the confessional differences, it is important to take them *kata pneuma*, not *kata sarka*. This means that one does not fixate on the differences as such but seeks to overcome them in renewed obedience to God's Word. The third aspect of the right dogmatical attitude is that it is *ecclesial*. Dogmatic theology must face the actual situation of the Church and participate in its fellowship of prayer. Dogmatics cannot be atemporal or merely aesthetic or romantic or secular. In this world and this time, dogmatics will ask for God's voice.<sup>174</sup>

However, the task of dogmatics goes beyond hearing God's Word towards teaching the Word. The Word is not only the norm, but also the object of preaching and teaching. The Church and its dogmatic theology cannot neglect the substantial proclamation of Jesus Christ. In addition to the formal task of guarding the truth of doctrine, dogmatics has the material task of expounding and presenting the content of the Word of God. Dogmatic method consists of the paradigmatic forging of the connection between hearing and teaching. Here Barth describes more precisely the relation between theonomy, autonomy and heteronomy. Seen from above, theonomy is the only word, indicating that theology lives from God's Word. Seen from below, we meet heteronomy in the authority of Scripture and Church, and autonomy in the freedom of obedience. The autonomy is not unqualified: it is obedient to God's Word. Still, Barth insists on the term autonomy, as he argues that obedience without freedom is no complete obedience. The dogmatician freely responds to the Word and offers his response to his fellow-believers. Method is arbitrary – Barth approves of the *dictum*, but adds the warning that the *arbiter* cannot sleep and dream, and then decide according to his fancy. Barth rejects the method of a system built on a basic axiom and constructed as a complete self-contained whole. Instead of a basic principle, Barth takes the Word of God as the leading guide of dogmatic method: method must serve to keep open the way for listening to the Word. Barth advocates the return to the *Loci* method used by Melancthon and Calvin: in renouncing a comprehensive exposition, one finds on each topic the relevant connections and grounds of doctrine.

For Barth's own theology, the question can be raised whether, given the identity of revelation and reconciliation, the whole of doctrine can coincide with Christology. Barth rejects this conclusion, since it would make an *idea* of reconciliation the axiom of doctrine, whereas the Bible narrates the salvation as a *total event*. The whole of God and his acts must be the material of dogmatics. The subsumption of all parts under one point of view, be it the doctrine of God, reconciliation, creation, or redemption, presents a distortion of biblical revelation. Christian doctrine, and consequently dogmatic theology, has four centers: God, creation, reconciliation, and redemption. According to Barth, this distinction of *Loci* follows the triune existence of God. Still, it does not turn dogmatics into a trinitarian system: its basic principle is not a systematic idea but the divine act of revelation.

Barth ends up with a brief sketch of the content of each of the four main *Loci* of his planned dogmatics. He is aware of the danger that, by describing the whole of doctrine, one will embark on erroneous systematizing. Therefore, the dogmatician needs the modesty to recognize that our words never equal God's Word.

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<sup>174</sup> CD I/2, 812-843 (KD I/2, 908-943).

And this modesty includes the realization that in God's light we are shown to be darkness, in God's judgment we are exposed as liars, and that we shall think and speak the truth always against our own selves.<sup>175</sup>

### 10.3.2. Christological Concentration

A widely recognized feature of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is expressed by the term "christological concentration." We will start here with scanning the pre-history of this motive.

Already in the early dialectical phase, we find signals of the importance of Christology for Barth. In his farewell to Herrmann, Barth pointed to his teacher's defective doctrines of Trinity and Christology (see section 10.1.1. above). In the frontal discussion with Harnack (see also section 10.1.1. above), the christological focus occurs on two points. First and most fundamental is Barth's statement that the event of incarnation is the center of reality of God's revelation. This furthermore implies that Barth is interested, not in the historical Jesus, but in the revelatory Christ. A second significance of Christ in Barth's view is the fact that in the Cross of Jesus the fundamental difference between God and man is expressed and maintained. Here Christology prevents all synthesis between God's Word and human culture.

Whereas the usage of christological notions as mentioned above was primarily critical and negative against the liberal theology of synthesis, we find in *Romans I* a more positive elaboration of christological motives (see section 10.1.4. above).<sup>176</sup> Barth states that in Christ God creates a new reality. Christ is the way in which God leads us back to himself as the Origin. He forms the transition from the possibility to the reality of revelation. The revelation in Christ is an objective, divine fact. We are incorporated in God's redemptive action. We only have to become aware of what is already real in Christ. Moreover, Barth sketches our participation in the reality of Christ in inclusive and organic terms. The general outlook of *Romans I* is dialectical, but Christology as the focus of God's salvation activity provides a basis of continuity between God and man.

*Romans II* is the outstanding document of Barth's full dialectical theology (see section 10.1.4. above). Here the idea of continuity between God and man in the reality of Christ is retracted. christological notions are rare in this exposition. Where they occur, they have a paradoxical character: Christ is the unity of the hidden and the revealed God, the positing and overcoming of the contradiction between God and man, the standpoint beyond position and negation. Barth's christological statements focus on the resurrection of Christ: resurrection is the disclosure of Jesus as the Christ, the appearance of God and the knowledge of God in him. The resurrection is principally unhistorical, and is connected by Barth with the *futurum resurrectionis*, the eschatological fulfillment of God's revelation in our reality. In conclusion, Barth's Christology of *Romans II* is not interested in the

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<sup>175</sup> CD I/2, 844-884 (KD I/2, 943-990). The quotation is from CD I/2, 844.

<sup>176</sup> To be sure, chronologically speaking the *Romans I* theology (1919) precedes Barth's expressions of disagreement with Herrmann and Harnack (1925 and 1923 respectively).

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incarnation, but merely in the death and resurrection of Christ as the negative and positive turning point of history.<sup>177</sup>

Basic for Barth's dialectical theology is the urgent problem of revelation, caused by the unbridgeable gap between God and man. Barth upholds the actuality of this revelation in the paradoxality of Yes and No. In Barth's subsequent development towards a dogmatic theology, the event of revelation is more fully colored by the doctrines of Trinity and incarnation (as expounded in the *Christliche Dogmatik*; see section 10.2.2. above). In both cases, the fundamental contradiction between God and man determines the structure of Barth's exposition. Christology remains paradoxical: in Jesus Christ, God is hidden precisely in the absoluteness of his revelation. The assumption of humanity is meant to solve the revelation problem: God remains God and at the same time becomes man, and thus can be known. The Anselm book, which completes the transition from the dialectical phase to the *Church Dogmatics*, contains few explicit references to Christology. Here Barth decides for a combination of his earlier actualism and a new realism; a combination that continues the revelational approach, but gives more room for a positive exploration of the reality of God's revelation (see section 10.2.3. above).

In the first parts of the *Church Dogmatics*, we find a shift of emphasis from "Word of God" to "Jesus Christ" as the main expression for revelation. From the doctrine of God onward, we can safely speak of christological concentration as the characteristic of Barth's theology. As Kamphuis and Muller pointed out, we can interpret this devise along two distinctions: soteriological-principal and noetic-ontic. For Barth, the concentration on Jesus Christ concerns, not only what is to be said about our salvation, but all that can be said about God and his work. So the christological concentration has the character of a universal principle.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, Barth states that Christ is central not only in our knowing God, but in the reality of God and world. His significance is not only noetic but ontic.<sup>179</sup>

In the subsequent sections on Barth's doctrine of God, we will find several examples of christological concentration. This concerns our knowledge of God (section 11.2), the being of God (section 11.3), and the attributes of grace and holiness (section 12.2.1), mercy and righteousness (section 12.2.2), patience and wisdom (section 12.2.3), unity, simplicity, and omnipresence (section 12.3.1), constancy and omnipotence (section 12.3.2), and glory (section 12.3.3). In a few of these instances, the christological focus is replaced by a trinitarian concentration. Moreover, chapter 13 on divine election will show that the christological concentration is fundamental to Barth's doctrine of God: as the decree of election determines the being of God, and Jesus Christ is the primary substance of this decree, Christology determines the doctrine of God.

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth*, 245-262.

<sup>178</sup> This is not to disregard Barth's contention that he does not use an "idea" of Christ, but follows the actual event of God's revelation in Christ. By "universal principle" I mean that the concentration on Christ is not limited to soteriology as a partial domain of doctrine, but determines the whole of Christian doctrine.

<sup>179</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 46-50; R.A. Muller, "The Barth Legacy: New Athanasius or Origen Redivivus? A Response to T.F. Torrance," *The Thomist* 54 (1990): 673-704.

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In the later parts of the *Church Dogmatics*, christological concentration remains a distinctive feature of Barth's expositions. We can only name a few important instances here: the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of humanity, and the doctrine of the church.

In view of all these examples, and elaborating on the Kamphuis/Muller-distinction mentioned above, we can discern the following functions of the christological concentration:

- I. *Epistemological*: for knowing God, we depend on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Under this heading fall different sub-functions of the christological focus: (a) Christology as reflecting the *dialectics* of revelation and hiddenness, (b) Christology as indicating that man is *included* in and *participates* in the process of revelation by which we can know God, (c) Jesus Christ functioning as the *heuristic* and *hermeneutical* key for understanding Scripture, and (d) Jesus Christ as standing for both the *question* and the *answer* in the *dialogical* process of interpreting reality.
- II. *Ontological*: Jesus Christ is determinative for God's being and for all reality. The doctrine of the Trinity explains that the *self-distinction* and *mutuality* between Father, Son, and Spirit is constitutive for God's being. Subsequently, Christology properly speaking elaborates the trinitarian insight by *including* Christ's *humanity* in the divine reality. This entails an inner, *ontological dialectics* in God in which the opposition between God and man is overcome (here the soteriological point of christological concentration fits in).<sup>180</sup> As a next step, God's *choice* in Jesus Christ is *foundational* for God's attitude towards the world and for all God's actions. In brief, Jesus Christ is the *focus* of all God's actions, the end to which all God's actions lead.

Taken together, all these aspects make the christological concentration a coherent concept that determines the whole of Barth's theology. Still, it interferes with the other important feature of Barth's mature theology: the usage of analogy.

### 10.3.3. Barth's Usage of Analogy

The concept of analogy is highly debated, not only in the discussions about Barth's theology,<sup>181</sup> but also in Barth's theology itself. In Barth's development prior to the *Church Dogmatics*, we have found little explicit mentioning of this idea. Still, the strong emphasis on the difference between God and man, revelation and history, faith and religion, indicates that "analogy" is not a plausible concept for Barth's dialectical theology.

Barth's Anselm book, immediately preceding the *CD*, does not discuss the analogy principle. As we have seen, however, it paves the road for analogical

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<sup>180</sup> The fact that I place the soteriological aspect here implies that in my view the soteriological importance of Jesus Christ in Barth's theology differs from the classical Reformed position: Barth embeds it in the wider ontological-epistemological problematic.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Gottlieb Söhngen, "Analogia entis in analogia fidei," in *Antwort*, 266-271; Walter Kreck, "Analogia fidei oder analogia entis," in *Antwort*, 272-286; Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie: Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths," in *Barth-Studien*, 210-232; Karl Hammer, "Analogia relationis gegen analogia entis," in *ΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ. Karl Barth zum achtzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1966*, ed. by Eberhard Busch et al. (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1966), 288-304.

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thinking by its emphasis on the *objectivity* of God's revelation (see section 10.2.3 above).

Barth's acceptance and usage of analogy as a theological thought form runs through several stages in the *CD*.<sup>182</sup> A negative point of departure is the Roman Catholic assumption of an *analogia entis* between God and his creature. In this direction, we have not only the polemical statement in the preface to *CD I/1* (see section 10.3.1 above), but also the rejection of the *vestigia trinitatis* (see section 10.3.1 above) and the elaborate discussion in the section on natural theology (see section 11.2 below). Barth has three fundamental objections against the *analogia entis* procedure: first, it presupposes a general ontology comprising both God and creature, thus disrespecting the uniqueness of God; second, it treats the similarity between God and creatures as something intrinsically present, thus neglecting the need of revelation for our knowledge of God; third, it tends to reduce the content of theology to immanent truths of humanity and morality.

The first positive statement about analogy is found in *CD I/1* as well. Here Barth states that our knowing God's Word is made possible by faith as a conformity or analogy with God in us. The foundation of this conformity resides in the Word itself that becomes present to us as an object (*Gegenstand*).<sup>183</sup> The next step concerns the subjective consequences. Barth still denies that there is a given connection point (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) in our humanity or personality. But he continues by saying that our reconciliation with God in Christ entails the new positing of the lost connection point. This equals the restoration of the *imago Dei*. "In faith, man is created *by* the Word of God *for* the Word of God." Barth is aware of his proximity to the Roman Catholic doctrine of *analogia entis*, when he speaks of man's conformity with God. The difference is that Barth's analogy of faith does not consist in being, but in the act of decision which reflects God's decision of grace. Barth understands this analogy in terms of the correspondence between God's speaking and man's hearing the Word. In this capacity to hear God's Word, man receives the analogy of faith.<sup>184</sup> Besides the emphasis on the actualist, decision character of analogy, it is remarkable that Barth interprets the Pauline usage of "analogy of faith" (Romans 12,6) in epistemological terms: it is the correspondence between the known object and the act of knowing. In this context, Barth approves (with some caution) the words of the Hegelian theologian Ph. Marheineke:

In the human spirit, God is not manifest by it, but by Himself,  
and as such is also manifest to the human spirit. The mind as

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<sup>182</sup> This section draws partly on Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei? Die Frage der Analogie bei Karl Barth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965). Pöhlmann provides a clear survey and classification on the different forms of analogy that occur throughout the *Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>183</sup> *CD I/1*, 229-237 (*KD I/1*, 241-249). In these passages, Barth frequently uses the term "experience," to which in fact the complete preceding section (198-227) was devoted. Its primary connotation is not the subjective, psychological experience, but the real encounter with the Word of God.

<sup>184</sup> *CD I/1*, 237-244 (*KD I/1*, 250-256).

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reason is lifted up into Him. ... His true knowledge of the Absolute is itself absolute.<sup>185</sup>

The third level of this analogy of faith is that man as a subject is in fact a predicate of God as subject: faith is not our action, but is worked in us by God the Holy Spirit.<sup>186</sup>

The subjective interpretation of analogy in terms of the analogy of faith is complemented by Barth's statements on the analogy of revelation in *CD II/1*. Here the focus is on the analogy of terms used for God and for creatures. Compared to his rejection of the *analogia entis*, Barth's position is rather subtle again. The primary insight is that human words become useful for speaking about God by God's taking them into service for his revelation. As Barth points out, terms from the created world are attributed to God on extrinsic grounds. Still, although there is no intrinsic connection between the human and the divine application, Barth claims that there is an original unity between God and the world which is brought back by God's revelation and salvation. Our words are originally and legitimately God's words, and in revelation God takes them back for his purposes.<sup>187</sup>

A further important form of analogy is developed in Barth's doctrine of creation. As Pöhlmann points out, the earlier influence of a Platonist dualism in Barth's view of the relation between God and the world has disappeared in the *CD*.<sup>188</sup> Creation is acknowledged as reality, but as a reality that is grounded only in the covenant of grace, in God's revelation and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Creation can be an analogy to the Creator, not due to a habitual property, but by an ever actual event of God's free grace. This actualist character of the analogy is fundamental to Barth's view of the relation between creation and Creator. More substantially viewed, Barth seeks a first analogy in creation's reflecting the glory of God: our world is the theatre in which God shows his glory. Moreover, as the theatre of God's glory, creation mirrors and echoes the Word of God. This type of relation between God and his creation is analogous to the intra-trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son.<sup>189</sup>

In his doctrine of creation of *CD III*, Barth elaborates the analogy between creation and covenant, creation and grace, firstly in terms of temporality. Creation is temporal, grace is initially eternal, but subsequently condescends into time. In turn, creation time consists of two types: improper time (time of sin) and proper time (time of Christ). Sinful time is improperly analogous to time as created by God: it is an *analogia carentiae*; it is lost time. Only by the time of Christ, the time of

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<sup>185</sup> *CD I/1*, 244 (*KD I/1*, 257).

<sup>186</sup> *CD I/1*, 244-247 (*KD I/1* 258-260).

<sup>187</sup> *CD II/1*, 225-243 (*KD II/1*, 254-275). For a detailed discussion, see section 11.2 below.

<sup>188</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 44-45. The dualism had a positive character in Barth's earliest, liberal theology: behind the obvious antithesis between God and the world, he assumes a fundamental synthesis, a continuity and identity between the world of appearances and the world of reality. In the later, critical period, all emphasis was on the infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world: creation is *merely* an analogy, a likeness to God's reality, but is never identical to it.

<sup>189</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 45-46. These insights are found in Barth's earlier works: *Dogmatik im Grundriss*, *Credo*, and *Gotteserkenntnis und Gottesdienst*.

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grace, can our time be restored to the original created time. Christ is the center of time, who fulfils the emptiness of our lost time. In a typical movement, Barth reverses the analogical relation between creation time and Christ time: principally seen, the time of Christ is the archetype, from which the creation time is derived.<sup>190</sup> In an overall description of created reality, Barth distinguishes three domains of being: celestial, terrestrial and demonic reality. The relation between heaven and earth is analogous to the relation between Creator and creation; parallel to it is the relation between angel and man. Pöhlmann states that this is an analogy of proportionality (*analogia proportionalitatis*): *a* relates to *b* as *c* relates to *d*. Heaven and earth reflect the relation between God and man in their *relative* difference of highness and lowness, but also in the fact that they have a history of encounter just as God and man have. This analogy is not arbitrary, since according to Barth the reconciliation of God and man in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is exactly the hypostatical unification of heaven and earth. The negative counterpart of this analogy exists in the relation between the celestial and the demonic realms: this is an *analogia mendacii*. Satan and his fellows are not identical with celestial or terrestrial creatures but try to cloth themselves with their similarity. They form the false image of what creation is like. Whereas this *analogia mendacii* has no real subsistence, Barth also states *das Nichtige* as a real, though negative, analogy to God. The important presupposition for Barth is that nothing exists neutrally, outside the will of God. That which contradicts God's will is not self-existent but depends on God's active rejection, God's No! That which is contradicted by God and that which contradicts God correspond to each other in their contradiction. As the echo of God's No and shadow of God's Yes, *das Nichtige* becomes also a negative analogy of the creation that is positively willed by God.<sup>191</sup>

In Barth's doctrine of creation, the doctrine of man has a central place. Essential for man is, in Barth's view, his social nature: he is disposed for having relations with other men and with God. Pöhlmann argues that in Barth's precritical and critical periods, Barth maintained the idea of man as God's image. In the *Romans II* era, any identity between God and man is radically denied: there is a *Todeslinie* between them. Man is merely a likeness of God. Not only the material continuity (i.e., good things in man that reflect good things in God), but also the formal resemblance (consisting of mutuality and partnership) is rejected. But soon after *Romans II*, Barth came back from this extreme denial and moved towards a more positive appraisal of the *imago Dei*. Still, the idea of *imago Dei* is critically qualified by Barth's statement that only Jesus Christ is the true image of God. Without Christ, man is a "blind mirror" of God. The exclusiveness of Christ as God's image implies, however, our inclusion in Christ as members of his body, the Church.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 46-48. Cf. CD III/1, 67-76 (KD III/1, 72-82) and in more detail CD III/2, 437-640 (KD III/2, 524-780). Barth's first thoughts on time were developed in the context of the doctrine of revelation, CD I/2, 45-121 (KD I/2, 50-133) The meaning and importance of Barth's reflections on temporality may seem hard to grasp. I merely mention them because Barth, according to Pöhlmann, introduces analogy terminology here. See further K. Runia, *De theologische tijd bij Karl Barth: Met name in zijn anthropologie* (Franeker: Wever, 1955).

<sup>191</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 48-50.

<sup>192</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 51-56.

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When in Christ we are in the image of God, what does this mean? Barth rejects several interpretations of the content of the image, and identifies as the true *tertium comparationis* the relatedness of man. The analogy between God and man is an *analogia relationis*. By this term, Barth rejects the idea that the image of God resides in some inherent quality. It depends on the actual relation with God, and thus is parallel to the *analogia revelationis* mentioned above.<sup>193</sup>

Typical of man is his social character, the occurrence of real, personal I-Thou encounters. Non-human creatures are merely next to each other and with each other; only man is for or against another. In this sociality, man reflects God's social, trinitarian character. As Barth's doctrine of the Trinity explains, it is essential for God to live in mutual distinction and relatedness. The reflection of God's sociality in man is twofold: first, in man's encounter with God, and, second, in man's encounter with other men. Barth emphasizes that God is, not only the archetype, but also the maker of man's being God's image. The relation of freedom and love between God and man is initiated by God, and reflects the intra-trinitarian dialectics of freedom and love. The second aspect of the *analogia relationis*, the mutual relations between human beings, is centered in marriage. Just as for God's trinitarian existence, for the biunity of man and wife the combination of distance and unity, distinction and relation, is characteristic. Barth's doctrine of the *analogia relationis* comes full circle when he mirrors the divine freedom and love for man in the freedom and love in human marriage, and finally in man's freedom and love for God. For Barth, the elaborate doctrine of man as God's image is the primary reason for the Old Testament verdict on making idols: it is God's work to create his own image; therefore, man cannot create an image of God.<sup>194</sup>

Continuing on Barth's doctrine of the correlation between creation and covenant, he also states an analogy between the history of salvation and the history of the world: evil and good that exist in secular history reflect sin and grace as constituents of salvation history. Barth here states that the sounds and melodies of his beloved composer Mozart are a likeness of the Kingdom of God. Still, the analogy is no direct identity: precisely the alleged top of secular history, the history of religion, is in fact the negative reflection of God's history of salvation. Secular history is not homologous, but antilogous to God's history.<sup>195</sup>

A significant field of analogy, where Barth seems to come dangerously close to the *analogia entis*, is the problem of the relation between God's providence and the created world. Barth here utilizes the scholastic terminology of primary and secondary causes, and speaks about an *analogia operationis*. Still, he warns that there is only a certain similitude between God's causation and our causation. The decisive difference is that God as cause is self-causating, founded in himself; our causation is due to God's *creatio continua ex nihilo*. Rejecting a general *analogia causae*, Barth states that the connection between God's causation and created causes lies exclusively in Jesus Christ, the true unity of God and man. Barth gives his

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<sup>193</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 56-59.

<sup>194</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 59-62.

<sup>195</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 63-65.

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theory of *analogia operationis* a strongly actualist outlook: created being *is* never Godlike in itself, but only *becomes* it by God's act of governing.<sup>196</sup>

As we have pointed out before, the center of Barth's doctrine of analogy is Jesus Christ. In Barth's proper Christology, we find the complete four possibilities of the *analogia proportionalitatis* between God and man: Jesus relates to man as Jesus relates to God, as God relates to God, and as man relates to man. This parallels the *analogia relationis* established above in respect to man as God's image. These analogies are grounded in the fact of hypostatical union, which is, in Barth's view, without precedent or analogy. The diverse relations between Jesus, God and man are qualified by the duality of humiliation and heightening of Christ. The similitude of Christ with God and man is dialectical: Jesus's highness reflects his humility, God's highness, man's highness, and man's humility; Christ's humility reflects his highness, God's highness, God's self-humiliation, and man's humility. It is a typical example of Barth's actualist and dialectical thinking that he fills in the analogy of the hypostatical union by means of the two states of humiliation and heightening of Christ.<sup>197</sup>

Barth's earlier statements on faith as analogy between God and man receive a further elaboration from Barth's christological insights: the *kenosis* of God in the humiliation of Christ is reflected in faith's being an empty hand, comforted despair and hollow space. Man's little meekness of faith is a reflection of Christ's great meekness. Moreover, as a Reformed theologian, Barth insists on the active character of faith. The twofold activity of repentance and confidence reflects the death and resurrection of Christ as the cause of our mortification and vivification. The inequality between man's faith and God's salvation remains dominant. Still, the importance of a true analogy in man is that otherwise God's grace would be brutal: regardless of and dissolved from our response. Barth's doctrine of Gospel and Law parallels this analogy of grace and faith: grace initiates faith (gospel), and grace asks for faith (law).<sup>198</sup>

### **10.4. Results**

We cannot simply speak of *one* theological method in Karl Barth. The preceding survey makes it clear that, as Van der Kooi points out, the route of Barth's theology is not linear. It shows curves that are sometimes so acute as to become "a crack in the road."<sup>199</sup> Still, we are justified in describing it as a road, or rather as a journey through the field of Christian speech about God.

The results of this investigation in the development of Barth's theological method are gathered along two lines: the historical and the systematical.

#### **10.4.1. Historical Observations**

From the historical point of view, we can give a refinement of the division handled in this section. In Barth's career as an independent theologian, we can detect the following important steps:

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<sup>196</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 65-69.

<sup>197</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 72-80.

<sup>198</sup> Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei*, 80-84.

<sup>199</sup> Van der Kooi, *Denkweg*, 1.

## *The Development of Barth's Theological Method*

1. *The finding of a standpoint over against the dominant liberal theology of his days: God is God; world is world.* From different sides, Barth was led towards this position. He became deeply disappointed by the leading German theologians' reaction to the First World War, which revealed to him the disastrous consequences of the liberal synthesis between religion and culture. He was equally suspicious of the political opposite of *Kulturprotestantismus*, religious socialism. He realized that the revolutionary fight for social justice was unjustly identified with the coming of the Kingdom of God. In his reading of the New Testament, especially Paul's letters, he discovered God's revelation as the only possible starting point of religion, against all human efforts. He learned to make a strong distinction between the historical and psychological explanations of "scientific" theology and the true substance of biblical revelation. These and similar insights are characteristic of Barth's writings from 1916 until 1921.

2. *The elaboration of this fundamental insight into a dialectical theology or a theology of crisis.* This development is most fully documented in *Romans II*. The basic intuition is worked out in a consistent theological method, built with blocks from different sources. Neo-Kantian philosophy, directly mediated to Barth by his brother Heinrich, provided him with the notion of "origin," by which he could better explain how God did and did not relate to created reality. As the *Ursprung*, God is both the denial *and* the new beginning of our existence. The negative side of this fundamental cleavage between God and world is expressed in the manifold and powerful paradoxes of *Romans II*. Here Barth underwent at least a stylistic influence from Søren Kierkegaard. Moreover, the dialectical relation between revelation and history is described in terms derived from Franz Overbeck (*Urgeschichte, Todeslinie*). Barth's thought is strongly eschatological, in a world-renouncing sense. In *Romans II*, the negative potential of dialectics is dominant. The new beginning of Christian life is indeed posited, but receives little elaboration. This purest form of dialectical theology is to be found in the years 1922 till 1924.

3. *The movement towards a more dogmatical theology.* Barth's appointment as an honorary professor of Reformed theology in Göttingen was an external occasion for an intense confrontation with traditional orthodox theology. Soon, Barth became enthusiastic of the rich contents and confident method of older theology, and he saw profit in connecting himself to this tradition. As early as 1922, Barth saw room for a dogmatic approach in theology, though he clearly preferred the dialectical method. In preparing his Göttingen lectures, the doctrines of the Church – primarily the doctrine of the Trinity – proved to be instructive for the way in which Barth attempted to develop his own theology. The final codification of this stage in Barth's career is the *Christliche Dogmatik* of 1927. Here the constitutive function of the doctrines of revelation and Trinity is evident. On the one hand, the distinctive starting point of theology is clearly maintained by Barth. On the other hand, the possibilities for a positive explanation of doctrine have increased. Still, the outlook of Barth's exposition is actualist in emphasizing the inextollable subjectivity of God: all that can be said about God is due to God's own act of revealing himself. Therefore, we are obliged to use paradoxes in speaking about God. An additional feature of the *Christliche Dogmatik* is its usage of existentialist philosophical concepts for clarifying man's situation before God. In the final

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analysis, the *Christliche Dogmatik* opts for a dogmatical theology in line with the patristic, scholastic and reformed tradition, but maintains a critical distance between Christian speech about God and the Word of God itself.

4. *The Anselmic shift.* The Anselm book of 1931 marks the decisive constitution of Barth's method that was afterwards employed in the *Church Dogmatics*. Besides the identification of the Church's Credo as the relevant form of Christian speech, the most important aspect of this programmatic treatise is the realist turn. Barth takes the reality of God as the foundation of theology. He advocates the priority of the ontic over the noetic, and assigns to theology a fundamentally *a posteriori* method. In clear rejection of an irrationalist interpretation of dialectical theology, Barth defends the rationality of theology grounded in the rationality of God. Still, the realist position does not lead to a denial of Barth's former criticism of any identification of God and created entities. Realist statements about God can only be done on the basis of and in accordance with the event of divine self-revelation. The Anselmian proof of God's existence is a proof from revelation.

5. *The elaboration in the Church Dogmatics.* As Barth himself indicated, the Anselm book provides the key to the CD. However, the key merely opens the door. Once we are inside, we discover that there are several rooms, corridors, stairs and doors in the house. The initial volumes clearly work out the points made in the Anselm book. God's trinitarian self-revelation is set out as the first thing to be said (*prolegomenon*). Moreover, the whole structure of the CD is governed by a triadic pattern following the works of creation (Father), reconciliation (Son), and redemption (Spirit). The constant involvement in theological exegesis<sup>200</sup> and the ongoing confrontation with the Church tradition form an important aspect of the theology of the CD. Throughout the initial discussions, the emphasis on the Word of God receives a more christological coloring. The doctrine of God has the function to explore the reality of God, but is equally colored by the christological concentration, which finds decisive expression in the doctrine of election. Christological concentration, then, is a main characteristic of Barth's mature theology. Another emerging feature is Barth's usage of analogies throughout the CD. This is an important device in order to establish a connection or continuity between God and the world. However, the Barthian analogy remains extrinsic: it always rests on a free choice of God, and is never an intrinsic quality of creatures.

Genetically viewed, Barth's theological method has gradually developed: this includes some substantial changes of interest and emphasis without implying the total absence in the earlier stages of thought lines that would later on be fully developed or the complete disappearance of early characteristics in the later phases. The opposition between dialectics and analogy (cf. the introduction to this chapter) points to a constant bipolarity in Barth's thinking, in which the

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<sup>200</sup> This term is used to indicate the typical way of Barth's dealing with biblical exposition in the *Church Dogmatics*. Cf. Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 125-133. See also Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1995). Further discussion of Barth's approach to Scripture is found in section 15.3.1 below.

proportions of both change, rather than to a dismissal of the former in favor of the latter.

It is important to note that Barth's method did not come "out of the blue" and does not stand on itself. Barth was constantly involved in discussions with both contemporary and historical theologians and philosophers from all different directions. The confrontations with Herrmann, Harnack, Overbeck, Peterson, Gogarten, Brunner and Bultmann (to name a few), and the ongoing dealing with the older theologies of Augustine, Calvin, the scholastics (medieval and Protestant), and Schleiermacher greatly helped him to shape his own theology. To be sure, Barth was impressively powerful in finding his own position in these discussions. Nevertheless, the points of contact with other people's thought are undeniable (cf. section 15.3.2 below). A second point in this context is convincingly made by Bruce McCormack: Barth's method is developed together with the substantial treatment of certain doctrines. This is especially clear in the prominent place held by the doctrines of Trinity and Christology in the *Church Dogmatics*, but holds as well for eschatological thought in *Romans II*. Barth's versions of the respective doctrines inform his method, while certain methodical presuppositions may co-determine his shaping of the doctrines. We can at this moment note an immediate connection between method and content; a connection that will be further specified in the analysis of Barth's doctrine of God.

#### **10.4.2. Systematic Questions**

Now coming to the systematical line of analysis, we can best proceed by a series of questions. Parts of the answers have to be postponed to the analysis of Barth's doctrine of God.

##### *1. What about the cleavage between God and man?*

Barth started around 1916 with the tautological formula: God is God; world is world. A strong motive in his insistence on the difference between God and man is his fear for any identification of God and inner worldly entities. Barth at once wishes to maintain the freedom of God, and to prevent Christianity from falling victim to Ludwig Feuerbach's theory of religion as mere projection. Theology is about God, the wholly Other. But the difference between God and man even amounts to a contradiction: man rebels against God, and our actual existence is a denial of God's Lordship.

From the outset, Barth has stated that only from God's part the cleavage can be bridged and the contradiction be overcome. Initially, this is described in terms of revelation and of God as origin. But the soteriological side of the issue becomes all the more prominent. Revelation is equated with reconciliation, and the event of revelation/reconciliation is traced back to the inner being of the triune God. While maintaining the subjectivity of God and his gracious initiative in revelation, Barth tends to include the human nature of Christ and the subjective realization by the Spirit in man's life into God's trinitarian existence. And whereas God and world were viewed as strict opposites in the earlier phase, Barth's doctrine of creation lays a positive (though dialectical) relation between creation and covenant.

To conclude: there remains a critical distance between God and the world in Barth's later theology, but the relation is positively qualified by Barth's doctrines of

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revelation, Trinity and Christology. As Barth stated in retrospect: the No had to be loudly exclaimed in order to give room for God's Yes.

### *2. What happened to dialectics and paradoxes?*

This question takes on the formal side of the preceding one: the method characterized by dialectics and paradoxes rests upon the inner, substantial dialectic (*Dialektik der Sache*) of the contradiction between God and man, God and world. This contradiction implies the impossibility of man's knowing God: God is unknowable, *deus absconditus*. Barth saw the dialectical method as suitable for his theological program: by means of paradoxes, every statement about God has to be denied at the same moment. However, he gradually became aware of the imminent one-sidedness of a "theology of crisis." God does not remain at a distance but, in the incarnation, has come as close as possible to this world. The *deus absconditus* becomes the *deus revelatus*. Theology cannot be limited to posing the antithesis between God and world, but has to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth expresses his new stance over against the paradox in relation to the Word of God:

First the Word of God meets us in a form that is to be distinguished from its content, and secondly the form as such is an enigma, a concealing of the Word of God. The relevant concept here is that of paradox. A paradox is a communication which is not only made by a *doxa*, a phenomenon, but which must be understood, if it is to be understood at all, *para ten doxan*, i.e., in antithesis to what the phenomenon itself seems to be saying. Just because the Word of God alone fulfils the concept of paradox in full rigor, whereas in all other conceivable paradoxes the antithesis between communication and form is such that it can be dissolved from a superior point of vantage, it is to be recommended that theology makes more sparing use of the term now that it has played its part, and also caused all manner of confusion.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> CD I/1, 166. In German: "Dass uns das Wort Gottes in einer von seinem Gehalt zu unterscheidenden Gestalt begegnet, ist das eine, dass diese Gestalt als solche ein "Rätsel," eine Verhüllung bedeutet, ist das zweite, was zu bedenken ist. – Es ist der Begriff des Paradoxons, auf den hier zu verweisen ist. Ein Paradoxon ist eine solche Mitteilung, die nicht nur mittels einer *doxa*, einer "Erscheinung" gemacht wird, sondern die *para ten doxan*, d.h. im Gegensatz zu dem, was die Erscheinung als solche zu sagen scheint, verstanden sein will, um überhaupt verstanden zu werden. Gerade weil nur das Wort Gottes den Begriff des Paradoxons in ganzer Strenge erfüllt, während in allen anderen denkbaren "Paradoxa" der Gegensatz zwischen Mitteilung und Gestalt ein solcher ist, der von irgendeinen überlegenen Standort aus aufgelöst werden kann, dürfte es sich empfehlen, von diesem Begriff, nachdem er seinen Dienst getan, aber auch allerhand Verwechslungen hervorgerufen hat, in der Theologie nun wieder sparsameren Gebrauch zu machen." (KD I/1, 172 (original Greek characters transcribed and italicized)).

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This lengthy quotation is worth consideration. The final sentence seems to indicate a partial farewell to the broad usage of paradoxes in the *Romans II* theology. However, Barth's reason to diminish the usage of paradoxes is the insight that the Word of God itself is paradoxical in the strictest sense. Other paradoxes can be resolved from a higher standpoint. The Word of God has in it an unsurpassable difference between form (*Gehalt*) and content (*Gestalt, Mitteilung*). In that sense, the apparent diminution of paradoxes amounts to an intensification of the paradoxical nature of revelation itself. But the paradoxality of God's Word does not prevent its being known by us. As we have seen (section 10.3.1 above) and will see (section 11.2 below), Barth maintains at once the *indirectness* and the *reality* of our knowledge of God. The picture is complicated by the fact that, in some parts of the *CD*, Barth denies the paradoxality of divine election, for instance, and Jesus's appearances during the Forty Days, while in other contexts maintaining a fundamental paradoxality in the relation between God's time and our time. But for the latter paradox Barth states that our time is raised (*aufgehoben*) into God's own eternity.<sup>202</sup>

We can state that the dialectic, including the paradoxality, is included in God himself and is turned into the world-wide movement of revelation and salvation.<sup>203</sup>

3. *What precisely is the function of the doctrines of revelation, Trinity, and Christology?*

The complex of revelation-Trinity-Christology forms the foundation and framework of Barth's theology. As will be pointed out below (section 14.1), these doctrines have both a hermeneutical and an ontological function. Hermeneutical: they decide over the way in which we can know God and speak about him. Ontological: they decide over the reality of God and the world. Barth's treatment of these doctrines covers a dialectical structure: the initial opposition between God and world is overcome in reconciliation and revelation. More precisely, the doctrine of revelation provides Barth's answer to the urgent problem of the (un)knowability of God; the doctrine of the Trinity is the interpretation of the revelation event in terms of God's self-immanent reality; the doctrine of Christology explains the movement from God to man and from man to God.<sup>204</sup>

4. *How is the rationality of theology to be understood?*

Contrary to popular interpretations of Barth, his theology is far from irrational fideism. To be sure, Barth's awareness of the epistemological gap between God and us and his insistence on God's freedom even from the laws of logic seem to point in that direction. Barth does indeed deny the subsumption of theology under alleged general categories of rationality. But he does not leave it at that. He claims

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<sup>202</sup> *CD I/2*, 52 (*KD I/2*, 58).

<sup>203</sup> Cf. the analysis by Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 81-87. Here we also encounter examples of the less than unambiguous positions Barth took on the paradoxality of the Word of God and theology.

<sup>204</sup> Kamphuis's part on Barth's theology is an elaboration of the thesis that the decisions always fall in Barth's Christology; Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 41-206. The statement is made on page 41.

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a unique form of rationality for theology, which is characterized by the following aspects:

- The *cognitive* aspect of faith. Barth states that, since faith includes knowledge, theology cannot be otherwise than rational.
- The *foundation* in the rationality of God. In Barth's Anselm book, God is the highest *ratio veritatis*. All objective and subjective rationality is dependent on God.
- *Sachlichkeit* as the constant concentration on the matter (*die Sache*) of theology: God. This entails two further things: first, that theological thinking is always subsequent to God and his revelation, and second that it should not be distracted by other themes (e.g., human existence, the problem of evil, etc.).
- The quest for *coherence*. The Church's Creed expresses the coherence of the truth about God. Given the fact that God reveals himself as the triune, what else is the case? In spelling out the consequences of the basic confession of God as our Lord in Jesus Christ, Barth often asks for the conditions or requirements for this being so. This procedure shows a formal similarity to Kant's treatment of the transcendental categories of understanding. However, for Barth, these requirements are not located in the human mind, but in God's revelation. They function not *a priori* but *a posteriori*.<sup>205</sup>

### *5. How do actualism and realism relate in Barth's mature theology?*

As we have seen before (section 10.2.3), Manfred Josuttis argued that Barth's Anselm book contains a tension between realism (ontology) and actualism. It is clear that Barth abandoned his earlier actualism of revelation in favor of a more realist view of God and his revelation to us. Still, Barth's realism is of its own kind. We can discern the following aspects of both Being and Act in Barth's mature theology:

*Being:*

- Barth rejects any resentment against ontological language about God, and speaks frankly about God's being.
- Barth claims the identity between God's being in himself and his revelation to us.
- Barth acknowledges the existence of creatures due to God's willing and acting; he identifies creation as the external ground of the covenant.

*Act:*

- God's being is decisively understood as being-in-act. (This insight will be further elaborated when we deal with Barth's doctrine of God.)
- God's act of revelation is an event, and can never be fixated in stable terms. While stating the actuality of revelation less "whimsically" than in his earlier theology, Barth insists on a structural freedom of God to reveal himself "*ubi et quando Deo visum est.*"

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<sup>205</sup> This is confirmed in Barth's initial statements concerning the knowledge of God (see section 11.2 below). The reality of our knowing God is the starting point: we cannot step outside the actual knowledge of God. Even when Barth asks for the conditions of this knowledge, how far God is and can be known, he remains within the recognition of its actuality.

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- Though God's giving existence to us enables the usage of analogies in speaking about God, Barth retains an actualist motive in claiming that these analogies are only made possible by God's gracious act of establishing them. They are never at our disposal.

In summary, we can, with Bruce McCormack, speak of a dialectical and critical realism.<sup>206</sup>

### *6. What can be said about Barth's appeal to revelation and his treatment of the Bible?*

It goes without saying that the appeal to revelation is fundamental to Barth's theology. His early discovery of revelation as the only possible and true starting point of theology determines the whole of his theological development. Where other themes are added and become central (particularly Christology), they receive their coloring from the revelation problematic. A few qualifications are needed to specify the place of revelation in Barth's theological method; and in the course of these remarks we will also touch upon Barth's view of and usage of the Bible.<sup>207</sup>

First, revelation is principally and almost exclusively understood as self-revelation. Barth rejects the idea of revelation as a set of eternal truths, which can be formulated by the Church in her dogmata. It is the reality of God himself that is at stake in revelation, a reality that can never be fully grasped. On the other hand, Barth insists that revelation is trustworthy: there is no hidden God behind his revelation.<sup>208</sup>

Second, because revelation is understood as self-revelation, it is viewed as an act or event. This prevents any objectification of revelation, and instead provides it with a consistently actualist character. Though Barth's mature theology is more confident of the reality of knowing God, there remains a critical distance between God's Word and our words and knowledge.

Third, this critical distance is worked out in Barth's conception of the three shapes of the Word of God: self-revelation in Jesus Christ, Scripture and proclamation. The proper Word of God is the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. This proper Word has its own paradoxality, as was indicated in the second question above. The other two shapes, Scripture and proclamation, stand in a relation of indirect identity to the primary event of revelation. Barth uses the term "witness" to indicate the character of this relation: Scripture and proclamation do not coincide with God's own Word but point to it, testify it, and are serviceable to it. Barth rejects an objectivist understanding of scriptural inspiration.

Fourth, this does not exclude a positive valuing of Scripture and the Church's proclamation and confession consequent to that positive valuing. Barth holds his

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<sup>206</sup> Cf. the title of McCormack, *Karl Barth*. The word order of these three terms is at random!

<sup>207</sup> On Barth's views of revelation and Scripture, see also Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), and J. Muis, *Openbaring en interpretatie: Het verstaan van de Heilige Schrift volgens K. Barth en K.H. Miskotte* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1989).

<sup>208</sup> Cf. for a mildly critical analysis of "self-revelation" in Barth's theology, C. van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel: God kennen volgens Calvijn en Barth; Een tweeluik* (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 295-300 (English edition: Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God; A Diptych*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, vol. 120 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 329-335).

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own version of the inspiration doctrine. For him, it means that God is Lord over the Bible, and that the Bible springs from a miraculous deed of God. It requires our obedience, practiced in careful exegesis. The Bible is independent of our agreement. The mode of God's speaking in the Bible is a presence between the remembrance of past revelation and the expectation of future revelation. The concrete, textual presence of Scripture is necessary to correct and judge our own ideas about God. The concrete authority of Church, confession and tradition is derived from this biblical authority.

Fifth, Scripture has a central place in Barth's theology as a witness to revelation. Lengthy exegetical and biblical-theological passages are found throughout the *Church Dogmatics*; in these scriptural expositions Barth finds and develops his fundamental insights. Barth's exegetical procedure is not unqualified. His focus on the revelation event as testified in the Bible results in a narrative approach, a christological explanation, and a hermeneutics of simultaneity. The latter aspect was already present in the first *Romans* commentary, where Barth sometimes dared to speak (as it were) in Paul's own words. Over against the historical-critical lecture of the Bible, Barth insists that the Word of God must and does touch our existence: we are placed before God.

### *7. How do the motives of christological concentration and analogy interact?*

At first sight, christological concentration and analogy work into opposite directions. Christological concentration implies the *denial* of any generally accessible knowledge of God, and points to the particular focus of God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all God's ways, and thus the beginning and end of all we can say about God. The principle of analogy, on the other hand, is meant to express the *connection* between God's reality and our reality, God's Word and our language. It seems to allow for a positive significance of created reality in understanding God.

At closer analysis the two motives are seen not to contradict each other. Christological concentration is not only decisive for our knowledge of God, but also for our knowledge of created reality. Under the aspect of Jesus Christ, our reality comes into consideration again. From the true humanity of Christ, we receive our humanity back. Thus, the christological concentration has the capacity of including created reality by radically qualifying it. Starting from the other side, analogy is always understood as established by the free decision of God. It does not give created reality an autonomous place next to God. The possibility of analogy rests in the christologically qualified revelation event. Barth's analogies often find a specific christological coloring. Jesus Christ is the only true analogy, the only *vestigium trinitatis*, the only sacrament, and so on.

In conclusion, we can state that christological concentration and analogy interact within the same framework of God's act of self-revelation which includes and raises our created reality (cf. the discussion of the first and second questions above).

### *8. Does Barth in fact follow the method he prescribes?*

This is in any case a tricky question. Even when people reach a high level of self-reflection, they keep blind spots in which they do not see what they are doing.

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It is unlikely that Barth is an exception to this rule. Barth prescribed theology to work *a posteriori*, to follow and obey the reality of its object, to start with the event of God's self-revelation. The intention to keep true to these rules is everywhere discernable in Barth's writings. Beyond the intentions, judgment becomes difficult. In fact, it requires a judgment of the final truth or falsity of Barth's conceptions of God and revelation. We have reason to assume that Barth's perception of God and his revelation was at least partly determined by external influences of which he was probably (half) unconscious. This has to be spelled out in more detail in the analysis of the doctrine of God. It can be said beforehand, that such co-determination by factors from one's intellectual biography and context is inevitable and nothing to be ashamed of. It should make us careful, however, in taking the appeal to revelation and the claims of truth by Barth for granted. The main problem here seems to be the particular type of dialectical thought (creating both tensions and solutions) underlying Barth's version of the relevant doctrines.



# 11. Doctrine of God: Entrance

## 11.1. Place and Contents

In Barth's theology, it is difficult to speak of the "proper" doctrine of God. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Barth's theology is dominated by a coherent cluster of themes: revelation, reconciliation, Trinity, Christology. In all these *loci*, the doctrine of God is fundamentally at stake. The subsequent analysis of Barth's distinct doctrine of God will show how these central concerns reappear at decisive points.

Still, we are justified to identify a "proper" doctrine of God in Barth. Not only is this required by the overall plan of this study, we can also appeal to the fact that volume II of the *Church Dogmatics* stands under the heading *The Doctrine of God*. In the doctrine of God, Barth most directly and closely confronts himself with the tradition of patristic and scholastic theology.

Both the place and the subject matter of Barth's doctrine of God reveal important aspects of his overall theological position. Far from being merely formal decisions, these choices reflect Barth's deepest theological convictions.

Barth is quite explicit about the place of the doctrine of God in the order of *loci*. While in most traditional dogmatics, the doctrines of revelation and God appear first, followed by Trinity, creation, Christology etc., Barth deliberately chooses as his starting point the insight that God can be known only through his revelation. The deepest ground of revelation is explained in the doctrine of the Trinity: God's revelation is identical with God speaking in person (*Dei loquentis persona*). In the trinitarian being, revelation is its own ontic and noetic ground: it cannot exist nor be known without God's being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ultimate point and justification of the trinitarian dogma is that it answers the question "Is it truly God who is revealed?" in the affirmative.<sup>1</sup>

Barth takes one further step: not only does he identify revelation and Trinity, he moreover intertwines revelation and atonement. Barth's concrete problem is the contradiction between God's saving promise and our human rejection of it. God makes himself known, but we refuse to know and acknowledge him. Barth gives a central place to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is both the definitive revelation of the Father and the Redeemer of our sins. In fact, he is our redeemer by being God's revelation. Through the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, the fundamental contradiction that determines our *condition humaine* is superseded.<sup>2</sup> The interconnection of Christology and doctrine of the Trinity ensures that God is essentially the one who overcomes the gap by revealing himself. To put it briefly, by way of equation: Trinity = Christology = revelation = atonement. This whole complex is foundational to the doctrine of God properly spoken. By this move, Barth turns the traditional procedure upside down. His objection against classical

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<sup>1</sup> CD I/1, 295-304 (KD I/1, 311-320).

<sup>2</sup> CD I/2, 1-44 (KD I/2, 6-48).

dogmatics is that it first develops a general doctrine of the being of God without regard to Trinity and incarnation, and only afterwards exposes the story of God becoming man and revealing himself in Jesus Christ. For Barth, the doctrine of God is essentially trinitarian.

The implications of the place of the doctrine of God after the doctrines of Trinity and revelation are confirmed by its specific contents. Barth develops his doctrine of God in volumes II/1 and II/2 of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. The first chapter discusses the question how God can be known. Referring to his doctrine of revelation, Barth puts this question in the framework of the answer that God has already given in his Word. The main part of vol. II/1 consists of an exposition of the being and perfections of God. This does not, however, complete Barth's doctrine of God: vol. II/2 gives an extended discussion of God's election and commandment, which Barth considers as integral elements of the doctrine of God. God's irrevocable choice to save man in Jesus Christ, and his unavoidable claim upon our lives, are essential to his being. This reflects Barth's central statements concerning God's essence, which consists of his love and freedom (sovereignty).

In the following chapters, we will investigate the different parts of Barth's doctrine of God focusing on its structuring features. Considering the more than 1500 pages of the volumes II/1 and II/2, one will understand that we must be highly selective. For the sake of convenience, I divide the discussion of Barth's doctrine of God into three chapters. In the present chapter, we will review Barth's preliminaries to the doctrine of God. The next chapter discusses the substantial body of what is in traditional terms the "proper" doctrine of God: the divine attributes, or, as Barth deliberately calls them, God's perfections. In chapter 13, Barth's doctrine of divine election and command will be concisely analyzed.

## **11.2. Knowing God**

Barth's discussion of the question, if and how God can be known, is strongly determined by the position developed in the Anselm book (see 10.2.3 above). The presupposition is the fact *that* God is known: it is knowledge in execution (*im Vollzug*). The reality of the knowledge of God precedes its possibility. This recognition of the factual knowledge of God is fundamental to Church and theology: if God were not present as the subject and object of faith, faith and Church and theology would be void. We cannot start outside the actual knowledge of God. Beginning with the recognition of its reality, we ask how far God *is* known and how far he *can* be known. This basic assumption has a number of consequences for Barth's specification of the knowledge of God.<sup>3</sup>

First, the certainty of the knowledge of God rests exclusively on the actually given knowledge of God. On this basis, the knowledge of God "is not and cannot be attacked; it is without anxiety and without doubt." Because of this "constraint of God's Word," the only possible apologetics is implicit apologetics elucidating the inner coherence of statements concerning God. For Barth, it is forbidden to choose an autonomous standpoint from which the knowability of God is justified: this would entail that in the final instance man creates his own "god."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> CD II/1, 3-7 (KD II/1, 1-5).

<sup>4</sup> CD II/1, 7-9 (KD II/1, 5-8).

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Second, Barth emphasizes the objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of the knowledge of God, which for him implies two important insights. To start with, God's objectivity means that

God becomes, is and remains to him [man] Another, One who is distinct from himself, One who meets him. Nor is this objectivity of God neutralized by the fact that God makes man His own through the Holy Spirit, in order to give Himself to be owned by him.

Furthermore, God's objectivity means that God is known *indirectly*. Barth distinguishes between a primary and a secondary objectivity of God: primarily, God is his own object of knowledge in his trinitarian life; secondarily, God is known by man through revelation. Barth states that this revelation takes place through God's works. God chooses means of revelation by which he presents himself to us. The biblical foundation of this view lies in the Old Testament emphasis on the Name of God as the form in which God is known. The name is not squarely identical with God, but is an indirect representation of God's being. The same holds, according to Barth, for the New Testament proclamation of Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation of God: God reveals himself indirectly through the humanity of Christ. In this context, Barth severely criticizes Augustine for his appraisal of an immediate, mystical knowledge of God. He states that we can never flee into non-objectivity because we will continue to need God's revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Third, knowledge of God is possible only by faith. By acknowledging the claim God makes in his Word we receive the true knowledge of God. This implies that our knowledge of God is not at our disposal, but is a gift of God's grace. It is the object of knowledge (God) that creates its knowing subject (man). The corresponding attitude on our part consists of prayer and obedience. God cannot be known in neutral distance, but only by active involvement in following God's voice. A characteristic feature of Barth's position is that he also makes the reverse statement: knowledge of faith is indeed *knowledge*. Barth opposes to one-sided definitions of faith as a feeling of dependence, or as (blind) trust. Faith has a strong cognitive component and even comprises sight and comprehension, although he realizes that the uniqueness of God makes the cognitive aspect of faith unique as well. In view of this emphasis on the cognitive dimension of faith, we should notice that Barth endorses a comprehensive conception of faith as knowledge: it is "the opening-up of human subjectivity by and for the objectivity of the divine He, and in this opening-up the re-establishment and re-determination of human subjectivity."<sup>6</sup>

Barth confronts the objection that his assumption of the reality of the knowledge of God equals the absolutizing of a human point of view. He boldly rejects the objection, on the ground that this reality depends on God's free choice to make himself known to us.

It is and remains God's free grace when he is object of us in His primary and secondary objectivity. ... How would it be His

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<sup>5</sup> CD II/1, 9-12, 16-21 (*KD* II/1, 8-11, 15-21). It can be questioned whether Barth's understanding of Augustine's formulations on "immediate" knowledge of God is correct.

<sup>6</sup> CD II/1, 12-16 (*KD* II/1, 11-15).

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objectivity if this were not so? How could He be our Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, how could He be the living Lord, if it were not so, and if His being for us were ever to be separated from His activity, so that a direction of man to God's being could exist that was grounded in something other than his being directed by God's activity?<sup>7</sup>

The first act is God's inciting faith in us and showing himself to us; the human act of faith is only the second act. The human "position" of faith does not as such differ from other epistemic positions; it differs by God's activity in it.<sup>8</sup>

An important step in Barth's doctrine of God, which reflects a general procedure of his theology, is the statement that the execution (*Vollzug*) of the knowledge of God is immediately connected with its contents. The *noetic* question belongs to the *content* of the doctrine of God. When God is known, he is known as the one who is to be feared above all, because he is to be loved above all and has made himself clear to us. The duality of fear and love in our knowledge of God is paralleled by its mystery and clarity. The positive aspect is in front: God makes himself known as the one we should love. It is not God's existence, but our existence that causes the problem. Due to our sinful nature we are not able to respond properly to God's self-revelation. Therefore, the knowledge of God remains a mystery. In this context, Barth repeats his statement that revelation is at once atonement: "How can there be reconciliation if there is no revelation?"<sup>9</sup>

A significant presupposition of Barth's views is the idea "that God is known through God and through God alone." Barth rejects the suggestion that this idea is based on a "critical or agnostic epistemology." Whatever theory of knowledge in general would be valid, the insight that God can only be known through God arises from "the object of the knowledge," God as He reveals himself as the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In translation, the first sentence of this quotation (*CD II/1*, 22) could imply that God's primary objectivity is accessible to us. In German (*KD II/1*, 22) the word order is slightly different: "wenn er in seiner primären und in seiner sekundären Gegenständlichkeit Gegenstand für uns ist." This formulation leaves open both interpretations: that God's primary objectivity is accessible to us, or that God, as He exists in both his primary and secondary objectivity, is (only secondarily) accessible to us. The latter explanation fits in better with the initial purpose of the distinction between primary and secondary objectivity.

<sup>8</sup> *CD II/1*, 21-31 (*KD II/1*, 21-33).

<sup>9</sup> *CD II/1*, 31-43 (*KD II/1*, 33-46). The final quotation (*CD II/1*, 38) fails to render the identification of reconciliation and revelation that is evident in the German phrase (*KD II/1*, 41): "Wie gäbe es Versöhnung, wenn sie nicht Offenbarung wäre?"

<sup>10</sup> A continuation and elucidation of this claim is found in connection with the "hiddenness" or "incomprehensibility" of God (*CD II/1*, 183; *KD II/1*, 205-206): "the assertion of the hiddenness of God ... has no connexion with a general theory of human knowledge, and therefore must not be measured by either the contradictory or what seem to be the very similar statements of general theories of knowledge. ... Our assertion does not deny what may be called God's revelation in the sphere of a general theory of knowledge which either is unrelated to God's revelation or is not, as this demands, related to it alone. Nor does it maintain and confirm, let alone derive from, what may be called God's hiddenness in a general theory of knowledge." In an illuminating concretisation, Barth rejects the idea "that

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Because God is known to himself in the Trinity, He is essentially able to make himself known to others. On the other hand, since his primary knowability is in himself, there remains the aspect of hiddenness in his (secondary) revelation to us. A crucial word in this respect is "impartation" (*Anteilgabe*):

Although we are men and not God, we receive a share in the truth of His knowledge of Himself. Certainly it is a share which He thinks proper and which is therefore suitable for us. But in this share we have the reality of the true knowledge of Himself.<sup>11</sup>

The element of "part" in "impartation" should not be understood as a quantitative limitation, as if God reveals only a part of his being; it should be understood in terms of "an objectivity different from himself," a "form distinct from Himself," the "giving of signs." Thus, Barth describes the character of revelation as sacramental: it comes by means of signs, mirrors and mysteries, but it still provides true knowledge. Barth enumerates three features of this sacramental revelation:<sup>12</sup>

It has its ground and summary in the human existence of Jesus Christ. The humanity of Christ is "the first sacrament," and at once "the basic reality and substance of the highest possibility of the creature as such." Since this first sacrament arises from God's free *gratia unionis*, the sacramental, revelational quality of creatures cannot inhere in themselves.

God makes himself known not only as an "I," but also as a "Thou" and a "He," by entering into a series of encounters. These encounters retain the duality of unveiling and veiling: in the meeting of Moses with Yahweh at Horeb, the "revelation of His name" (*Namensoffenbarung*) consists in the "refusal of a name"

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the theological statements of the hiddenness of God say roughly the same as the Platonic or Kantian statement, according to which the supreme being is to be understood as a rational idea withdrawn from all perception and understanding." God is *not* identical with such a "rational idea, however transcendent." The decisive argument for Barth is that a Platonic or Kantian "idea" is "a non-objective entity, or one which is objective only in our intention," while biblical revelation insists on the "objectivity" (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of God. God is "the substance of all objectivity," and thus his hiddenness "is not the content of a last word of human self-knowledge ...; it is the first word of the knowledge of God instituted by God Himself, which as such cannot be transposed into self-knowledge or into the statement of a general theory of knowledge."

<sup>11</sup> We can notice two important connections here, one internal, one external to Barth's explicit theological statements. The first, internal, connection is to the conception of God as "the ultimate foundation of truth (*ratio veritatis*)" which Barth developed in his exposition of Anselm of Canterbury (see section 10.2.3 above). The second, external, connection is to the concept of archetypal and ectypal theology which was introduced by Franciscus Junius into Reformed scholastic theology (see part I, section 4.3 above). Barth does not refer to this distinction, but he has two fundamental concerns in common with Junius: (1) the insight that there is a divine self-knowledge which is foundational for the revealed knowledge of God; (2) the recognition of a difference between God's self-knowledge and our knowledge of God.

<sup>12</sup> CD II/1, 43-62 (*KD II/1*, 47-67).

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(*Namensverweigerung*), but “even in the form of this substantial refusal it is still really revelation.”

God makes himself known in time, by repetition. We cannot comprise God’s eternal self-knowledge, but God “lowers Himself to be known by us according to the measure of our own human cognition.” This adaptation means that God’s revelation is temporal, consisting of a series of acts, of which the unity of his eternal Word with the man Jesus is the heart and center. In a typically Barthian phrase:

In our creaturely time, although it is our time, and therefore the time of our sin, He has given us His divine time. He allows us our time in order that we may always have time for Him – no, in order that in it He may always have time for us, revelation time. The participation which we are given in God’s self-knowledge consists in this, in the continual concession of revelation time by means of the sacramental reality at the heart of our time.

After explaining the *reality* of the knowledge of God, Barth goes on to discuss the *possibility* of knowing God. Again, this possibility is not something to be founded on external reasons; it is already given in the *readiness* of God to make himself known. The question is about the how and the how far of this possibility. Barth insists on a theological discussion of this question, opposing a reliance on general ontology and epistemology. The opposite procedure, establishing God’s knowability from an external point of view, implies

the conjecture that behind or above the fact of the real knowledge of God there is a kind of empty space which can be filled up by the assertions of an overlapping doctrine of being and knowledge in general. The temptation which necessitates this idea of an empty space must be attacked at its roots.<sup>13</sup>

God’s readiness to be known is foundational and constitutive to the possibility of knowing him; our human readiness to know God is based in his readiness to give himself known to us. Barth sees the readiness of God to be known not as accidental, but as intrinsically given with God’s essence and acting, his being and existence.<sup>14</sup>

God can be known because He is the truth. This implies that God is unveiled, open, transparent. God’s being open in himself leads to his being known by us by means of revelation; God’s openness is known indirectly by us.<sup>15</sup> Barth fights at two frontiers at once here. On the one hand, he rejects the 19th century denial of God’s truth and revelation. In its quest against false metaphysics, 19th century

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<sup>13</sup> CD II/1, 65 (KD II/1, 69). In Barth’s insistence on the actual reality of the knowledge of God (on the basis of revelation) we can, besides its positive substance, detect two negative concerns throughout Barth’s exposition. First, he is eager to reject all man’s attempts to have God at his disposal. Second, he denies all suggestion of a “God behind God,” an absolute *Deus absconditus*. The latter motive is operational in the quotation given above.

<sup>14</sup> CD II/1, 63-68 (KD II/1, 67-73).

<sup>15</sup> CD II/1, 68 (KD II/1, 73).

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philosophy has in fact combated the true existence of the God who speaks, and has replaced the knowledge of God with mere human self-knowledge. We have to uphold, according to Barth, the belief that God is truly known by his good-pleasure in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of God has an undialectical certainty.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Barth opposes the idea that the possibility of knowing God has an anthropological foundation, both in the 19th century form of the Feuerbachian projection thesis, and in the Roman Catholic form of the assumption of an analogy of being (*analogia entis*) between the Creator and the creature. Against the statements of the First Vatican Council, Barth holds that we have no analogy at our disposal to know God, neither as Lord, nor as Creator, nor as Reconciler, nor as Redeemer. Barth claims that the fundamental error of the Roman Catholic church is its assumption of a common ground of being between God and creatures. From the outset, Rome must go wrong because it asks for the knowability of God *in abstracto*, instead of the God who revealed himself as triune. When Barth rejects the “natural theology” that arises from the *Vaticanum*, this is

only a self-evident consequence of our initial contradiction of its concept of God. We reject this because it is a construct which obviously derives from an attempt to unite Yahweh with Baal, the triune God of Holy Scripture with the concept of being of Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy. The assertion that reason can know God from created things applies to the second and heathenish component of this concept of God, so that when we view the construct on this side we do not recognise God in it at all, nor can we accept it as a Christian concept of God.<sup>17</sup>

To the contrary, Barth states that both God’s “being” and our “being” can only be viewed from God’s revelation.<sup>18</sup>

On Barth’s concise rejection of the idea of *analogia entis* follows his fierce and epochal attack on the phenomenon of natural theology.<sup>19</sup> Barth’s lengthy discussion<sup>20</sup> of this problem points out some significant insights that reflect the main motives of his whole theology. We should be aware beforehand, however, that Barth fights at several frontiers at once: (1) the Roman Catholic church with its idea of *analogia entis* and its subsequent synthesis of nature and grace, (2) the older Protestant theology of the 16th through 18th centuries, which had too easily and fatally adopted a harmonious view of the relation between faith and reason, (3) 19th century liberal theology which had led to a synthesis between Christianity and culture (*Kulturprotestantismus*), (4) Barth’s former allies Brunner and Gogarten,

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<sup>16</sup> CD II/1, 69-75 (KD II/1, 74-81).

<sup>17</sup> CD II/1, 84 (KD II/1, 92).

<sup>18</sup> CD II/1, 75-84 (KD II/1, 81-92).

<sup>19</sup> CD II/1, 85-178 (KD II/1, 92-200).

<sup>20</sup> Viewed from Barth’s own presentation, the word “discussion” is ill-chosen: he claims that a “natural theology” is “quite impossible within the Church, and indeed, in such a way that it cannot even be discussed in principle” (*im Grunde diskussionslos unmöglich*). Barth’s dealing with this phenomenon has the character of astonished musings on the incomprehensible vitality of this impossible possibility.

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who argued for a more positive appreciation of anthropological prerequisites in the knowledge of God, and (5) the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) who legitimated the rise of the Third Empire in terms of a “natural revelation” of God’s will.

These groups have a different weight in Barth’s opposition, but the inclusion of all these enemies in one attack sometimes leads to ambiguity in Barth’s criticism and in his own position.

It is surprising that Barth provides something like a formal definition of “natural theology” only towards the end of his discussion of this phenomenon. For the sake of analysis, it is worth quoting in advance:

Natural theology is the doctrine of a union of man with God existing outside God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. It works out the knowledge of God that is possible and real on the basis of this independent union with God, and its consequences for the whole relationship of God, world, and man.<sup>21</sup>

Barth’s opposition is thus not directed against a theology constructed on the basis of the *physical* world, or specifically against the concept of *innate* knowledge of God, but against the assumption of a basic, essential, natural connection between God and man.

Barth discusses three alleged reasons for the persistence of natural theology. First, mankind has always sought the ultimate answers to ultimate questions. Often the ultimate reality that is thus discovered, is called God. According to Barth, Scripture makes it clear that this quest does not lead to true knowledge of God, but is only a self-occupation of man.<sup>22</sup>

Second, natural theology seems to have a pedagogic and pastoral importance in confronting people with the gospel. They are first challenged to recognize the need of thinking about God, and subsequently encouraged to accept the true God. Presupposed in this approach is

the question whether in this sphere there exists as a possibility somehow attainable within the life-endeavour of natural man the knowability of a god whose disclosure will bear the character of an outstanding decision, of a decision which is previous to the decision of faith or unbelief, and for the sake of which theology must betake itself to this preliminary field of operation with at least a preliminary seriousness simply because this god is identical with the real God whom the Christian Church must proclaim, so that the establishing of this knowability in the natural sphere, in the sphere of the human life-endeavour, will

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<sup>21</sup> CD II/1, 168. In German (*KD II/1*, 189): “Natürliche Theologie ist die Lehre von einer auch ohne Gottes Offenbarung in Jesus Christus bestehenden Gottverbundenheit des Menschen; sie entwickelt die auf Grund dieser selbständigen Gottverbundenheit mögliche und wirkliche Gotteserkenntnis und deren Konsequenzen für das ganze Verhältnis von Gott, Welt und Mensch.”

<sup>22</sup> CD II/1, 85-88 (*KD II/1*, 93-96).

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in fact mean a preparation for the establishing of His knowability in His revelation.<sup>23</sup>

If this question is answered affirmatively, the “god” who is discovered by this strategy serves as the “legitimate representative” of God, yielding his place to the true God in due time. Barth denies the success of this strategy: the unbeliever either looks through the apologetic mask and discovers that the God he is urged to believe in differs from the “god” with which he was first confronted, or he is left intact in his unbelief because he finds no difference between the “god” that is constructed out of his own life-endeavour and the subsequently preached God of revelation. Either way, natural theology is not preparatory to the Word of God, but rather hinders it. Barth implicitly opposes Emil Brunner and Friedrich Gogarten, who had, each in his own way, defended an apologetic use of natural theology. In Barth’s view, they make unbelief too harmless, as if it can be sweetly led over to the realm of belief. In fact, unbelief is active enmity against God.<sup>24</sup>

The third and most important ground in defense of natural theology is the fact that Scripture seems to teach it. The Bible indeed contains a line on which God is said to speak to man in the cosmos. Barth argues that this is a marginal line, not an independent strand of the biblical testimony. The only possibility for man to know God is by revelation. Scripture places man between judgment and grace, and leaves him no escape from this alternative. While Scripture can place different emphases in different contexts, it is impossible that it teaches contradictory statements concerning God’s revelation and natural theology. Barth interprets the passages in which man in general is addressed as directly related to the main thrust of the biblical message: the special revelation of God by which all mankind in the cosmos is touched and changed. The biblical digressions on man and cosmos reflect the fact that this revelation has a concrete scenery and a specific address.<sup>25</sup> Willingly or unwillingly, all mankind witness the Word of God. But it is impossible that this witness becomes a second source of revelation in addition to the self-revelation of God. Quite contrary, the Bible is emphatic in stating that all men are false, unreliable witnesses.<sup>26</sup> The passages in which God’s work in the universe is mentioned cannot be abstracted from the specific actions by which God saves his people and reveals himself. Creation is not independent, but it is the theatre of God’s covenant and salvation. Barth endeavors to show that texts such as Genesis 1, Psalms 8, 19, and 104, the book of Job, Acts 14 and 17, and Romans 1 can only be interpreted against this background.<sup>27</sup> As the answer to the question whether Scripture allows or even requires some “natural theology,” Barth states that

Holy Scripture neither urges nor even authorises us to look around for a readiness of God for man which is different from His readiness in the grace of His Word and Spirit. ... But it is from Scripture that we now hear the very definite command

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<sup>23</sup> CD II/1, 89 (KD II/1, 98).

<sup>24</sup> CD II/1, 88-97 (KD II/1, 96-107). Barth denies that Anselm of Canterbury can be adduced as a witness for this pedagogic, preliminary apologetics (CD II/1, 92-93 (KD II/1, 101-102)).

<sup>25</sup> CD II/1, 97-103 (KD II/1, 107-114).

<sup>26</sup> CD II/1, 103-107 (KD II/1, 114-118).

<sup>27</sup> CD II/1, 107-123 (KD II/1, 118-136).

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not to ask about another knowability than the one bestowed upon us in the grace of His revelation.<sup>28</sup>

Feeling satisfied that he has proven insufficient the three aforementioned grounds for the vitality of natural theology, Barth still faces the question of how the persistence of natural theology in the Christian Church is to be explained.<sup>29</sup> Barth continues by discussing the readiness of man to know God. On Barth's fundamental principles, the readiness of man is grounded in the readiness of God to reveal himself. This implies a threefold attitude of openness on man's part: first, recognition of his need, second, a definite and objective knowledge of his own need and of God's grace, and third, subjective willingness to accept God's grace.

The problem with natural theology is that it assumes the existence of openness in man in advance, thus concealing the true closedness of man against God. As such, natural theology is nothing but the theological expression of man's enmity against God. It is the most sophisticated form of human self-maintenance.<sup>30</sup> This explains, in Barth's view, the tendency of natural theology to obtain a monopoly position. It enters into church and theology with the humble pretension of performing auxiliary services. But as soon as it is admitted in this role, it starts to overtake control, and ends up dictating the limits of special revelation. This is seen in the development from Orthodoxy towards Enlightenment theology, but also in 19th century syntheses of Christianity and culture, up to the monster alliance of religion and racism in Adolf Hitler's Third Empire. Barth equals the success of natural theology with the process of domestication of the gospel.<sup>31</sup>

The only way out is, in his view, to leave behind all anthropological presuppositions: one should not start with man, not even with the regenerated man of the church. Here Barth comes with a surprising application of his method of christological concentration: the only man that is truly open to God and ready to know him is not man as such but Jesus Christ as the real man. In his person, God's readiness to reveal himself and our readiness to know God are united. The christo-

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<sup>28</sup> CD II/1, 125-126 (KD II/1, 139).

<sup>29</sup> Barth expresses his bewilderment about the fact that throughout the history of the Church we encounter the appeal to natural theology as a "secondary, self-evident classicising support for Christian theology." Even in Augustine, "in spite of his truly consistent development of the soteriological principle of grace," the "platonic idea of God" is used "as the scientific foundation of his ecclesiastical and Christian thinking." This fatal duality carries over through the Middle Ages to the time of Reformation and humanism. Barth regrets the fact that "in contradiction to Calvin's proposal, the mischief could be done which now may be read in article 2 of the *Confessio Gallicana*, from which it quickly spread to the *Confessio Belgica* (art. 2-3)." After the Reformers had died, "it could impress itself on their disciples as the indispensable prolegomena of theology ... Then in the 18th century it was able publicly to enter on the overlordship which for a long time it had already exercised in secret." Barth suggests that "natural theology can do so much that we must seriously ask whether there is not good reason to represent the history of Christian theology and of the Church in general as one long history of the relationship of reason and revelation, of philosophy and theology, and this means as one long history of 'Christian' natural theology." CD II/1, 127-128 (KD II/1, 140-141).

<sup>30</sup> CD II/1, 126-136 (KD II/1, 141-151).

<sup>31</sup> CD II/1, 136-142 (KD II/1, 151-158).

logical aspect of man is the only aspect that really matters. Again, we should beware of “understanding Him ... as the ideal case or an idea of our possibility and reality”: Christ is not “man as such,” but He is “the only begotten, unique and eternal Son of God.” In a sort of syllogism, Barth constructs the line from his basic axiom until our knowing God: God can be known only by God (Trinity); but God has become man and man has been taken in God (incarnation); therefore God can be known by us. When Christ knows his Father, our human flesh is present.<sup>32</sup> But the question remains: how do we participate in Christ’s openness to God? The answer is: by faith, through the Holy Spirit. Barth characterizes the operation of faith as our participation in the event that takes place within God: faith is the temporal form of our eternal being in Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> It is from the christological point of view that there is true readiness of man towards God.<sup>34</sup>

From this absolute starting point, natural theology can only be seen as an attempt to violate the lordship of Christ. Moreover, since Christ the Lord is triumphant, natural theology, as an expression of sin, cannot be taken seriously, as a tragic fact, but only as an antiquated illusion. Whereas the unity with Christ is the believer’s only comfort in life and death, natural theology is the only comfort in life and death of natural man. There is no questioning about a synthesis of the two: natural theology and Jesus Christ are mutually exclusive. This is also the deepest ground for Barth’s refusal to “discuss” natural theology seriously: if we grant it that honor we are after all in danger of being infected by it. The only suitable approach is “to start from the fact that it is already destroyed, and therefore to give it only incidental and supplementary attention.”<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion of his discussion of natural theology, Barth explains the first article of the *Barmen Theological Declaration*, which states that Jesus Christ is “the one Word of God, whom we have to hear and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” He makes it clear the *Barmen* does not only speak against the *Deutsche Christen*, but against all forms of natural theology that have occurred in the history of the church. The gospel of Jesus Christ is at stake.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> CD II/1, 144-154 (KD II/1, 160-173).

<sup>33</sup> CD II/1, 158: “Faith is the temporal form of his eternal being in Jesus Christ.” In German (KD II/1, 177): “Der Glaube ist die zeitliche Gestalt seines [scil. des Menschen] ewigen Seins in Jesus Christus.”

<sup>34</sup> CD II/1, 154-162 (KD II/1, 173-180).

<sup>35</sup> CD II/1, 162-172 (KD II/1, 180-193).

<sup>36</sup> CD II/1, 172-178 (KD II/1, 194-200). The story of Barth’s nearby authorship of (or, to say the least, strong involvement in) the Barmen Declaration is told by Busch, *Lebenslauf*, 258-261. Oswald Bayer, *Theologie*, Handbuch Systematischer Theologie, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 336-356, provides an interpretation of the Barmen Declaration that is critically directed against Barth’s understanding of it. Bayer argues for a “genuine,” Lutheran reading of Barmen. Cf. also Karl Barth, *Theologische Existenz heute! Beiheft “Zwischen den Zeiten,”* vol. 2 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1933); Hans Asmussen, *Barmen! Theologische Existenz heute*, vol. 24 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1935). In CD IV/3, Barth returns to the first article of Barmen, and places it in front as the *Leitsatz* of the exposition of Christ’s prophetic function (CD IV/3, 3; KD IV/3, 1). Somewhat surprisingly, Barth speaks of the “lights” of the created world next to Jesus Christ as the unique “light of the world” (CD IV/3, 86-165; KD IV/3, 95-188). Cf. Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 132-133.

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The third main item concerning our knowledge of God, besides its actual *execution* and its *possibility*, is the question of the *limits* of our knowledge of God. Barth starts with the repetition of his basic assumption that God is known by God alone. Because our knowledge occurs by and with God, it has the highest certainty. The consequence of this axiom is that the intuitions and concepts we use in participating in God's revelation are not in themselves suitable for knowing God. The first thing to know about God is his concealment. This insight in God's hiddenness or incomprehensibility is not an example of the general epistemological reserve, nor does Barth accept the Kantian thesis of the non-objectivity (*Nicht-Gegenständlichkeit*) of God. The incomprehensibility of God is not a negative conclusion of reflection on our own capacity of thinking, but a positive article of faith. Barth gives the following "definition" of God's incomprehensibility:

In other words, the lines which we can draw to describe formally and conceptually what we mean when we say "God" cannot be extended so that what is meant is really described and defined; but they continually break apart so that it is not actually described and therefore not defined.<sup>37</sup>

The reason for this is that things we can comprehend are somehow similar to us, under our control, and finally of one kind with us. This is not how we stand before God; we can know him only by his grace, and in his grace He maintains his hiddenness to make sure that He has the initiative.

The sufficiency of our thought-form, and of the perception presupposed in it, and of the word-form based on it, collapses altogether in relation to this God. Of ourselves we do not resemble God. We are not master of God. We are not one with God. We are not capable of conceiving Him.

Barth's emphasis on God's incomprehensibility should not be misunderstood: he does not mean the predicates that philosophy ascribes to the Absolute. Therefore, it is false to assume that negative concepts (Dionysius) or experiences (Schleiermacher) come closer to the reality of God than positive concepts. The incomprehensibility of God is properly understood in Jesus Christ: He is both the denial of human possibilities to attain God, and the gift of divine revelation that creates the possibility to know God.<sup>38</sup>

This positive side is important to Barth. He emphasizes that our thoughts and words are truly taken into the service of God's revelation. But the order remains such that our knowledge of God mirrors his revelation, not the reverse. In this respect, there is no difference between simple, naïve knowledge and scientific knowledge of God: both stand under the crisis of God's concealment. But from the concealment arises a true, positive knowledge of God, specifically in Jesus Christ. This knowledge is indirect and by way of signs. But it still is knowledge for which

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<sup>37</sup> CD II/1, 179-187 (*KD* II/1, 200-209).

<sup>38</sup> CD II/1, 188-193 (*KD* II/1, 211-217).

## Doctrine of God: Entrance

to be grateful. It is even knowledge that gradually approaches its object, God. Therefore, theology is a useful activity in nearing the mystery.<sup>39</sup>

Barth discussed the incomprehensibility of God as the *terminus a quo* of our knowledge of God; the *terminus ad quem* is the veracity and certainty of this knowledge. The duality of concealment and certainty is meant to safeguard the character of our knowledge of God as true knowledge that is never at our disposal. God can and will reveal himself; He is not a *deus absconditus*. Barth gives an interesting explanation of the relation between knowledge of God and knowledge of the “world-reality”:

God, who is an object of our cognition, and an object of our cognition which is God – this is certainly a reality within our world. For our knowledge must be knowledge of world-reality if it is really going to be our knowledge. And it is because He makes world-reality into His witness that God becomes objective to us in His revelation, and an objective thing can become a witness of God. But then, this world-reality will always be one which is distinguished from all others by the gracious presence of God.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, even in eternal life the dimension of concealment of God will remain (Barth applies the category of *theologia viatorum* to eternal life as well as to our present condition). Our knowledge of God needs to be justified by grace. In the final analysis, Barth claims that not the veiling but the unveiling is the proper sense of God’s revelation and the direction of his will.<sup>41</sup> This means that concealment is subordinated to manifestation. God makes us participants in his own veracity. This participation consists of three elements: (1) the sacrifice of our lives as a grateful response to the revelation, (2) marveling reverence that opens our lips to praise God, and (3) community between God and us, in which parity and disparity is overcome by analogy.<sup>42</sup>

It is this idea of analogy that Barth subsequently deals with in detail. His discussion of the concept of analogy is important, because it clarifies his position against both the Roman Catholic doctrine of *analogia entis* and the more cautious use of the analogy concept by the Protestant scholastic theology. Although the term “is burdened by its use in natural theology,” it is at this point “as such unavoidable.” Barth provides a basic definition:

In distinction to both likeness and unlikeness “analogy” means similarity, i.e., partial correspondence and agreement (and, therefore, one which limits both parity and disparity between two or more different entities).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> CD II/1, 194-204 (KD II/1, 218-229).

<sup>40</sup> CD II/1, 207 (KD II/1, 232).

<sup>41</sup> CD II/1, 215: “Not the veiling, however, but the unveiling is the purpose of His revelation, the direction of His will.” In German (KD II/1, 242): “Aber nun ist ja nicht die Verhüllung, sondern die Enthüllung der Sinn seiner Offenbarung, die Richtung seines Willens.”

<sup>42</sup> CD II/1, 204-225 (KD II/1, 229-254).

<sup>43</sup> CD II/1, 225. In German (KD II/1, 254): “Analogie bedeutet im Unterscheid zu Gleichheit

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Barth states that the term “analogy” reflects the real relation in which God comes to us in his Word. The possibility of analogy resides only in God’s revelation; still it focuses on our being God’s creatures. Because we are God’s creatures, we can and must speak about God, and we can do so in words taken from all things that are God’s creation. By revealing himself, God takes possession of his own creatures. The truth is primarily God’s, and secondarily becomes ours. Our concepts are led back to God. Barth is emphatic in claiming that this is a dynamic process, initiated and governed by God. The problem with natural theology is that it abstracts the religious concepts from God as the giver into God as a given,<sup>44</sup> and changes a dynamic “becoming” into a static “being.”

It is to be noted that the human word receives concrete content and concrete form from God, and becomes capable of saying something, by the fact, and only by the fact, that it is spoken on the strength of God’s permission and command, therefore has the definite similarity with its object which is promised and bestowed by God’s revelation, and is not arbitrarily discovered and affirmed. ... All kinds of things might be analogous of God, if God had not made and did not make a very definite and delimited use of His omnipotence in His revelation .... And all kinds of things might become analogous of God if it were left to our wisdom or will ... to claim this thing or that as an analogy of God .... Genuine proclamation is not possible on the basis of the opinion that we have to reckon with an analogy of human views, concepts and words, which may be established apart from God’s revelation ... It is only possible where the analogy is understood as the work and proposition of revelation itself.<sup>45</sup>

The dynamics of the analogy of revelation is further safeguarded by Barth’s claim that the “partial” character of the analogy does not consist of a quantitative partiality: it is not a part of God that is revealed to a part of man. Both God and man are integral wholes. The partiality is qualitative: in God’s revelation, the dialectics of veiling and unveiling is maintained. Analogous concepts are true, but never exhaustive.<sup>46</sup>

After his positive exposition of the use of analogy in knowing God, Barth confronts with a classical position concerning analogy, formulated by the Lutheran Orthodox theologian Andreas Quenstedt. In spite of the fairly technical character of this discussion, a more detailed account of his dealings with Quenstedt is necessary to focus Barth’s own position. Quenstedt discusses the topic in line with medieval scholastic theology: he asks how concepts such as justice, spirit, goodness etc. can be ascribed to God. He rejects the options of univocal and equivocal predication, and opts for analogy, defined by Quenstedt as “*quae et nomen et rem*

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und Ungleichheit: Ähnlichkeit d.h. teilweise und darum die Gleichheit wie die Ungleichheit begrenzende Entsprechung und Übereinstimmung zwischen zwei oder mehreren verschiedenen Grössen.”

<sup>44</sup> In German: the phrase “er gibt” is changed into “es gibt.”

<sup>45</sup> CD II/1, 232 (KD II/1, 261-262).

<sup>46</sup> CD II/1, 225-236 (KD II/1, 254-267).

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nomine designatam communem habent, sed inaequaliter."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, there are different sorts of analogy. Quenstedt rejects the understanding of analogy as an *analogia inaequalitatis* (as exists between the different *species* of a *genus*) or as an *analogia proportionalitatis* (consisting of a few similar properties in spite of difference in other respects). The type of analogy that applies to God is, according to Quenstedt, the *analogia attributionis*: certain properties exist primarily and originally in one entity (the *analogans*) and are secondarily attributed to an entity that is dependent on the former (the *analogatum*). As a Creator, God bestows his creatures with qualities that resemble his own virtues. One step further, Quenstedt argues that creatures possess these properties not only externally (*extrinsece*) and formally in their relation to the Creator, but internally and properly (*intrinsece*).<sup>48</sup>

Barth has a number of problems with Quenstedt. The first is that the Lutheran master does not distinguish the specific *theological* analogy from the common use of analogy in philosophy. The second and central objection is that Quenstedt views analogy as intrinsic to creatures, while in Barth's opinion the analogy depends solely on God's gracious revelation. Quenstedt, in other words, bases the analogy on creation, not on justification. Consequently, the third problem is that Quenstedt considers the difference between God's *absolute* reality and our *relative* reality as the decisive difference in the analogy. Barth claims that Quenstedt's theory of analogy tends to assume a general ontology as the basis of the doctrine of God. This provides a common ground of knowledge between God and man, and the insight that knowledge of God is knowledge of faith perishes. In Barth's view, the fact that Christology has the central place in the actual structure of Quenstedt's theology is no more than a lucky inconsistency. We can learn from the history of Protestant orthodox theology that the concept of analogy can only be used in a keen awareness of the Word of God, the revelation in Jesus Christ, as the only legitimate starting point.<sup>49</sup>

The conclusion of Barth's discussion of the limits of our knowledge of God is that in all three aspects (God's veracity, our participation, analogy) the way of faith is at stake. The circle of faith is a circle of truth (*circulus veritatis*), not a vicious circle (*circulus vitiosus*). In fact, Barth admits that the appeal to God's revelation as the ground of our knowledge of God cannot be defended against charges of circularity; what he denies is that this charge hits the mark. The real challenging of faith is the temptation that comes from God; but with the temptation, God gives the answer at once: Jesus Christ is both the question and the answer, the one and only circle of God's truth.

In Him who is true God and true man it is true that in His true revelation God gives man a part in the truth of His knowing, and therefore gives to man's knowing similarity with His own and therefore truth. On the basis of the grace of the incarnation, and on the basis of the acceptance and assumption of man into

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<sup>47</sup> See section 5.2 above for the functioning of this commonplace on the predication of concepts to God in Reformed Orthodoxy. As Barth sees it, Quenstedt's rejection of univocity is directed against "Duns Scotus and his school."

<sup>48</sup> CD II/1, 237-238 (KD II/1, 267-269).

<sup>49</sup> CD II/1, 238-243 (KD II/1, 269-275).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

unity of being (*Einheit des Seins*) with God as it has taken place in Jesus Christ, all this has become truth in this man, in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Our personal participation in God's truth in Jesus Christ is that we "believe *with* the risen Christ, i.e., on the basis of the divine comfort which has come upon Him."<sup>50</sup>

### **11.3. The Being of God**

"God is." This little sentence is to be explained in the doctrine of God. The *noetic* problems have been discussed, now the *ontic* reality of God is to be investigated. But Barth insists that the insights concerning the knowledge of God and those concerning the being of God strictly belong together. In fact (and this is an important insight in Barth's method) every single dogmatic sentence is "at once the basis and the content of all the rest."<sup>51</sup>

Barth's discussion of the being of God is governed by the following *Leitsatz*:

God is who He is in the act of His revelation. God seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us, and therefore He loves us. But He is this loving God without us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the freedom of the Lord, who has His life from Himself.<sup>52</sup>

In explaining this sentence, Barth firstly emphasizes that theology must ask after God's being, in addition to God's works. When the doctrine of God is confined to God's works, it cannot be made clear that really *God's* works are confessed. "If the Word of God forbids the question of God's being as a particular question, or leaves us in doubt about this particular question, it means that it gives us no real revelation."<sup>53</sup>

Barth opposes a "resentment against the concept of being" that he sees virulent in Protestant theology from Philip Melancthon up to 20th century theologians such as Hermann Cremer. He maintains that God does not merge into his relations and works, but has his own identity that differs from the entities he is related to. On the other hand, Barth claims that God's being does not exist outside his works and words. The risk of a dominance of the concept of being over the doctrine of God is even greater: a freely bethought concept of being determines what it means for God to be God. To the contrary, Barth states that God's own revelation determines the manner of God's being. Here he opposes to the scholastic tradition that applies a general concept of being to God. The fundamental error is that God's

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<sup>50</sup> CD II/1, 243-254 (KD II/1, 276-287).

<sup>51</sup> CD II/1, 257-258 (KD II/1, 288-289).

<sup>52</sup> CD II/1, 257. In German (KD II/1, 288): "Gott ist, der er ist in der Tat seiner Offenbarung. Gott sucht und schafft Gemeinschaft zwischen sich und uns und so liebt er uns. Eben dieser Liebende ist er aber als Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist auch ohne uns, in der Freiheit des Herrn, der sein Leben aus sich selber hat."

<sup>53</sup> CD II/1, 259 (KD II/1, 290).

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being is thus seen apart from the Trinity. Therefore, Barth energetically distances himself from the older Protestant doctrine of God.<sup>54</sup>

Barth describes the being of God primarily as an event that cannot be transcended. In past, present, and future, God's revelation event is actual. The doctrine of the Trinity exposes God as the subject, predicate, and object of this event. The doctrine of God, dealing with the being of God, cannot go beyond this divine event: "event" or "act" is the ultimate, definitive word concerning God's being. Biblically speaking, God is the living God. But we cannot fill the terms "event," "act," "life" arbitrarily; it is the specific event, act and life of God that fills our understanding. God remains free in his life and sovereign in his acting. However, this freedom does in turn not coincide with any freedom or distance occurring in our world (e.g., spirit as opposed to nature, soul over against body, inward versus outward, invisible contra visible). Barth opposes the Protestant scholastic thesis that the spiritual creature is closer to God than the material.<sup>55</sup> In his view, God transcends both spiritual and material creature. He points to the biblical God language that includes bodily as well as spiritual terms.

The true freedom of God is not in his distance from created reality, but in his *being in Person*. The personality of God is understood by Barth in terms of self-consciousness, will, self-determination, power, and self-sufficiency.<sup>56</sup> The ground of these predicates is God's trinitarian existence, which means that God is the self-moved being. Precisely by this self-movement, God differs from the material (moved by others) and the spiritual (unmoved) beings. By this position, Barth distinguishes himself clearly from all attempts to make God a function of human existence or mind. It is God, not man, that is originally and properly "person."<sup>57</sup>

Barth realizes that the aforementioned description of God's being is dangerously formal; he therefore hastens to provide a more substantial filling up of the statement that "God is in the act." The act of revelation is expressed in the name of God, by which God reveals himself as the one who seeks and creates community with us. This is the ongoing line of God's works, in the creation of the world, and in the salvation of mankind by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He wills to be ours, and He wills us to be his. Barth emphasizes that even

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<sup>54</sup> CD II/1, 259-261 (KD II/1, 290-293). The contrast with scholastic theology could have been mitigated if Barth had noticed the inclusion of God's trinitarian existence in many scholastic "definitions" of God; see section 5.3 above.

<sup>55</sup> CD II/1, 265-268 (KD II/1, 297-300). Barth's discussion of the spirit – nature problem seems to be complicated by the interference between the scholastic classification scheme (spirit – matter) on Aristotelian basis and the sharpening of the spirit – nature division in 19th century German Idealism.

<sup>56</sup> CD II/1, 268: God is "the I who knows about Himself, who Himself wills, Himself disposes and distinguishes, and in this very act of His omnipotence is wholly self-sufficient." In German (KD II/1, 300): "das Ich, das um sich selber weiss, das sich selber will, sich selber setzt und unterscheidet und eben in diesem Akte seiner Machtvollkommenheit in vollem Genügen sich selber ist." Note the failure in rendering "das sich selber will etc." into "who Himself wills etc," thus changing "self" from the object of the will etc. into an emphasis on the subject of the will etc..

<sup>57</sup> CD II/1, 264-272 (KD II/1, 294-305).

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through death, wrath, hell, and darkness, God aims at life, love, community and light. Methodically important is Barth's warning against the inversion of the Johannine statement "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). We cannot fill the concept of God's love with our understanding of love in general, but we must derive its contents from the specific deeds of God's revelation. Hence, the following qualifications of God's love appear:

- God's love is identical with his goodness, and consists in God's giving himself to us. It is incorrect to define God's love in terms of a "highest good" which He shares with us, apart from the personal fellowship He bestows on us.
- God's love is regardless of any quality or dignity in its object. Barth objects to definitions that state that God's love involves a "delight" and "approval" of its object. To the contrary, God's love, Barth argues, is directed towards enemies that are *made* friends by God's love.
- God's love is an end in itself; it is not subjected to a superior goal such as God's glory or our salvation.
- God's love is necessary with respect to God's own essence and nature, but it is free from necessity in respect to its objects. God's overflowing love does not imply that God needs partners in love for his own self-satisfaction. The scholastic tradition has correctly pointed to the *beatitudo Dei* as his happiness in and with himself.

Thus understood, the love of God is fundamental to his being. The whole doctrine of God must be faithful to the confession: God is love, in time and eternity.<sup>58</sup>

Barth now returns to the personality of God: the love of God is fundamental to the concept of "person" and to our being a person.<sup>59</sup> God's personality is not abstract, but concrete: it is revealed in God becoming man in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is at once the only true human person we can know, and the person of God the Son. In other words, in Jesus Christ humanity "is caught up in fellowship with the personality of God."<sup>60</sup>

A specific discussion is devoted by Barth to the question, whether the personality of God contradicts his absoluteness.<sup>61</sup> Introducing this problem, Barth adds a passage on "paradox" that is interesting in view of the development of Barth's theological method. As we can recall from sections 10.1 and 10.2, Barth's early theology partly rested on the acceptance of paradoxes in thinking after God's Word. We have also noticed (section 10.3.1) that Barth consciously limits and abandons the usage of paradoxes in the *Church Dogmatics*, following on his intensive confrontation with Anselm of Canterbury. Barth's statements in the present context provide a significant insight into what is and is not meant if Barth

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<sup>58</sup> CD II/1, 272-283 (KD II/1, 306-318).

<sup>59</sup> CD II/1, 283-285 (KD II/1, 333-334). Barth moderates the "person" language by stating that God's being love is more important than God's being a person, and by distinguishing the "three Persons" of the trinitarian dogma and the personality of God.

<sup>60</sup> CD II/1, 284-286 (KD II/1, 319-322). In the sentence from which the final clause is quoted, Barth indicates an anhypostatic understanding of Christ's human nature: "The One, the person, whom we really know as a human person, is the person of Jesus Christ, and even this is in fact the person of God the Son, in which humanity, *without being or having itself a person*, is caught up into fellowship with the personality of God."

<sup>61</sup> CD II/1, 286-297 (KD II/1, 322-334).

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sometimes maintains the “paradox” language. Barth rejects the suggestion that “the application of the personal manner of speech to God means the recognition of a paradox in the nature of God.” Barth acknowledges that there is a “paradox of the nature of God that we cannot unravel,” but states that this paradox does not consist of “a logical tension between two concepts which we can perceive and control as such,” namely “absolute” and “personality.” The true paradox is “the combination of His grace and our lost condition, not the paradox of the combination of two for us logically irreconcilable concepts.” Barth then rejects the usage of paradoxes as a dialectical delimitation of God or as the dialectical conquest of a conceptual antithesis. From these remarks, we can conclude that for Barth the paradox is a soteriological category (grace versus sin), not a logical category (Yes versus No).

The question of absoluteness versus personality was vehemently raised in 19th century theology, but Barth sees a background already in the classical doctrine of God, which reserves the term “person” to the doctrine of the Trinity and operates in the doctrine of God with a general, abstract concept of God in terms of “being.” In German Idealism, the rationalist tendencies of Enlightenment philosophy were radicalized in describing God as “the highest idea, or the origin of all theoretical and practical aesthetical ideas” and thus as “the source of all rationality,” which must necessarily be absolute. Arguing on Spinozist terms, the Idealists held it impossible to ascribe personality to the Absolute Idea. Personality was viewed as individuation and definition, and thus implied limitation and negation, both qualifications contradicting the concept of the absolute. Under these signs, 19th century theology (e.g., D.F. Strauss, A.E. Biedermann, H. Lüdemann) chose to defend the absoluteness of God and to deny his personality. An additional – in Barth’s view decisive – motive for this denial was the fact that in 19th century thinking “personality” had become an essential predicate of man. Man as the finite subject was posed against an infinite object (the universe or God). The whole system would collapse if the object of knowledge (God) became finite as well. Barth diagnoses human self-maintenance behind the 19th century *denial* of God’s personality. Even more astonishing is the fact that 19th century *defendants* of the personality of God (e.g., H. Siebeck, H. Lotze, A. Ritschl) argued on the basis of the same presupposition, that personality is originally human. Barth discovers within 19th century theology weak signals of an awareness that God is person otherwise than as a projection of our personality. This indicates to him that the biblical testimony of God’s revelation perseveres in spite of human attempts to obscure it. In addition to the historical survey of the discussion on God’s personality, Barth makes some important remarks concerning the relation between God’s personality and the doctrine of the Trinity. In his own exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, Barth had argued that

the concept “person” should be dropped in the description of this matter, because in all classical theology it has never in fact been understood and interpreted in the sense in which we are accustomed to think of the term to-day. The Christian Church has never taught that there are in God three persons and therefore three personalities in the sense of a threefold Ego, a threefold subject. ... The important and true thing intended by

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the concept of personality in the modern sense as a description of God is, of course, connected not merely closely, but indissolubly, with the doctrine of the Trinity. Being in Himself Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is in Himself the One who lives and loves, and therefore One ... What we can describe as personality is indeed the whole divine Trinity as such, in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in God Himself and in His work – not the individual aspects by themselves in which God is and which He has. ... There are not three faces of God, but one face; not three wills, but one will; not three rights, but one right; not three Words and works, but one Word and work. ... This one God as the Triune is – let us say it then – the personal God.<sup>62</sup>

A final qualification of the being of God is given with his freedom. God is unique in his being and in his love. The account of the freedom of God provides the depth of the doctrine of God. Barth realizes that it is utterly difficult to find words for this uniqueness of God's being. A more severe danger is that the freedom of God seems to point to a deity beyond the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. God's freedom is to be rightly understood in terms of his self-movement and lordship: God has the fullness of life, power, and authority within himself.<sup>63</sup>

In this connection, Barth interacts with the traditional attribute of *aseitas* or *independentia Dei*. On the one hand, Barth accepts "aseity" as a concept that is identical with "freedom." Its fundamental meaning is that God has his own being in himself, and not in anything else. On the other hand, Barth says the traditional understanding of *aseitas* or, even more strongly, *independentia* indicates too exclusively the negative side of God's freedom. Moreover, the aseity terminology is open to the misunderstanding that God is his own cause (*causa sui*), and thus his own effect. This entails not primarily a logical inconsistency, but an impossibility founded in God's being the First Cause who cannot depend on anything. It is incorrect, according to Barth, to speak about divine self-realization: God has the full reality of his being eternally. He does not, as it were, gradually acquire the fullness of being. Positively speaking, God is free to be himself, and to act faithfully and savingly. God is free to prove his existence; this includes both the otherness of God regarding other beings, and the reality of his existence. In this context, Barth mentions the so-called proofs for the existence of God, and insists that the true proof of God's existence is his self-revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> CD II/1, 297 (KD II/1, 334). Cf. also part III of this study, section 17.3, where Nico den Bok's study on Richard of St. Victor's doctrine of the Trinity is reviewed. The above quotations from Barth confirm Den Bok's qualification of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity as 'monopersonal', and thus as differing from the idea of 'social Trinity'. Moreover, we find in Barth's statements proof against the suspicion that Barth is a modalist.

<sup>63</sup> CD II/1, 297-302 (KD II/1, 334-339).

<sup>64</sup> CD II/1, 302-305 (KD II/1, 339-343).

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Connected with the traditional conception of God's independence is the statement that God exists necessarily. Barth opposes to the connotation arising with "necessary," that an external determinant would "force" God to exist. In his view, the actual reality of God's existence has priority; only on this basis can the necessity of God's existence be stated. This necessity means that the "non-existence or the possibility of his non-existence is negated and becomes inconceivable." But it is a necessity that rests on a free decision on God's part, not on any logical or ontological system.<sup>65</sup>

Barth continues by stating that God is not only free in himself, but consequently also free from other entities. Since the concept of God's freedom is not applied to an abstract, absolute deity, but to the concrete, living and loving God, the existence of other beings is not an embarrassment or threat to God. In the Idealist conception Barth is opposing, the Absolute (infinite) is dialectically balanced and compromised by the relative (finite). But, Barth argues,

when the world has to be viewed *sub specie aseitatis*, i.e., in the light of the primary creative freedom of God, there can no longer be any question of aloofness or hostility to the world on the part of the absolute God .... God has His absoluteness decisively in Himself.<sup>66</sup>

The true freedom of God resides in himself, and therefore it can leave room to other beings. Both a hostility between God and world and a deification of the world is excluded. God's relation of freedom towards the world consists in both *transcendence* and *immanence*. This implies, noetically, that God cannot be counted among or classified with other beings. The classical sentence *Deus non est in genere* forbids any subsumption of God under a general category of thought. Ontically, God's existence is, regardless of the existence of others. This renders impossible all pantheist or panentheist conceptions.<sup>67</sup>

The freedom of God is the ground of his immanence: precisely because He is absolutely free, He is able to create everything out of nothing, and to indwell his creation, and to unite himself with mankind in Jesus Christ. This insight is the source of the paradox, that God is at once wholly inside and wholly outside created reality (*totus intra et totus extra*). In this connection, Barth affirms the multiplicity of God's dealings with the world and the real occurrence of change within it: God's "changelessness does not coincide with any one of our constancies." In the hierarchy of God's actions and relations towards the created world, Jesus Christ is central. Barth views the relation between God the Father and God the Son as the prototype to God's relation with the world. This centrality of Christ ensures that God's freedom towards the world does not result in arbitrariness, but in faithfulness. For Barth, Christology is presupposition and criterion of the knowledge and understanding of God's freedom in his immanence. All speech about God's freedom should conform to its expression in Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> CD II/1, 305-307 (KD II/1, 343-346). For a fuller explanation of these statements in the context of Barth's analysis of Anselm's ontological argument, see section 10.2.3 above

<sup>66</sup> CD II/1, 309 (KD II/1, 348).

<sup>67</sup> CD II/1, 307-313 (KD II/1, 346-352).

<sup>68</sup> CD II/1, 313-321 (KD II/1, 352-361).

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Barth's final remarks on the being of God provide an instructive summary: we must

remind ourselves that in this whole discussion we have not been looking past the revelation of God to a dimension of His being somewhere beyond; we have not been concerned to define a divine predicate, a general idea of God, but the profundity of the revealed God Himself in His aseity, His primary and secondary absoluteness. ... When we say that God is free, the accent does not fall on "free" but on "God." ... We cannot get behind God – behind God in His revelation – to try to ask and determine from outside what He is. ... We have seen indeed that the life and act of God is the life and act of His love. ... God loves, and in this act lives. ... His loving is, as we have seen, utterly free, grounded in itself, needing no other, and yet also not lacking in another, but in sovereign transcendence giving, communicating itself to the other.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *CD* II/1, 320-321 (*KD* II/1, 360-361).

## 12. Doctrine of God: Perfections

### 12.1. Introducing the Divine Perfections

Traditionally, the largest part of a doctrine of God consists of a discussion of the properties or attributes of God. In Barth's treatment, the perfections of God take up the larger half of volume II/1; only the doctrine of election, which fills volume II/2, exceeds it in length.

Barth mentions the different terms used for this part of doctrine, and deliberately chooses the term "perfections" (*Vollkommenheiten*). In his view, the words "attributes," "properties," and "virtues" are too formal and place God too much on a par with other entities; by the term "perfections" it is expressed that the perfect being of God consists of his fullness of perfections. This holds only for God.<sup>1</sup>

The *Leitsatz* by which Barth opens his section on God's perfections, reveals the most important structural features of Barth's position:

God lives His perfect life in the abundance of many individual and distinct perfections. Each of these is perfect in itself and in combination with all the others. For whether it is a form of love in which God is free, or a form of freedom in which God loves, it is nothing else but God Himself, His one, simple, distinctive being.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing to notice is that God's perfections and his being are mutually connected: the fullness of perfections is the expression of the perfect, living being of God. Knowing God is possible only by knowing God's perfections. And the other way round: in knowing God's perfections, we are confronting the one and rich being of God. Here Barth introduces the relation between the one and the many. Seen as one, God is the one who loves freely; seen as many, God is his perfections.<sup>3</sup>

Second, Barth specifies the type of relation between God's perfections and being. His starting point is the biblical expression "Lord of glory" (*Herr der Herrlichkeit*). Barth insists on the identity of God's being and perfections. His main motive is that otherwise the proper (abstract) being of God is conceived beyond his (concrete) perfections. The identity of being and perfections is also important against the opposite danger: the diversification of God into independent powers and capacities. The risk of such a view is that the final principles of our reality are

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<sup>1</sup> CD II/1, 322-323 (KD II/1, 362-363).

<sup>2</sup> CD II/1, 322. In German (KD II/1, 362): "Gott lebt sein vollkommenes Wesen in der Fülle vieler, einzelner und unterschiedener Vollkommenheiten, deren jede für sich und mit allen andern zusammen darin vollkommen ist, dass sie, sei es als eine Gestalt der Liebe, in der Gott frei ist, sei es als eine Gestalt der Freiheit, in der Gott liebt, nichts anderes als Gott selber, sein eines, einfaches, ihm eigenes Wesen ist."

<sup>3</sup> CD II/1, 322-324 (KD II/1, 362-364).

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hypostatized and projected in God, which makes both God and us the slaves of the “powers of this world.” Quite the contrary, the identity of God’s being and perfections guarantees that God is Lord over all powers, principles, and capacities. Barth sees “an exact parallel” between the doctrine of divine perfections and the doctrine of the Trinity:

as it is of decisive importance to recognise the three modes of being [*Seinsweisen*], not only economically as modalism does, but ... as modes of being of the one eternal God Himself, so it is equally important to understand that God in Himself is not divested of His glory and perfections, that He does not assume them merely in connexion with His self-revelation to the world, but that they constitute His own eternal glory. Again, as it is of decisive importance not to dissolve the unity of the Godhead tritheistically into three gods, but to understand that the three modes of being strictly as the modes of being of the one God with whom we have to do in all His works, so it is of equal importance to interpret God’s glory and perfections, not in and for themselves, but as the glory of the Lord who alone is able to establish, disclose and confirm them as real glory.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Barth formulates a structurally important insight concerning the mutual relation between God’s perfections, which deserves a more detailed analysis. As indicated in the *Leitsatz*, he views them as singular and distinct properties. Barth develops his position in discussing the traditional statement that there is no real difference (*differentia realis*) between the attributes of God.<sup>5</sup> Barth claims that the traditional doctrine of God has always denied any objective, real diversity within God. Most extremely, this is done by the nominalists, who hold that the different attributes consist merely in different concepts or names. In this view, only the unity of God is real, allowing no distinction at all. A milder version of nominalism is, according to Barth, found in the mainstream of the tradition. Concerning God’s essence, the absolute unity and simplicity is maintained. The distinctions are necessary only on our part because of our limited understanding. Barth acknowledges the fact that the (medieval and Protestant) scholastics maintained the foundation of these concepts in the reality of God (*fundamentum in re*), but in his view this does not outweigh the emphasis on the inadequacy of the concepts in respect to the ultimate unity of God. Both the extreme and the mild forms of nominalism, show a dominance of the divine essence over God’s perfections. Thus, a gap is created between, on the one hand, the revealed perfections and deeds of God and, on the other hand, the general and abstract essence of the deity (*nuda*

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<sup>4</sup> CD II/1, 324-327 (*KD* II/1, 364-368). In view of Barth’s subsequent assumption of multiplicity of God’s perfections, it is important to notice that his statements thus far amount to the affirmation of the concept of *simplicitas Dei!* To be sure, a closer analysis will reveal that even Barth’s explicit affirmation of multiplicity is consistent with at least some interpretations of simplicity. Our final evaluation, including Barth’s position, will have to point out what is and is not excluded in ascribing simplicity to God.

<sup>5</sup> See on the Reformed Orthodox discussion of this question: part I, sub-section 5.4.1.

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*essentia*). A consequence of this position is that on the one hand the tradition wants to maintain that the attributes properly (*proprie*) belong to God, while on the other hand the differentiation of attributes is viewed as improper (*improprie*). Barth praises (quite exceptionally!) the German theologians of the 19th century (F.H.R. Frank, G. Thomasius, I.A. Dorner) who dared to maintain the real diversity of God's properties together with his essential unity.<sup>6</sup>

Barth's own position, in line with 19th century German theology, is expressed in three fundamental statements:<sup>7</sup>

- The "multiplicity, individuality and diversity" of God's perfections concerns the essence of the one God, not a second essence next to God. Barth utilizes the term "repetition": each of the distinct perfections *repeats* the insight that God is the one who loves freely.<sup>8</sup> The perfections are essential to God. However, not only the unity but also the plurality is essential to God. The plurality does not only exist in God's external relations and actions, but in his inner being.
- The plurality, singularity and distinction of God's perfections concern his simple, undivided and non-compound being. Barth emphasizes that the diversity of perfections does not destroy the unity of God: every single perfection is nothing else but God himself and nothing else but the other perfections. On the other hand, the multiplicity of God, and every distinct perfection is just as real as his simplicity. The unity and simplicity of God cannot be understood without the real difference between the perfections. The right understanding of both multiplicity and simplicity implies "that they are not mutually exclusive but inclusive, or rather that they are both included in God Himself."<sup>9</sup>
- The plurality, singularity and distinction of God's perfections are grounded in God's own essence, not in God's participation in other essences. The diversity of God's perfections could lead to the conclusion that every single property has an existence independent of God's essence. In that case, one could first discern the properties of goodness, wisdom, power etc., and subsequently ascribe them to God. Barth firmly denies this procedure, and in this context sides with the scholastic rejection of the understanding of attributes as *formae accidentales seu accidentia*. He insists on the right order of subject and predicate: everything that is in God is originally and primarily in God, and is only in a derivate and secondary sense outside him. But this priority of God over his perfections should not, finally, be misunderstood in the "nominalist" emphasis of God's unity over against the plurality of perfections.

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<sup>6</sup> CD II/1, 327-330 (KD II/1, 368-372).

<sup>7</sup> CD II/1, 331-335 (KD II/1, 372-377).

<sup>8</sup> Here we have a further sign of the parallel indicated above between Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and his doctrine of God's perfections: just as the perfections, the divine Persons are understood by Barth as repetitions (*Wiederholungen*) of God's being. See CD I/1, 350 (KD I/1, 369).

<sup>9</sup> This final clause can be understood in two ways: (1) multiplicity and simplicity are both included in God, but still stand over against each other; (2) "included in God" counts as explanation of "inclusive," which yields the insight that the concepts of multiplicity and simplicity are not exclusive but inclusive, *because* they are included in God.

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The fourth element of Barth's *Leitsatz* points towards the classification and grouping of God's perfections: the love and freedom of God are the structuring principles. To start with, Barth mentions the diversity of classifications in the doctrine of God. But in his view, the failures of classification on the basis of a general concept of God are easily recognized, and the remaining right path of classification is widely present in the history of doctrine. From the presence of this "ecumenical line," Barth modestly concludes "that it does not need any special depth of intelligence to find our bearings correctly in the whole matter." Barth distinguishes three types of false classification: (1) a psychological approach that bases its doctrine of divine perfections on the analogy with human psychological capacities (intellect, will, emotion), (2) a deduction of God's perfection from religious genesis: the qualifications produced by the religious mind in a dialectical process (e.g., thesis, antithesis, synthesis) determine the structure of the doctrine of God, and (3) a historicist approach that attempts to deduce God's attributes from the history of Jesus. Over against these modern ways, Barth joins the consensus of orthodox tradition that distinguishes between qualifications of God's freedom and qualifications of God's love. Barth mentions the alternative pairs of terms occurring in the tradition (negative-positive, incommunicable-communicable, absolute-relative, metaphysical-personal etc.), but insists that these different terms reflect the same pattern of classification. In Barth's words, the principal distinction of perfections in the theological tradition is between attributes that emphasize God's hiddenness and attributes that emphasize his revelation.<sup>10</sup>

Barth frames his own exposition by means of the terms "love" and "freedom" as substantial terms that at the same time reflect God's revelation and hiddenness. In three points the orthodox tradition needs to be corrected:<sup>11</sup>

- a. It is wrong to understand the love of God as his positive, relational, immanent side over against the freedom of God as his negative, absolute, transcendent side. The tradition gives at least the impression that the distinction between the two groups is a division. Barth emphasizes that the distinction has "only a heuristic significance," and that love and freedom, immanence and transcendence determine each other mutually.
- b. It is wrong to deduce the distinction between the two groups from logical and epistemological insights. Barth here deals with the famous threefold way proposed by Dionysius Areopagita: the *via negationis*, *via eminentiae*, and *via causationis*. Even if this threefold way is taken "at best," not as "an attempt at natural theology" but only as "a method for the formation of concepts," Barth denies that our negative concepts are suitable to signify God's being as such, or our superlative concepts to indicate God's superiority, or our relational/causal concepts to express God's relation to the world.
- c. The traditional doctrine of God wrongly poses the attributes of God's freedom in front. This order reflects the procedure of starting with a general

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<sup>10</sup> CD II/1, 335-341 (KD II/1, 377-384). Here we have evidence of the strong connection Barth lays between the contents of the doctrine of God and the problem of our knowledge of God. See also section 12.2. above. Just as in earlier contexts, Barth emphasizes the primacy of God's self-disclosure over his remaining hiddenness.

<sup>11</sup> CD II/1, 344-350 (KD II/1, 387-393).

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concept of God and subsequently adding the specific trinitarian and christological aspects. To the contrary, Barth argues that in the order of revelation and reflecting God's being, one should start with the perfections of God's love and thereafter discuss the perfections of God's freedom. Revelation has the priority over hiddenness, Trinity has the priority over aseity. "It is as the personal triune God that He is self-existent [*aseitarisch*]."

Barth attempts to do justice to both the priority of God's love and the strong, dialectical connection between love and freedom by expounding God's perfections in pairs: first, under the heading "Perfections of divine love," he discusses three pairs of which every first member is a perfection of love and every second member a perfection of freedom; second, under the heading "Perfections of divine freedom," he expounds another three pairs, each composed of a perfection of freedom and a perfection of love. This structure makes it clear that the distinction between love and freedom is not watertight, but that both qualify each other in a dialectical way. According to Barth, the dialectic governing the structure of his doctrine of God is not arbitrary, but is identical with the dialectic of revelation and of the divine essence.<sup>12</sup>

### **12.2. Perfections of Divine Love**

Barth discusses the perfections of divine love emphatically in the first place, before the perfections of divine freedom. The reason is that the gospel of Jesus Christ preaches God's love first and foremost, and that only by the love of God we learn about his freedom. It would be arbitrary and artificial to invert this order, as the scholastic tradition did. Barth admits that "method is arbitrary" (*methodus est arbitraria*), but understands this slogan in the sense that any classification of God's perfections is hypothetical and provisory. However, there must be good reasons for the order one chooses. As mentioned above, Barth does not rigidly separate the perfections of love and the perfections of freedom. He expounds them in pairs. The perfections of grace, mercy, and patience answer the question: "By what determinations does the love of God ... become for us an event and reality so that we may and must infer in consequence that these are determinations of the divine being?" These three perfections are coupled to, respectively, holiness, righteousness, and wisdom as perfections of freedom that answer the question: "In what determinations does the freedom of God stand when His love is actualized for us?" As one can see in these wordings, Barth consistently combines the *act* aspect and the *being* aspect of God (see section 12.3 above).<sup>13</sup>

#### **12.2.1. Grace and Holiness**

The first perfection of God's love is his *grace*. By this property, the love of God is distinguished as divine love. It characterizes God's love

in so far as it seeks fellowship by its own free inclination and favor, unconditioned by any merit or claim in the beloved, but

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<sup>12</sup> CD II/1, 348-352 (KD II/1, 392-395).

<sup>13</sup> CD II/1, 351-353 (KD II/1, 394-396).

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also unhindered by any unworthiness or opposition in the latter – able, on the contrary, to overcome all any unworthiness and opposition.

In continuity with the Protestant scholastic tradition, Barth emphasizes the fact that grace is primarily an inner, essential property and relatedness of God. Against Roman Catholicism, Barth states that grace is only secondarily a divine gift towards creatures, and then still not a hypostatized entity that intermediates between God and man, but a direct relation between both.<sup>14</sup>

Grace does not presuppose any dignity in its recipient. It is in fact despite our indignity and sin that God descends towards us and overcomes our indignity by forgiving our sins. “Grace, in fact, presupposes the existence of this opposition. ... It is not limited by it. It overcomes it, triumphing in this opposition and the overcoming of it.” Barth insists that grace confronts us with God himself: He personally comes towards us, and we are personally placed before him.<sup>15</sup>

A significant further step in Barth’s exposition is his claim, that God is not only gracious in his outward relations, but also inwardly in his trinitarian being: God is gracious from eternity to eternity. Barth realizes that this claim seems speculative, but he maintains the insight that God as He reveals himself is identical to God as He is in himself. Therefore, the trinitarian life of God has, in Barth’s view, the aspect of inclination, benignity and favor. From this ultimate source, God’s grace flows over to us.<sup>16</sup>

To grace as a perfection of God’s love corresponds his *holiness* as a perfection of freedom. The latter concept does not qualify or expand the former since God is properly and fully grace. But due to our sinful reaction, it is necessary to place holiness alongside grace in order to prevent us from manipulating grace or from stubbornly clinging to our limited idea of what grace is. By holiness, God’s love is characterized by the fact that God, as He seeks and creates fellowship, is always the Lord. He therefore distinguishes and maintains His own will as against every other will. He condemns, excludes and annihilates all contradiction and resistance to it. He gives it validity and actuality in this fellowship as His own and therefore as good. In this distinctiveness alone is the love of God truly His own divine love.

The similarity between grace and holiness is that both point to God’s overcoming our resistance. The difference is that God does so in different modes: grace is the forgiveness of sins; holiness is the judgment upon sin.<sup>17</sup>

While Barth agreed with the Protestant orthodox description of God’s grace, he cannot go with the Protestant scholastic tradition on God’s holiness. His objection

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<sup>14</sup> CD II/1, 353-354 (KD II/1, 396-398).

<sup>15</sup> CD II/1, 354-357 (KD II/1, 398-401).

<sup>16</sup> CD II/1, 357-358 (KD II/1, 401-402).

<sup>17</sup> CD II/1, 358-360 (KD II/1, 402-404).

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is that the scholastics make holiness exclusively a qualification of God's freedom without noting its connection with the love of God.<sup>18</sup>

A strong emphasis is laid by Barth on the connection between grace and holiness: God is not "the holy" (*das Heilige*) in the sense of Rudolf Otto's *tremendum*, but He is the Holy One of Israel, the Redeemer. Redemption does not mean that God surrenders himself to his adversaries or compromises himself; rather it is through his vigorous judgment that He realizes redemption. We can only live as God's companions by knowing and fearing him as our supreme judge. The event of atonement clearly shows the belonging together of grace and holiness. Barth here opposes to Martin Luther, who went too far in separating law and gospel in the Word of God. In the person of Jesus Christ, God is revealed as the Holy One in the unity of grace and judgment.<sup>19</sup>

From biblical theology, Barth gains the insight that God's holiness enables our fellowship with him. The Old Testament cultic holiness regulates our lives before God. The ground of the holiness commandments lies in the repeated affirmation "I am the Lord." God in person warrants the fulfillment of the commandments. God's holiness binds us to the realm of his grace; inside we can live, outside we are punished. The Old Testament prophecies *and* Christ's death reveal that

not after but in the manifestation of wrath and judgment ...  
there comes the pardon, reconciliation ... in short, the grace,  
which was from the very outset the secret meaning of this  
whole revelation of God's holiness.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning God's holiness, Barth makes a trinitarian claim similar to that concerning God's grace. We cannot say that there is in God any sin which He has to resist. But there is God's essential purity, which as such contradicts and will resist everything which is unlike itself. This inner purity urges God to judge sin in his creature, but also to overcome and even to adopt it in order to create fellowship with sinful mankind.<sup>21</sup>

### **12.2.2. Mercy and Righteousness**

In starting the exposition of a second pair of divine perfections, Barth realizes that this is not a turn toward something different, but simply a continuation of the preceding account of God's grace and holiness. In God, there are no different "things," but only one being. Dealing with God's mercy and righteousness, we enrich our understanding of his grace and holiness.<sup>22</sup>

By the perfection of *mercy*, we learn again to understand God's love as specifically the love of God. "Mercy" is not necessarily included in a general concept of love. But God's loving relation with mankind as it is actually revealed necessarily implies both the aspects of grace and mercy. Barth interprets "necessarily" on the basis of the German *notwendig*: God "turns" our "need." The specific aspect of mercy is that it identifies in God a

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<sup>18</sup> CD II/1, 359 (KD II/1, 403).

<sup>19</sup> CD II/1, 360-363 (KD II/1, 405-408).

<sup>20</sup> CD II/1, 363-367 (KD II/1, 408-412).

<sup>21</sup> CD II/1, 368 (KD II/1, 413).

<sup>22</sup> CD II/1, 368-369 (KD II/1, 414).

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readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing. It lies, therefore, in His will, springing from the depths of His nature and characterising it, to take the initiative Himself for the removal of this distress.

Barth states that mercy is more than grace in that it implies the real presence of God amidst the distress and the real will of God to remove it. "Mercy" indicates a true movement in the heart of God; an insight Barth maintains against Schleiermacher's description of God as "the source of the feeling of sheer dependence" (*das Woher des Gefühls schlechthinigen Abhängigkeit*), which cannot, according to Barth, have a heart. Barth also reacts to the Protestant scholastic doctrine of divine affections. The truth of the scholastics is that God's "affections" arise out of his own being; the lack of truth is that the scholastics deny the truly affective character of God's mercy because of their concept of divine immutability. In Barth's own words: "God cannot be moved from outside, but from inside his own being He shares it [human distress] in sympathetic communion."<sup>23</sup>

The emphasis in the concept of mercy is not so much on man's sin, but on the misery that sin brings along. God's mercy is not passive and impotent, but active and powerful in restoring man from his misery. God's mercy receives its depth in the passion of Jesus Christ: here, God has taken up our misery, sin and guilt, and has made it his own.<sup>24</sup>

God's mercy is accompanied by his *righteousness*. By realizing that God's mercy, grace and love are righteous, we learn to see these perfections as truly God's. God's righteousness means, according to Barth, that God, in willing our fellowship, always

does that which is worthy of Himself, and therefore in this fellowship He asserts His worth in spite of all contradiction and resistance, and therefore in this fellowship He causes his own worth to prevail and rule.

God's righteousness is factually, not logically, related to his mercy and holiness: in respect to mercy, God's righteousness implies that God's participation in our misery does not destroy his dignity; in respect to holiness, God's righteousness means that God does not only maintain his will, but also his essential dignity.<sup>25</sup>

Barth's dissent with Protestant scholastic theology, apparent in case of God's holiness, is reinforced with respect to God's righteousness. The problem is that God's justice is merely viewed as requiring and punishing, and thus seems to contradict his mercy. Barth reacts to this idea of justice by referring to the famous experiences expressed by Martin Luther: after a long period of understanding God's justice in the sense of demand and wrath, Luther discovered that the

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<sup>23</sup> CD II/1, 369-371 (KD II/1, 415-417).

<sup>24</sup> CD II/1, 371-375 (KD II/1, 417-422).

<sup>25</sup> CD II/1, 375-377 (KD II/1, 422-424). The distinction between logical and factual relations between God's perfections is typical of Barth's way of thinking: both the possibility and the necessity of a thing are dependent on its actuality (see section 10.2.3 above).

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righteousness of God consists not of his rigidly requiring obedience from us, but of saving us by justification. Moreover, the righteousness of God is directly related to his goodness, and therefore only allows what is suitable to God. From the biblical testimony, a difference or contradiction between mercy and justice is excluded beforehand. In this respect, Barth is not content with the scholastic statement that God's will is the rule of his justice. He surprisingly refers to Anselm's argument for God's justice based on God's *altissimum et secretissimum bonitatis tuae*: God in his justice will do only what is convenient and decent on account of his most good nature.<sup>26</sup>

However, the mutual relation between mercy and justice cannot lead to a mitigation of God's righteousness. Both in the Old and in the New Testament, God is truly the supreme judge, his word is the word of law that reveals his righteous will, his deeds consist of the execution of the law. This is the element of truth in the traditional concept of *iustitia distributiva*: in the (forensic) justification of the sinner, God fulfils his own law and reveals himself as righteous. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God establishes a new situation of justice, in which He provides righteousness both to himself and to mankind.<sup>27</sup>

There is the reality of a judicial decision about good and evil, there is indeed reward and punishment. It is crucial, in Barth's view, to acknowledge these realities, but they must be understood in faith, not as fulfillment of human ideas of justice. The distributive justice of God can never be perceived without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christ is at once the unambiguous witness of God's love, grace and mercy and the no less unambiguous witness of a divine act of wrath, judgment, punishment. On the cross of Calvary, God's No! came down on Jesus Christ in full weight. It was a real condemnation of our real sins that Christ had taken upon himself. The effect is that God's wrath and judgment never again come over us, but that we encounter God's Yes! that was triumphantly spoken on Easter Day.<sup>28</sup>

Four insights can clarify God's manifestation of his justice in the death of Christ:<sup>29</sup>

- a. Only the fact that God, in our place, took the punishment of sin upon himself reveals the infinite depth of God's wrath and the depth of sin as resistance against God.
- b. Only the Son of God could (physically) take upon him the full punitive justice of God, so that justice could take its course.
- c. Only through the suffering and death of the Son of God, God's justice could be satisfied and God's faithfulness towards himself and towards man be maintained (lawfully).

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<sup>26</sup> CD II/1, 377-381 (KD II/1, 424-428). Note that in the quotation from Anselm God is addressed in the second person (*tuae*).

<sup>27</sup> CD II/1, 381-386 (KD II/1, 429-434).

<sup>28</sup> CD II/1, 391-398 (KD II/1, 439-448). It is remarkable that in explaining God's justice as manifest in Christ, Barth constantly refers to articles 11 till 18 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* which expound the necessity of atonement by the suffering and death of Christ. While expressly denying that atonement "must" take place this way, Barth repeatedly affirms that it "cannot" be in another way ...

<sup>29</sup> CD II/1, 398-406 (KD II/1, 448-457).

- d. Only because it is the Son of God who took our place can this substitution be effectual in our reconciliation with the righteous God, as is evidenced in the resurrection of Christ. After Christ, we experience only signs and shadows of God's wrath, not his punishing judgment as such.

### **12.2.3. Patience and Wisdom**

The biblical testimony occasions the addition of God's *patience* to his grace and mercy: often the three are mentioned together. Barth claims that love does not necessarily imply patience: deep, passionate love can be very impatient. God's patience is

His will, deep-rooted in His essence and constituting His divine being and action, to allow to another – for the sake of His own grace and mercy and in the affirmation of His holiness and justice – space and time for the development of its own existence, thus conceding to this existence a reality side by side with His own, and fulfilling His will towards this other in such a way that He does not suspend and destroy it as the other but accompanies and sustains it and allows it to develop in freedom.<sup>30</sup>

Barth defends this as an essential property of God against the idea that God's love could consume or even annihilate its object. The necessity of God's being patient is a factual, not a logical necessity.<sup>31</sup>

God's patience is often described as the moderation or temperance of his anger. This is not a weakness in God, hindering the exertion of his grace and judgment. When God's anger is moderated, it proves to be truly God's anger, an anger controlled by God himself.<sup>32</sup>

God's patience means that God, in saving his creature, leaves time and space for it. Barth here refers to Thomas Aquinas's statement "*gratia non tollit (non destruit) sed (praesupponit et) perficit naturam.*" This is not a neutral, inactive coexistence of God and creature, but an active relation. Barth discusses the biblical examples of Cain, Noah, and Jonah to illustrate the operation of God's patience: on God's part, it always consists in respect for his creatures, and it is directed at human repentance. But the questions can be asked: does God's patience attain its goal, and is God always patient? The answer to these questions is provided, according to Barth, in Jesus Christ. He is the Word, by which God upholds all things (Hebrews 1:3). The ground for God's patience towards us does not lie in creature, but in the Son of God. In Jesus Christ, God has created time and space for man, so that man's behavior cannot frustrate him anymore. "For the sake of this One, there is space and time for the many." In turn, God's patience is no empty space, but an inviting and appealing presence. God's patience aims at our faith in Christ. It is also in Christ that God's anger and punishment come to an end. All punishments must be related to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. In the light of the cross, our sufferings turn into signs of life because Christ has suffered eternal

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<sup>30</sup> CD II/1, 409-410 (KD II/1, 461).

<sup>31</sup> CD II/1, 406-409 (KD II/1, 457-461).

<sup>32</sup> CD II/1, 409-411 (KD II/1, 461-462).

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death for us. God has fully committed himself to save us, and the only thing required from us is faith and gratitude.<sup>33</sup>

The discussion of God's *wisdom* concludes the first group of divine perfections. This property shows the depth and majesty of God's patience. The will of God, which is gracious, merciful and patient, is at once knowable and full of light. According to Barth,

the wisdom of God is that God not only wills but knows what He wills. And He knows not only what He wills, but why and wherefore He wills it. And He wills only that of which He knows the why and wherefore, of which the why and wherefore is then His own meaning, plan and intention.

This implies that our existence has a sense and purpose within God's plan. Characteristically, Barth interprets God's plan from its focus in Jesus Christ: it is for his sake that our life is redeemed and made meaningful.<sup>34</sup>

God's wisdom is further described in relation to God's grace and mercy, justice and holiness. The wisdom of God guarantees that God is not irrational in manifesting his grace and mercy, and that He does not diminish his justice and holiness by saving us. Barth explicitly denies that the relation between grace and justice is a "paradox." Although it is a mysterious wisdom, it still provides reason, meaning and purpose to all God's works. All God's activity is thought out by him with correctness and completeness, it is an intelligent, reliable and liberating activity. Barth criticizes the Protestant scholastic tradition, which viewed the wisdom of God as a part of his knowledge. The specific feature of wisdom is, according to Barth, that it gives firmness and orientation to God's deeds. It is closely related to the biblical concept of providence, by which God governs the world. God's wisdom is the meaning of the world.<sup>35</sup>

By an exposition of biblical materials concerning God's wisdom, Barth makes it clear that one cannot reverse the thesis: it is not the immanent meaning of the world, as with the Stoa, that is identical with God's wisdom. According to Barth, the Old Testament wisdom literature emphasizes that God's wisdom is not directly

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<sup>33</sup> CD II/1, 411-422 (KD II/1, 462-475).

<sup>34</sup> CD II/1, 422-424 (KD II/1, 475-478).

<sup>35</sup> CD II/1, 424-427 (KD II/1, 478-481). On occasion of Barth's criticism of older scholasticism's dealing with God's wisdom (*sapientia*) in the context of God's intellect or knowledge (*scientia*), I point to a structural, systematic difficulty. As we have seen in chapter 7, Reformed Orthodoxy shapes its exposition of the second group of divine attributes on the model of the three "faculties" (intellect, will, power) of God's life. Within this basic structure, biblical terms and conceptions are incorporated. This leads to the somewhat artificial subsumption of "wisdom" under "knowledge." In fact, the "knowledge of God" comprises all God's cognitive or intellective capacities; in the meanwhile, most Reformed orthodox acknowledge a "volitional" or "practical" component in God's wisdom. Barth does not follow the common Reformed scholastic pattern of classification; he is therefore free to place God's wisdom in a separate position. The remarkable fact is that, in turn, Barth's placement of God's knowledge (*scientia*) within his discussion of God's omnipotence is less than self-evident. One way or another, the chosen pattern of classification leads to some inconveniences.

disclosed by his creatures, but is only found in God's dealings with Israel that are directed at the final revelation in Jesus Christ. From this perspective, Barth returns to the patience of God. Just as God's patience culminated in Christ, so the purpose and meaning of God's works are fully manifest in him who has become wisdom from God for us (1 Corinthians 1:30).<sup>36</sup>

### **12.3. Perfections of Divine Freedom**

In the previous sections, we have seen how Barth coupled all perfections of divine love to a corresponding perfection of freedom. This expressed the unity of divine being, and emphasized the divine nature of God's love. Subsequently, Barth discusses the second group of God's perfections, explicating God's freedom. Again, God's freedom cannot be separated from his love: the divine character of God's freedom lies in its loving purpose and operation. Three perfections express the freedom, majesty and sovereignty of God: his unity, constancy and eternity. Three further perfections indicate that God's freedom is not accidental and arbitrary, but consciously self-determined: omnipresence, omnipotence and glory. The first trio answers the question:

What are the specific determinations in which the love of God attested in the Bible becomes event and reality in the freedom of God, so that we can and must see these determinations as those of the divine being?

The second trio answers the question:

What are the specific determinations of this love itself in so far as it is the love which becomes event and reality in His freedom, so that we can and must understand these determinations as those of the divine being?

Barth claims that this order at best reflects the biblical revelation of God.<sup>37</sup>

#### **12.3.1. Unity and Omnipresence**

Unity is, according to Barth, a term in which all the perfections of divine love and freedom, and thus of God's essence, can be summarized. The fact that God is one distinguishes God from all other beings and explains his superiority.<sup>38</sup>

In the concept of unity, Barth discerns two aspects: uniqueness (*singularitas*) and simplicity (*simplicitas*). To start with: God's uniqueness does not mean that only God exists, but that God alone is God. This is a fundamental insight for Barth: any god that has more gods alongside it is not God. Towards all other beings, God is unique, because He exists in and through himself, while everything else exists by him and in dependence on him. Both the Early Church and the Reformation have upheld the confession of God's uniqueness as the fundamental article of faith. It

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<sup>36</sup> CD II/1, 427-439 (KD II/1, 482-495). In a final exposition, Barth shows how King Solomon in his wisdom was an antitype of Jesus Christ: the wisdom of God is judging and governing wisdom. Christ as the wise judge and king reigns over all our life.

<sup>37</sup> CD II/1, 440-441 (KD II/1, 495-497).

<sup>38</sup> CD II/1, 442 (KD II/1, 498).

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entails the de-divinization of the world, and the refusal of divine reverence for any creature.<sup>39</sup>

The second aspect of God's unity, his simplicity, asks for a more detailed discussion. Barth's brief definition is: God is simple, that is, "in all that He is and does, He is wholly and undividedly Himself." Barth immediately continues to emphasize that this simplicity does not exclude God's being in three Persons or having really distinct perfections. Concerning the perfections, Barth states that in specific things that God is and does, He never is apart from other things He is and does. From the totality of God's being, a specific perfection comes to the fore. Therefore, the simplicity of God is as much a fundamental statement of the doctrine of perfections as is the uniqueness of God. Indeed, the uniqueness of God is based on his simplicity. As God is simple, He "cannot without self-contradiction tolerate a second or third Almighty which is equally simple and eternal." Within the Godhead, "there is no additional or subsequent being."<sup>40</sup>

The simplicity of God is also important to avoid the idea of "combination, amalgamation or identification of God with the world." Creation and even incarnation should not be thought of in these terms. In his oneness with his creature (in Jesus Christ) and in his works of creation, reconciliation and revelation, God never ceases to be truly God and never becomes something less than God. In reviewing the traditional doctrine of simplicity, Barth discerns two elements. First, he states that this concept serves no other goal than the central aims of the trinitarian and christological dogmas, namely to express the unity of God in his works towards his creatures. Second, he sees an increasing dominancy of logical and metaphysical insights in the elaboration of this doctrine.

There could be no objection to the logic, metaphysics and mathematics of these line of thought if they had been used only to perform the service of explanation – a service which is quite possible and even up to a point necessary to render in this way. But we cannot read these things in the older writers with unmixed joy. The trouble is that they are put at the head, and not, as we are trying to do here, in their proper turn.

Barth points to the (semi)nominalist tendency in the scholastic doctrine of divine attributes: the fundamental concept of simplicity excludes the acceptance of real diversity of God's perfections (see also section 12.1 above). His own intention is to maintain the concept of simplicity, but to give it a more biblical and Christian basis.<sup>41</sup>

The simplicity of God is a designation of God's freedom. All other things that are one and unique are only relatively unique as an *exemplar* of a *genus*, so that they can in some respect be considered as composite. God is absolutely unique because He is absolutely simple, without any composition. God's unity equals his freedom,

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<sup>39</sup> CD II/1, 442-445 (KD II/1, 498-501). In this context, Barth makes one of his rare allusions to the political situation of his days: "It was on the truth of the sentence that God is One that the 'Third Reich' of Adolf Hitler made shipwreck." The original German text is stated in the future tense; apparently the English edition was adapted to the later course of events.

<sup>40</sup> CD II/1, 445-446 (KD II/1, 501-502).

<sup>41</sup> CD II/1, 446-447 (KD II/1, 502-503).

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his aseity, and his divinity. Barth states that the order of subject and predicate in this sentence cannot be reversed: we cannot start with our conceptions of unity or simplicity and subsequently ascribe them to God. God's uniqueness and simplicity are not known through an abstract, human concept of unity or simplicity, but by the encounter between God and man, brought about by God. In this event, "God's 'I' meet man's 'Thou' and becomes the reality and determination of its existence." In the encounter, God is known as incomparable (unique) and undivided (simple) in his love towards man.<sup>42</sup>

In an anticipation of his doctrine of election, Barth connects the unique event of encounter with the event of election: God's choosing his people is the ground for the confession of his uniqueness and simplicity. The *locus classicus* Deuteronomy 6:4 is thus placed within the election framework which the first chapters of Deuteronomy reflect. Biblical monotheism is about the God who discloses and gives himself to his people. The often praised "Jewish monotheism" deviates from the Old Testament in denying that God's openness and self-disclosure is rooted in his existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible is not concerned with a theoretically justified monotheism but with the actual identification of the Father of Jesus Christ as the one and only God ("henotheism"). The confession of the one God depends on the acceptance of Jesus the Messiah, in both his self-distinction and identification with God his Father.<sup>43</sup>

Barth follows a similar procedure to explain further the concept of *simplicity*. The proper sense of simplicity is revealed in the factuality of God's dealings with his creatures. Barth regrets the scholastic elaboration of the concept along logical, metaphysical and mathematical lines: it tends to separate God's simplicity from the fullness of his life and the concreteness of his actions. Fortunately, the Protestant scholastics filled the concept of simplicity also with Scriptural materials, but the auxiliary lines threaten the biblical contents.

Who and what is God Himself? We must not now go back and give an answer which declares what we think the conception of God ought to be, what God must be to be God according to all necessary and ideas in respect of the concept of deity.<sup>44</sup>

When God's simplicity is understood from the biblical account of God's deeds, it has the main emphasis of trustworthiness, truthfulness, fidelity and thus finds its final focus in Jesus Christ. "God's simplicity reveals itself and consists in His continual self-confirmation in His speech and action; His continual self-confession and self-attestation in His identity."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> CD II/1, 447-450 (KD II/1, 503-507).

<sup>43</sup> CD II/1, 450-457 (KD II/1, 507-514).

<sup>44</sup> CD II/1, 458 (KD II/1, 515). Here Barth seems to dismiss the enterprise of "conceptual analysis" that examines the presuppositions and implications of (biblical or) theological statements. Remarkably, he immediately continues to point out that simplicity is a presupposition or postulate of creation, reconciliation and redemption as the acts of the gracious and holy, merciful and righteous, patient and wise God.

<sup>45</sup> CD II/1, 457-461 (KD II/1, 514-518).

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In Barth's exposition, the *omnipresence* of God does not only follow *on* his unity, but even follows *from* it: because God is unique and simple, He is omnipresent. Omnipresence is a determination of God's freedom. As the sovereign Lord, his presence is the ground for the existence of all other beings. God's presence includes his lordship and glory. Therefore, Barth states that for God nothing exists which is only remote. There is in God himself remoteness and proximity, and these are one. In God's creation, there is remoteness and proximity, but neither of them can ever be without God's presence. In creatures, remoteness or proximity is grounded on their multiplicity, and thus creates real distance. Since God is not multiple but simple, He is above the antithesis between distance and nearness. Love means the unity of distance and nearness. Barth argues that this unity of distance and nearness is not only apparent in God's dealings with his creatures, but is grounded in God's existence as Father, Son, and Spirit. In himself, God "is not only existent. He is co-existent." This is the reason why He can be co-existent with other beings. Thus God's presence in the world does not make him dependent on the world: He has a perfect loving presence in his own being. In retrospect, Barth designates all previously discussed perfections of divine love as qualifications of God's omnipresence.<sup>46</sup>

An important criticism is passed by Barth on the traditional, scholastic parallel between God's omnipresence and eternity. These perfections are often dealt with as specifications of God's infinity: omnipresence is understood as infinity related to space, eternity as infinity related to time. Barth rejects this approach as an attempt to construct a doctrine of God along the lines (albeit in the form of negation) of our created existence. In his view, the biblical revelation places omnipresence and eternity in different directions. Omnipresence is a perfection of God's love, eternity a perfection of God's freedom. Time, the correlate of eternity, "is the form of creation in virtue of which it is definitely fitted to be a theatre for the acts of divine freedom." Because God is eternal and creation is temporal, God can act as the free and sovereign Lord. In opposition, "space is the form of creation in virtue of which, as a reality distinct from God, it can be the object of his love." This spatiality of creation is required in order that God be near to creation in his loving presence: if creation were omnipresent itself, it would exclude the omnipresence of God.<sup>47</sup>

A more incisive objection against the scholastic tradition is that it utilizes "infinity" as a negative concept, contrasting it with our created, finite existence. By this procedure, God comes to stand over against creation, infinity against finitude. Such a conception can help man to maintain himself against a God who has nothing to do with space and time. The biblical God, however, is above the difference between finite and infinite, between time and timelessness, between spatiality and non-spatiality. Barth states:

there is no reason why God in His essence should not be finite in the same perfect way as He is infinite. But to be finite in this perfect way necessarily means in such a way that His finitude does not prevent His being infinite, and therefore that while

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<sup>46</sup> CD II/1, 461-464 (KD II/1, 518-521).

<sup>47</sup> CD II/1, 464-465 (KD II/1, 521-523).

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finitude is that which limits and is a determination of His creation, it does not involve any limitation or defect in God.<sup>48</sup>

We can see in biblical history how God posits time and space in his actions, and this is the form in which God is revealed as the living and loving God. Without time and space, there is no life and love of God! But, Barth continues with an important substantial-methodological rule, "God does not do anything which in his own way He does not have and is not in Himself." God's works reflect God's being. Indeed, God is infinite, in that He has no external basis and goal, standard and law. But in his infinity, He is also finite, since in his love He is his own basis and goal, standard and law.<sup>49</sup>

Barth elaborates the concept of God's omnipresence by stating that God has his own place beyond all places. Internally, God has the togetherness of Father, Son and Spirit at the distance posited by the distinction that exists in the essence of God. Externally, God has the togetherness at a distance of Creator and creature. In both cases, the togetherness is different from identity. The interpretation of omnipresence as non-spatiality leads to the identification of God and creation. To the contrary, the combination of nearness and distance presupposes that God is spatial in his own way, that He has his own place or space. When all created spatiality is made relative by the presence of God, this does not imply the denial but the absolutizing of God's space and presence.<sup>50</sup>

God's spatiality is given with God's being. God's spatiality is never separated from his essence or dependent on something else. His spatial presence is never out of his control since He is Lord over all spaces. He is everywhere truly and equally. Barth deals with traditional formulas expressing the omnipresence of God, and he rejects the "play" with the words "everywhere" and "nowhere." The statements explaining God's being everywhere may never lead to the conclusion that God is nowhere. The concrete revelation of God's being in his deeds obliges us to assume the spatiality of his being.<sup>51</sup>

The same concreteness of revelation invites us to distinguish particular ways of God's being present. The dynamics of God's life and love renders it impossible to understand God's omnipresence as "indifferent," uniform presence. Precisely the variety of God's being present with his creation makes up the perfection of divine omnipresence. The first and foundational instance of God's presence is his

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<sup>48</sup> Anticipating on further evaluation, I notice that in this context Barth (1) shows no awareness of the reservations and qualifications of scholastic theology itself around the ascription of infinity to God; (2) fails to notice that the traditional concept of the infinity of God cannot be ascribed to "just any entity"; (3) does not explain what it might mean for God to be both finite and infinite.

<sup>49</sup> CD II/1, 465-468 (KD II/1, 523-527).

<sup>50</sup> CD II/1, 468-470 (KD II/1, 527-529).

<sup>51</sup> CD II/1, 470-472 (KD II/1, 529-531). While Barth's objection against the "play" with "everywhere" and "nowhere" is positively speaking quite instructive, its polemical application against scholastic thought seems to miss sufficient ground: the *dictum* to which Barth opposes, does not squarely state that God is *ubique* and *nusquam*, but compares the mode of God's omnipresence to a circle, the center of which is "everywhere," the periphery "nowhere."

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exclusive, trinitarian self-presence. Barth refers to the biblical speech of the throne of God, which in the final analysis he identifies as the Trinity. Second, God is present in all his creation. Here the inner love of God turns outwards. God created a space different from his own space, a space in which He is present in “both distinction and relationship.” No creature is excluded from this divine presence, although the general presence of God can be in wrath or in grace, in revelation or in hiddenness. The third form of God’s presence is his special presence in his Word of revelation and reconciliation. In fact, this special presence is the ground for God’s general presence in the world, not only noetically, but also ontologically. In the Old Testament, the special presence of God takes shape in holy places and theophanies. The New Testament shows on the one hand a relativizing of the local presence of God, and on the other hand a concentration of God’s presence in Jesus Christ. The fourth and final form of divine presence is in turn basic and constituent for the special presence mentioned before: it is the dwelling of God in Jesus Christ. Barth refers to the traditional distinction between the gift of adoption (*gratia adoptionis*) and the gift of union (*gratia unionis*): in Jesus Christ, God is united with man in a special way, and our “adoption” into God’s special presence is based on God’s union with man in Christ. The implication of this union is that God not only provides created space for his creature, but even has raised man to his own throne: man enters the space of God. So, the argument starting with God’s trinitarian being comes full circle.<sup>52</sup>

Barth concludes his exposition of divine omnipresence by reviewing the 16th till 17th century dispute between Lutheran and Reformed theologians on the ubiquity of the human nature and body of Christ. Barth sees it as an unfortunate controversy since both parties had their one-sidedness: the Reformed did not take seriously enough the connections between the forms of divine presence (in terms of the preceding paragraph: the stages of the circle), while the Lutherans did not pay enough attention to the differences between the stages of the circle. The Lutherans could not escape the suspicion of Monophysitism and did not succeed in expressing the true creatureliness of the human nature of Christ. The Reformed, on the other hand, seemed to destroy the unity of the Person of Jesus Christ by sharply distinguishing between his divine and human nature. Barth acknowledges that the dispute could not satisfactorily be settled on the presuppositions of either side. He claims that his model of a special spatiality of God can help to overcome the problem.

In virtue of the proper and original presence of God on His supra-heavenly throne, in which in Jesus Christ even human nature in its corporality has a part, there does exist also a relative but real presence in the world ..., not only of God, but also of man united with God in Jesus Christ.

So we must maintain the historical, limited spatiality of Christ’s body, but also accept that it partakes in God’s omnipresence from his throne in heaven.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> CD II/1, 472-487 (KD II/1, 531-548).

<sup>53</sup> CD II/1, 487-490 (KD II/1, 548-551). Note that Barth here speaks about “identity” of divine and human space in Christ, whereas initially he uses “unity” and “union.”

### 12.3.2. Constancy and Omnipotence

In discussing God's unity and omnipresence, it was implied that God is constantly One and almightily omnipresent. However, it must be explicated that God is constant in his freedom and almighty in his love.<sup>54</sup>

The constancy of God means that the one and omnipresent God remains the One He is. In him there is found no "deviation, diminution or addition, nor any degeneration or rejuvenation, any alteration or non-identity or discontinuity." This absence of change is not contrary to either the freedom or the love of God. Neither does it contradict the fact that God is the living One. God is in the fullness of his life that differs from everything else. God's life is a repetition and affirmation of whom He is. He is Lord over his life and cannot be subjected to change.<sup>55</sup>

Superficially, Barth's terminology seems to reflect the traditional doctrine of the immutability of God. However, he severely criticizes the elaboration of the concept of immutability by the Protestant scholastics, notably Amandus Polanus. Their original failure, according to Barth, is that they argue the immutability of God from the general concept of the *ipsum ens* or *actus simplicissimus* or *primum movens*. A more suitable insight is expressed by Augustine: God is "beyond the antithesis between rest and movement." Still, Augustine limits the movement and change in God to his outward works, while his inner being is in complete rest. Barth owes his own concept to the 19th century theologian I.A. Dorner.<sup>56</sup>

The decisive starting point for speaking about God's constancy is the right order of subject and predicate. "God is unchangeable" may not be inverted to "the unchangeable is God." The immutability of God *can* in fact be recognized from the content of God's self-revelation. The proper understanding of immutability is that God always, at every place, is what He is continually and self-consistently, in eternal actuality. God never is potentially or intermittently. The focus of his constancy is that He will never contradict himself and that He maintains himself in love and freedom. God is constant in his knowing, willing and acting and therefore in his person. This constancy includes a holy mutability and sincere engagement. God's constancy is not *despite*, but *in* his changes. In this line, Barth defends a literal interpretation of the so-called biblical anthropomorphisms that ascribe change or even repentance to God. There is a real movement from anger to love or vice versa.<sup>57</sup>

From the basic understanding of God's constancy follow important insights concerning the relation between God and his creation. God is not necessitated to create the world, nor does the existence of creatures threaten his immutable being. His relation to the world consists of love and freedom, and thus is real and vivid. Barth rejects both a monistic and a dualistic interpretation of this relationship. Monism may lead either to a denial of a real significance of the created world, or to the claim that all changes in the world are changes within God. Dualism, in turn, has also two possible emphases: either the changeable world is left lonesome by the unchangeable God, or the world is seen as independent without need of help

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<sup>54</sup> CD II/1, 490-491 (KD II/1, 551-552).

<sup>55</sup> CD II/1, 491-492 (KD II/1, 552-553). Note that again Barth uses the term "repetition" to indicate the mode in which God is who He is.

<sup>56</sup> CD II/1, 492-493 (KD II/1, 553-554).

<sup>57</sup> CD II/1, 493-499 (KD II/1, 554-561).

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by God. Although monism and dualism are opposite conceptions, they have in common the conclusion that a real encounter between God and world is impossible. By contrast, the Christian faith, including the confession of God's constancy, states that God and world have a real history of reconciliation and revelation, leading to future redemption. God is true to himself and to his plan in rescuing the world. In all God's deeds, we can discover his one fixed decision, taken once for all. He is never "faced with a *fait accompli*" by sin and evil, but always remains sovereign, constant and faithful.<sup>58</sup>

Barth relates God's constancy specifically to his dealing with contradiction and sin. Therefore, he states that God's mercy and wrath are essentially in God prior to God's concrete reaction to sin. God is not necessitated but free in that He chooses to be sinful man's God, Judge and Savior. God has specific dealings with man and enters into a partnership with him. This does not compromise God's freedom since the partnership is founded on divine election. God's work places created existence in the perspective of eternal redemption. These works of God are not without human activity. Barth points to the fact that God hears our prayers and in his freedom is, so to speak, "conditioned by the prayer of faith." Both aspects are important: God remains free, but really answers our requests. Christian patience is not resignation in face of an immutable fate, but at once submission and active expectation and hope.<sup>59</sup>

The final part of the exposition of God's constancy is devoted to the christological focus. Jesus Christ is "the meaning and secret of the history of salvation." In order to know the constant will and being of God, we have to look at Jesus Christ. God is immutably the God who became one with creature in Jesus Christ as the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. God identifies himself with Jesus even in his sufferings and death. For this reason, the fact of incarnation should not be understood as a change in God. In Barth's view, the statement by Protestant orthodoxy that the assumption of manhood by God entails no alteration is too weak. Not only is the incarnation no compromising of God's immutability, it is in fact the perfect revelation of God's real nature. The *kenosis* motive expresses the insight that being God is not God's only possibility: He can also empty himself, and unite himself with humble manhood. The cross of Golgotha is not the humiliation, but the exaltation of God. It makes clear that God has freely chosen to assume humanity, and that He has bound himself and us to this fact of salvation. It is only through the free choice of grace that the decree of God is necessary and compelling for us.<sup>60</sup>

To the latter statement, Barth attaches a brief discussion of the Reformed doctrine of God's will and decree. He mentions the distinctions within God's will that we have investigated before: the parallel set of terms *voluntas beneplaciti / occulta / antecedens / absoluta – voluntas signi / revelata / consequens / conditionalis* (see part I, section 7.3 above). Barth praises Reformed orthodoxy for interpreting God's will as an *actio interna* of the divine essence. But a problem remains in the distinction between God's *voluntas beneplaciti* and *voluntas signi*. All concrete,

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<sup>58</sup> CD II/1, 499-505 (KD II/1, 561-568).

<sup>59</sup> CD II/1, 505-512 (KD II/1, 569-576).

<sup>60</sup> CD II/1, 512-518 (KD II/1, 576-583).

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historical dynamics of God's deeds is placed under God's revealed, outward will, while the *voluntas beneplaciti* as the proper, inward will of God remains hidden. This threatens to make uncertain the binding character of God's *voluntas signi*. Moreover, the insights concerning God's will and decree are applied to the general concept of divine providence. This procedure abstracts God's complacency from its concrete content: Jesus Christ. According to Barth, the *voluntas beneplaciti* must be filled with the *voluntas signi* as the proper will of God. This warrants the vividness of God in the confession of his constancy.<sup>61</sup>

The counterpart of God's constancy is his *omnipotence*. This perfection is the only property ascribed to God in the oldest creeds. It signifies the positive side of God's freedom, distinguishing it from the freedom of an unmoved and immobile being. God's omnipotence means that He has "power over everything that He actually wills or could will. God is able to do everything which as His possibility is real possibility." We can note here that Barth uses the classical formula (see part I, section 7.4 above) with the specific emphasis that God determines what is possible. By his active power, God differs from both the merely changeable and the merely immutable. All divine predicates are proven to be truly divine by God's power to realize his grace, mercy, patience, justice etcetera.<sup>62</sup>

Just as with the other attributes, Barth insists on the right order of subject and predicate: *God is almighty*, not *power is God*. This risk of reversing subject and predicate is enormous, particularly in view of the power of God: it would make God a tyrannical demon. Both in the Creed and in Scripture, the Almighty is the Father of Jesus Christ, the God in whom we believe. The binding of God's omnipotence to his concrete revelation is enforced by a moral-judicial addition to the power concept. God has not only power (*potentia*) but also moral and legal possibility (*potestas*). God can do only *de facto* what He also can do *de jure*.<sup>63</sup>

An important point in the doctrine of God's omnipotence is the insight that God's power is not identical with and exhausted by his actual works. Omnipotence is more than omnicausality. God is first and foremost almighty in himself, and from his own being applies his power beneficially to us. Barth criticizes Protestant orthodoxy for separating the inward, trinitarian power of God and the outward power of God's works in his creation. It is correct that the scholastics discerned an internal power of God in the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, but it is dangerous to limit the doctrine of omnipotence to the other, external power of God. In 19th century theology, for instance with Schleiermacher, this led to the equation of omnipotence and omnicausality. With Schleiermacher, "the totality of finite being is the complete and exhaustive presentation of the divine causality." Here God is limited to actual reality, and his freedom as the Creator over against his creation is lost. The source of failure is, in Barth's view, the nominalist understanding of the divine attributes: the idea of simplicity leaves no room for a real multiplicity, thus making God the prisoner of his own attributes.

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<sup>61</sup> CD II/1, 518-522 (KD II/1, 583-587). Discussion of distinctions in the divine will is continued by Barth in CD II/1, 587-597 (KD II/1, 661-673).

<sup>62</sup> CD II/1, 522-524 (KD II/1, 587-589).

<sup>63</sup> CD II/1, 524-526 (KD II/1, 589-592).

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Additionally, God becomes the prisoner of the world when God is seen as merely the infinite qualifier of the finite world.<sup>64</sup>

Whereas the power of God exceeds his actual deeds, it is no empty power. It is a specific and concrete capacity by which God can live of and by himself as the triune God. All God's works are a recapitulation of his being, and the world is the scene and instrument of God's self-manifestation. It is in God that all true possibilities are actual, and thus God is the criterion of possibility: that which is impossible for God is truly impossible. It would only diminish the power of God if He could do things that are impossible for him.<sup>65</sup>

Barth's relation to traditional theology is ambivalent at this point. On the one hand, he joins the Church Fathers and the scholastics in emphasizing that God cannot do things contrary to his nature. On the other hand, he regrets their entering into discussions about the logical (im)possibilities. In line with Thomas Aquinas and other medieval scholastics, the Protestant orthodox argue that things involving a logical contradiction do not come under God's omnipotence. For instance, God cannot undo what has been done, or make a man out of an animal. Now, Barth does not claim the opposite, for example that God could make it true that  $2 \times 2 = 5$ . But he does state:

We cannot accept the idea of an absolutely possible or impossible by which even God's omnipotence is measured. On the contrary, we have to recognise that God's omnipotence is the substance of what is possible.

Against Thomas Aquinas, Barth joins the Reformed scholastic J.H. Heidegger, who had stated that the power and will of God are the only root and foundation of possibility (*omnis possibilitatis fundamentum et radix*). According to Barth, the logic of possibility, impossibility and necessity is a human, relative system. Logical truth exists merely due to God's creative will, and therefore it is relative, not absolute.

Up to and including the statement that two and two make four, these do not have their value and truth and validity in themselves or in a permanent metaphysical or logical or mathematical system which is "absolute" in itself, i.e., independently of God's freedom and will and decision. They have their value and truth and validity by the freedom and will and decision of God as the Creator of all creaturely powers.

Only God, the omnipotent Creator, can be trusted absolutely; the truth of logic can be trusted only relatively. The actual power of God sets the limits of the possible, and thereby safeguards the stability of our world. We cannot wantonly say that two and two are five since God's power prohibits that to be true. "The limit of the possible is not, therefore, self-contradiction, but contradiction of God."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> CD II/1, 526-532 (KD II/1, 592-598).

<sup>65</sup> CD II/1, 532-533 (KD II/1, 598-599).

<sup>66</sup> CD II/1, 533-538 (KD II/1, 600-605). In this connection, we find another of the scarce allusions by Barth to the Nazi regime in Germany: if we put our trust not in God but in absolutized human systems of logic, it is to be doubted whether "we can avoid the headlong plunge into a *contradictio in adjecto* which rests on the discovery of an imaginary God and

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Since God's power is power over everything, we have to examine the relation of God's omnipotence to powers outside him.

God's power is power over everything. This means the power of all powers, the power in and over them all. It does not mean the sum or the substance of all powers .... Created powers, and above all the powers of opposition and therefore of powerlessness, are always distinct from God's power.<sup>67</sup>

God allows other powers to exist "beside His power." In this context, Barth discusses the traditional distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. This is a legitimate distinction insofar as it expresses the insight that God can do more than He actually does, and that his power is free. Often, however, it has been interpreted in terms of ordinary versus extraordinary power of God (*potentia ordinaria* – *extraordinaria*). In this version, the distinction presupposes a normal, natural course of things to which the extraordinary power of God makes exception by means of miracles. For Barth, this interpretation of the distinction is dangerous. He insists on the unity of God's power: the usual, ordinary course of events is as much the result of God's miraculous power as the so-called miracles; the other way around, the "extraordinary" interventions in the "normal" course of nature, draw attention to the speciality of God's world-sustaining power. The danger of separation between ordinary and extraordinary power of God is that it coincided in late medieval nominalism with the distinction between the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus*. As we have seen before, the latter distinction is a concept most firmly opposed by Barth. He states that we must reckon with the freedom of God's power, but not with possibilities that are materially different from what God actually and ordinately does. God has finally and definitively revealed his *potentia absoluta* as *potentia ordinata* in Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup>

Barth continues his exposition of God's omnipotence by introducing God's *knowing* and *willing* as its positive characteristics. Barth explains that the freedom of God consists of his personality and spirituality (cf. section 11.3 above). The spirituality of God expresses itself in God's knowing and willing as qualifications that provide the omnipotence of God with form and color. God's power is its own master, it wills and knows itself. It is always directed by God's wisdom, and it is free since it is self-determining by knowledge and will. Barth states that God's knowledge and will shape not only his omnipotence, but even his other perfections such as unity, simplicity, holiness, grace, etc. God's *knowing* is revealed by God's speaking the truth and our hearing it. God's *scientia* awakens our *conscientia*. God's willing becomes clear from the fact that the *revelation* of God is at once the divine

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an imaginary world, the fundamental dissolution of all systems of relationships and therefore complete scepticism and anarchy in the realm of creation, *the irruption of a Third Reich of madness* [ italics added]."

<sup>67</sup> CD II/1, 538 (KD II/1, 606).

<sup>68</sup> CD II/1, 538-542 (KD II/1, 606-610). In view of the conflation of the *potentia ordinaria* – *extraordinaria* distinction with the *deus revelatus* – *absconditus* distinction, Barth regrets the fact that Martin Luther maintained the *deus absconditus* as a background concept.

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*reconciliation*. God is not a merely passive knower, but in a free, unnecessary way He acts to reconcile us with him.

There is in God supreme necessity and supreme contingency. This supreme contingency in the essence of God which is not limited by any necessity, the inscrutable concrete element in His essence, inscrutable because it never ceases or is exhausted – is His will. ... Everything that God is and does must be understood as His free will. Otherwise we may have understood all kinds of ideas or powers, fate or nature or history, but we have not understood God.

God's act of love towards us is unthinkable without his active willing.<sup>69</sup>

There are a series of qualifications on the doctrine of God's knowledge and will.<sup>70</sup> Just as with the other perfections of God, God's knowledge and will are identical to God's being.

God's knowledge does not come about in virtue of a special capacity or in a special act that might well come to an end and be discontinued. It does not first require the existence and essence of its objects and it does not come about by the indirect method of the forming of specific concepts of the objects. On the contrary, by the very fact that He is God, God knows before any objects and without any means. His being is itself also His knowledge. ... Fundamentally the same thing is to be said about God's will. God is His own will, and He wills His own being.

However, the insight that God *is* the single and complete act of his knowing and willing should not lead to a denial of the concrete multiplicity of God's knowledge and will. This risk occurs if "we think of the divine will as self-grounded and hovering in eternal regularity over all changeable materials and states," and if the concrete biblical witness about the "stirrings and movements of the divine will" is understood as mere "anthropomorphism."<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, the identity of knowledge and will with the essence of God implies their mutual identity. In this sense, it is important to see that in God there is no primacy of either his knowledge or his will.

We have to treat His knowledge seriously as knowledge and His will as will, and God Himself in the unity and also in the particular characteristics of both as spirit, as a divine person. ... He is the divine person in the fact that He is one in both, completely the knower and completely the willer: not

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<sup>69</sup> CD II/1, 542-549 (KD II/1, 610-618). Quotation from p. 548 (616).

<sup>70</sup> In connection with parts I and III of this study, we must note that throughout his discussion of the divine knowledge and will, Barth often comes to insights that strongly parallel those developed in older and newer scholasticism. The fact that Barth uses different terminology, and that he distances himself from what in his view are distortions and deviations in the older theology, should not obscure this structural similarity of positions.

<sup>71</sup> CD II/1, 549-551 (KD II/1, 618-620).

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conditioned and limited in His knowledge by His will nor in His will by His knowledge; but conditioned and limited in both ... only by Himself; in both of them freely and completely Himself. That God's knowledge is His will and His will His knowledge means, then, that His knowledge is as extensive as His will and His will as His knowledge. Everything that God knows He also wills, and everything that He wills He also knows.<sup>72</sup>

The third qualification that Barth makes to knowledge and will in common is that they are free, and superior to all their objects. For God's knowledge, this is expressed by the term *omniscience*. God knows everything, his knowledge "as omnipotent knowledge, is complete in its range, the one unique and all-embracing knowledge." Still, Barth refuses to

call it in this respect an infinite knowledge. It is, of course, infinite in its power. But although the realm of the knowable is infinite for us, for God, who knows everything, it is a finite realm, exhausted and therefore limited by His knowledge.

Barth emphasizes that there is no infinite realm of possible or non-existent things that exceeds the omniscience of God. Even evil, death and hell, though they qualify as *nihil pure negativum*, are known as such by God. No one and nothing can hide from God; his knowledge is comprehensive as well as penetrating. Parallel to omniscience, Barth uses the neologism "omnivulence." There is no thing or will outside God that conditions or hinders God's will. Again, Barth refuses to speak of an "infinite" divine will in regard to its objects: the realm of objects that can be willed, is determined and limited by God's will. An important practical insight arising from the recognition of God's all-embracing will, is that we should not give in to the illusion of an infinite human will. Moreover, Barth emphasizes that God's will, his saying Yes or No, places us before a decision: do we conform to God's will, or rebel against it? There is no neutrality in view of God's will.<sup>73</sup>

Continuing with the knowledge of God, Barth states that it has the character of *praescientia* concerning all objects outside him. The "prae" is not purely temporal, but logical: God's knowledge is superior to its objects. This superiority *includes* the temporal priority of God's knowledge. Moreover, it means that God's knowledge is independent of the things known and is the presupposition of their existence.

Everything that exists outside Him does so because it exists first and eternally in Him, in His knowledge. It is for this reason that His knowledge is not actually tied to the distinction between past, present and future being. For this reason, too, all things in all ages are foreknown by God from all eternity, or, to put it in temporal terms, always – no less and no differently in their future than in their present and past.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> CD II/1, 551-552 (KD II/1, 620-621).

<sup>73</sup> CD II/1, 552-558 (KD II/1, 621-628).

<sup>74</sup> CD II/1, 559 (KD II/1, 629).

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In discussing the famous statement of Thomas Aquinas, that God's knowledge is the *causa rerum*, Barth makes some qualifications. First, it "could not be applied to what is only possible for the simple reason that this is an object of the divine foreknowledge only as the possible and not the actual." And, Barth continues, "What is not an effect cannot have a cause." More substantially, the Thomist *dictum* cannot be applied to what is "disavowed and rejected by God," namely sin and death, since this would make God the author of sin. A final difficulty is noticed by Barth in respect to

the created wills of angels and men. If we say of them that they, too, have their cause in the divine foreknowledge and are its effects, this cannot mean that they are not real as wills ..., that they do not have freedom of choice and therefore contingency (even if a created freedom and contingency). For the contingency of being is no more set aside by the fact that God is its originator than is its necessity. Both are established by this. God knows about everything in His creation in its own way. He knows about nature as nature, spirit as spirit, the necessary as necessary, and the contingent as contingent. This correspondence between God's will and created things does not have its origin and norm in created things themselves ... but in God their Creator and therefore in His foreknowledge. The created corresponds to the divine foreknowledge, and it is only for this reason that the divine foreknowledge corresponds to the created. ... But if this is the case, it is so in such a way that as the effect it is this specific thing, determined in a particular way. It is, therefore, granted its own contingency. The created will does not lose its character as a will, and therefore its freedom (a created freedom, but freedom nevertheless) because it is an effect of this cause. On the contrary, it is given it.<sup>75</sup>

Parallel to the qualification of God's knowledge as foreknowledge is the determination of God's will as free. God's will "is not limited by anything outside itself, and is not subject to any necessity distinct from himself." As a pure will, it is "determined by itself, to act or not to act, or to act in a particular way."

In this self-determination it has no law over it. It does not have an external law in which one of its objects is necessarily in its existence or nature a motive either as a goal or as a means to other goals. Nor does it have an internal law, because it is itself God, and therefore the standard of everything divinely neces-

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<sup>75</sup> CD II/1, 559-560 (KD II/1, 629-630). If we try to identify Barth's position reviewed in the text above in terms of "Thomism" and "Scotism," he seems to oscillate between both. The understanding of the relation between God's foreknowledge and its objects in terms of eternity vs. time seems to reflect Thomas's position on God's knowledge of contingent things. In his discussion of Thomas's *dictum* of the divine foreknowledge as the *causa rerum*, however, Barth moves towards a "Scotist" position by emphasizing the crucial role of the divine will in actualizing possibilities. His argument as given in the lengthy final quotation resembles in close detail the classic Reformed position (cf. part I, section 7.2).

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sary and the substance of everything holy and just and good, so that there can be nothing divine which must first be its motive or norm. ... There is only one thing which the divine will cannot will, and that is the absurd. It cannot will to cease to be the divine will, to be God Himself.<sup>76</sup>

We cannot provide reasons for God's willing this or that, but we have to acknowledge that all why-questions are answered by an appeal to God's will. From this insight, Barth states, important systems of thought are refuted: pantheism as well as panentheism, determinism as well as indeterminism and dualism. The free and unchangeable will of God comprises all necessary and free created beings and actions.<sup>77</sup>

By a final qualification, Barth emphasizes the *propriety* of God's knowledge and will, its *truly* being knowledge and will. It is important that God *truly* knows himself and everything else. Otherwise, God would only be a simple being. The differentiation of God by means of power, knowledge and will expresses God's divine, spiritual personality. We can summarize God's revelation in the formula "God knows," thus implying God's conscious decision to act *ad extra*. This self-differentiation by knowledge entails our distinct knowledge of God. Barth discusses in some detail the older, scholastic distinctions used to characterize God's knowledge:

*scientia necessaria - scientia libera*  
*scientia speculativa - scientia practica*  
*scientia simplicis intelligentiae - scientia visionis*  
*scientia approbationis - scientia reprobationis.*

The legitimate motive in these distinctions is that they point to the real, divine, omnipotent character of God's knowledge. The distinctions also rightly maintain the difference between God who "cannot not be, and therefore cannot not be the object of His own will,"<sup>78</sup> and the world which "in accordance with His free will ... might not be, or might be in a very different form, and therefore might not be the object of His knowledge, or might be so in a very different way." The risk, however, is that they focus too much on the objects of divine knowledge. Again, this can be a legitimate interest, inasmuch the "genuine, real knowledge on the part of God ... involves conclusively the existence of its genuine and real objects." But especially in Roman Catholic theology this interest in the genuine reality of the objects tends to entail the ascription "to the creature, as the object of the divine

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<sup>76</sup> CD II/1, 560-561 (KD II/1, 631). In this quotation, we find indications of strong voluntarism (God's will is its own standard and norm) and of the insight that God's will is essentially connected to God's goodness, holiness and justice. This means that Barth's voluntarism does not imply the arbitrariness of God's will.

<sup>77</sup> CD II/1, 561-563 (KD II/1, 631-634). Barth's discussion of the deviant thought systems is rather rough. In respect to indeterminism versus determinism, he equates them with Pelagianism and fatalism respectively. This description prevents him from understanding his own position as a qualified form of indeterminism.

<sup>78</sup> The final word "will" is a misreading or mistranslation of the German text, which has "Wissens."

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knowledge, not merely a distinctiveness but an autonomy which on its side limits the divine knowledge."<sup>79</sup>

According to Barth, the illegitimate assumption of independence on behalf of created entities has led to the discussion on middle knowledge (*scientia media*; for an exposition of this issue, see part I, section 7.2 above). Barth argues that the theory of middle knowledge was not invented by the Jesuits "for its own sake," but was designed "to aid a new semi-Pelagianism to gain its necessary place and right ... in opposition to the Augustinian-Thomist teaching of the Dominicans." In Barth's view, "since the anathematising of Reformation teaching it is impossible that there should not be at least the Jesuit tendency in the Roman Catholic system." From this perspective, it is surprising or even astonishing, to note that the theory of *scientia media* was also accepted in Protestant theology by some Reformed (Gomarus, Walaeus) and even more Lutheran theologians.<sup>80</sup> In later Enlightenment theology, the foundational assumption of the *scientia media*, the independence of free creatures, was commonly accepted. Barth states that the decisive point of view of the Thomist party in the controversy is twofold: on the one hand, a strong connection between God's knowledge and God's will and decree; on the other hand, a definition of human freedom as placed *under* God. This is a correct view, but it is not strong enough. The only way to effectively defeat the doctrine of middle knowledge is to confess the utter incomparability of God and creature. Wherever the idea of an *analogia entis* is accepted (and Thomas Aquinas was the inventor of the *analogia entis*), a middle ground between God and man occurs of which the Molinist theory of *scientia media* is merely the consequence. If God and man are placed in one ontological system, the relation A – B is in principle reversible to B – A: God conditions man, but can in turn be conditioned by man. The evangelical starting point should not be in some ontology (this is the weakness of Reformed Orthodox opposition to the *scientia media*), but in Christology. Here we find the assumption of humanity by God in such a way that reversal of its order is impossible. The relation between God and man is not qualified as a *complexio oppositorum*, but as grace. When grace is the dominant word in the evangelical church, it can have no use for the *scientia media*.<sup>81</sup>

The genuineness and reality of God's *will* has to be established as well. It seems that, if all objects fall under God's power, there is no room for God's will. But again, the differentiation by which omnipotence is God's power, safeguards the decisiveness of God's will. Just as God's knowledge differentiates between good and evil, so God's will differentiates between being and non-being. Again, Barth

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<sup>79</sup> CD II/1, 563-568 (KD II/1, 634-640).

<sup>80</sup> It can be doubted whether Barth gives a satisfactory exposition of Gomarus's and Walaeus's views of *scientia media*. It could well be argued that they accepted middle knowledge in the sense of a structural moment in God's knowledge, logically situated "between" God's knowledge of mere possibilities and God's knowledge of actuality, but that they never viewed the "conditional futures" with which middle knowledge is concerned as a category that becomes actual apart from a determinate decree of God. In view of Lutheran Orthodoxy, Barth points out that the theory of *scientia media* fits well with the doctrine of election on the basis of foreseen faith (*ex praevisa fide*).

<sup>81</sup> CD II/1, 569-586 (KD II/1, 640-661).

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mentions some scholastic distinctions for God's will (cf. the exposition in part I, section 7.3 above):

*voluntas naturalis/necessaria - voluntas libera;*

*voluntas occulta/beneplaciti - voluntas revelata/signi;*

*voluntas absoluta/antecedens/efficiens/efficax - voluntas conditionalis/consequens/permittens/inefficax.*

In these distinctions, Barth sees the attempt to maintain both the omnipotence and the genuineness of God's will. Moreover, several of these distinctions point to the multiplicity and flexibility of the will of God, and Barth states that this multiplicity should be interpreted as *real*. God relates to different objects in different ways. Barth objects, however, to a tendency to separate the hidden and the revealed will of God:

We therefore correct the theologoumenon of our fathers by finding in both the *voluntas occulta* or *beneplaciti* on the one hand and the *voluntas revelata* or *signi* on the other the one will of God, the one God who wills, the will of the divine love. This is in itself both God's hidden and His revealed will, so that God can both possess it for Himself from eternity to eternity and also in time reveal it to a knowledge distinct from His own. This revelation is the divine arrangement for our benefit. But in this arrangement we have to do with nothing less than with God Himself.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, Barth states that the correct view of God's omnipotence as knowing and willing, and thus personal, is indispensable for rightly determining the relation between Creator and creatures. Moreover, it substantiates the power of God as the power of his love. When the source of our recognition of God's power, knowledge and will is found in God's revelation and reconciliation, we realize that all God's power is laid in one hand, the hand of Jesus Christ. In considering God's omnipotence, we cannot move from the general to the particular, but we have to start with the particular and then come to the general. The God of Israel shows his power in the universe – that is the continuing message of the Old Testament. The definitive demonstration of God's power is found in one person, the Logos of God, Jesus Christ. The identification of God's omnipotence and Jesus Christ implies two insights: first, Jesus Christ is at once the power and the wisdom of God, so that God's power can never be blind and brute; second, the power of God can only be understood as the power of the Crucified.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> CD II/1, 592 (KD II/1, 668). We can notice a significant shift of the categories in which the *revelata - occulta* distinction is understood: in scholastic theology, it occurred as a device for solving exegetical difficulties concerning on the one hands texts that affirm God's willing the salvation of all, and on the other hand texts claiming that God wills salvation only for the elected and faithful. In Barth's theology, the distinction is understood in terms of his general hermeneutical dialectic of revelation and hiddenness.

<sup>83</sup> CD II/1, 597-607 (KD II/1, 673-685). Concerning the manifestation of God's power in the Cross of Jesus Christ, we find in Barth's statements no indication of the idea of "power as powerlessness" which is rather influential in post-Hegelian theology. The point Barth makes here is that through the crucifixion and resurrection, God ultimately realizes his plan of

### 12.3.3. Eternity and Glory

In a final consideration of God's freedom, Barth examines the fact that in himself and in all his works God is eternal and therefore glorious.

God's *eternity* is a qualification of "the sovereignty and majesty of his love in so far as this has and is itself pure duration." In God's duration, "beginning, succession and end are not three but one, not separate as a first, second and a third occasion, but one simultaneous occasion as beginning, middle and end." That God is eternal means that God is simultaneous, i.e., beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction. Eternity does not apply to creation: in created beings past, present and future are distinct or even opposed. As pure duration, God's eternity is not the infinite extension of time, but its antithesis. Barth points to the fact that eternity is the principle of God's constancy: since time has no power over God, He is free to be constant. In addition to his prior statement that time is the formal principle of God's free outward action, Barth states that eternity is the formal principle of God's inward freedom. Barth argues that eternity is the source of the deity of God: "According to the Bible it is not being as such, but that which endures, duration itself, which is the divine."<sup>84</sup>

It follows from this fundamental definition that eternity cannot merely and primarily be viewed as opposed to time. Since God is not an abstract being, but the living Lord, He "has" in his own way beginning, succession and end, without their "having" him. Barth refers positively to the famous definition by Boethius of eternity as *interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*. Barth even affirms the abbreviation of this definition to the divine *nunc*. But when the "possession of life" is simplified into a *nunc stans* (a "standing now"), Barth objects that on God's part this includes a *fluere* ("fleeting"). "The theological concept of eternity must be set free from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time." God is, according to Barth, "the prototype and foreordination of time." God has time because and as He has eternity. Time does not exist only since the creation of the world, but in all eternity, God is and has time for us. Because time and space are the forms of God's being for us and our world, they must be pre-existent in God's eternity and omnipresence. The decisive theological statement is that eternity is *God's* time and therefore *real* time. In the interpretation of eternity, the main emphasis must be laid on *sempiternitas*.

It is real duration, real beginning, continuation and ending. If all this exists in an imperfect and intrinsically unintelligible way, yet with relative reality in the form of created time, as the form of our existence and our world, the reason for this is that it has its basis ... in the decree of the will of God in creation and providence. The presupposition of this basis in God Himself is His eternity. As the eternal One who as such has and Himself is

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salvation.

<sup>84</sup> CD II/1, 608-610 (KD II/1, 685-688). The final quotation seems to violate Barth's rule that no abstract concept as such is divine, but only God himself. His later discussion of God's eternity makes it clear that the concept of eternity is to be substantiated from God's self-revelation, but this initial statement does not clearly anticipate that insight.

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absolutely real time, He gives us the relatively but in this way genuinely real time proper to us.

God's eternity is coexistent with time, but this is a coexistence which we cannot reverse.<sup>85</sup>

The right view of eternity is gained from the insight that we are speaking about the eternity of the triune God. The intra-trinitarian relations of Father, Son and Spirit reveal that God is in himself beginning, succession and end. In the unity of God, there is a before and after of divine order and divine temporality. Similarly, the incarnation of the Son of God makes it clear that the eternal God assumes our time and becomes temporal. God is timeless in that He lacks the defects of our time. But at once, He is temporal in that time is not alien to him but can be taken to him and lifted up to the time of eternal life. Barth is eager to emphasize that God's eternity is not identical with the immanent unity or continuity or purpose of created time: it is God's own time.<sup>86</sup>

Barth elaborates the concept of eternity by the triad pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality. This is an attempt to reflect the positive connection of eternity and time in the Bible. These three ways of God's relating to time are the presupposition of God's governing the world and fulfilling his salvation purpose. The triple truth of God's pre-, supra-, and post-temporality is needed to articulate the Christian message.<sup>87</sup>

God is pre-temporal: his priority does not only consist of the eminence of his being, but also of his "physical" precedence. Before we and all other things existed, God exists. Before all time, God was in himself, and therefore He is independent and without presupposition. Our election in Jesus Christ is grounded in God's eternal, pre-temporal love.<sup>88</sup>

By God's supra-temporality, Barth understands eternity as being with and in our time. Eternity is not without time, but causes itself to be accompanied by time. By its inherent alteration, time becomes separated from its own beginning, but by its being embraced by eternity, it is never separated from God's beginning. In his eternity, God bears and keeps and preserves our time. Every moment of time is in direct contact with God's eternity. This is not to deny, however, that God makes a real progress through our time: by the death of Jesus Christ, the old era is removed to the past, and by his resurrection, the new era is pronounced as the future. We live in two spheres at once: the sphere of our past and the sphere of God's future.

The consequence is that the contemporaneity of our being in both spheres is always to be understood as non-contemporaneity, as the overcoming and dissolution of the past by the future, not as an *equilibrium* or see-saw between the right and validity of the two realms. Luther's *simul justus et peccator* cannot and should not, in Luther's sense, be taken to mean that the totality with which we are righteous and sinners involves an equal and equally serious determination of our existence. ...

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<sup>85</sup> CD II/1, 610-615 (KD II/1, 688-693).

<sup>86</sup> CD II/1, 615-619 (KD II/1, 693-698).

<sup>87</sup> CD II/1, 619-621 (KD II/1, 698-700).

<sup>88</sup> CD II/1, 621-623 (KD II/1, 700-702).

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Our sin has been, and our righteousness comes. God affirms our righteousness as He negates our sin. We are at the same time righteous and sinners only under this determination, with this preponderance, and with this decision.<sup>89</sup>

The supra-temporality of God must be understood from the middle point of time, Jesus Christ, in which the turn from past to future has come about.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, God is post-temporal. When all time has ended, God is still there. God is goal and end of everything. All movement does not vanish into the great void, but is fulfilled in God's perfection. Barth here refers to the biblical Sabbath motif. In the end, God will be manifest as the One He was from the beginning.<sup>91</sup>

Barth concludes his exposition of the three forms of eternity by an excursus on the history of the concept. He shows that different phases of the tradition were one-sided in emphasizing either the pre-temporal (the Reformation of the 16th century) or the supra-temporal (18th and 19th century theology) or the post-temporal (the Blumhardts, religious socialism) character of God's eternity. Barth regrets his own naivety in *Romans II*, where he joined the exaggerated emphasis on the eschatological (post-temporal) character of salvation. He notices that while fighting for a strictly eschatological understanding of the gospel, he had in fact succumbed to an "existentialist," supra-temporal interpretation. Over against this one-sidedness, Barth argues that pre-, supra-, and post-temporality are equally God's eternity and therefore the living God himself. There is a symmetry among them that "is not to be reduced to a geometrical formula," but one that implies an "irreversible direction." Each of the three has a share of the others. With a trinitarian term, we can and must speak of *perichoresis*. Thus, we have to honor both the distinction and the unity of God's eternal life.<sup>92</sup>

The final perfection of God is his *glory*. The confession of God's eternal duration is completed by saying that God is gloriously eternal.

God's glory is His dignity and right not only to maintain, but to prove and declare, to denote and almost as it were to make Himself conspicuous and everywhere apparent as the One He is. ... It is further His dignity and right to create recognition for Himself.

God's glory is not only his right but his power to do all this. "To sum up, God's glory is God himself in the truth and capacity and act in which He makes himself known as God." In this triumphal glory, God is at once the supreme love.<sup>93</sup>

From a brief analysis of the biblical terms *doxa* and *kabod*, Barth distils three aspects of God's glory: God is glorious in himself, He makes us to know his glory, and He makes us participants of his glory. In interacting with the theological

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<sup>89</sup> CD II/1, 627 (KD II/1, 707).

<sup>90</sup> CD II/1, 623-629 (KD II/1, 702-709).

<sup>91</sup> CD II/1, 629-631 (KD II/1, 709-711).

<sup>92</sup> CD II/1, 631-640 (KD II/1, 711-722).

<sup>93</sup> CD II/1, 640-641 (KD II/1, 722-723).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

tradition, Barth comes to a more precise description comprising four aspects of God's glory as the manifestation of his perfections:

- God's being "is His fullness and self-sufficiency," and distinct from every other being, because it is *God's* being.
- God is the "radiance of light" that reaches all other beings and permeates them.
- In the radiance of God's light, we meet "God's face," "God in person."
- God's glory incites the echo of joy and glorification by his creatures.<sup>94</sup>

Still, the questioning continues: what is the shape and form in which God reveals his glory? To what extent and in what way does God convince and persuade us? The answer is: God's glory is his beauty. By God's beauty, He convinces and persuades us, He "gives pleasure, creates desire and rewards with enjoyment." God's glory means that God is "pleasant, desirable, full of enjoyment." Barth realizes that the usage of the concept of beauty reaches back to pre-Reformation spirituality and thus occur in the context of unacceptable Platonism. Among Protestants, it causes hesitation, which is enforced by the threat of aestheticism. Barth argues that aestheticism is no more dangerous than any other -ism. Although the beauty of God can never be a leading concept of doctrine, it still has biblical justification. By his grace and love, God is worthy of love. "In and with this quality it speaks and conquers, persuades and convinces ... with its peculiar power and characteristic of giving pleasure, awaking desire, and creating enjoyment." There is a legitimate use for the idea of *fruitio Dei*: the enjoyment of God as the ultimate goal of man. Holy Scripture itself speaks about "joy in God." The beauty of God is the objective basis of our joy in God.<sup>95</sup>

From the beauty of God follows the beauty of theology. Barth provides some examples to make it clear that the beauty of theology is grounded in God's being: the relation between God's essence and his perfections, the triunity of God, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ including his humiliation and crucifixion. The point of all these examples is the combination of identity and difference, rest and movement in God. A theology that reflects the beauty of God in these respects is itself beautiful. In parentheses, Barth claims that a theology of the beauty of God is a legitimate alternative to natural theology: it is God's eternal beauty that attracts man.<sup>96</sup>

The glory that God has in himself is manifested in his glorious works. The beginning, centre and goal of these works is Jesus Christ. The manifestation of God's glory aims at our glorifying him. Jesus Christ is not only the glory of God, but also the first among the creatures that glorify God. Through him, we become new creatures who respond gratefully to God. Our honoring and praising God is not due to us, but depends on God's work in us. Otherwise, our praises would be false notes. The ultimate ground of our praise is God's permission, his grace and good-pleasure. The concrete form of glorifying God is to follow and obey him. In

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<sup>94</sup> CD II/1, 645-649 (KD II/1, 728-732) Barth mentions Petrus van Mastricht as the source of these insights.

<sup>95</sup> CD II/1, 649-656 (KD II/1, 732-740).

<sup>96</sup> CD II/1, 656-666 (KD II/1, 740-752).

### *Doctrine of God: Perfections*

our self-offering, we enter into conformity with God. The present shape of our participation in God's glory is the form of Church, proclamation, faith, confession, theology, prayer. Under these forms, the glory of God is partly hidden; its fullness is to be found in Jesus Christ. But the Church is the anticipatory presence of the glory of God in this world, in expectation of its full manifestation.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *CD II/1, 666-677 (KD II/1, 752-764).*



## 13. Doctrine of God: Election and Command

In Barth's theology, the doctrine of election is not a marginal detail, but a central piece. In his own words (the first *Leitsatz* on election), the doctrine of election is the sum of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's treatment of the doctrine of election consists of four parts: first, the problem of a correct doctrine of the election of grace; second, the election of Jesus Christ; third, the election of the community; fourth, the election of the individual. My rendering of Barth's doctrine of election will be less detailed than the preceding parts of the doctrine of God. As will become clear, Barth sees election as an integral part of the doctrine of God; we will focus on his substantiation of this thesis, and leave aside the more specific features of a doctrine of predestination.

My review of Barth's exposition of the command of God will be even more brief, since only a few aspects are directly relevant to Barth's doctrine of God.

### 13.1. A Correct Doctrine of the Election of Grace

Barth makes it clear that, in listening to the Word of God in the preceding volumes, we heard the voice of Jesus Christ. Substantially and materially, his name was dominating everything. The doctrine of God is not about God as subject in itself, but about God in his outward relations. The relation of God to his creatures rests on a definitive decision on God's part, and therefore the doctrine of election is a substantial part of the doctrine of God. God is who He is in his inclination towards mankind, more precisely towards the people represented in Jesus Christ. All that God further is and does, is in conformity with the foundational and directive prototype and model that is realized in the decree of election.<sup>2</sup>

In God's election, we find two elements: it is an undeserved, free, sovereign deed of God, and it is an act of grace. Barth here makes the remarkable statement that the doctrine of election is originally and finally not dialectical, but undialectical. The true intention of this doctrine is to express the very essence of all good news. It should be seen as light and benefit and received with joy. Barth refers to Calvin's view of the election as a ground of comfort. The theological tradition, starting with Augustine, tended to balance election and non-election or reprobation. Still, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas maintained the conceptual difference between election and reprobation. Another line of theology, running from Isidore of Seville and Gottschalk to Zwingli and Calvin, developed a strict parallelism between election and reprobation under the common concept of predestination. To be sure, John Calvin and the Synod of Dordt placed the positive election in the foreground, although the threat of equilibrium between election and reprobation was clearly present. Barth points to the fact that Calvin insisted on the public, regular preaching of election, and takes this as an indication that the doctrine of

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<sup>1</sup> CD II/2, 3 (KD II/2, 1).

<sup>2</sup> CD II/2, 4-9 (KD II/2, 2-7).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

election should present the positive message of the gospel: a neutral, undecided principle of election and non-election cannot be preached.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the core intention of the doctrine of election is to honor God's grace, freedom and divinity, it puts a special emphasis on the justice of God. Therefore, election or predestination should not be understood as an arbitrary, capricious act of God. Barth insists, however, on making clear that this free and just act is done by the Christian God; an insight that does not allow formal, neutral conceptions. Barth defines predestination as a spontaneous *opus internum ad extra* of the triune God. Thus, it has the character of love in freedom. Barth states that love and choice mutually presuppose each other. God's choice is uncompromisingly grounded in his love. God's choice is not negative in itself. It is the rejection of his love that results in non-election, damnation. God even confronts our denial of his love with his sustained affirmation. In his act of election, God fulfils his righteousness and restores the order of justice in which we receive our place.<sup>4</sup>

After the investigation of the relation between freedom and love in God's election, Barth identifies a second preliminary question: what is the *source* or foundation of the doctrine of predestination? Since this doctrine is at once vital for the whole of the Christian faith and very vulnerable, Barth urges the maintenance of the proper criterion for all doctrine: the Word of God. He opposes this starting point to four different reasons why people uphold the doctrine of predestination: (1) because the tradition says so, (2) because this doctrine is didactically or pedagogically useful, (3) because the dual reaction to the proclamation of the gospel – acceptance and rejection – are deduced from a dual decree of God, and (4) because God in his omnipotent will has the absolute priority over the world and determines all that happens (providence), including eternal salvation or damnation (predestination). The right starting point is, according to Barth, to see God's special way through the history of his *people Israel*, directed to *Jesus Christ*. God is the electing subject, his people are the elected object. The focus of both subject and object is found in Jesus Christ: He is electing God and elect man at once. Barth states that most of the theological tradition was aware of the Christ-centered character of predestination. However, the question remains whether the central place of Christ was fully honored theologically. The impression arises that an absolute decree *behind* Jesus Christ makes the reference *to* Christ merely pastoral. An unfortunate aspect of the Synod of Dordt is that the Calvinists refused to speak about Christ as the foundation of election. This was understandable, since the Remonstrants used this term in their own way. Still, the insight that Christ is the cause and subject of election was neglected.<sup>5</sup>

As a final preliminary consideration, Barth discusses the *place* of the doctrine of election. He chooses to place election before the exposition of God's works of creation and redemption, because it is the primal and basic decision over God's being. Barth mentions six other options for the placement of the doctrine of election:

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<sup>3</sup> CD II/2, 9-18 (KD II/2, 7-18).

<sup>4</sup> CD II/2, 18-34 (KD II/2, 18-35).

<sup>5</sup> CD II/2, 34-76 (KD II/2, 36-82).

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- *between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of creation.* This is the common order in Reformed Orthodoxy. The difference with Barth's position is that in the older concepts, the doctrine of election is not decisive for the doctrine of God, and is understood as part of the *decretum absolutum*;
- *after Christology and the doctrine of creation.* This order is found in some Protestant theologians. The intrinsic connection between Christology and predestination is overlooked here;
- *related to the doctrine of reconciliation, after creation and Fall, in the context of the doctrine of the Church.* This place is mirrored in the Heidelberg Catechism, which mentions election merely in the section on the Church. The disadvantage of this view is that it focuses on the elect people, not on the electing God;
- *in the context of soteriology, immediately after Christology.* The doctrine of election is placed here by a few Reformed theologians;
- *in the context of soteriology, after the doctrine of sin and before Christology.* This is the practice of a rather broad stream of Protestant theology;
- *in the context of soteriology, as its consummation and final ground.* This order was used by Calvin in his *Institutes*.

The good intention of the last three or four options is that they recognize the soteriological content of the doctrine of election. However, the risk is to view redemption as secondary to the proper essence of God. Barth claims that the doctrine of election is decisive for both the doctrine of God and the doctrine of all God's works. Election is basic for understanding both God and man. Even sin does not break or hinder God's way: in his elective purpose, God overcomes sin step by step.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, the doctrine of election expresses God's self-determination as the gracious God. In a typical formula, Barth states that Jesus Christ is at once the basis of knowledge (*Erkenntnisgrund*) and the basis in actuality (*Realgrund*) of God's primal self-determination. God

is *Deus ipse* at the beginning of all His ways and works. From the stand-point of this beginning and this Subject these ways and works are *per se*, in all circumstances and in all forms and stages, the ways and works of grace.

Even God's enemies, sin and devil, death and hell, are servants of God's grace.<sup>7</sup>

### ***13.2. The Election of Jesus Christ***

The central place of Jesus Christ in Barth's doctrine of election is evident in the fact that he starts his exposition with the election of Christ. The *Leitsatz* of this section reveals already its most important contents:

The election of grace is the eternal beginning of all the ways and works of God in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man

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<sup>6</sup> CD II/2, 76-91 (KD II/2, 82-98).

<sup>7</sup> CD II/2, 91-93 (KD II/2, 98-100).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own glory.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Christ is central in election, because He has at once the essence of God and the essence of man. Barth's primal proof text is John 1: the *Logos* precedes all creation and is at the same time the sum of all that is. In Barth's view, the *Logos* is from the beginning of John's gospel the substitute for Jesus Christ. In Christ, God's choice and decision is free both inwardly and outwardly. This free choice is by definition a concrete decree (*decretum concretum*) and election is election of grace. Barth points out that election is a deed of the triune God. From this point of view, he identifies Jesus Christ as the *subject* and *object* of election: He is the electing God, and also elected man.<sup>9</sup>

First, then, Christ is the electing God. As the Son and the Word, Christ is primarily the internal object of the love of God, but as such He is active in God's outward election. It is in and through Christ that God predestines us. The importance of this statement for Barth is that it defeats the idea of a *deus absconditus*, whose will and decree exist outside Christ and therefore cannot be certainly known by us. The refusal of Reformed Orthodoxy to call Christ the foundation of election (see also the preceding section) leads, in Barth's view, to uncertainty and Pietism. The theological tradition knew about a predestination of the Mediator, but it left this insight unused in elaborating the doctrine of the predestination of man. Only a few theologians maintained the strong connection between election and covenant, decree of election and decree of salvation. Barth holds that Christ is more than just the mirror of election: He is its co-author. The will of God cannot be thought of apart from the will of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Second, Christ is elected man. Barth states that in virtue of his divinity, Christ is ordained and appointed Lord and Head of all others who are elected with him. He is the creature that is at once the Creator. Christ's special place means that He is not *an* elected man, but *the* elected man. Barth appeals to the great exponents of the traditional doctrine of predestination, who have all asserted that in the predestination of the man Jesus we see what predestination is always and everywhere. The fact that the man Jesus was elected to be God's Son means that the relation between God and man is defined as Fatherhood and Sonship. Christ's predestination implies for Barth his foreordination to suffering and death. God's election governs not only creation, but also fall and rejection. On the Cross, Jesus took our rejection by God upon himself. This event is on the one hand the maintenance and resolution of God's reprobation, and on the other hand the vindication of God's love for man and man's obedience to God. We partake in

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<sup>8</sup> CD II/2, 94. In German (KD II/2, 101): "Die Gnadenwahl ist der ewige Anfang aller Wege und Werke Gottes in Jesus Christus, in welchem Gott in freier Gnade sich selbst für den sündigen Menschen und den sündigen Menschen für sich selbst bestimmt und also die Verwerfung des Menschen mit allen ihren Folgen auf sich selber nimmt und den Menschen erwählt zur Teilnahme an seiner eigenen Herrlichkeit."

<sup>9</sup> CD II/2, 95-103 (KD II/2, 101-110).

<sup>10</sup> CD II/2, 103-116 (KD II/2, 111-124).

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Christ's election by our faith in him. Our election consists of our being "in him" the object of election.<sup>11</sup>

In a long excursus, Barth discusses the famous Supralapsarian-Infralapsarian controversy. His exposition is systematically important, as it provides a sharpening of his own position. The question is whether the object of God's decree of predestination is the *homo creabilis et labilis*, or the *homo creatus et lapsus*. Barth points out that both sides have much in common: both teach a predestination of individuals, an immutable decree, symmetry of election and reprobation, and a *decretum absolutum*. The Supralapsarian view places emphasis on God's virtues as determining his decree. The Infralapsarians succeed to place man concretely under God's decision and are justly reluctant in locating the origin of sin and evil. The risk on this side, however, is a separation between the economy of creation and the economy of salvation: predestination implies a new stage of God's work in the world. Barth's own attempt is to leave the common ground of Infra and Supra, and to rethink the Supralapsarian intentions from a new starting point. Not a *decretum absolutum*, but the concrete predestination of Jesus Christ precedes all God's deeds. Within God, there is the duality of Yes and No, and this duality becomes the content of the history of God and man. Barth claims that in this way he continues on a dynamic inherent to Supralapsarian thought, that secretly urged it to be liberated from the bounds of absolute, double predestination. Infralapsarianism, on the contrary, accepted two different decrees of God and took no pains to interconnect them. Here the will of God seems to be neutral. The future of the doctrine of election is in the Supralapsarian direction.<sup>12</sup>

In a second section on the will of God in the election of Jesus Christ, Barth clarifies his Christ-centered view of predestination on four systematic points.

First, he elaborates the epistemological, hermeneutical implications of his starting point. Since Jesus Christ is defined as both the subject and the object of predestination, both are principally known. The opposite position that views predestination as a *decretum absolutum*, leaves both sides obscure and unknown: the electing God can be the *deus absconditus*, and the possibly elected man cannot be identified. Barth states that the double obscurity of the strict traditional doctrine of predestination renders it unsuitable. An insight that Barth shares with Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Calvin is that the Bible proclaims God as the choosing God, who completes his electing work in Jesus Christ. However, the exact relation between Christology and doctrine of predestination is established differently. The tradition refuses to identify Christ as the substance of predestination, as Barth does: the traditional doctrine of predestination is about mankind in general and about individual persons, not about Christ. Barth appeals to the best expositors of the tradition for the insight that the Word of God cannot be understood outside Jesus Christ: all knowledge about God and man can only be found in him. The actual and burning question for Barth is: why did the older theology depart from this just and principal hermeneutical decision, and replace it by a foreign thought-scheme? The christocentric hermeneutics of the theology of the Reformation

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<sup>11</sup> CD II/2, 116-127 (KD II/2, 124-136).

<sup>12</sup> CD II/2, 127-145 (KD II/2, 136-157).

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

should have prevented the exegesis of predestinarian texts apart from Jesus Christ. One single example of a soteriological, christological framing of the doctrine of predestination is found by Barth in the *Confessio Scotica*, written by John Knox. The few voices pleading for this line have hardly been considered in the theology up to Barth's days.<sup>13</sup>

In the second place, Barth relates God's decree of predestination to what was said before about God's constancy, eternity and will (see sections 12.3.2 and 12.3.3 above). God eternally and constantly wills and maintains himself. Strictly speaking, this will of God precedes the decree of predestination. Where Barth joins the Supralapsarians in claiming that predestination is the beginning of all God's decrees and works, he takes one step further in asserting that God's eternal good-pleasure, his Yes to himself, is identical with God's good-pleasure towards us. This is the implication of the Johannine sentence that the *Logos*, Jesus Christ, was in the beginning with God. So the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace that God perfects and seals in the election of Christ is the sum, source and beginning of all God's ways.<sup>14</sup>

The third point of consideration is the duality of predestination, the *praedestinatio gemina*. Barth sees different forms of duality in God's decree of election. The first form is that election decides about God's inner essence *and* about man's existence. More concretely, in the election of Jesus Christ we find the duality of the electing God and the elected man. In Christ, God chose to have fellowship with man and He chose to give his fellowship to man. One step further, this mutual fellowship implies that God compromised himself and put himself to loss, while He put man to gain. Double predestination means salvation for man and risk for God. Put in traditional terms: God ascribes to man *election*, salvation and life; to himself He has ascribed *reprobation*, perdition and death. The negative side of this pair is that by becoming man's Partner, God exposes himself to evil and contradiction. The consequence, according to Barth, is that God exposed himself to the actual grasp of evil, submitted himself to the misery resulting from man's rebellion, made himself the object of wrath and judgment, and tasted damnation, death and hell. In passing, Barth notes that this divine act renders impossible any accusation of God's permission of the fall: He took full responsibility for this permission by bearing the guilt of sin in our place. The traditional argument that election and reprobation reflect God's justice and mercy is interpreted by Barth in

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<sup>13</sup> CD II/2, 145-155 (KD II/2, 157-168). On page 154, Barth mentions a decisive impulse given by a lecture titled "Election et foi," which was delivered by Pierre Maury at a 1936 congress in Geneva. On pages 188-194, he narrates more fully the proceedings of this Congrès international de théologie calviniste, especially the discussion aroused by an address delivered by Barth's brother Peter Barth on "Die biblische Grundlage der Praedestinationslehre bei Calvin." This discourse pleaded for an actualist understanding of election and denied a foreordination of the outcome of man's life. The subsequent discussion showed an unfruitful dilemma between a rigid and arbitrary foreordination by God and a human freedom under mere divine *praevisio*. From hindsight, Barth discovers an existentialist misunderstanding of the actual, historical character of God's election in his brother's views. The solution that maintains God's sovereignty against the slightest threat of synergism, while evading the arbitrariness of *potentia absoluta*, is Barth's own christological concentration.

<sup>14</sup> CD II/2, 155-161 (KD II/2, 168-175).

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the sense that God justly punishes our evil in his own Son, while mercifully taking the authors of evil to his bosom. Thus, justice and mercy are not divided over elected and reprobated men, but are shown in the one event of predestination. There is no threat of non-election, one can only believe in the good news of election. Rejection of man exists only as the dark background and objective correlative of man's unbelief or false belief. The positive side of double predestination is that God destines man to fellowship with God and to participation in God's brightness, blessedness and eternal life. The promise of life is only secondarily accompanied by the shadow of darkness and sin: this is the permission of evil. Evil is the impossible possibility, the impotent power. If from God's side we can expect only the good, an eternal pre-destination of man to evil cannot be thought of. Barth strongly opposes a symmetrical treatment of individual election and reprobation. God's choice for man is unambiguous and irrevocable. Barth states that the way from reprobation to election is irreversible. His version of the doctrine of double predestination stands or falls with its starting point in the election of Jesus Christ. Only a double predestination conceived in this way can be the cause of joyful obedience and thankfulness.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth issue in this context is the actual character of predestination. Here Barth continues on the fundamental statement of his doctrine of God that God's essence is in the act of his love (see section 11.3. above). The eternal will of God is a divine activity in the form of the history, encounter and decision between God and man. God is the living One, not only in himself, but also towards his creatures. Election means that God's choice is prior to our existence, but at once it is the beginning of a true encounter between God and us. Here Barth speaks of divine sovereignty and human autonomy. The theonomy has the first place, but our individuality and autonomy truly follows. The relation between the two is found in Jesus Christ: he represents God's kingdom, but at once exercises as a man the lordship of the kingdom. Seen from the election of Jesus Christ, God and man are not rivals. God's election aims at the response and prayer of man, in which man's will conforms to God's will. Chosen by God, man in turn chooses God. Barth contrasts his actualist view of predestination with the traditional interpretation of the decree as a once-for-all fixed plan. The element of truth in the latter concept is that God's acting in history is not arbitrary but steadfast. The older theology loses sight, in Barth's view, of the living nature of God's decree. Barth refers back to his discussion of God's eternity as not only before, but also above time (see section 12.3.3 above). Analogous to creation, reconciliation, justification etc., predestination must be understood as an activity, an eternal history. This does not dissolve predestination into the general stream of world-events. It is and remains *God's* activity, centered in Jesus Christ. Predestination is the secret work of God hidden in the secular history.<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, Barth substantiates the election of Jesus Christ as a revealed mystery, as identical with the eternal will of God, as double predestination, and as historical activity of God.

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<sup>15</sup> CD II/2, 161-175 (KD II/2, 175-191).

<sup>16</sup> CD II/2, 175-194 (KD II/2, 192-214), including the forementioned excursus (pages 188-194) on the *Congrès international de théologie calviniste* held at Geneva in 1936.

### **13.3. The Election of the Community**

Although Barth's chapter on the election of the community is not the most important in the context of this study, it nevertheless contains insights that affect the whole of Barth's doctrine of election as a part of his doctrine of God. The election of the community (in its two forms of Israel and Church) is seen in three relations: to Jesus Christ, to the world, and to the individual believer.

Barth states that the Holy Scripture is not immediately interested in the singular or plural number of elect, but in a mediating election of a fellowship of men in Jesus Christ. This community is the inner circle of God's redemptive work in the world, whereas the election of Christ is the outer circle. The election of the community is the link, the mirror and the medium between the election of Christ and the election of the believers. In this sense the dictum holds: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.<sup>17</sup>

God's predestination is one in Jesus Christ, and at the same time twofold: God enters into fellowship with us and undergoes his own judgment over our sins, and accepts us in his fellowship and gives us his mercy. This duality is reflected in two aspects of reacting to God's promise: the former is hearing and the latter is faith. Israel is the past form of the community of hearing, the Church is the present form of the community of believing. Both are centered around Jesus Christ who is the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the Church. The manifestation of rejection and election in Israel and Church can only be seen from the middle point, Jesus Christ. In a first excursus on Romans 9-11, Barth pleads for a coherent interpretation of these chapters, in which Israel and Church are kept properly together.<sup>18</sup>

Barth further elaborates how Israel is the mirror of God's judgment. Israel's dealings with the Messiah manifest the human incapacity, unwillingness, unworthiness and misery regarding God. In Jesus Christ, God has chosen these bad human properties for himself and has suffered under them. For the Church after Christ's death and resurrection, Israel stays the reminder of man's rebellion against God. The Jewish synagogue, in turn, is continued rebellion against the community with God established in the Church. Israel has become the mirror of God's sheer, stark judgment, and thus in its own way is a witness of God. The unfaithful Jews attest to the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ. They can attempt to deny Jesus the Messiah, but they cannot succeed in hindering God's work of salvation.<sup>19</sup>

On the other side of the mirror, the Church reflects God's mercy by which He bestows his glory to man. The Church manifests what God chooses for man: love and grace. In this function as the perfect form of the chosen community, the Church is anticipated and pre-existent in Israel. Just as there was a chosen rest for Israel including incidental believers from outside Israel, so the Church is still confronted with elect Jews witnessing that Israel as a whole is elected.<sup>20</sup>

In a long excursus, Barth attempts to incorporate the important chapters Romans 9-11 in his view of the two forms of God's community. He points out that the two opposed figures, Jacob and Esau, remain (grand)children of Abraham and therefore stand in relation to God. Esau is the prototype of rejection that always

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<sup>17</sup> CD II/2, 193-197 (KD II/2, 215-217).

<sup>18</sup> CD II/2, 197-205 (KD II/2, 217-226).

<sup>19</sup> CD II/2, 205-210 (KD II/2, 226-231).

<sup>20</sup> CD II/2, 210-213 (KD II/2, 231-235).

accompanies election. But we find a continuity of God's justice in the ongoing renewal of his mercy. The personal effect differs between Jacob and Esau, Church and Israel, but the direction of God's will and work remains the same. Human rebellion cannot hinder God's work, nor does it originate in a *decretum absolutum* to the negative; it merely serves as the shadow side of God's mercy. Barth sees a clear order between rejection and election: rejection is the passing shadow of God's one will to elect. Even the "vessels of wrath" serve to manifest the glory of God's mercy. The function of Israel as witness of God's judgment culminates in Jesus Christ, who became the vessel of wrath *par excellence*. Through Christ, the wrath over Israel is not the final word: towards the end of Romans 9, Paul appeals to God's grace which He has continuously proven to Israel and which remains attainable for the Jews in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to reflecting God's judgment and mercy, Israel and the Church also represent the hearing and believing of God's promise. The primary obligation of Israel was to hear God's Word. Israel's history shows that it constantly refused to hear. Israel's stubbornness is overcome by the final Word of God, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfilled promise. The service of the Church consists of putting faith in the fulfilled promise. Faith is briefly described by Barth as putting confidence in God's mercy as it is attested to man. By faith, the Church constitutes the completed communion between the promising God and the believing community. Again, the Church as faithful community is pre-existent in Israel.<sup>22</sup>

A third excursus on Romans 9-11 focuses on hearing and believing God's promises as fulfilled in Jesus Christ (mainly Romans 10). Since Christ is the substance of God's law, Israel's rejection of the Messiah is at once their transgression and breaking of the law. On the other hand, precisely the confession of the man Jesus Christ as the Lord is the recognition of God's lordship. By the resurrection from the dead, Jesus is revealed as the centre of God's election. The Jews who have the Scriptures must learn to understand them as kerygma, as the witness of Jesus Christ. Only then their hearing can grow into believing. But even the inexcusable, disobedient people of Israel are the people of God's election. Israel's disobedience is incredible, but it serves to glorify the faithfulness which God maintains over against all human contradiction. Again, the result of this excursus is that rejection, here viewed in the form of human disobedience, is merely incidental and marginal: God continues his main line of election.<sup>23</sup>

The final element in the duality of Israel and Church is that they represent the passing and the coming man. Again, the centre of the community of elect is Jesus Christ: in Christ, God makes man die in order that he may truly live; He makes him pass in order that he may acquire a real future. Israel shows the suffering and death that God took upon himself. This is a lasting remembrance for the Church: the suffering was overcome, death was killed. But the suffering and death of Christ imply that Israel after Christ wrongly remains in suffering and death. The "eternal Jew" in his suffering is marked as the brother of the eternal Son who conquered

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<sup>21</sup> CD II/2, 213-233 (KD II/2, 235-256).

<sup>22</sup> CD II/2, 233-240 (KD II/2, 256-264).

<sup>23</sup> CD II/2, 240-259 (KD II/2, 264-285).

death. The Church is the witness of the resultant salvation and life.<sup>24</sup>

Again, a lengthy excursus (in this case on Romans 11) concludes Barth's exposition. Barth points out that, according to Paul, in the election of the "remnant" of Israel, God maintains his faithfulness and promises towards the whole people. The fact that God remains faithful implies that even the hardening of the majority of Israel must be seen not as a final rejection, but as a condition for the salvation of the Gentiles and eventually of Israel itself. Because of the eschatological purpose of God regarding Israel, a fundamental separation of Israel and Church is impossible in the interpretation of Romans 9-11: both are interdependent. Paul's expressions "fullness of the Gentiles" and "all Israel" are emphatically not understood in the numeric sense: the former refers to the full number of those chosen by God from the Gentiles, the latter to the complete community from both Jews and Gentiles. Israel started as the example of disobedience, but it will in the end be the object of God's irrevocable mercy.<sup>25</sup>

### **13.4. The Election of the Individual**

The *Leitsatz* of Barth's chapter on the election of the individual is worth quoting in full:

The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man's own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual man consists in this: that this choice of the godless man is void; that he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision. The promise of his election determines that as a member of the community he himself shall be a bearer of its witness to the whole world. And the revelation of his rejection can only determine him to believe in Jesus Christ as the One by whom it has been borne and cancelled.<sup>26</sup>

A most remarkable feature of these sentences is the fact that they start with the negative choice: rejection. Barth claims that reflection on this negative side is the just way of relating election and individuality. The traditional doctrine of predestination has always focused on the private relationship between God and individual human beings. Barth admits that a doctrine of election is incomplete without discussing individual election, but insists on placing the salvation of the individual within the framework of God's choice for fellowship with humanity in

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<sup>24</sup> CD II/2, 259-267 (KD II/2, 286-294).

<sup>25</sup> CD II/2, 267-305 (KD II/2, 294-336). In two directions, Barth insists on the concrete, christo-centric interpretation of Paul's discourse. On the one hand, he refuses to think of Israel's re-implantation in the olive-tree as an example of a general idea of *apokatastasis pantoon* (295). On the other hand, he rejects the interpretation of God's irrevocable mercy in terms of the philosophical concepts of immutability, incomprehensibility or independence (302).

<sup>26</sup> CD II/2, 306 (KD II/2, 336).

Jesus Christ. Just as the election of Christ involves the election of the community, so the election of the community aims at individual election. In a surprising excursus (Barth's doctrine of election was published in 1942), Barth opposes Christ as Head of the community to the *Führer* ideology of his own days. Consequently, the community is not a totalitarian *Volksstaat*, but leaves room for true individuality. The emphasis on Christ and community does not diminish the importance of individual election. In Barth's view, individuality is the *conditio sine qua non* of election, but not the *ratio praedestinationis*.<sup>27</sup>

However, Barth argues that the *gracious* character of election on the level of individuals is made clear only by understanding individuality first of all in the negative mode. The election of Jesus Christ shows a negated possibility of man's existence without God, his godlessness. Through man's godlessness, his individuality turns into sinful and fatal isolation and loneliness. Man's rejection consists of his attempt to live in isolation from God, but this is an idle, impotent attempt. The good news of election is that God nullifies and overrules this human attempt: precisely the isolated and rejected man is the object of God's predestination and election. The Church as God's elect community witnesses to all men that they *are elected* in spite of their godlessness. This promise is proclaimed without reservations, and followed by the summons to listen and believe. The following sentences pointedly express Barth's view of individual election:

Election is the eternal basis, the eternal anterior reality, the eternal presupposition of the existence of those who may live as elect. ... Not every one who is elected lives as an elected man.<sup>28</sup>

This refusal does not annul God's decision; it merely manifests that the threat of rejection by God is already rendered powerless by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, personal faith in God is the manifestation of the positive choice of God. And to this personal answer man is personally summoned. One by one, people are addressed with the promise that their being is in Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Barth clearly distances himself from the classical doctrine of individual predestination, he discerns in it four important, positive aspects: (1) the relation between election and faith: faith is the realization and completion of election, (2) the emphasis on the gracious character of election and salvation: our being elected depends on no merits of our own, (3) the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints: our belief is not conditional on our fallible will but rests on God's absolute faithfulness, and (4) the theory of the *sylogismus practicus*: the insight that the life of the believers testifies to and mirrors their election. But Barth claims that these elements of truth can only function properly when the election of Jesus Christ is seen as the ground of personal election.<sup>30</sup>

The remaining sections of Barth's chapter on individual election develop these fundamental insights. Election lays a claim on every individual man and establishes a personal relation between God and man. The elect live in solidarity with

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<sup>27</sup> CD II/2, 306-314 (KD II/2, 336-345).

<sup>28</sup> CD II/2, 321 (KD II/2, 353).

<sup>29</sup> CD II/2, 314-325 (KD II/2, 345-357).

<sup>30</sup> CD II/2, 325-340 (KD II/2, 357-375).

the reprobate. There is merely a relative difference between elect and reprobate: both stand in God's service to reflect the election and rejection of Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup>

The term predestination points to man's destination: the life of the elect is directed towards Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Its concrete sphere of operation is the community of the Church. Its result is the experience of the love of God and the active participation in God's works. The believers are commanded to represent and proclaim God's promise of salvation. Doing this, they are made part of God's universal work of election. Because of God's freedom, Barth refuses to conclude the *apokatastasis pantoon*; because of God's grace, he denies the doctrine of a fixed number of elect.<sup>32</sup>

The destination of the rejected man is less directly determined. The situation is that God is *for* him, but he is *against* God. Since the rejection of man was "chosen away" by God in the real rejection of Jesus Christ, man's reprobation exists merely in virtue of the non-willing of God. Although God does not simply annihilate this reprobation, it has no autonomous existence apart from the existence of the elect. Only the elect know the reprobate: first of all in Jesus Christ; subsequently in themselves; and finally in others. In Christ, rejected man belongs to the past. He is no more than a dissolving shadow. Still, the rejected have a function as the necessary reverse side of the destination of the elect. They provide a threefold witness: first, they show the nature of the recipients of the gospel in their grotesque existence against God; second, they manifest the mode of existence that is denied and overcome by the gospel; third, they show that the existence without God is limited and has no future.<sup>33</sup>

### **13.5. The Command of God**

In the second part of KD II/2, Barth gives his first approach of Christian ethics under the heading "The command of God." In this section, I highlight the aspects that relate directly to Barth's doctrine of God.

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<sup>31</sup> CD II/2, 340-354 (KD II/2, 375-391). In a lengthy exposition (CD II/2, 354-409; KD II/2, 391-453), Barth adduces biblical material from the Old and New Testaments to prove his statement that election and rejection have their substance in Jesus Christ, and that the reprobation of man is merely a fading shadow of impossible possibility.

<sup>32</sup> CD II/2, 410-419 (KD II/2, 453-464). The excursus on pages 419-449 (KD II/2, 464-498) provides biblical arguments for the open plural of the elect, against a distinction between elect and non-elect within the Church, and for the strong connection between election and apostolate in the world.

<sup>33</sup> CD II/2, 449-458 (KD II/2, 498-508). The subsequent excursus on pages 458-506 (KD II/2, 498-563) examines the existence of the rejected in the person of Judas Iscariot. Judas's betrayal of Jesus Christ does not dissolve his apostolic function; indeed it fulfils a necessary service to our salvation. Because Christ was "handed over" to die for us, death was once for all overcome, so that no one will definitively be "handed over" by God to eternal damnation. Barth even calls Judas the *executor Novi Testamenti*: the executor of the New Testament, since he caused the death of the Testator. Despite the severe guilt that Judas took upon himself by betraying his Saviour, he remained within the circle of election. Connecting the end of Judas's life to 1 Peter 3:19 concerning the preaching of Christ to the "spirits in prison," Barth states that God wills even the rejected to become believers and thus to share in God's election.

## *Doctrine of God: Election and Command*

The first chapter of Barth's exposition explains how ethics is a task of the doctrine of God. God's command is the complement of his election: both elements together constitute the covenant of God with man. In turn, the concept of covenant is needed to complete the doctrine of God. Although there is no essential necessity for God to have this relationship with man, we cannot go behind God's free decision to do so. God has determined his own being and man's being by his choice. "Election" expresses what God wills *with* man, "command" indicates what God wills *from* man. In brief, God's command is the gospel in the form and shape of the law.<sup>34</sup> As such, ethics belongs to the doctrine of God: it examines God's claim upon our life. Parallel to the christological focus of Barth's doctrine of election is his statement that Christian ethics has to start, not generally with ideas and norms of the good, but specifically with the command as fulfilled by Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, ethics is not about human action as such, but about the holiness of Jesus Christ as both God and man, and about our praise of God's grace in Christ.<sup>36</sup> Ethics is the *theory* of God's *praxis* as the commanding God in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. The threefold focus of Christian ethics resembles God's threefold work of salvation, which in turn mirrors God's triune existence as Father, Son, and Spirit, and thus the richness and plurality of God.<sup>37</sup>

The good at which Christian ethics aims is to believe and obey God. In his gracious turning towards us in Jesus Christ, God proclaims his authority over us as creatures and sinners. This is no empty authority that merely leads to an ethics of theonomy, but it is an authority of love: in Christ, God has done the good for us, and his self-offering determines the content of God's command.<sup>38</sup> God's claim of love aims at the restoration of man to the divine likeness and to fellowship with God in eternal life. Our action must be in accordance with and following on God's works. This determines not only the direct relation between God and us, but involves the right attitude towards the people of God as well. Typical of Christian obedience is that we accept the gracious action of God as right, that we acknowledge our being God's possession and the object of his mercy, that we seek our righteousness in God alone. In summary, God commands us to believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup> Barth's further consideration of the form of the divine claim results in the statement that God's command has the character of permission, the granting of a very definite freedom. God's grace invites us to live under the law of freedom. The terms used for human, Christian life remind us of the unity of freedom and love that is constitutive of Barth's doctrine of God's perfections. The definition of the command in terms of permission and freedom does not loosen, but strengthens its seriousness and rigor. God's command is a unity of obligation and permission. The realization of this unity is not a mere ideal, nor is it at our disposal, but it is found in Jesus Christ. Through personal faith, his existence of obedience and freedom

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<sup>34</sup> CD II/2, 509-512 (KD II/2, 564-567).

<sup>35</sup> CD II/2, 518 (KD II/2, 575). Barth's rejection of a synthesis between general ethics and Christian ethics is found on pages 520-535 (KD II/2, 577-594).

<sup>36</sup> CD II/2, 537-542 (KD II/2, 597-603).

<sup>37</sup> CD II/2, 549-551 (KD II/2, 609-610).

<sup>38</sup> CD II/2, 552-565 (KD II/2, 612-628).

<sup>39</sup> CD II/2, 566-583 (KD II/2, 628-648).

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becomes ours.<sup>40</sup>

The next section deals with the command as God's *decision*. Whereas election decides primarily about God's being for us and secondarily about our existence as elect, the command of God is primarily a decision about our life which implies God's stance towards our lives. The command expresses the will of God to make us belong to him. God places us personally before him and tests our personal response of love by means of the command. The command requires true obedience and presupposes human responsibility. The "ought" question is posed not absolutely, but from the christological centre. We should not contrast the command and our response in terms of ideal vs. real: God's command in Christ is concrete and realized.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Barth states that the content of Christian ethics cannot be derived from abstract ideas of the good or the categorical imperative or the Kingdom, but must be read from the concrete revelation in Scripture. In the concrete, contingent laws and commands, God determines our lives before him. All through the different situations, God's command establishes the continuing covenant between God and man.<sup>42</sup> In the final analysis, the content of the command is identical with the content of the gospel: it rests upon the gospel and aims at the restoration of harmony between God and man, men towards each other, and inner harmony within man.<sup>43</sup>

The final part of Barth's exposition of the divine command discusses the command as the *judgment* of God. In this notion, Barth doctrine of *election* comes full circle. God's judgment is from the beginning seen in the context of his grace. There is a real judging of our lives by God, but this means that God accepts us as his possession and makes our trespasses his own. The judgment as confrontation with the command is a sign of God's love, since Jesus Christ is truly judged and sentenced to death.<sup>44</sup> God's manifestation of his judgment in Christ aims at our recognition of our guilt and at the remission of our sins. But our refusal to repent does not annul God's faithfulness towards us: we cannot maintain ourselves as trespassers. We are always sinners, but also always justified. This is not a dialectical *equilibrium*, but the latter has the preponderance over the former. Our lives have the same irreversible order as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must live from God's forgiveness, and respond with faith and holiness. Again, these predicates of humanity belong to Jesus Christ: in continuing recognition of God's judgment, we learn to receive our holiness from the Spirit of God.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> CD II/2, 583-613 /9KD II/2, 648-681).

<sup>41</sup> CD II/2, 631-661 (KD II/2, 701-737).

<sup>42</sup> CD II/2, 661-708 (KD II/2, 737-791).

<sup>43</sup> CD II/2, 708-732 (KD II/2, 791-818).

<sup>44</sup> CD II/2, 733-741 (KD II/2, 819-829).

<sup>45</sup> CD II/2, 742-781 (KD II/2, 829-875).

## 14. Analysis and Discussion

What are the determinants of Karl Barth's doctrine of God? What underlying structures and conceptions can be discerned? What is its main thrust and character? How does it fit in the whole of Barth's theology as roughly sketched out in chapter 10? What does Barth's doctrine of God reveal of his theological method?

These are the most important questions for a systematic analysis of Barth's doctrine of God. We start the discussion "outside" of the doctrine of God: the two complexes of revelation-Trinity-Christology at the front of the doctrine of God and Christology-election at the back of this doctrine. Via Barth's account of the knowability of God, we arrive at some central features of Barth's doctrine of God proper. This chapter closes with an attempt to sketch Barth's "concept of God."

### 14.1. Trinitarian Understanding of God's Being

Two substantial interpretations of Barth's doctrine of God have been provided by Eberhard Jüngel and Colin Gunton.<sup>1</sup> Both concentrate on the trinitarian qualification of Barth's conception of God, and argue for a resultant dynamics and changeability in Barth's doctrine of God.

For Jüngel, the primary significance of Barth's trinitarian starting point in the doctrine of God is hermeneutical. Barth's fundamental methodological principle is that theological thought has to follow its object. When theology reflects on the being of God, it has to follow the way that God's being itself goes. The peculiarity of Barth's doctrine of God is the statement that God's being *goes* this way, summed up in the term "revelation."

Bei diesem Versuch [scil. the analysis of Barth's doctrine of God] stellen wir uns, indem wir uns der Gotteslehre anwenden, dem hermeneutischen Problem in seiner äussersten Konzentration. Das Sein Gottes ist das hermeneutische Problem der Theologie. Genauer: dass das Sein Gottes *geht*, ist das hermeneutische Problem schlechthin. Denn nur weil das Sein Gottes geht, kommt es zur Begegnung zwischen Gott und Mensch. Und eben in dieser sich der Bewegung des Seins Gottes verdankenden Begegnung zwischen Gott und Mensch ist das hermeneutische Problem grundgelegt.<sup>2</sup>

The focal point of this "movement" is seen by Jüngel in the "encounter" of the electing God and the elected man in Jesus Christ: this event is due to God's choice.

The "movement" from God to man and from man to God is clearly present in Barth's Christology. It is a two-way movement originating in God's *Urentscheidung*,

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<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth; Eine Paraphrase*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1967); Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, new ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 10-11.

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and thus in God's own being. God's original decision to choose man is rooted in God's trinitarian existence. Barth's choice to make the doctrine of the Trinity decisive for the doctrine of God is, in Jüngel's words, "eine *hermeneutische Entscheidung von äusserster Relevanz*."<sup>3</sup> It is not merely decisive for the hermeneutical method of Barth's whole dogmatics, but also provides the very starting point of theological hermeneutics as such. The doctrine of the Trinity poses the question of theological language: to what extent is our language appropriate for speaking about God? Barth denies an inherent capacity of language to express the truth of God. Only by revelation does it become possible to speak about God: revelation conquers language and takes it into service. Genuine theological language is not an illustration, but an interpretation of God's revelation. God's revelation is, in turn, the self-interpretation of God. And the doctrine of the Trinity is, finally, the interpretation of God's self-interpretation as identical with God's being. The actuality of God's self-revelation asks for the possibility of self-revelation in God's own being.<sup>4</sup>

Since revelation is seen by Barth as a divine speech event, his trinitarian formulation of God's being is framed as the exposition of subject, predicate, and object of the sentence "God speaks" (*Deus dixit*). Or, more substantially, in revelation we have to do with the being of God in a threefold way: He is Revealer, Revelation, and Being-Revealed. This triplicity is a repetition or distinctness of God's being, not the inclusion of otherness or contradiction in God. Jüngel points to an important implication of this understanding of the Trinity: if revelation is constitutive in God's own being, there can be no opposition between a *deus absconditus* and the *deus revelatus*. Still, the revelatory character of God is not an automatic implication: it is God's free choice to reveal himself. But when God reveals himself, He becomes truly revealed to man in a historical event. In summary, Jüngel states that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity explains the sentence "*Gott entspricht sich*." The unity of identity and non-identity is here stated as an event, a movement in God.<sup>5</sup>

The preceding formulations may sound rather abstract and formal. Jüngel goes on to explain that the relational structure in God's being (the *Seinsweisen*) is qualified as "genetic relations." The unicity of these divine relations is defended against an intrinsic analogy with created relational structures. As *repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate*, the Trinity is distinct from and foundational to all outward and created relationality. Barth takes pains to describe God's being in its *Seinsweisen* as a *concrete* event, by means of the concepts of *perichoresis* and *appropriation*. *Perichoresis* is the unlimited mutual encounter of the three *Seinsweisen* by participation in each other; it constitutes the *unity* of the Three. The other concept, *appropriation*, provides the balance by pointing to the specific activity of each of the three Persons (or *Seinsweisen*). It is a hermeneutical procedure, by which the intra-trinitarian *particularity* in the unity is recognized in God's activity in the world. It aims at concretely naming God as Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 12-27.

<sup>5</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 27-37.

<sup>6</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 37-53.

## Analysis and Discussion

When Jüngel proceeds to discuss God's "being objective" (*Gegenständlich-Sein*), he makes it clear that for Barth this does not annul the previously stated subjectivity of God. God as object of our knowledge is not stated from some (classical) epistemology or philosophical realism, but is derived from his own trinitarian self-distinction. As God is distinct within himself, He chooses to make himself known to other beings, and even creates a subject to know him. Jüngel emphasizes that the "objectivity" of God must consistently be understood in "actualist" terms, since it refers to the event of divine self-revelation. This event includes the bringing about of faith as the way in which man comes to stand before God. Our knowing God can finally be described as God's knowing himself in us. The primary objectivity of God (in the intra-trinitarian relations) is executed in the secondary objectivity in which God makes us partake in his own self-knowledge. The secondary objectivity and our knowledge of God are indirect: God makes himself known by means of what is not himself. Barth calls this a sacramental reality. The central object by which God can be known, and thus the first sacrament, is the human nature of Jesus Christ. Jüngel points to the fact that Barth speaks of God's "giving us time" in his revelation and of God's being known "in repetition": the *repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate* echoes in the temporal repetition of our knowledge of God. While refusing an anthropological grounding of faith, Barth in fact provides a basis for anthropology in the event of divine self-revelation.<sup>7</sup>

The final part of Jüngel's analysis shows the results of the previous argument for Barth's proper doctrine of God. Barth utilizes the term "being" for God, but this is not a general concept of being: it is determined by the trinitarian reality of God's self-revelation. From the fact that the three *Seinsweisen* in their (genetic) relations are constitutive for God's being, Jüngel concludes that God *is* who He *becomes*. Additional proof for "becoming" as the appropriate term is the fact that God is an *active* subject: God's action decides over his own being and over the whole of reality. Barth describes God's being as act, as "durch sich selbst bewegtes Sein." The formal concept of "act" is qualified by the terms "love" and "freedom." God does not only choose for himself (freedom), but also chooses for man (love). Election is an integral and central part of Barth's doctrine of God. The doctrine of election deals with God's relation to himself and to mankind, and thus takes up the dominant motives of trinitarian and christological thinking. In Barth's doctrine of election, Jüngel discovers parallels to the doctrine of the Trinity in the *concreteness* of distinction and unity, the *prevenience* of God's eternal existence and love before our temporal existence, and the concrete historical *realization* of God's "urgeschichtliche Entscheidung." The doctrine of election thus confirms God's being involved in "becoming." This divine "becoming" is finally at stake in the "passion of God." The suffering of Jesus Christ reveals the possibility that God suffers. Here Barth distances himself from the *impassibilitas* taught by traditional theology, although he does not go so far as the "death of God." Barth understands God's suffering at once as God's action. The Son took upon him the passive suffering by active obedience. Barth speaks about divine self-distinction between Father and Son, but at the same time asserts the identification by the Father with

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<sup>7</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 54-73.

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the Son's suffering. God maintains his own being in undergoing the suffering. The "Yes" of God to himself, breaking through the "No" of death, becomes also reality in our human lives. In suffering and victory, God "entspricht sich," and brings men again "in eine Entsprechung zu Gott."<sup>8</sup>

The conclusion of Jüngel's "paraphrase" of Barth is that God's "being" must be understood as "becoming." The event of God's gracious revelation to and encounter with man is the proper source of the doctrine of God. Because of the trinitarian foundation, the independence and subjectivity of God is warranted. The trinitarian relations do not fall under a general category of relation, but are determined by their being relations in God. Moreover, this foundation legitimates the usage of historical categories for God, provided these categories are interpreted from God's self-interpretation. Although our historical categories are inappropriate, we cannot do without: to the revealed self-repetition of God corresponds his self-repetition towards us in history. In Jesus Christ, God makes his own history. God is self-related, but subsequently places himself in relation to us, and us in relation to him. This correspondence or repetition establishes the *analogia relationis*. It is an analogy that cannot be fixated, but is permanently and actively established by God's Word, the Easter word of victory.<sup>9</sup>

We can affirm Jüngel's analysis on a number of aspects:

1. *The decisive hermeneutical importance of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity.* This doctrine in turn is the interpretation of God's self-revelation, finds its centre in Jesus Christ, and has its practical focus in God's election in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of God and proper speaking about God are possible only on the basis of this trinitarian self-revelation of God. Here lies the deepest ground of Barth's rejection of natural theology. In addition, this position determines the character of theological language and the place of analogies: we cannot construct analogies starting in our reality, but have to receive the analogies created by God in his revelation.

2. *The prevenience of the reality of God before his being related to and known by us.* We have noted the prevenience of the ontic before the noetic and of the real before the possible in the section on Barth's Anselm book (see section 10.2.3). Now we can discern the same pattern in Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and of God: since our knowledge has to follow God's own being, the fundamental insight is that God has his own relational existence *before* his being related to us, and that the doctrine of the Trinity expresses the ontological possibility of the reality of God's revelation. Moreover, the subjective possibility of our knowing God is included in the trinitarian event of self-revelation, in the mode of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The relational and dynamic structure of God's being.* Jüngel makes it clear that for Barth, "God" cannot be an abstract or empty concept. The constitutive relations in God's being account for a "history of God," a divine act and event of self-distinction and self-love, which is reflected by God's "history with the world" as the act and event of outward distinction, revelation and love.

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<sup>8</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 74-103.

<sup>9</sup> Jüngel, *Gottes Sein*, 103-122.

## *Analysis and Discussion*

4. *The concreteness of God's actions and perfections.* Jüngel points out that Barth's grounding of the doctrine of the Trinity on the event of revelation, together with the doctrines of perichoresis and appropriation, leads to a concrete and "historical" understanding of God's actions and perfections. They are always seen under the aspect of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

To each of these affirmations, we add a qualification:

Ad 1. Jüngel accepts Barth's version of the doctrine of the Trinity as fundamental in both a hermeneutical and an ontological sense. What he does not examine, however, is the question whether the doctrine of the Trinity is truly the starting point for Christian theology and ontology or that there lies a consciously or unconsciously preconceived ontology behind it. Plausible as the construction of trinitarian doctrine in terms of revelation event and distinction-in-relation may be, it is not evidently the only systematically and biblically possible interpretation. It is grounded in a concept of revelation, and uses dialectical thought patterns that could at least be questioned.

Ad 2. Barth's insight in the priority of God's reality over our knowledge is an important and plausible directive for theological method. In this respect, however, two complications arise. First, Barth's theology shows a strong epistemic focus: the fundamental question for Barth is how God can be known by us. Hence the primary place of God's revelation in his theology. In Barth's elaboration of the doctrine of revelation and its ontological foundation in the doctrine of the Trinity, the epistemic interests plus the presuppositions concerning the basic relation between God and man (principal contradiction, reconciled in Jesus Christ) have considerable influence. This gives these doctrines a different function and content if compared with the classic trinitarian and christological dogmas. Second, Barth's epistemology of faith gives our subjective knowing God as well as the overcoming of the epistemic gap between God and man a place within the divine, trinitarian revelation event (as Spirit and Son respectively). In the former respect, he insists on the inextollable subjectivity of God in his revelation; in the latter respect, a dialectics of thesis – antithesis – synthesis seems to be incorporated in Barth's conception of God.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, the difficulties inherent in Barth's epistemological preoccupation seem to be reinforced in Jüngel's interpretation when Jüngel reduces, in the final analysis, the doctrine of the Trinity to the formula "*Gott entspricht Sich.*"<sup>11</sup>

Ad 3. Jüngel correctly points to "event" and "repetition" language as fundamental for Barth's understanding of God's being. However, the fact that the relations-in-distinction are constitutive for God's being does not logically imply that in a temporal sense God's being is constituted in three subsequent steps (and thus exists in "becoming"). Traditionally, temporal priority and posteriority among the three divine Persons are explicitly denied. Barth's conception as such is open to a contemporaneous, logical-dialectical interpretation. To be sure, the inclusion of the human nature of Christ and the event of incarnation in the Trinity points

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<sup>10</sup> For a similar criticism of Barth's doctrine of revelation, see Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 133-137.

<sup>11</sup> For a severe, intentionally devastating critique of Jüngel's Barth interpretation, see Ulrich Barth, "Zur Barth-Deutung Eberhard Jüngels." See footnote 6 in section 9.2 above.

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towards a historical movement within God. And Barth does not share the traditional objections to temporality and change in God. However, it is not obvious whether the “event” of revelation/incarnation and the “history” of Christ should be understood as truly *historical*, or instead form an eternalized, *dialectical* movement.

Ad 4. Even if it is true that Barth’s treatment of God’s perfections is actualist and particularist, this is not the whole story. As we have seen in the descriptive sections, a recurrent feature is that according to Barth God’s perfections include the reconciliation of contradictions. This is clear in his expositions of grace, holiness, justice, unity, omnipresence, and eternity. Along with the trinitarian and christological focus, he performs a *dialectical* movement resulting in God’s being exalted above the dilemmas of sin and obedience, punishment and forgiveness, unity and plurality, space and infinity, time and timelessness. By touching on the traditional themes and concepts and dealing with them in his own way, Barth develops a specific ontology accompanying his doctrine of God (see further section 14.5 below).

Colin Gunton’s analysis of Barth’s doctrine of God brings us a few steps ahead in these central issues. As mentioned above, he agrees with Jüngel in stating that Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is decisive for his concept of God. Moreover, he interprets Barth’s doctrine of God also in dynamic terms of “becoming.” A distinctive feature is that Gunton places Barth’s central doctrines in the context of his Anselmian program, and opposes it to the neo-classical doctrine of God advocated by Charles Hartshorne. He makes it clear that Barth’s theology has its own rationality, grounded in the revelatory event of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is pointedly an *a posteriori* rationality which, as Gunton states, deviates from both the classical and the neo-classical approach.<sup>12</sup>

Gunton does not explicitly answer the question whether there is an ontological structure underlying Barth’s theology. He defends Barth against interpreters (Von Balthasar, Pöhlmann) who see a tacit *analogia entis* behind Barth’s *analogia actionis*. The claim of Barth’s theology is that his ontology grounds in the doctrine of the Trinity. Where Barth shows an increasing use of analogy terms, he should be understood from this foundation, not from a general system of analogy.<sup>13</sup> Still, Gunton points to two aspects that raise questions. The first is Barth’s predilection for “event” language above “substance” language. According to Gunton, “event” thought is not in itself preferable to or more dynamic than “substance” thought.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, and that connects this objection to the second point, in Gunton’s view Barth tends to eternalize the revelation event. Here Gunton even speaks of a Platonist trait in Barth’s thought. He argues that the *Christus-Logos* performs a task similar to the *Ideen-Logos* in Plato’s philosophy. The dialectical movement of God’s humiliation and man’s elevation in the event of incarnation and reconciliation is at risk of becoming an eternal idea, read out of the immanent Trinity.<sup>15</sup> Despite his attempts at reconstructing the doctrine of God in more temporal terms, Barth

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<sup>12</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 117-135.

<sup>13</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 169-175.

<sup>14</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 236-238.

<sup>15</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 183.

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remains bound to a fixation on the past, as is evident in his dominant use of christological categories. Barth's trinitarian foundation suffers from a defective Pneumatology. In Gunton's view, the Spirit stands for the future and for the openness of God towards humanity. He advocates a more "social" version of the doctrine of the Trinity, in which the person of the Spirit receives full attention.<sup>16</sup>

Gunton's remarks provide a qualification of the concrete historical/temporal character of Barth's doctrine of God. Fundamentally, Barth's trinitarian start gives room for temporal differentiation and development. At times, Gunton notes that Barth comes in the vicinity of Hartshorne's process philosophy. But in contrast to Hartshorne, Barth is not intent upon temporalizing the concept of God: his aim is to do justice to the concrete plurality of the trinitarian revelation event. Barth's statements on the multiplicity in God start in the confession of God's unity. Indeed, God is not viewed as timeless; on the other hand, He is not univocally temporal, but is Lord over time. Similarly, the term *repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate* should not be understood as *repetition* only, but pointedly as *eternal repetition*. The divine *Seinsweisen* are not necessarily subjected to temporal succession.<sup>17</sup>

After all, we have sufficient reason to hold with Jüngel and Gunton that Barth's trinitarian foundation for the doctrine of God results in a dynamic and relational conception. Although Barth describes God not in unambiguously temporal terms, he has indeed freed himself from binding God to either temporality or atemporality, thus providing room for the dynamic understanding of God's "being" as "becoming." Furthermore, the questions of a tacit ontology under Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and of the role of dialectics in it remain open.

Thus far, we have hardly touched on Barth's doctrine of election. As was shown in chapter 13 above, for Barth the doctrine of election is a central part of the doctrine of God, and the sum of the Gospel. After what was said about the trinitarian foundation of Barth's conception of God, little has to be added. In God's internal trinitarian relations, his benign relation to mankind is included in the Person of Jesus Christ. Barth's doctrine of election makes it clear how this relation of God to his creatures rests on his definitive and eternal decision. God is not necessitated to this choice; it is a spontaneous act, performed in freedom and love (the key words of Barth's doctrine of God's perfections; see section 14.2 below).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 230-235, 239-244.

<sup>17</sup> Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 139-141.

<sup>18</sup> Several Barth studies have pointed to the intimate relation between doctrine of the Trinity and doctrine of election as determinants of Barth's theology. Cf. Michael Menke-Peitzmeyer, *Subjektivität und Selbstinterpretation des dreifaltigen Gottes: Eine Studie zur Genese und Explikation des Paradigmas "Selbstoffenbarung Gottes" in der Theologie Karl Barths*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie, vol. 60 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002); and Hans Theodor Goebel, "Trinitätslehre und Erwählungslehre bei Karl Barth: Eine Problemanzeige," in *Wahrheit und Versöhnung. Theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gotteslehre*, ed. by : Dietrich Korsch and Hartmut Ruddies (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1989), 147-166. Goebel understands Barth's doctrine of election as the completion of the intentions of his doctrine of the Trinity, and he assigns a crucial role to the concept of the divine "will" in both doctrines. This results in the objection against Barth's initial doctrine of the Trinity that it focuses in an abstract way on the "possibility" of God as the Lord who reveals himself. According to Goebel, the insight

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The basis of God's decree of election is Jesus Christ. This holds in different respects. First, He is both the basis of knowledge (*Erkenntnisgrund*) and the basis in actuality (*Realgrund*). This coupling of the noetic and the ontic principle indicates the strong connection between both in Barth's theology. By stating that election can be known in Christ only, Barth avoids the idea of an unknowable and horrifying *decretum absolutum*<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Christ is both the subject and the object of election. Election does not only decide over our destination, but also over God's being. The next step is that Barth refuses to speak about double predestination in terms of a division of humanity into elect and reprobate. He states that both election and reprobation are ascribed to Jesus Christ: God takes reprobation upon himself, and endows election to man. Therefore, election is an unambiguous and irrevocable choice of God for man. However, Barth does not want to fixate this into a static principle: he insists on the actual, historical character of God's decree of election.

Consistent with the focus on Jesus Christ, Barth deals with individual election only in the last place. In the lives of individual believers, election takes the shape of faith and obedience to God. This connects the doctrine of election to the subsequent exposition of God's command as the equally important decision over our lives.

In accordance with the systematic thrust of Barth's theology, we find in his doctrine of election at once an affirmation of the inner dialectics (between election and reprobation) within God, and the qualification of this dialectic to the effect that God has unambiguously and irrevocably chosen for man's salvation.

On this point, I make two critical remarks. The first concerns the "actualist" character of Barth's doctrine of election. Barth is emphatic in claiming that election should never turn into a stable, objective principle: it remains God's free decision. Given the context in which Barth places election, however, it can be questioned whether he can effectively avoid treating election as a static principle. Election is God's *Urentscheidung*, the beginning and end of all his ways, a decision not only concerning our destination but also concerning God's own being. It is precisely in the doctrine of election that Barth fundamentally denies "dialectics" in God. Moreover, God's choice for man is established in the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. Within Barth's Christology, this unity is conceived as eternal: there is no *Logos asarkos*, only the *Logos ensarkos*. Human nature shares in the pre-existence of Christ. Via this eternal unity in Christ, mankind is ultimately lifted up into

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that God *wills* to unite himself with man in Christ should determine the understanding of Trinity (154). In my view, Goebel distinguishes insufficiently between the "natural will" that operates in the internal trinitarian relations and the "free will" by which God chooses man as his partner in covenant. He notices that Barth followed this traditional distinction (157), but does not employ it in his own systematic argument. On Barth's unclarity concerning the "natural" will (*ad intra*) and the "free" will (*ad extra*) of God, cf. also E.P. Meijering, *Von den Kirchenvätern zu Karl Barth: Das altkirchliche Dogma in der "Kirchlichen Dogmatik"* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1993), 66-67.

<sup>19</sup> Van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel*, 339-340 (English: *As in a Mirror*, 381-382), points to the shift from thinking in terms of "substance" to thinking in terms of "person" or "subject" (and a parallel shift from a "propositional" understanding of revelation to understanding revelation as self-revelation) as a background for Barth's position here.

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God's internal trinitarian existence. Despite the assertion of God's freedom in election and despite the fact that Barth understands Trinity as God's existence in himself prior to his existence for us, God's decision to love us becomes an indispensable dimension of his being. God's freedom turns out to be a "one way freedom" directed only to our final salvation.

The term "one way freedom" brings me to the second remark, concerning the structural relation between God and man in Barth's theology. In one sense, this relation is crucial for understanding the whole of Barth's theological program. Barth's early dialectical theology revolves around the infinite distance between God and man. His mature theology still assumes this diastatic relation, but increasingly develops the insight that God, by his revelation, bridges the gap and includes us in his communion. The problem with the way in which Barth solves the initial contradiction is that all is conceived as a dialectical process in God. This is true in the epistemic dimension: God can only be known by God, our knowledge of God is properly speaking realized by the Holy Spirit. In the ontological dimension humanity is incorporated in Christ, and via Christ, in the Trinity. As a result, we hardly find indications of human freedom and serious, substantial reaction towards God. The hermeneutical role of Christ as "true man" is so dominant, that "factual man" hardly has any place in Barth's thought. From the perspective of Barth's rejection of natural theology and his insistence on divine, gracious revelation as the only way to restore the relation between God and man, this is perfectly consistent. But Barth pays a high price. The reality of a true relation between God and man as separate subjects is considerably downplayed in favor of an inner-divine dialectical movement in which all tensions and contradictions are eternally harmonized. My two remarks together yield the objection that Barth's doctrine of election, in spite of his verbal assertions, creates an objective and universal "system" of salvation which does not do justice to both God's freedom and human freedom.

### **14.2. *Knowing God***

Barth's position on the possibility of knowing God is largely determined by the foundational function of the doctrine of the Trinity in his theology. This doctrine elaborates the insight that God can only be known through his own revelation by stating that this revelation is grounded in and identical with God's own existence as Father, Son, and Spirit. In his discussion of the knowledge of God, Barth characterizes God's trinitarian existence as the "primary objectivity" (*primäre Gegenständlichkeit*) of God: God is distinct from himself and knows himself. On the basis of this primary objectivity, God makes himself known to us in a "secondary objectivity" by instruments of revelation that indirectly represent him to us. In this connection, we have to note two points: (1) Barth's incorporation of the notion of "objectivity" is a sign of his strong attention for epistemological problems in the line of modern, Kantian philosophy; (2) the dialectics of manifestation and concealment (*Enthüllung – Verhüllung*; cf. section 10.3.1 above) is maintained in this part of the *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This observation confirms the thesis advocated by Spieckermann, Beintker and McCormack, that the assumption of an "inner, material dialectics" (*innere Dialektik der Sache*)

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To God's objectivity in his revelation corresponds an attitude of "faith" on our side. In this context, Barth interprets "faith" mainly in terms of "recognition" and "knowledge."<sup>21</sup> This makes it clear that the emphasis for Barth is on the relatedness to the "objective" revelation of God, not on subjective, psychological characteristics of faith as a "human capacity."

A crucial but difficult statement in Barth's epistemology is "that God is known through God and through God alone." What is clear about this statement is that it paraphrases the trinitarian unfolding of the revelation event: God is not only the subject of the act of speaking (in the "mode of being" of the Son), but also the subject of the act of our hearing, understanding and accepting his Word (in the "mode of being" of the Spirit). In a sort of syllogism, Barth constructs a line from his basic axiom to our knowing God: God can be known only by God (Trinity); but God has become man and man has been taken in God (incarnation); therefore God can be known by us. Barth uses the term "impartation" (*Anteilgabe*) to express the mode in which we are involved in God's act of self-revelation. From this insight, it is only a small and logically evident step to Barth's view of analogy as God's "taking into service" our words and concepts. Less clear, however is the relation of Barth's epistemic principle to epistemology in general. The phrase "God is known through God and through God alone" is apparently a specification of the general principle "everything is known by its equal." Barth, however, explicitly rejects any relation of his principle to any theory of knowledge whatsoever. Two critical remarks seem to be in place here:

1. Barth's refusal to connect his epistemic principle to any "general epistemology" tends to obscure its philosophical antecedents, together with its presuppositions and implications. The appeal to "God's free decision" is less than convincing in this respect.
2. The principle itself could be a symptom of a fundamental problem in Barth's basic view of God and man, namely the lack of a relative independence of man as the recipient of revelation. This "relative independence" should not be understood as if the contents of revelation can arise out of human capacities, but it does mean that man is considered as a subject in his own right. Barth's strong insistence on God himself as the only starting point of revelation and the "elevation" of man in Christology tend to eliminate proper human activity in response to God's revelation. The genuine problem of man's incapacity of accepting God's Word due to his sinful disobedience is, as it were, eternalized in the higher synthesis of reconciliation as the inner, dialectical movement in God.

Given these basic lines of Barth's view on "knowing God," his rejection of "natural theology," though epochal in its effects on Protestant evangelical theology, is merely the logical consequence of his fundamental insights. In evaluating Barth's position against the scholastic tradition of (qualified)

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is a continuous constituent of Barth's thought ever since the first *Römerbrief*.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed analysis of Barth's understanding of "recognition" (*Anerkennung*) as a fundamental concept of religious epistemology and theological methodology, see Bent Flemming Nielsen, *Die Rationalität der Offenbarungstheologie: Die Struktur des Theologieverständnisses von Karl Barth* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1988), 42-46; cf. also 67-73.

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affirmation of “natural theology,” two questions should, in my view, take a leading place: (1) does Barth’s rejection really affect the concept of “natural theology” as it functions in classic Reformed theology? (2) can a qualified affirmation of “natural theology” be consistently combined with the legitimate motives of Barth’s doctrine of revelation? We will return to these questions in the final evaluation at the end of this study.

Barth’s concept of “analogy” forms the transition from his rejection of “natural theology” to the substantial exposition of the doctrine of God. We should notice that “analogy” stands under the heading of “incomprehensibility”: whereas we can truly know God, we cannot “comprehend” him. Barth maintains the dialectics of manifestation and concealment of God in his revelation, but unambiguously qualifies it in the sense that the manifestation is primary, the concealment reminding us of the fact that knowledge of God is not at our disposal. In the concept of analogy developed by Barth in this connection, we can discern the following aspects:

1. “Analogy” means similarity, i.e., partial correspondence and agreement. In relation to two different entities, parity and disparity are mutually limited and qualified by analogical predication.
2. The possibility of analogy is rooted in God’s revelation, but focuses on our being God’s creatures.
3. Analogy bases on the fact that truth resides primarily in God, and secondarily is imparted to creatures.

In these first three aspects, Barth’s view of analogy stands close to the classic tradition of medieval and Reformed scholastic thought.

4. Analogies function in a dynamic way, governed by God’s free decision to take words and concepts into his service; they should not be turned into static, absolute truths.
5. The correspondence attested between God and creature in analogy is “partial” in a qualitative sense, which means that in the use of analogy the dialectic of veiling and unveiling is maintained.
6. Creatures do not have the “intrinsic” quality of being analogous to some divine property: analogies are “extrinsically” attributed by a divine act of justification.

In these three final aspects, Barth distances himself from the scholastic theory and practice of analogy.<sup>22</sup> In the end, he claims that our (analogical) knowledge of God is based on our personal participation in Jesus Christ. In this unity with Christ, the revelation of God comes “full circle.”

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<sup>22</sup> A recurrent objection in Barth’s criticism of scholastic theology, that falls somewhat outside the unfolding of his own position, is that scholasticism (i.e., Andreas Quenstedt) argues from a “general concept of being” or a “general ontology.” As a symptom of this theological malady, Barth sees the fact that Quenstedt takes the distinction between “absolute” and “relative” being as the decisive difference between God and creature. Apparently, for Barth the terms “absolute” and “relative” are disjunctive properties of one common concept of “being.” I would argue that in effect this disjunction is so exclusive that it makes no sense to understand the “bare” concept of “being” that functions in both connections as a substantially “common category.” In Barth’s opposition on this point, his reception of the 19th century discussion of “Absolute” and “relative” might play a role; cf. section 14.4 below.

### **14.3. God's Being in the Act of Free Love**

Having dealt with the "outward" determination of the doctrine of God by the doctrine of the Trinity (together with revelation, Christology, and election), we now come to the doctrine of God proper. However, this terminology is misleading: for Barth, there is no doctrine of God proper separate from the doctrine of the Trinity, and the determination by the latter is substantial, not outward. Still, it remains true that Barth devotes considerable space to what traditionally was distinguished as the doctrine of God. This part of doctrine has to explain the short sentence "God is"; a sentence that has a different emphasis compared with the trinitarian *Leitsatz* "God reveals Himself as the Lord."

The strong connection between the trinitarian foundation and the "proper" doctrine of God is obvious in the central statement "God is Who He is in His act of revelation." Barth explains that the terminology of "being" (*Sein*) should not be abhorred in relation to God. It is important for Barth not to limit to the works of God, but to express clearly that these are *God's* works. We note here as an important motive Barth's fear of the *deus absconditus*: Barth does not allow to think of a God beyond God. The reality and truth of revelation is at stake in maintaining the concept of being. Still, God's being is decisively defined in terms of "act." This forbids the understanding of God under a general category, as a static, abstract, monolithic and unrelated essence. It urges us towards an active, concrete, personal and relational understanding of God. Barth emphasizes the transcendence of God in all respects: God's being in act transcends all temporal succession and all logical, physical and metaphysical divisions. This understanding of transcendence is of utter importance for Barth's doctrine of God. It enables him consistently to ascribe to God the overcoming of oppositions by including them within himself (see section 14.5 below).

In his discussions of the being of God, Barth is in constant opposition to important strands of 19th century theology and philosophy.<sup>23</sup> Behind the decline of metaphysics, he discerns an attack on the true existence of God. The urgent problematic of absoluteness vs. personality is diagnosed as an effect of the absolutizing of the human subject. The suspicion of Ludwig Feuerbach that belief in God is mere projection of needs and wishes leads Barth to maintain the true and independent existence of God based in the Trinity.

This being of God is further described by the polarity of freedom and love. Just as in the Anselm book (see section 10.2.3 above), Barth appeals to the Name of God. God's name is the expression of the fact that God seeks and creates community with us and that He loves us. In brief: God is love. But in order to prevent that "love" is misunderstood, it is qualified by God's freedom. God is unique in his existence and his love. Again, Barth is critical of the 19th century contrast between Absolute and relative: in this Idealist thinking, the Absolute is made dependent on the relative. God does not need us; instead, he is free to love us. Surprisingly, Barth connects the immanence of God to his freedom, just as he related God's transcendence to God's love. The relation between God and world, characterized by freedom and love, has the relation between Father and Son as its prototype. For

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<sup>23</sup> A more complete confrontation with the theological "parents and grandparents" is given in Barth's *Die protestantische Theologie*.

## *Analysis and Discussion*

Barth, Christology is the presupposition and the criterion of understanding God's freedom in love.

The mutual determination of freedom and love that was sketched in the preceding paragraph turns out to be fundamental for Barth's exposition of God's perfections. As we have seen above (section 12.1), Barth's classification of God's perfections is innovative. Instead of a grouping of "negative" and "positive" or "incommunicable" and "communicable" attributes, he chooses a dividing principle derived from the substance of God's revelation: love and freedom. Moreover, it is not true for Barth that "love" stands for "positive" attributes and "freedom" for "negative" attributes: both determine and qualify each other, and together they express what is to be said about God. Barth explicitly places his discussion of God's properties in a dialectical framework: he couples a perfection of love to a perfection of freedom, each part assuring that the other part is understood as truly God's perfection.

In conclusion: we have in Barth's fundamental statements concerning the being and perfections of God an affirmation of the previously examined importance of the trinitarian foundation. The concrete understanding of God's being as the act of love and freedom, which governs the subsequent discussion of God's perfections, is the elaboration of the fundamental understanding of God's trinitarian existence. In turn, the connection between the Trinity and the event of revelation is strongly active as well, in that Barth insists on the veracity of God's self-revelation (no *deus absconditus!*) and understands the epistemological and the ontological questions as both answered in the doctrine of God.

In connection with God's "being in the act," Barth's more technical conceptuality can be found in the terms "subjectivity" (*Subjektivität*) and "objectivity" (*Gegenständlichkeit*). These concepts have caused some difficulties in Barth interpretation.

The "Munich circle" around Trutz Rendtorff has argued that Barth's ascription of "inextollable subjectivity" to God exhibits Barth's indebtedness to the problematic of modern theology: since Kant's "turn to the subject," subjectivity has become the central characteristic and problematic of man. As Rendtorff c.s. argue, Barth has incorporated this theme in the center of his dogmatics by applying the category of subjectivity in an superlative and exclusive way to God. To this analysis, the "Munich circle" adds two negative qualifications of Barth's theological position. The first reproach is that the exclusive emphasis on God's subjectivity results in the elimination of human subjectivity, freedom and autonomy. In this respect, Barth is even associated by some authors of this group with the authoritarian climate permeating Europe in the 1930's and 40's. A second objection points to an implicit effect of Barth's claim of the inextollable subjectivity of God, namely that it immunizes Barth's own understanding and exposition of God's revelation. Given Barth's exclusive starting point in God's self-revelation, there is no possibility to ask beyond the contents of revelation as (tentatively) transmitted in Barth's dogmatics. On this point, Barth's theology has been labeled as "revelational positivism" (*Offenbarungspositivismus*, a term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer) or "decisionism" (*Dezisionismus*, Wolfhart Pannenberg's diagnostic

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term). On this critical analysis, Barth's appeal to God's absolute subjectivity and Lordship has the function of immunizing his theology for rational discussion.<sup>24</sup>

A starting point for evaluating this type of analysis is the insight that "subjectivity" as ascribed to God has different connotations in Barth's theology. Claus-Dieter Osthövener makes a helpful distinction by pointing to the different connections in which the term "subject" functions:<sup>25</sup>

- a. *subject – object*: this disjunction expresses Barth's insight that God should never become an "object" of human knowledge or religion as if God were "construed" or "conceived" or "projected" by the human mind. In this context, the term "subject" means that we cannot treat God as a "given," but quite contrary that we are entirely dependent on God's giving himself known to us.
- b. *subject – predicate*: this distinction elaborates on the first: God's freedom and our absolute dependence on him has as a substantial consequence for appropriate God-talk that God decides over the meaning of the predicates applied to him. We cannot establish *a priori*, on the basis of some "analogy," what it means for God to be free, loving, etc., but we have to follow God's self-revelation.
- c. *subject – action*: a proper understanding of God as a subject implies that He is conceived as distinct from his actions. On the one hand, Barth identifies God by referring to his revelational acts. On the other hand, he points out that God is not necessitated or limited to his acts. God's subjectivity in this respect can be defined as his "personality": He is the free and conscious subjects of his acts.

In these three nuances, I discern a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect is that Barth employs the category of "subjectivity" to prevent the reduction of the knowledge of God to immanently human possibilities. The positive reverse side is that God is active in making himself known, and that on this basis true knowledge of God is possible. A further elaboration of this positive aspect is that God is decidedly understood as a Person. On this point, my claim is that in Barth studies the "realist" substance of Barth's understanding of Trinity as God's way of being a Person has been underestimated. It is true, Barth presents the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of his doctrine of revelation. From this perspective, Trinity merely seems to be a "function" of revelation. This appearance, however, should not hide for us the conceptual substance of Barth's exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity itself. In considerable affinity with the classic tradition of the Church, Barth subscribes to the concepts of "essence" and "modes of being"

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<sup>24</sup> A representative statement of this perspective is found in Trutz Rendtorff, *Theologie in der Moderne: Über Religion im Prozess der Aufklärung* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1991). Cf. also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Problemggeschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 198-204. After his extensive analysis of Barth's development of the concept of "subjectivity," Mentke-Peitzmeyer, *Subjektivität und Selbstinterpretation*, comes to a similar judgment: 403-417 (related to Barth's doctrine of the Trinity), 531-554 (concerning Barth's doctrine of election), 556-581 (general conclusions).

<sup>25</sup> Claus-Dieter Osthövener, *Die Lehre von Gottes Eigenschaften bei Friedrich Schleiermacher und Karl Barth*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, vol. 76 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 131-134.

## Analysis and Discussion

(which he prefers to “persons”);<sup>26</sup> he maintains the distinction between immanent and economic Trinity, and accepts Augustine’s dictum “*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa.*” Consistent with his reservations concerning the “persons” language, Barth ascribes “personal individuality” to the Trinity as a whole, thus distinguishing himself from later conceptions of “social Trinity.”<sup>27</sup>

On the basis of these observations, I would state that a deconstruction of Barth’s theology in terms of modern “subjectivity” fails to do justice both to his theological motives and his specific conceptuality in the doctrine of the Trinity. Barth wanted to speak properly about God, not tacitly about man (this would make him a Feuerbach in disguise!). In this respect, I also disagree with Heinzpeter Hempelmann, who regrets the fact that the initial “instrument of emancipation” (*Emanzipationsmittel*) of God’s “inextollable subjectivity” became “substantialized” in his doctrine of the Trinity. According to Hempelmann, the Prolegomena of the *Church Dogmatics* show that

die Rede von der unaufhebbaren Subjektivität Gottes als einem Emanzipations-mittel im Rahmen der ersten Phase der Negation aller philosophisch-weltanschaulichen Umklammerungen der Theologie unter der Hand zum *Inhalt* des – in der zweiten Phase positiv zu entfaltenden – theologischen Ansatzes wird. Der den Gegnern entgegengeschleuderte Kampfbegriff des Subjekt-Seins als Zusammenfassung des ganz anderen, des unentgegen-Seins Gottes, der doch eigentlich den Weg zu einer Wahrnehmung des im Deus dixit offenbaren Seins Gottes eröffnen sollte, wird nun schon vorab zu der wesentlichen, alles weitere fundierenden und normierenden Bestimmung.<sup>28</sup>

As Hempelmann sees it, Barth remains bound, though in an antithetic mode, to the modern concept of God. Barth fails to realize, so Hempelmann, that his usage of modern terminology affects the substance of his theological conceptions. Contrary to Hempelmann, I follow Bruce McCormack’s thesis that the material doctrines of Christology and Trinity became constitutive of Barth’s mature theology. In my view, Barth’s full understanding of God’s “subjectivity” can only be grasped by means of these fundamental doctrines.

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<sup>26</sup> In passing, I note that Barth’s preference for “modes of being” has numerous precedents in the Reformed scholastics, who often use the same term (*modi subsistendi*) to circumscribe the “persons” in the Trinity. The prominent occurrence of “modes of being” (*Seinsweisen*) in Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is insufficient evidence for “modalist” tendencies in Barth.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed analysis of the doctrine of the Trinity, starting from the early scholastic thought of Richard of St. Victor and interacting with “social trinitarianism,” see Nico den Bok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St. Victor († 1173)*, Bibliotheca Victoriana, vol. 7 (Paris: Brepols, 1996); a survey of this study will be given in part III, section 17.3. The basic intuitions evident in Barth’s exposition of Trinity and in his discussion of the “personality” of God arguably agree closely with Den Bok’s position.

<sup>28</sup> Hempelmann, *Unaufhebbare Subjektivität Gottes?*, 131-132.

## *The Doctrine of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*

As an opposite term of “subjectivity” we encounter the notion of the “objectivity” of God (*Gegenständlichkeit Gottes*) in Barth’s doctrine of God.<sup>29</sup> In section 14.2 above, we saw how this concept functions in Barth’s epistemology: whereas God is primarily known to himself in his trinitarian life, He becomes secondarily “objective” to us through signs that indirectly reveal him. Behind this noetic function of the “objectivity” of God is an ontic dimension, related to Barth’s insight that the concept of “being” can and should be applied to God in an appropriate way. The foundation for the ascription of “ontic objectivity” to God in the *Church Dogmatics* was laid in *Fides quaerens intellectum* (see section 10.2.3 above). In dealing with Anselm of Canterbury’s “ontological argument” for the existence of God, Barth arrives at the conclusion that as the criterion and source of all other existence, God has the highest form of existence, which is the necessary one. Several interpreters have argued that Barth develops his own, ontological “thought form” here.<sup>30</sup> In doing so, he corrects the merely actualist, dialectical thinking of his earliest theology. In Barth’s “thought form,” the ontic and the noetic dimensions are closely related: our knowledge of God (noetic) has to follow God’s own being strictly (ontic), and the rationality of speech about God (noetic) is founded in the supreme truth of God himself (ontic). The other way around, God truly is (ontic) as He reveals himself (noetic): the concept of being that applies to God can never be abstracted from his gracious act of self-revelation.<sup>31</sup>

The doctrines of revelation and God as developed in the *Church Dogmatics* continue these lines. The systematic implications of Barth’s usage of the term *Gegenständlichkeit* can be summarized in the following statements:

1. God “really” exists, apart from our knowledge of him.
2. God’s primary objectivity means that there is in God an inner self-differentiation into subject(s) and object(s) of knowledge and love.
3. God’s primary objectivity is identical with God’s subjectivity, which means that God never becomes an object of our knowledge in the “normal” sense.
4. Through God’s secondary objectivity, God makes himself known to us.
5. This revelation is real but indirect, rests on God’s actual decision and thus can never be “objectified.”

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<sup>29</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Theologischer Realismus und realistische Theologie bei Karl Barth,” *Evangelische Theologie* 46 (1986): 404, points out that Barth’s realism does not consist of a simple recourse to a pre-modern dogmatism that takes God as “objektiver und subjektiver Gegebenheit.” A proper understanding of both concepts, “subjectivity” and “objectivity,” as they mutually determine each other, is crucial to the right interpretation of Barth’s realistic theology. An English version of the largest part of Dalferth’s article is available as Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Karl Barth’s Eschatological Realism,” in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. by S.W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14-45.

<sup>30</sup> This term is introduced by Josuttis, *Gegenständlichkeit*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Dietrich Korsch, “Intellectus fidei: Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Method in Karl Barths Anselmbuch,” in Korsch and Ruddies, *Wahrheit und Versöhnung*, 125-146, argues for the strict connection between Anselm’s program of rational theology and his “ontological argument,” a connection that also characterizes Barth’s position. According to Korsch, the joint discussion of the epistemological and the ontological question by Barth provides an adequate response to the philosophical dilemmas created by the great Idealist systems of Kant and Hegel.

## *Analysis and Discussion*

Within the dynamics of “act” and “being” we encounter the problem of necessity and contingency in Barth’s theology. Barth differs from both the Reformed scholastic tradition (cf. part I, esp. section 7.2 and 7.3) and recent philosophical theology (*in casu* the Utrecht School, see part III) in not addressing this issue separately. As a result, we note that Barth’s views on the matter are not fully elaborated and clarified. Some indications, however, can well be taken from the material.

At first sight, Barth advocates a radical understanding of contingency. From his initial dialectical phase, he retains a strong emphasis on God’s freedom which prohibits the subsumption of revelation under categories of logical necessity. As Barth repeatedly states, God’s free decision is at the basis of everything, including the structures of life and the laws of logic. This implies that God can or could also decide otherwise. This basic statement, however, receives some qualifications in Barth’s mature theology.

To start, Barth’s exposition of Anselm’s argument for God’s existence includes the acceptance of the ontic and noetic *necessity* of God’s existence. To be sure, this is not an *a priori* necessity, but a necessity of faith: given God’s revealed Name, we must, in understanding this Name, acknowledge that God *cannot not-exist*. In this respect, Barth accepts a dimension of necessity, although he does not explain it in fully ontological terms. What is important for his full ontological “thought form,” is that he sees both the ontic and the noetic necessity as ultimately grounded in God.

Moreover, Barth is eager to emphasize that the contingency based on God’s freedom is not a foreign, outside force, but comes from the wise and loving God. Although Barth does not explicitly make the connection, this insight is, from a systematic point of view, in accordance with two interrelated statements from the scholastic doctrine of God:

- (1) the concept of simplicity, which implies that God’s properties are mutually equivalent and qualify each other;
- (2) the recourse to God’s (essential) nature as a (necessary) dimension underlying God’s (contingent) acts.<sup>32</sup>

In a few passages, Barth seems to touch on the traditional, Reformed scholastic, conception of God’s good and wise will as determining all reality. His abhorrence of a “whimsical,” arbitrary *potentia absoluta* of the *deus absconditus* prevents him from giving all weight to radical contingency, and urges him to embed God’s freedom in his wisdom, goodness and love. Barth’s initial statement of God’s wisdom is quite clear on this point: God knows what He wills, and also why and wherefore He wills it. God’s will is not a blind will, but a wise will. An other significant aspect of Barth’s (tacit) agreement with the Reformed scholastic emphasis on God’s will is that by his will God allows room for creatures to act by

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<sup>32</sup> An interesting example of this latter movement is Barth’s rejection of the scholastic statement that God’s will is the rule of his justice. Instead, he follows Anselm in arguing that God’s justice is based on his most good nature. See section 12.2.2 above. Cf. also this statement: “There is only one thing which the divine will cannot will, and that is the absurd. It cannot will to cease to be the divine will, to be God Himself.” (CD II/1, 561; KD II/1, 631).

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their own wills. God is not necessitated to create the world, nor does the existence of creatures threaten his immutable being. His relation to the world consists of love and freedom, and thus is real and vivid. Barth's affinity with classic Reformed thought concerning the centrality of God's will is confirmed by his circumscription of God's omnipotence as the "power over everything that He actually wills or could will." To be sure, the "voluntarist" or even "decisionist" overtones are stronger in Barth than they are in earlier Reformed theology.

In discussing God's omniscience and "omnivulence," Barth shows a remarkable awareness of the intricacies of scholastic discussions on the relation between God's intellect and will concerning the acts of the created wills of men and angels (see section 12.3.2, near footnote 75). His statements in that connection, although written in a somewhat loose and typically rhetorical style, reflect precisely the classic Reformed position as outlined in section 7.4 above. Barth shares the Reformed scholastic concern for maintaining the freedom of created wills.

As a whole, we can notice a balance between the dimensions of necessity and contingency in Barth's doctrine of God. This balance is structurally similar to the Reformed scholastic position, although Barth's technical conceptuality is less developed and his emphases are different. In this respect, Eginhard Meijering comes to a remarkable conclusion on the basis of his analysis of Barth's doctrine of God.<sup>33</sup> Because of its argumentative density and its convergence with my own findings, I will give an extensive quotation:

In immanenter Kritik kann noch eine weitere Frage an Barths Gotteslehre gerichtet werden. Es darf als sein theologisches Hauptanliegen angesehen werden, dass die geschichtliche Offenbarung zum Wesen Gottes gehört. Aber Barth zieht gerade nicht die Konsequenz, dass Gott also von seinem Wesen her zu seiner Offenbarung genötigt ist, im Gegenteil, er betont

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<sup>33</sup> Meijering, *Von den Kirchenvätern zu Karl Barth*, 203-204. In his final conclusions (400-404), Meijering makes similar comments on Barth's relation to classic theology: at first sight, it seems that Barth proposes a voluntarist account of the doctrines of God and election; but after all, since Barth identifies God's will with God's being and acknowledges (though in a conceptually confused way) a dimension of necessity within God, his position comes considerably close to the patristic, medieval and Reformed scholastic view. Comparing Barth with Athanasius, Meijering states (402-403): "Bei Athanasius folgt der Wille Gottes dem Wesen Gottes, muss der Wille Gottes das Wesen Gottes wollen,- bei Barth ist auch das Wesen Gottes frei gewollt. Aber Barth muss von einer höheren Freiheit bei den *opera ad intra* sprechen, da Gott nur der Vater des Sohnes und Geistes sein wollen kann, er aber nicht der Schöpfer zu sein braucht. Barth ist in dem Sinne voluntaristischer als Athanasius, als er das Wesen Gottes nicht dem Willen Gottes vorangehen lässt. Barth geht aber nicht so weit, das Umgekehrte zu sagen und -in extrem nominalistischer Weise- den Willen über das Wesen zu stellen. ... Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt betrachtet ist der Unterschied zur traditionellen Gotteslehre in der Gnadenwahl also nicht so gross, wie Barth es erscheinen lässt. ... Der Unterschied zwischen Barth und der klassischen Theologie besteht darin, dass bei Barth Gott als lebendiges Subjekt die geschichtliche Offenbarung in sein Wesen einbeziehen will, das will die traditionelle Lehre gerade nicht lehren, aber Barths Vorbehalt, dass Gott dies nicht zu tun braucht und auch unabhängig von der Offenbarung als Vater, Sohn und Geist das vollkommene Sein hat, entspricht der traditionellen Lehre, dass Gott sich nicht zu offenbaren braucht."

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immer wieder, dass Gott sich in Freiheit offenbart. Wenn diese Freiheit zum Wesen Gottes gehört, dann könnte dies zur Konsequenz führen, dass Gott auch bezüglich seines trinitarischen Wesens anders hätte entscheiden können (in extrem nominalistischem Sinne, dass er auch hätte entscheiden können, nicht der Vater des Sohnes und des Geistes zu sein). In dem Falle wäre das freie Handeln Gottes hinsichtlich seines Wesens tatsächlich identisch mit dem freien Handeln Gottes in der geschichtlichen Offenbarung. Aber diese Konsequenz zieht Barth nicht. Seine Lehre unterscheidet sich, wie wir gesehen haben, letztlich nicht von der der reformierten Scholastiker, die sagen, dass Gott in höchster Freiheit (*libertas spontaneitatis*) und in höchster Notwendigkeit (*necessitas absoluta*) sich selbst will, und das er in konditionierter (d.h. von seinem freien Willen bestimmter) Notwendigkeit (*necessitas hypothetica*) und in Wahlfreiheit (*libertas indifferentiae*) seine Schöpfung will. ... Wenn diese grundsätzliche Übereinstimmung zwischen Barth und den reformierten Scholastikern an diesem so wesentlichen Punkt besteht, dann darf die Frage gestellt werden, ob alle von Barth in der klassischen Gotteslehre angebrachten Korrekturen wirklich so einschneidend sind, wie er es darstellt. Es liegt hier ein gewisser Unterschied vor, aber er bedeutet nicht mehr, als dass in der klassischen Theologie das Sein Gottes nicht ungewollt ist und auch nicht anders gewollt sein kann, während bei Barth Gott sein Wesen frei will und sein freier Wille ist. Aber auch bei Barth sind Gottes Wesen und Gottes Offenbarung nicht identisch, sie dürfen es nicht sein, denn dann wäre Gottes Liebe keine freie Wille mehr, und wäre Gottes Gnade billig. Die Grundthese Barths, dass Gott sich offenbart, wie er ist, und dass er ist, wie er sich offenbart, deutet auf eine Analogie zwischen dem Wesen und der Offenbarung Gottes, aber das Wesen Gottes beruht auf einer höheren Notwendigkeit und einer höheren Freiheit Gottes als bei der Offenbarung Gottes der Fall ist. Es ist Barth hier nicht gelungen -und es konnte ihm eigentlich auch nicht gelingen-, die in der reformierten Scholastik vorliegende -traditionelles Gedanken- gut aufnehmende- Konzeption wesentlich zu verändern. Er formuliert und argumentiert hier voluntaristischer, aber nicht grundsätzlich anders. Die Koinzidenz der Freiheit und Notwendigkeit im Wesen Gottes ist nicht nur eine Erkenntnis Hegels, die vielleicht über Dorner zu Barth gelangt ist, sondern auch schon der reformierten Scholastiker.

Despite the different emphases, we note a remarkable agreement between Barth and classic, scholastic thought on this fundamental level of the doctrine of God. We will return to this point in the final evaluation of the three parts of this study.

#### **14.4. Multiplicity of God's Perfections**

A peculiar aspect of Barth's doctrine of God is his defense of a real difference (*differentia realis*) between the perfections of God (see the exposition in chapter 12). In this, he deviates strongly and explicitly from the scholastic tradition, both medieval and Protestant. What is at stake here?

First of all, the decisive motive behind Barth's choice is his abhorrence of the idea of a *deus absconditus*, a God beyond God. He signals overt or concealed nominalism in the traditional denial of a real difference between God's attributes. This alleged nominalism has two aspects: first, it appeals to our limited understanding and concepts as the reason why we need different terms to describe God; second, it separates the revealed perfections from a hidden essence of God that cannot be known. The latter problem is reinforced by the fact that the tradition puts emphasis on the utter unity and simplicity of God, tending to degrade the distinct perfections to mere appearances. Barth's counter arguments only deal with this threat of separation between essence and attributes, and do not discuss the asserted limitation of our concepts and understanding.<sup>34</sup> From what he said earlier about God's incomprehensibility, it is clear that he views this in dialectical terms. Incomprehensibility does not mean that negative terms about God are more suitable than positive ones. The confession of God's incomprehensibility does not arise out of reflection on human limitations, but out of faith. Faith is understood by Barth as "God knowing God within us." It is at once the denial of human capacities to know God *and* the gift of a new possibility within us. The first thing to know about God is that we cannot know him: his concealment belongs to his revelation. The specific dialectics of revelation and concealment explains why Barth cannot allow for a separation between revealed and hidden parts in God.

In Barth's own account of the difference between God's perfections, there is a striking structural parallel to his doctrine of the Trinity. The identity and non-identity between God's essence and his attributes is described in similar terms as the identity and otherness of the three modes of being (*Seinsweisen*) in God. Moreover, the same holds for the perfections individually: each is a *repetition* of the insight that God is the one who loves freely. Just as the plural repetition of the modes of being is constitutive to God, so the plurality, singularity and distinction of all perfections is essential to God. Barth insists that there is a real multiplicity in God which does not reside in his outward relations, but in his inner being.

In addition to the multiplicity ascribed by Barth to the divine perfections as a whole, we find a similar multiplicity within the discussion of individual perfections. This is particularly clear in Barth's version of the doctrine of immutability (in Barth's terms: constancy) and in his discussions of the divine power, knowledge and will. Barth insists on the plurality and difference of God's concrete acts: God does different things, and therefore his power, knowledge and will are flexible and mobile.

However, Barth's statements concerning the relation between plurality and unity, multiplicity and simplicity are less than perspicuous. He holds that the asserted plurality and singularity concerns the simple, undivided and non-

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<sup>34</sup> Ironically, Barth's introductions to the successive discussions of pairs of divine perfection do appeal to our limited capacity to understand and express the richness of God's life.

compound being of God. He states that God's perfections are identical with himself, and that any single perfection is nothing else but God himself and nothing else but the other perfections. In discussing the traditional, scholastic view, Barth had rejected the idea that, though the difference between the attributes is conceptual and due to limitation on our part, it still has a foundation in God's own being (*fundamentum in re*). For him, this does not outweigh the inadequacy of the concepts in the scholastic account. After all, it is hard to see the exact difference between Barth's balancing multiplicity and simplicity, difference and identity, and the scholastic statement of formal or conceptual (not real) difference founded in God's being itself.<sup>35</sup> The qualifications added to the statement of multiplicity read as considerably "orthodox" aspects of the concept of simplicity. Moreover, it seems that Barth does not in practice maintain the "real difference" as he claimed before. He often argues that, moving from one perfection to another, we do not encounter a different "thing" but merely a continuation and necessary complement of what was said before.<sup>36</sup>

A way to do justice to the difference between Barth and the scholastics is to reckon with Barth's totally different frame of thought. Given Barth's doctrine of the Trinity as the interpretation of the revelation event, Barth is not obliged on his own terms to think of a timeless unity of God's being. The possibility of becoming, relation, plurality is inherent to his conception of God. For Barth, the occurrence of multiplicity does not threaten the unity of God as it would for the scholastics, since he sees the unity guaranteed in God's maintenance of his own subjectivity in the act of revelation and reconciliation. Within the large event or act, there is room for dialectics, movement and change. Ultimately, the warrant for God's unity lies in the coming of Jesus Christ and in the election of mankind in Jesus Christ.

### ***14.5. Dialectics in the Perfections***

On several levels of Barth's theology, and especially of his doctrine of God, we have encountered different forms of dialectics: identity and otherness, revelation and concealment, multiplicity and simplicity, freedom and love, etc. In discussing now the dialectics in his exposition of the individual perfections of God, we have to start elsewhere.

It is remarkable that Barth is in sustained discussion with the Protestant scholastic theology, especially in examining the perfections of God. Much of the materials handed over in the scholastic doctrines of God are incorporated by Barth. There is an interesting ambivalence in Barth's attitude towards this tradition. On the one hand, he accepts many of its questions, concepts, and arguments. This is especially true in cases where the Protestants opposed the Roman Catholics, for instance in describing God's grace primarily as an immanent property of God instead of as a gift to creatures, and in rejecting the theory of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) by which the Jesuits tried to give increased room to human freedom

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<sup>35</sup> Note here that a "formal" difference in the scholastic terminology indicates a very strong difference: it means that the essential definitions of all attributes cannot be made the same. "Formal" is far more than "apparent." The only option which is denied is that in God "goodness" is another *thing* (= independent, individual entity) than "justice."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. the start of sections 12.2.2 and 12.2.3 above.

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over against God's providence and decree. As a whole, Barth clearly wishes to work in continuity with the doctrine of the Church. Aside from the scholastics, this is true particularly for the Church Fathers (Augustine, Hilary) and the Reformers (Luther, Calvin). However, Barth also offers incisive criticism of the tradition on almost all occasions. What are the grounds for his criticism?

The first is that the patristic and scholastic tradition takes the wrong starting point. It treats the doctrine of God in terms of a general concept of being. In the discussion of God's attributes, this results in metaphysical discussions and definitions that miss the mark, according to Barth. Central in Barth's own understanding of God's perfections is that they must be interpreted from the special, particular revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We cannot inform ourselves about what it is for God to be eternal, wise, almighty etc. We have to be told by God what He is like. In technical terms, this is the rejection of the *analogia entis* in favor of the christological concentration.<sup>37</sup>

The second ground for revision of the doctrine of God's perfections is found in biblical theology. Throughout his discussions, Barth provides exegetical and biblical-theological arguments for his interpretation of the attributes.<sup>38</sup> For instance, he argues that God's holiness has an important cultic aspect, which makes it clear that fellowship with God is made possible. Concerning God's justice, he states that it is centered in Jesus Christ, and thus is not only the judgment or wrath of God, but also the gracious bearing of punishment and the overcoming of wrath. In dealing with God's wisdom, Barth claims that it is not merely a cognitive perfection, but is closely related to the active governance and will of God. An interesting example of Barth's dynamizing of the doctrine of God is his exegesis of the *locus classicus* for God's simplicity Deuteronomy 6:4, not as an abstract statement of non-composition, but as pointing to God's election of his people as the ground for confessing his simplicity. Another remarkable biblical-theological exposition is given in respect to God's omnipresence: Barth reviews the biblical passages in which God has a place (*makom*), and argues that the Trinity is God's own place beyond all places.

Part of the biblical material presented by Barth already points towards a "dialectical" understanding that is characteristic of Barth's doctrine of God. An important objection to much traditional theology is that it places God in *opposition* to created reality. Whereas our existence is *finite*, we ascribe *infinity* to God. God's *eternity* is often opposed to our *temporality*. God's *omnipresence* is interpreted in terms of God's being *outside* spatiality, and so on. When Barth opposes this procedure, we are reminded of his statements concerning God's transcendence and immanence. For Barth, God's transcendence consists of his overcoming the contradictions within our world and even the contradictions between God's world and our world. God is so transcendent as to be completely immanent. God's freedom and love do not delimit each other, but rather reinforce each other. From this basic thought, we see the lines drawn to Barth's interpretation of perfections as

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<sup>37</sup> To be sure, Barth admits an *analogia attributionis extrinsecae* (see the end of section 11.2 above) dependent on the actual coming of God in his Word. In Barth's discussion of God's perfections, the christological concentration may as well take the form of a trinitarian focus.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for the details of these examples the corresponding sections of chapter 12 above.

simplicity (cf. also section 14.4 above), omnipresence, eternity, immutability, and power. The recurrent conclusion is that God is not bound to opposing limitation, but is able to include and thus extol it. This also holds for the more “moral” perfections, such as grace and holiness: God can overcome contradiction and sin within himself without being compromised by it.

This dialectical understanding of the perfections – it will come as no surprise – is exactly consistent with the fundamental dialectics of revelation, reconciliation, and Trinity, which we have stated before (see section 10.4.2., questions 1-3). Moreover, this dialectic is described by Barth as finding its concrete expression and fulfillment in the story of Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup> In some discussions (e.g., concerning God’s power and wisdom), the christological focus serves to avoid the risk of positing a God beyond God (*deus absconditus*), of which Barth was so afraid. This latter insight implies that the dialectics in Barth’s doctrine of God is not intended to create contradictions in God but rather to maintain the unambiguous unity of God’s identity in and despite the conceptual differentiations. For the doctrine of God, the observation by Hans Urs von Balthasar that the “heimliche, nein offen aufgesprochene Voraussetzung” behind the dialectical method of Barth “keine andere ist als ursprüngliche Identität,” can be affirmed.<sup>40</sup>

## 14.6 Karl Barth’s “concept of God”

For anyone familiar with Barth’s theology, it seems extremely improper to speak of Barth’s “concept of God.” Barth’s doctrine of God reads as one great crusade against the assumption that we can define such a concept. Still, the

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<sup>39</sup> I insert here a brief review of Terry L. Cross, *Dialectic in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of God*, Issues in Systematic Theology, vol. 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001). Cross convincingly argues for continuity in Barth’s using both dialectical and analogical thinking throughout his theology from *Romans I* until the *Church Dogmatics*. Contrary to the common interpretation, he states that the “turn to analogy” does not lead to the disappearance of dialectic in Barth’s *magnum opus*; instead we encounter dialectic at the heart of the doctrines of revelation and Trinity. Cross’s examination of the doctrine of God proper is rather brief (the knowledge of God: 156-172; the being of God: 173-192). He omits Barth’s interaction with the protestant scholastic use of an *analogia attributionis*, his precise statement of the relation between God’s being and God’s act, and Barth’s position on the multiplicity (*realis differentia*) of God’s perfections. Moreover, Cross’s survey of the doctrine of election is so brief as to limit to Barth’s assertion that it is finally undialectic, without investigating the inner dialectic of election and reprobation in Jesus Christ (195-196; it seems to run against Cross’s general thesis when he speaks of “the *logic* [italics added] of the *order of the revelatory event* [italics in the original]”). Valuable in Cross’s analysis of the dialectic in Barth’s account of God’s perfections is the insight that we encounter here a *dynamic* dialectic, constituting a *movement* that reflects the divine, trinitarian movement of self-revelation. The unity within the dialectic is safeguarded by the concept of *perichoresis*, directly borrowed from the doctrine of the Trinity. Of historical interest is Cross’s tracing back Barth’s dialectics partly to *Hegel*, partly to *Kierkegaard* (201-204). Cross’s final conclusion is that in Barth’s doctrine of God we find a co-operation of a *dialectica fidei* and an *analogia fidei*. Both are dependent on the event of God’s gracious revelation, both are needed to speak faithfully about God. According to Cross, Barth locates a dialectics *within* the analogy, within the own being-in-act of God. This evaluation agrees with the conclusions of my own study.

<sup>40</sup> Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 77.

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sobriety of scientific analysis requires that we attempt to collect the aspects of Barth's exposition of this doctrine into a more or less coherent whole. The ironic fact is that, while rejecting the classical metaphysics accompanying the scholastic doctrine of God, Barth developed his own half-explicit ontology of God. Typical of this counter-ontology is at once the refusal to take a universal starting point for speaking about God, and the assumption of a highest order dialectics in the reality of God.

In summarizing the outcome of description and analysis given above, we can note the following elements as constitutive of Barth's "concept of God":

1. God should always be conceived of as supremely, inextollably Subject. Proper speech about God should not make God into an object that can be manipulated by or reduced to human wishes and thoughts. For this reason, knowledge of God is only possible inasmuch God reveals himself to us and makes us participants in his own self-knowledge.
2. In his revelation, God becomes "objective" (*gegenständlich*) without ever becoming a passive "object." In Barth's epistemology, this insight entails that knowledge of God counts as *real* knowledge (under the conditions stated by Kant), though it is knowledge of its own sort.
3. The (ontic) source and (noetic) explanation of both the "subjectivity" and the "objectivity" of God is found in God's trinitarian existence. Trinity means:
  - that the whole event of revelation has God, the Lord, as its subject;
  - that God has the fullness of divine life in the relations of Father, Son, and Spirit;
  - that the self-differentiation and unity of God in the (immanent) Trinity is prior to and foundational to his outward manifestation: God is not dependent on his relation with us; instead, his inner "relatedness" is the basis for his free love towards us.
4. God's being is defined by his act of free love. This means (a) that we can properly ascribe "being" to God, and (b) that this is not a static, abstract concept of being, but a dynamic concept drawn from the concrete event of revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Freedom and love function as the two "basic properties" in Barth's doctrine of God.
5. In conceiving the divine "perfections," we must be careful not to start with preconceived notions, but to let God himself determine the content of concepts attributed to him. For Barth, this is a methodical consequence of statement 1. above.
6. The understanding of the divine perfections is characterized by a twofold dialectics:
  - a. the dialectics of "freedom" and "love": Barth organizes his exposition of the perfections in two series of three pairs of notions, to the effect that the dimensions of divine freedom and divine love qualify each other in the concrete shape of the different perfections;
  - b. the dialectics of difference and identity: God's perfections are understood as not merely standing in opposition to creaturely properties (e.g., spatiality, temporality) but as including and overcoming these contradictions.
7. The doctrine of God should avoid any tendency toward nominalism and any suggestion of a God beyond God (*deus absconditus*). For this reason, Barth rejects

### *Analysis and Discussion*

the classic understanding of divine simplicity as the denial of a real difference (and, therefore, plurality) among the divine perfections.

8. The acceptance of “multiplicity” of the divine perfections, together with the dialectics in the discussion of several of the perfections, and the consistent reference to God’s salvific act in Jesus Christ as determinative of God’s being and his perfections, suggest the possibility of a “temporal,” dynamic understanding of Barth’s doctrine of God. Although Barth is not fully explicit on this point, it cannot be ruled out as a legitimate interpretation of his statements.
9. The *pointe* of the doctrine of God is God’s eternal purpose to save man in Jesus Christ. This decree of election determines the being of God and man and their relationship. It comprises the elimination of contradiction and enmity against God by the reprobation and punishment of Christ in our place. In this christological, dialectical movement that is rooted in the inner being of God, the initial cleavage between God and man is bridged.



## 15. Conclusions

This final chapter of part II attempts to answer the question “How do method and content relate in the doctrine of God of Karl Barth?” In section 10.4, I have elaborated the findings of my examination of Barth’s theological method as it developed over the decades of his active career. Chapter 14 contains the analysis and, on some points, further discussion of central aspects of Barth’s doctrine of God. In order to bring the two lines together, I start with a summary of the results gained thus far. Section 15.2 answers the central question under the heading “Revelation and ontology.” In addition to the sketch of Barth’s method given in chapter 10, some characteristics arise from the survey of his doctrine of God in chapters 11 through 13. Dealing with these features of Barth’s method, section 15.3 will address “Remaining questions.”

### 15.1. Summary

During some twenty years after World War I, Karl Barth gradually developed his distinctive approach of dogmatic theology. The following statements can serve as a reminder of the fuller analysis given in section 10.4 above:

1. Barth’s theological position is developed in contrast with the dominant liberal form of Protestantism of his days. Barth takes his starting point in the infinite difference between God and world. In the subsequent stages of his dialectical theology, Barth employed (1) the Neo-Kantian language of “origin” (*Ursprung*) to indicate that knowledge of God starts “beyond” our reality; (2) paradoxical and dialectical language to express the fact that we can never “grasp” God in concepts, an insight based on the “inner, material dialectics” of God’s revelation and hiddenness, grace and judgment; (3) the concept of God’s “inextollable subjectivity” as a further warrant that God in his revelation is not at our disposal, an insight later elaborated with help of the doctrine of the Trinity.
2. Starting with Barth’s book on Anselm of Canterbury, his theology receives a clearly “realist” character. Barth takes the reality of God as the foundation of theology. He advocates the priority of the ontic (God) over the noetic (our knowledge of God), and thus assigns theology a fundamentally *a posteriori* method. Against a possibly irrationalist interpretation of dialectical theology, Barth defends the rationality of theology grounded in the rationality of God. Still, the realist position does not lead to a denial of Barth’s former criticism of any identification of God and created entities. Realist statements about God can only be done on the basis of and in accordance with the event of divine self-revelation. In continuity with this position, the *Church Dogmatics* develop in interaction with subsequent material doctrines. Characteristic of the method of Barth’s mature theology are the following features:
  - the anchoring of the epistemic question (revelation) in the confession of the personal identity of God (Trinity);
  - the development of the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia relationis* as alternative to the Roman Catholic *analogia entis*;

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- the consistent attempt to focus all doctrinal statements in Jesus Christ (christological concentration).

The detailed examination of Barth's doctrine of God results in the following summary:

1. The starting point of the doctrine of God is the confession of God as the triune. This holds both in the *noetic* sense (Trinity is the foundation of the event of revelation as the only basis for our knowledge of God) and in the *ontic* sense (Trinity defines the personal identity of God). The doctrine of the Trinity guarantees both the inextollable subjectivity and the true objectivity of God in his revelation.
2. The doctrine of God describes the being of God, but does so in terms of God's act of free love. Barth rejects the recourse to abstract ontological concepts and insists on God's revelation as decisive for the meaning of theological concepts. Barth's doctrine of God offers a decidedly Christian "ontology" on the basis of God's free act of self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Over against the *analogia entis*, Barth offers the *analogia fidei* or *revelationis* as the appropriate doctrinal device.
3. Barth's consistent start in the concrete event of revelation rather than in general categories of thought results in a profound reworking of the traditional doctrine of the divine attributes (or, in Barth's terminology, perfections). Typical of this reinterpretation is a twofold dialectic:
  - a. The understanding of the perfections as qualifications of God's fundamental properties "love" and "freedom," which replaces in Barth's exposition the traditional classification in terms of "incommunicable-communicable," "absolute-relative," "metaphysical-moral" divine properties. This point of view prevents an abstract and static perception of God's perfections and instead requires the substantiation of these concepts from the concrete salutary acts of God in Christ.
  - b. The interpretation of the perfections as not only opposed to creaturely properties but as including and overcoming the opposition between Creator and creature. This type of dialectic greatly influences Barth's account of perfections such as immutability (constancy, in Barth's terms), omnipresence, eternity, and omnipotence.
4. An important motive in Barth's doctrine of God is his abhorrence of a *deus absconditus*. Hence his identification of God's being with his act of free love, and his assumption of multiplicity instead of simplicity among God's perfections. Despite Barth's verbal rejection of the notion of simplicity, however, many important aspects of the concept are retained in his theology.
5. On questions of necessity and contingency that prove crucial to any discussion of the relation between God and the world, Barth shows at surface level a strong emphasis on the freedom of God's will and the resultant contingency in the created world. In some passages this even amounts to the denial of necessity to basic laws of logic. However, the exposition of God's knowledge and will in relation to creaturely acts shows that beneath the surface Barth endorses basically the same conceptual structures we encountered in Reformed Orthodoxy (cf. part I, sections 7.2 and 7.3).

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6. The doctrine of election properly belongs to the doctrine of God and forms its focus: within God's inner being, He has decided to unite man with himself in Christ, in order to overcome the rebellion and enmity of man against God. In this doctrine of election, the trinitarian and christological foundation of Barth's doctrine of God comes full circle.

### 15.2. Revelation and Ontology

In Barth's theology, we can identify a clear and multiple connection between his method and the contents of his doctrine of God. The two poles of the doctrine of God as expounded in the *Church Dogmatics* can be labelled with the terms "revelation" and "ontology." The former reflects the concerns of Barth's early, dialectical theology that can for the present purpose be summarized in the following statements:

- (1) Barth rejects any tendency to reduce our knowledge of God to any human capacity;
- (2) Barth insists on the ontological, epistemological and moral cleavage between God and us;
- (3) Barth states that God's self-revelation is the only starting point of true knowledge of God;
- (4) Barth claims that in the act of revelation God remains inextollably Subject without ever directly being the object of our knowledge;
- (5) Barth shows a certain preference for dialectical, paradoxical speech based on the inner dialectics of manifestation and concealment in God's revelation.

These concerns do clearly return in Barth's exposition of the doctrine of God:

Ad (1): continuing on the "Doctrine of the Word of God" (CD I/1 and I/2), the doctrine of God proper (CD II/1) starts with the question of the knowledge of God, which is answered by pointing to its actual fulfilment through God's revelation in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The "possibility" of our knowledge of God follows on this "reality," and the possibility itself does not reside in man's readiness for God, but in God's readiness for man. The only Man that is ready for God is Jesus Christ, and by partaking in him by faith we receive our readiness for God.

Ad (2): Barth's emphasis on revelation as the only source of our knowledge of God marks his view on the profound epistemological cleavage between God and us. His rejection of "natural theology," and especially of the Roman Catholic conception of the *analogia entis*, constitutes the ontological counterpart of the epistemological cleavage. The being of God cannot be brought under one category with created beings. Moreover, the ontological and epistemological cleavage coincides with the moral conflict between God and man that arises from human sin and rebellion. In this respect, Barth understands revelation and reconciliation as fundamentally one event.

Ad (3): in the doctrine of God, Barth's statement of God's self-revelation receives some specific applications. First, the free act of revelation is understood as essential to God's being: Barth describes God's being as the act of his free love. The doctrine of the Trinity that is fundamental in circumscribing the "identity" of God is rooted, according to Barth, in the event of revelation. Second, the insistence on revelation as the starting point of theology leads Barth to his view of "analogy" in

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speech about God. While rejecting analogy based on similarity of being (*analogia entis*), Barth maintains that words and concepts taken from created reality can be properly used to speak about God. A third consequence of Barth's insistence on God's self-revelation lies in the christological focus of revelation. Throughout the doctrine of God, Barth ends his argument by pointing to Jesus Christ as the full revelation of God in this or that specific respect.

Ad (4): in Barth's doctrine of God, we encounter the duality of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" ascribed to God (cf. section 14.3 above). God's "subjectivity" is elaborated in Barth's doctrine of the Trinity that explains how God has his own life within himself, including his ontological independence, self-differentiation, and relatedness. In several passages of his doctrine of God proper, Barth refers to the Trinity as the prototype of God's salutary acts towards the world. These references contain the duality of on the one hand expressing God's independence and freedom, and on the other hand identifying the root of God's grace and love in his inner being. As regards the "objectivity" of God, this notion has several dimensions in Barth's doctrine of God. First, it means a correction of the merely "non-objective" (*nicht-gegenständlich*) knowledge of God as stated in Barth's earliest dialectical phase and the affirmation of the knowledge of God as true knowledge (though a knowledge of a unique sort). Second, God's becoming "objective" for us is based on his primarily being "objective" within himself; in this respect, the "subjectivity" and the "objectivity" of God both are reduced to the Trinity. Third, the objectivity of God for us remains indirect: God chooses creaturely means that become in a sacramental way the vehicles of his revelation. The objectivity of God maintains the duality of revelation and hiddenness: we can not fixate God on the means in which He becomes objective. God makes himself "objective" for us, but never becomes an "object" that we can comprehend or manipulate.

Ad (5): the usage of dialectical and sometimes paradoxical language arises logically from Barth's position as sketched in the previous remarks. Although Barth deliberately mitigates the employment of paradoxes – a mitigation that reflects a genuine change in his theological orientation – he maintains the paradox at the most fundamental level of his theology. In the doctrine of God, and especially in the exposition of the divine perfections, this results in the consistent procedure of pairing opposite terms that qualify each other. Barth rejects a merely "negative" theology that interprets God's perfections in absolute contrast with the properties of created beings as well as a merely "affirmative" theology that makes God the *elongatur* of man or other creatures. The dialectical and paradoxical ways of argument in Barth's doctrine of God have a strongly inclusive tendency: the initial opposition that can at times be stated in stark terms is finally overcome – not, according to Barth's own claim, in a conceptual synthesis, but in the sovereign acts of God as the Lord.

So, as a first step in answering the overall question of this part of my study, I have substantiated the claim that Barth's principal method can clearly be recognized in his practice of dealing with the doctrine of God. At the same time, we have to realize that the method as summarized in propositions (1) through (5), implies substantial doctrinal convictions already. This is in itself a corroboration of the insight that method and content can never be completely separated but instead interact from the very beginning.

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The second pole in Barth's mature theology is indicated by the term "ontology." From the perspective of Barth's earliest dialectical theology – notably the second edition of his commentary of *Romans* that earned him his fame during the 1920's – this term must raise protest. From the survey of the development of Barth's theological method (chapter 10), however, it is undeniable that between his earliest writings and the *Church Dogmatics* Barth changed his mind on some fundamental issues of theological methodology. Barth research of the past 20 years has given reason to date the beginnings of these changes back to 1924, when Barth first started to lecture on the whole of Christian doctrine (the so-called *Göttingen Dogmatics*). In preparing for these lectures, Barth discovered the classic doctrines of Trinity and Christology and became convinced of their indispensable value in guiding theological thought. Together with these specific doctrines, Barth gained a positive sense for traditional, patristic and scholastic theology, especially in contrast with the neo-Protestant theology of the 19th century with which he was raised.

The gradual shift of orientation culminated in Barth's study on Anselm of Canterbury (1931) and in the almost simultaneous replacement of the projected *Christliche Dogmatik* with the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932). In the book on Anselm, Barth took the reality of what (or better: whom) the Church confesses in the Creed as his starting point, and he saw the theologian's task in thinking after the truth of this confession. Barth's discussion of Anselm includes his affirmative exposition of the "ontological" argument for the existence of God, which led Barth to deal with ontological notions such as "essence," "existence," "necessity," "contingency," and "possibility." Indeed, Barth is outspoken on the status of ontological statements concerning God: they are possible only on the basis of God's self-revelation; the formula *IQM* (*id quo maius cogitari nequit*) that enables Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence is, in Barth's interpretation, not an invention of pure reason but a revealed name. To put it briefly: while rejecting an ontology "from the outside" that applies general categories to God, Barth endorses and develops an ontology "from the inside" that spells out the truth implications of the statements made by the Church in obedience to God's own Word. Because of its further colouring, Barth's ontology is aptly labelled "ontology of grace" by Wilfried Härle.

The doctrine of God in particular provides the elaboration of this ontology, as can be seen in the following statements:

- (6) The doctrine of God is the explication of the sentence "God is."
- (7) In speaking about God, the reality of God precedes logical possibility.
- (8) In view of God, "being" and "act" are equivalent.
- (9) In all qualifications of God, his being a free, loving Person should be maintained.
- (10) In God's perfections, the one and simple being of God is explicated into several directions which cohere in the one divine act of free love.
- (11) The proper understanding of God and his relation to the world requires a precise balance of necessity and contingency.
- (12) God's decree of election in Jesus Christ is determinative for both God's own being and the whole of created reality, and is therefore of utmost ontological importance.

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Just as propositions (1) through (5) above, these statements can be elaborated on in order to clarify the connection between method and content:

Ad (6): Barth is emphatic in opposing any “resentment” against the concept of “being.” Starting from his theological conviction, he in fact enters into a philosophical discussion here. In the post-Enlightenment demise of metaphysics, Barth diagnoses an implicit rejection of the truth of the Christian faith, that God exists *par excellence*. Consistent with his basic method, he starts with the fact that God exists and acts. Consequently, the doctrine of God has to deal with God’s existence and God’s essence in all its ramifications. From this starting point, Barth’s doctrine of God receives a decidedly *realist* outlook: it attempts to make claims about God as He really is.

Ad (7): in his book on Anselm, Barth developed the insight that in respect to God the *ontic* precedes the *noetic*, the *real* precedes the *possible*. In both parts of this statement, the superiority (or, as Barth prefers, Lordship) of God is expressed: neither is God in any way dependent on or limited to our knowledge, nor can our laws of logic and (im)possibility have any authority over him. These fundamental insights are upheld and explained throughout Barth’s doctrine of God. It results in a profound and repeated relativizing of our conceptual frameworks. In his doctrine of analogy that explicates the foundation of theological language about God, Barth emphasizes that the significance and capability of terms to be applied to God does not reside in themselves or in their creaturely referents, but derives solely from God’s decision to employ these terms. In addition, Barth states that God as the Subject controls the meaning of the predicates (love, power, etc.), so that we cannot approach God with a preconceived meaning of these predicates.

Ad (8): in accordance with the two preceding statements, this proposition expresses the duality of realism and actualism in Barth’s thought. On the one hand, Barth really attempts to make ontic claims about God’s being. As I have argued before (section 14.3), the realist potential of his doctrines of Trinity and God should not be underestimated. On the other hand, Barth emphasizes that the being of God itself is not static, but consists of free acts, and that, consequently, our knowledge of God cannot fixate God in static terms but has to respect and to reflect the dynamics of God’s own life and his revelation. In this respect, Barth’s theological ontology does not *per se* imply a non-temporal understanding of God’s eternal existence, but seems to be open to the assumption of real, “temporal” movement and change in God.<sup>1</sup>

Ad (9): Barth’s discussions of the personality of God show a profound interaction with the philosophy and theology of German Idealism. In Idealist thought, the ultimate predicates of Absoluteness and Personality logically exclude each other. On this presupposition, theologians often saw themselves forced to choose between these two qualifications in view of God. Barth refutes the Idealist

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<sup>1</sup> This sentence is deliberately phrased quite carefully. While Barth employs terminology that evokes the idea of temporality, repetition, movement and change in God, he also maintains a strict distinction between God’s “duration” and our “time”; qualifies God’s eternity as pre-temporality, supra-temporality, and post-temporality to the effect that “eternity” cannot simply equal “temporality”; and insists, despite his acceptance of multiplicity in God, on the full unity of God’s being. Cf. sections 12.3.3 and 14.1 above.

## Conclusions

assumption, and defends the compossibility of Absoluteness and Personality in God. It is important to notice that God's personality is related by Barth to the doctrine of the Trinity, and that in his trinitarian existence God is understood by Barth as one individual Person.<sup>2</sup>

Ad (10): there is an understandable difficulty in Barth's position on this point. It belongs to Barth's way of doing theology that he felt deeply committed to traditional doctrine but not ultimately obliged to follow it. Barth's doctrine of God is not the logically consistent unfolding of a regulative concept of God, but a more or less coherent combination of insights and motives. This feature can be clearly recognized in Barth's dealing with the problem of simplicity – multiplicity. Barth rejects the classic notion of simplicity because of its alleged adherence to a "highest being" philosophy, and because it threatens, in Barth's view, the reliability of God's revelation in his distinct acts and perfections. Multiplicity of divine perfections is posited by Barth for the simple reason that God reveals himself in different perfections; and in this statement, Barth is not hindered by a conceptual obligation to maintain essential unity in these plural perfections. On the other hand, as we have seen, Barth insists on important aspects of the traditional notion of simplicity, particularly the insights that in each of God's perfections we have to do with the full essence of God, that the divine perfections are not derived from properties in general but originate in God himself, and that one perfection is not "something different" from the other but merely the continuation of the other under a different angle. Barth gives us a clue of his conception here by using the same term "repetition" he had employed earlier in describing the "persons" (modes of being) in the Trinity: in Father, Son, and Spirit we have three times the same God; similarly, the divine perfections indicate the same God in different perspectives and relations. In the latter clause, "perspectives and relations" is not meant in a reductionist sense: for Barth, it is really God who is love, grace, wisdom, holiness, power, etc. Commenting on the relation between method and content in this respect, we could say that Barth expresses basically the *same view* as large parts of traditional theology with the help of a *different conceptuality*; although his choice for

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<sup>2</sup> As indicated before, I see no reason to complain about Barth's dismissal of "person" as an appropriate term in the context of describing the three *personae* or *hypostaseis* of the Trinity and his replacement of this term by "modes of being." There is no modalism implied in this choice. On the contrary, Barth's reserving the term "person" in the strict sense for the triune God "as a whole" is fully consistent with orthodox doctrine and is a plausible "mono-personal" alternative to the idea of "social Trinity." Cf. on the charge of modalism against Barth also J.A. Heyns, *Die grondstruktuur van die modalistiese triniteitsbeskouing* (Kampen: Kok, 1953), 143-155. Heyns mentions two possible grounds for this accusation: (1) the rejection of the term "person" in favor of "mode of being"; (2) the dialectic of revelation and hiddenness, that seems to run parallel to the modalist statement of a hidden God that manifests himself in merely outward acts of revelation. In both respects, Heyns concludes: "It is clear that the apparent similarity between Barth's view and the modalists is merely terminological, while in the essence of the matter we have to do with irreconcilable conceptions." (Afrikaans: "Dit is duidelik dat die skynbare ooreenkoms tussen die voorstelling van Barth en die modaliste alleen 'n terminologiese is, terwyl ons in die wese van die saak met onverenigbare voorstellinge te doen het.")

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a different approach is motivated by substantial insights that lead to a different emphasis.

Ad (11): in Barth's doctrine of God, we do hardly face the dimensions of necessity and contingency in these precise (philosophical, scholastic) terms. However, I have argued (section 14.3) that the underlying conceptual structure of Barth's theology implies a balanced view of necessity and contingency. We have to realize that it is crucial for Barth to develop these insights not in neutral, philosophical categories, but to substantiate them with distinctly theological thoughts on the basis of revelation. With that proviso in mind, we can say that Barth reserves necessity in the strict sense to God himself. In the doctrine of God proper, this is phrased in terms of God's freedom, independence, and aseity. This strict necessity of God in himself implies the exclusion of necessity in two directions: first, God is not dependent on or in need of the created world; second, the created world is not necessary in itself, but exists due to the free decision of God's will. The latter element gives Barth's theology a strong voluntarist outlook. At times, Barth expresses extreme views on the contingency of even the basic laws of logic and the basic structures of reality. It is not clear whether he understood (and accepted) the full conceptual implications of these statements. In my view, he was driven by the desire to uphold God's absolute freedom and sovereignty against attempts to subdue God to the limits of human thought, and took the remaining conceptual difficulties for granted. Still, in regard to both God's own, inner being and his outward acts, the emphasis on the free will of God is balanced by references to God's good and wise nature and to hypothetical necessity or, to recur to an early scholastic, Anselmian, term: convenience.

Ad (12): Jesus Christ is the beginning of all God's ways, Barth states in his doctrine of election. The central place of Christ in election is consistent with the initial start of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in the doctrine of the Trinity. Between these two focal points, the doctrine of God is determined toward the following characteristics:

- the identity of God cannot be defined in abstract, neutral terms, but by a concrete, personal Name;
- God's essence, and therefore our knowledge of God, has from the outset a soteriological focus: God manifests his love, and wills to take us into communion with him;
- all that is said about God and his perfections has to be said in terms of God's historical acts of revelation and redemption.

The impact of the christological setup of Barth's theology on human existence mirrors these characteristics:

- our identity as humans is found in Jesus Christ, so that there is no human existence apart from Christ in a neutral position;
- our stance toward God cannot be one of a neutral, unaffected spectator, but we are questioned in the deepest roots of our existence: do we accept God's choice to love us in Christ, or do we flee in the "impossible possibility" of rejecting God's love?
- living in faith means obedience to God's concrete, historical, contingent command.

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By these two series of statements ( (1) through (5) and (6) through (12) ), the relation of method and content in Barth's doctrine of God is fundamentally answered. We can, in summary, notice a strong and positive connection of method and content. The fundamental method of Barth's theology is consistently carried out in his doctrine of God. In turn, the method itself is determined by substantial theological convictions. In addition, it should be noticed that Barth's way of doing theology enables him to incorporate insights into his exposition of doctrine that do not immediately follow from, but nevertheless are consistent with, his presuppositions. It is at once a focused and an open-minded theology.

### 15.3. Remaining Questions

Given the fundamental conclusions exposed in the preceding section, some questions concerning Barth's method in his doctrine of God remain open. I pick up some of the "systematic questions" discussed in section 10.4.2 above. First, we look at the Scriptural standard of Barth's doctrine of God. Second, we attempt to sketch Barth's place in the history of thought. Third, I make some comments on further argumentative features of Barth's doctrine of God.

#### 15.3.1. Barth's Use of Scripture

On the basis of the preceding survey of important parts of Barth's theology, we are *not* equipped to give a satisfactory evaluation of its Scriptural adequacy. The best we can do here is, first, to mention Barth's own intentions concerning the "biblicity" of his method and theology; second, to refer to the most important conclusions of recent studies on this topic; and, third, to place some observations on the use of Scripture in the doctrine of God alongside these findings of other studies.

For Barth, the Scriptural principle is the most characteristic and fundamental feature of truly Reformed theology. In an oral presentation, later published as an article on "Das Schriftprinzip der reformierten Kirche," Barth advocates a strong view of Scripture against the historicist approach of modern Protestantism. Scripture should be accepted not as a "source" of historical information, but as a "command" that asks for obedience. In this connection, Barth emphasizes the formal and material authority of Jesus Christ over the Church as *dominus ac rex scripturae*. The Church is based on Scripture, not the reverse. The Scriptural principle truly is an *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*.<sup>3</sup>

In his elaboration of this principle, two further aspects are important. First, Barth developed a specific hermeneutics that can be typified as "theological exegesis." In conscious opposition to the detached approach of historical and literary analysis which dominated the academic theological world of his days, Barth insists on the understanding of Scripture as "prophetic and apostolic witness" of the Word of God. We have to approach the Bible in the awareness that God has spoken to his people, and in the expectation that He will speak to us again. Barth advocates a strict focus on the "substance matter" (*die Sache*) of the

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, "Das Schriftprinzip der reformierten Kirche," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925): 215-245. Cf. also Barth's essay "Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und ihre Aufgabe," in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, 179-212, esp. 193-197.

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biblical witness, and assumes that in understanding Scripture as the Word of God, one becomes “simultaneous” with the time of biblical revelation. Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit makes us present to and co-existent with the event of revelation. Whereas this hermeneutic stands firmly against the historical-critical approach of liberal Protestantism, the second feature of Barth’s hermeneutics distances him from the older Orthodox position which claimed the verbal inspiration and, consequently, the absolute normative and historical authority of Scripture. While maintaining a very high view of Scripture, Barth consistently distinguishes between Scripture as the written deposit of revelation and the foundational event of revelation in Jesus Christ itself. On the one hand, Barth takes very seriously the concrete shape in which Scripture witnesses God’s Word. On the other hand, he maintains a principial distinction between Word and Scripture, and in his own procedure of theological exegesis focuses on the christological *pointe* of the biblical passages. In this christological focus, the two motives of Barth’s view of Scripture coincide.

At the International Symposium on Karl Barth held at Emden in 2003, Michael Trowitzsch expressed the perplexity of Barth scholarship on the exact procedures of biblical exegesis performed by Barth in the *Church Dogmatics*:

Die Schwierigkeit liegt, wenn ich recht sehe, nicht zuletzt darin, dass die Schriftauslegung von Karl Barth immer noch unverstanden ist. Wir wissen nicht, was eigentlich vorgeht: *wie* Barth Texte auslegt. Wir können es nicht zureichend beschreiben, wie eigentlich das Verfahren zu bestimmen ist, demgemäss er sich den biblischen Texten nähert. Es muss vielleicht keine einfache, aber eine beschreibbare, eine benennbare Lösung geben, und wie mir scheint, sind wir weit davon entfernt, das wirklich gedanklich durchdrungen zu haben, was vor sich geht.<sup>4</sup>

Wolf Krötke joined the debate by in part blaming Barth himself for this difficulty:

Er riecht sozusagen in die Texte hinein, hat die Konkordanz vor sich und hat Wunderschönes und hat vieles gemerkt, aber es ist in der Tat methodisch nicht nachvollziehbar, wenn man nicht einen solchen sprühenden Geist hat, mit dem man die Texte kombiniert.<sup>5</sup>

Included in Krötke’s further critique of Barth is the problem of his pre-critical acceptance of the biblical worldview in “supranaturale Tatsachen” such as the existence of angels and demons and the defense of the Virgin Birth.

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<sup>4</sup> Quotation from the report of the concluding debate of the symposium: “Statt eines Nachwortes ... Abschlusspodium: Karl Barth in Deutschland – Resümee und Perspektive,” in: Beintker et al., *Karl Barth in Deutschland*, 471-472.

<sup>5</sup> Beintker et al., *Karl Barth in Deutschland*, 472. Krötke’s remarks remind us of Barth’s early confrontation with Adolf von Harnack (cf. section 10.1.1 above), who accused Barth of subjectivism and spiritualism in his approach to Scripture.

## Conclusions

Despite Trowitzsch's negative conclusion, some research has been done in Barth's exegetical procedures.<sup>6</sup> Trowitzsch himself edited a volume of essays on *Karl Barths Schriftauslegung*.<sup>7</sup> The first essay, by Wolf Krötke, deals with Barth's Christology as an example of his exegesis. Since Jesus Christ is the central message of Scripture, Christology has to be the unfolding of Scripture *par excellence*. Krötke points out that in practice Barth prefers the Pauline-Johannine perspective to the Synoptic account, although he finally integrates the two perspectives. Moreover, the event of the resurrection of Christ is constitutive of the whole biblical story. On this point, a sharp contrast exists between Barth and common historical-critical scholarship: while this scholarship attempts to grasp the "historical Jesus" by means of scientific historical techniques, Barth posits the unique and contingent yet all-determining character of the event of resurrection. Krötke denies that Barth's christological concentration causes narrow-mindedness in his explanation of Scripture: the whole world is included in God's single act of reconciliation, and therefore the whole of biblical testimony is rehearsed in Barth's theology.<sup>8</sup>

In a next article, Walter Schmithals discusses the dilemma of "dogmatic" (or "doctrinal") and "historical" exegesis. He develops the dilemma with the help of the opposing positions taken by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Surprisingly, Schmithals notices fundamental agreement between the two on several points: (1) both desire to be "biblical" theologians; (2) both are in search of the actual message or "kerygma" of Scripture; (3) both view the Bible as God's revelation with Jesus Christ as its center; (4) both keep to the text of Scripture without recourse to the world "behind" the text; (5) both attempt to perform in their specific profession the task of theology as a whole. Despite these commonalities, there is an unbridgeable gap of method between Barth and Bultmann. With the "historical awareness" that arose in European intellectual history, the pre-critical "doctrinal method" of biblical exegesis has been replaced by a profoundly historical approach to the texts of Scripture. The methodical revolution of Barth is that he returned to the doctrinal method because, in his view, the historical approach of Scripture fails its proper substance. Barth can virtually neglect historical and literary analysis due to his extreme focus on the "substance" attested by the text. Bultmann, by contrast, has brought historical exegesis to its culmination by his program of "demythologizing" the New Testament.<sup>9</sup>

Trowitzsch concludes the little volume with a sketch of Barth's approach to Scripture as post-critical exegesis in service of the Church and its proclamation. He emphasizes that Scripture discloses itself, and that by this disclosure we come to partake in the world of God. The world itself, especially the world of modern

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<sup>6</sup> A recent survey and analysis of Barth's biblical hermeneutic at a fundamental level is given by Helmut Kirschstein, *Der souveräne Gott und die heilige Schrift: Einführung in die biblische Hermeneutik Karl Barths*, Mit einem Vorwort von Jürgen Moltmann (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Wolf Krötke, "Die Christologie Karl Barths als Beispiel für den Vollzug seiner Exegese," in Trowitzsch, *Karl Barths Schriftauslegung*, 1-21.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Schmithals, "Zu Karl Barths Schriftauslegung: Die Problematik des Verhältnisses von 'dogmatischer' und historischer Exegese," in Trowitzsch, *Karl Barths Schriftauslegung*, 23-52.

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European culture, does not in itself witness God: repentance and conversion is needed to encounter God. Trowitzsch characterizes the dominance of the “principle of method” in modern philosophy as a symptom of the human attempt for full knowledge of and control over reality. Against this methodical arrogance, Karl Barth places the principal irrelevance of method and the demand of *Sachlichkeit*. Post-critical, theological exegesis as advocated by Barth wants to serve the actual, personal encounter of God and man.<sup>10</sup>

In her examination of Barth’s exegesis of “predestinarian texts” in *CD II/2*, Mary Kathleen Cunningham notices the following characteristics of Barth’s exegetical procedure:<sup>11</sup>

- a. Barth treats texts not as isolated, but juxtaposes and clusters them. This evidences a canonical approach to Scripture: Barth considers Scripture in its final form as the coherent witness of Jesus Christ. Historical reconstruction of sources and ideas becomes less relevant for him. In this respect, his usage of historical-critical scholarship is eclectic and obscures the genuine contrast between Barth’s approach and historical criticism. The clustering of texts enables Barth to import a meaning discovered in one text into the next.
- b. Barth insists on the primacy of Jesus Christ as the “logical subject” of Scripture in determining the meaning of biblical passages. While most “professional” exegetes look for intra- or extra-biblical antecedents of biblical concepts and motifs, Barth denies that Scripture ascribes “pre-conceived notions” to God and Christ. It is only through the narrative account of God’s revelation in Christ that words and phrases receive their proper meaning. Barth understands Scripture not as containing references to general concepts that can be logically deduced, but as the dramatic description of a world-encompassing story or a world of its own.
- c. The focus on and primacy of Christ continue in Barth’s consistent attempt to relate all biblical statements to the soteriological core of the message of Scripture. In the “predestinarian texts” examined by Cunningham, this leads Barth to a “spirited exegetical assault on the *Logos asarkos*,” an assault in which detailed philological argumentation is interwoven with a principal christocentric focus.

Different conclusions on Barth’s practical hermeneutics are presented by Anne Marijke Spijkerboer.<sup>12</sup> She also investigated Barth’s exegesis in the context of the doctrine of election, but focused on his treatment of two Old Testament narratives (1 Kings 13; 1 Samuel 9-10). Spijkerboer concurs with Cunningham on the fundamental significance of Christ as the “mystery” of all Scripture. She argues,

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Trowitzsch, “ ‘Nachkritische Schriftauslegung’: Wiederaufnahme und Fortführung einer Fragestellung,” in: Trowitzsch, *Karl Barths Schriftauslegung*, 73-109. With this title, Trowitzsch reacts to an earlier article under the same heading by Rudolf Smend.

<sup>11</sup> Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis*, passim. Summarizing statements are found on pages 39, 40, 59-63, 70-76. It should be noticed that Cunningham explicitly draws on Hans Frei’s adoption of Barth’s hermeneutics in a program of post-liberal theology with a strong component of narrativism.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Marijke Spijkerboer, *En zij vonden ze niet: Storingen in de hermeneutiek aan de hand van Barth’s exegete van ‘de man Gods uit Juda’ en van ‘David en Saul’* (Kampen: Kok, 1996).

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however, that Barth's usage of Christ as the hermeneutical key to the Old Testament causes "disturbances" in his understanding of these narratives:

In the course of this study it appeared that Barth runs aground when he applies his own rules. At the end of his exegesis of 1 Kings 13 and also that of 'David and Saul' a confusion arises for him regarding the reading of the texts with Christ as the hermeneutical key and without this key. Close reading of Barth's text made it possible for me as a reader to trace his confusion, but Barth himself does no more than ask several questions at the end of his exegesis.<sup>13</sup>

Spijkerboer then frames the discussion in terms of the "alien" and the "known" in Barth's understanding of Scripture: while the category of "mystery" implies that we encounter something unknown in God's (absolutely autonomous) revelation, it seems that in practice Barth mostly registers the "known" (Christ) in Old Testament texts while he tends to eliminate the "alien" from his interpretation. According to Spijkerboer, Barth's "running aground" in his exegesis is a salutary disturbance, since it occasions the relativizing of the stated autonomy of the text of Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

The fundamental intentions of Barth concerning the place of Scripture in theological exposition, together with the qualifications resulting from Barth scholarship as mentioned above, are generally affirmed in his concrete usage of Scripture as we encountered it in the exposition of the doctrine of God. Biblical texts often form the starting point of a dogmatic argumentation and substantially fill the concepts developed by Barth. Decisive corrections of traditional concepts and arguments are based by Barth on Scriptural evidence. At the same time, it becomes abundantly clear that Barth interprets the biblical material in accordance with his basic theological views on, for example, the dialectics of revelation and concealment and the centrality of Christ in God's revelation. Therefore, an honest evaluation of his exegetical efforts should contain at least these two components: (1) concrete interaction with his detailed exegetical (semantic, grammatical, intertextual) arguments, and (2) an overall answer to the question whether his view of Christ as the hermeneutical key (and his own application of this principle) does justice to Scripture.

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<sup>13</sup> Quotation from the English summary: Spijkerboer, *En zij vonden ze niet*, 216-217.

<sup>14</sup> Spijkerboer, *En zij vonden ze niet*, 217-219. Spijkerboer's analysis and evaluation is complicated by two apparently opposite positions she takes. On the one hand, she defends the "alien" and marginalized elements of reality (the people of Israel, women) against Barth's "masculine" uniformizing hegemony; on this account, one would expect her to welcome Barth's emphasis on the radical "otherness" and autonomy of God's revelation. On the other hand, it turns out that she wishes to draw God's revelation closer into our created reality (even in the shape of "a framework of our own human culture, words and experiences") in order to make it understandable.

### **15.3.2. Place in the History of Thought**

For Barth's place in the history of thought, we must look in two directions. The first question to be highlighted is his reception of Christian thought up to the Enlightenment, including patristic theology, medieval and post-Reformation scholasticism, and the thought of the Reformers (mainly Luther and Calvin). On the basis of my discussion of the relevant parts of the *Church Dogmatics*, I present the following observations:

1. For his emphasis on the revelation of God as the living Word, Barth frequently appeals to the Reformers Luther and Calvin. These are somewhat isolated by Barth for their freedom from "natural theology" and metaphysical bindings.
2. In expounding the substance of doctrine (i.e., Trinity, doctrine of God), Barth exhibits understanding of and affinity with the terminology and conceptuality of Church Fathers, medieval doctors, and "Old Protestant" scholastics. In general, he treats their discussions as helpful in elucidating the substance matter of the Christian faith, and thus opposes the suggestion that this theology has become obsolete by philosophical developments since the Enlightenment. In this respect, Barth consciously places himself in the ongoing tradition of the Church that comprises the Early Church as well as medieval theology and Protestant scholastic thought, which Barth sees in fundamental agreement with each other.
3. The general affinity with traditional theology does not prevent Barth from uttering severe criticism at key points. His main target of opposition is the alleged alliance of most of traditional theology with natural theology and general ontology. In Barth's view, the perennial attempt to undergird the truth of the Gospel with help from secular philosophy is a fatal flaw of traditional theology, which means that the whole body of doctrine needs to be re-established on a radically different foundation. Barth's most fierce opposition is against Roman Catholic (Thomist) theology with its synthesis of nature and grace on the basis of the *analogia entis*. As he sees it, however, most of Protestant theology suffers from the same disease.
4. While showing a considerable acquaintance with the historical resources of theology, Barth does not always notice internal differences in the tradition of Christian thought. As we noticed above (sections 14.3 and 15.2) Barth advocates a voluntarist approach of the doctrine of God. In that respect, he misses some opportunities to connect to the tradition of theology that centers on the divine will as determinative of reality; a tradition that stretches from Augustine and Anselm via Duns Scotus to Calvin and Reformed scholasticism. From his own voluntarist position, he opposes a Thomist "essentialism" that is not representative of his own (Reformed) tradition. In short, the distance between Barth and the classic theological tradition is often overstated due to a lack of proper understanding of the tradition.
5. It would be incorrect to place Barth merely in strong continuity with the orthodox theology of the Early Church and Reformation. Barth shares in many of the convictions and problematics of modern culture (as we will see immediately below), and he has performed significant innovations on key issues of doctrine. Relevant to this study are, for example, the way in which he connects the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrine of revelation, and his reconstruction of

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the doctrine of election. The main thrust of his theology is found in the christological concentration that causes the fundamental alteration of most if not all distinct parts of doctrine. This resetting of theology is Barth's answer to the typically modern, post-Enlightenment *condition humaine*.

In the second place, Barth's relation to post-Enlightenment theology and philosophy should be examined. This is especially important in order to clarify the relation of method and content in his theology: if his theological (dialectical) method implies the tacit incorporation of modern theological and philosophical (e.g., Hegelian) presuppositions, Barth's claim that his theology is based on the event of divine self-revelation needs to be nuanced. At the same time, however, the relation of Barth and modern thought is perhaps more difficult to establish than his stance toward the patristic and scholastic tradition: whereas his doctrinal expositions are replete with quotations from classic theology, the parts of the *Church Dogmatics* explored here contain relatively few references to newer theology and hardly any to recent philosophy. Within this limitation, I give the following sketch of Barth's place in the recent history of thought:

1. Biographically speaking, it is evident that Barth carried with him much of the heritage of 19th century philosophy and theology. In his preparatory education and theological studies, he must have read the classic texts of German philosophy and theology of the era. During his years as a pastor, and later as a professor of theology, he continued studying authors such as Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dörner and Ritschl. Despite his deliberate farewell to this tradition of thought and life around World War I, it is plausible that his intellectual "parents and grandparents" had a lasting influence on his thought, even if it is by way of contrast.
2. It is *communis opinio* in Barth studies that "typically Barthian" features such as the rejection of natural theology and the concentration on Jesus Christ as the one and ultimate revelation of God stand in continuity with Barth's theological teachers, notably Ritschl and Herrmann. The consequences drawn by Barth from these positions, however, differ radically from those of his predecessors: the rejection of natural theology leads Barth to a massive opposition to the whole theological and cultural constitution of neo-Protestantism; the concentration on Jesus Christ is not developed in the direction of "historically verifiable facts" or "inner experience" but is understood in terms of God's supra-historical, non-experiential revelation.
3. Barth's references to 19th and 20th theology are mostly critical. A main target of his polemic is F.D.E. Schleiermacher for his proposal to base theology on man's "feeling of absolute dependence." Barth's theology of the Word of God is intended as the precise opposite of Schleiermacher. Although Barth's relation to Schleiermacher remained complicated throughout his life, there is, in my view, no reason to suggest that in the end Barth arrived at a position similar to Schleiermacher's. The main concepts of Barth's theology grow out from an entirely different root.
4. C. van der Kooi has argued that Barth's doctrine of God (especially of our "knowing God") intends to provide an answer to the "Kantian situation" in epistemology. If true knowledge consists of objective perception within the categories of time and space, it seems that the invisible, unperceivable God

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cannot be known. Barth accepts this as a description of “normal” knowledge, but then claims that God has his own way of being “objective” for us by using indirect instruments from the created world. By this move, Barth counters the reductionist exclusion of God from knowledge. Moreover, Barth brings a “subjective” line in his epistemology: God is Subject of his revelation and even works the knowledge of him in us as knowing subjects, through the Holy Spirit. By this twofold argument, Barth has safeguarded both the objective and the subjective side of our knowing God.<sup>15</sup> Van der Kooi continues to argue that Barth’s reaction to Kant has a high price: by placing God in an indirect, dialectical epistemic relation to creatures, Barth accepts that the world as such is “empty of God.” At this point, the doctrine of creation and Pneumatology could, in Van der Kooi’s view, provide a corrective on Barth’s position.<sup>16</sup>

5. The third great name, in addition to Schleiermacher and Kant, is G.W.F. Hegel. Although the *Church Dogmatics* contain few references to this Idealist philosopher, Barth at times expressed some sympathy with Hegel. Among the 19th century theologians he refers to, those with Hegelian leanings (e.g., Marheineke, Dorner) are treated rather positively. Barth scholarship has pointed out structural similarities between Hegel’s philosophy and Barth’s theology. Most remarkable is the type of dialectics employed by Barth, characterized by the ultimate inclusion of identity and differentiation. Also Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity, as an explication of the unity of God as Revealer, Revelation, and Being-Revealed, could remind of Hegel’s triad of subjective, objective, and absolute Spirit. In my view, however, we should be careful in deducing a dependence on Hegel’s thought from these similarities. It might well be that Barth received and transmitted in “Hegelian” patterns of thought insights that were, according to Barth’s own claims, discovered in God’s Word. If that is the case, discussion can still arise on the question whether this peculiar presentation in “Hegelian” categories is (most) appropriate.<sup>17</sup>

This brief review of Barth’s place in the history of thought, both pre- and post-Enlightenment, yields important hermeneutical insights that affect the relation of method and content:

- positions that are explicitly rejected can sub-consciously continue to influence one’s thought;
- in the reception of historical material, interference with ideas and problems from different eras can easily cloud or even distort the picture;
- one should distinguish between the verbal acceptance or rejection of given terms and concepts on the surface level and the structural development of one’s own conceptuality that might well resemble a systematic position which is verbally rejected;

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<sup>15</sup> Van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel*, 230-246, 262-266 (English: *As in a Mirror*, 251-270, 289-293).

<sup>16</sup> Van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel*, 276-281, 375-385 (English: *As in a Mirror*, 305-310, 426-438).

<sup>17</sup> On Barth’s relation to Hegel, cf. Freyd, *Gott als die universale Wahrheit*, and Michael Welker, “Barth und Hegel: Zur Erkenntnis eines methodischen Verfahrens bei Barth,” *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983): 307-328.

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- similarity with or dependence on specific categories of thought does not in itself determine the (in)appropriateness of one's position: discussion has to be continued on the level of presuppositions, propositional content, implications and connections of one's own concepts (whatever their origin).

These observations do not allow for any positive conclusion in regard to Karl Barth, but are stated here as a methodical warning. The investigation in Barth's theology has confirmed the conclusion drawn from the study of Reformed scholasticism, that we should not take things at face value.

### 15.3.3. Argumentative Characteristics

Finally, I want to highlight some further characteristics of Barth's argumentative procedure. Three aspects come to the fore. First, Barth's usage of precise concepts in expounding his doctrine. In this respect, Bent Flemming Nielsen comments:

... dass Barth einen sehr freien und ungezwungenen Umgang mit Worten und Begriffen pflegte .... Barth denkt in hohem Masse sachorientiert oder problemorientiert und nur in geringem Masse von Begriffen her. Derselbe Sachverhalt und dieselbe Fragestellung können sich hinter unterschiedlichen Terminologien verbergen. ... Wenn wir hier mit einer Begriffsanalyse einsetzen, ist dies also nicht als eine Behauptung unsererseits zu verstehen, dass bestimmte Problemstellungen stets mit einer bestimmten Terminologie verbunden wären. Sondern hierin kommt die Annahme zum Ausdruck, dass man sich durch die Analyse einer bestimmten Terminologie einer bestimmten Fragestellung nähern kann. Und das dürfte keine Erschleichung sein! Denn die Kirchliche Dogmatik enthält gerade in ihrer Sachorientierung – eine lange, lange Reihe von Begriffsbestimmungen, denen nachzugehen bei einem Versuch, sich der Sache zu nähern, legitim sein muss.<sup>18</sup>

Barth exhibits a remarkable terminological and conceptual flexibility, which requires any interpreter to follow the complete line of his thoughts before defining "what Barth really wants to say." Barth's flexibility in this regard sometimes led him to near self-contradiction. A famous example of a term that could receive squarely opposed applications in different stages of Barth's theology is the phrase "impossible possibility": while in Barth's early theology of crisis (*Romans II*) it indicated the miraculous event of *God revealing himself* despite all human incapacity and negation, later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* describe *human resistance and sin* as the "impossible possibility" that cannot stand firm in the light of the victory of God's grace in Christ. For a systematic analysis of Barth's theology, Barth's loose way of dealing with his terms and concepts poses a serious problem. This study, in which Barth is accompanied by Reformed scholasticism and analytical philosophy, is vulnerable to the temptation of forcing Barth into a similarly clear conceptual framework. In the preceding description and analysis, I have attempted to do justice to Barth's theological motives as expressed in the variety of his language,

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<sup>18</sup> Nielsen, *Rationalität der Offenbarungstheologie*, 42-43.

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while at the same time distilling the maximum of conceptual clarity from his more precise expositions.

My second remark on Barth's mode of argumentation concerns his manner of dialectically qualifying his initial statements. While at the largest scale Barth's theology has a remarkable coherence and unity, the inner dialectics of his "system" is reflected on the micro-level by his constant addition of new substantives and adjectives of a (partly) opposite meaning. This does not in itself imply that Barth commits open self-contradiction by saying Yes and No at the same time in the same respect. In fact, he is convinced that only a Yes or a No does not convey the full truth of the matter: in order to be properly understood, the No that goes along with the Yes needs to be heard, and *vice versa*. Ideally, the result of such dialectical qualification is not meaningless contradiction but a nuanced understanding of the truth. This feature of Barth's argumentation is a direct consequence of his view of God's "inextollable subjectivity" in his revelation: truth about God is not at our disposal; as soon as we fixate God in terms of either affirmation or negation, we absolutize our own concepts and thus commit idolatry. Moreover, this dialectic reflects the insight that true knowledge of God is structured by the concrete sequence of God's acts of salvation in Jesus Christ: we need to understand the "full story" in order to know God. Starting with this benevolent interpretation, I suggest that this way of dialectical qualification at times is in danger of obliterating any conceptual content. To restrict examples to the doctrine of God as the specific focus of this study, I point to Barth's discussion of God's omnipresence. The following quotation neatly summarizes Barth's approach:

there is no reason why God in His essence should not be finite in the same perfect way as He is infinite. But to be finite in this perfect way necessarily means in such a way that His finitude does not prevent His being infinite, and therefore that while finitude is that which limits and is a determination of His creation, it does not involve any limitation or defect in God.<sup>19</sup>

While it can be understood that, in Barth's view, God is beyond the difference of spatiality and non-spatiality, the apparent identification of "finite" and "infinite" in regard to God is hardly understandable. Barth does not explain what, in this connection, these terms would mean. Despite Barth's important qualifications of God's presence within himself and towards the world, the precise relation between God's infinite presence and finite created spatiality disappears from the picture.

My third and final remark elaborates on the previous two comments. The difficulty of pinpointing the conceptual content of Barth's expositions continues on the scale of the different genres within the *Church Dogmatics*. As indicated in the Introduction (section 9.2), there is a considerable difference in style between Barth's main text, headed by the *Leitsätze*, and the more technical and polemical explications in fine print. A balanced view of Barth's theology has to take both levels into consideration. In my own description and analysis, I have paid much attention to the excursus in which Barth develops a more technical conceptuality

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<sup>19</sup> CD II/1, 467 (KD II/1, 526).

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interacting with traditional and contemporary thought. As a tentative justification, based on my “reading experience” in the *Church Dogmatics*, I offer the following impression:

In his main text, Barth gives a constructive exposition of doctrine that expresses his motives and purposes. This text level is rhetorical in style, often suggestive rather than fully argumentative. Its force is in the creative association of themes and concepts and in the dialectical concatenation of terms. On this level, Barth performs a sophisticated composition and structuring of definitions and distinctions. The fine print level, on the other hand, cannot, as Barth notes in the Introduction of volume I/1, be read apart from the main text. In that sense, it is secondary and can at best fill in the spaces defined by the leading sentences. Still, it has its own value precisely in fine-tuning from a conceptual point of view the more rough statements of the main text. Its style is more argumentative, dealing with specific formulas, distinctions and discussions. Its content consists of mainly three categories: first, Barth adduces biblical material to substantiate the running exposition of doctrine (on his treatment of the biblical material, see the beginning of this section); second, Barth interacts with the classic tradition of doctrine (both patristic and scholastic) and takes a stand on its nuanced conceptuality (commonly positive to a large extent, and then critical inasmuch as the tradition reflects a “general ontology”); third, Barth enters into discussion with “neo-Protestant” and contemporary writers (here he is most polemical). From this differentiation within the style and argumentation, I draw the insight that we should not always take Barth at his word in his statements on the main text level; he deserves a deeper look into the fine print level in order to discover more precisely the conceptual ramifications of his views in relation with other positions.



PART III.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN

THE UTRECHT SCHOOL



## 16. Introduction

The investigation of the so-called Utrecht School completes the analytical substance of this study. The choice of this strand in Dutch systematic theology is motivated by several considerations.

The first reason is contextual. For at least two decades (1980 - 2000) a group of scholars related to Utrecht University has delivered a significant and recognizable contribution to theological discussion in the Netherlands. Through a series of monographs and a number of multi-authored volumes, they have presented themselves as a "school" in theology. Although their approach to theology has provoked some critical discussion, no comprehensive description and evaluation has been undertaken thus far. This part of my study provides the first survey and assessment of the efforts of the Utrecht scholars. To be sure, it will be limited in scope and detail. Still, I hope to provide a valuable introduction to the themes and methods characteristic of their theological direction. As will be shown below, the Utrecht School is not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon, but is related to different traditions of theology and philosophy in both the continental and the Atlantic world. This ensures relevance for this part of the study beyond the Dutch context.

Within a specifically Reformed perspective, the Utrecht School poses an outspoken challenge: on the one hand, many of its members clearly wish to continue and develop an orthodox Reformed theology; on the other hand, some aspects of its method and factual outcomes have raised some suspicion in traditional Reformed circles. As this study wishes to contribute to a contemporary Reformed theology, the Utrecht School gives a clear indication of the possibilities and questions we have to face.

A second reason to include the Utrecht group of scholars in this study is that their approach fits well into the overall question: how do method and content relate in the doctrine of God? The Utrecht School shows an outstanding clarity and explicitness about its method. Moreover, the doctrine of God is one of its most important areas of research. As we will see below, there is a more than arbitrary link between the Utrecht School's general approach and its focus on the doctrine of God. This makes it a promising object for studying the connection between method and content.

The third reason lies in the attitude of the Utrecht School towards the subjects of the previous parts of this study: Reformed Orthodoxy and Karl Barth. As will be elaborated below, most of the Utrecht scholars aim at a conscious and positive continuation of the theological tradition of medieval and Protestant scholasticism. This is not a mere repristination, but an attempt to take up the scholastic agenda aided by contemporary philosophical instruments (mainly conceptual analysis and modal logic, as will be explained below). The Utrecht School's affiliation with the scholastic tradition implies some critical distance to the theology of Karl Barth. In fact, the Utrecht scholars make a breach with the Barth-dominated theological scene of the 1950's till 1970's in the Netherlands. However, there is no complete opposition between Barth and the Utrecht School. Some of the Utrecht theologians

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have substantial affinity with Barth's theological intentions and some of his views. A common feature is the critical attitude towards Enlightenment philosophy and theology. In central parts of the doctrine of God, we will discover tendencies similar to Barth's intuitions. Within the composition of this study, we may expect the Utrecht School to be helpful in evaluating the merits and disadvantages of both the Reformed Orthodox and the Barthian position. Of course, the Utrecht theology will also be tested on its own value.

Some factual information about the history and personal composition of the Utrecht School is needed to understand its scope and variety. The story starts with the appointment of Vincent Brümmer (\*1932) as a professor of philosophy of religion at Utrecht University in 1967.<sup>1</sup> Brümmer, born and raised in South Africa, studied both theology and philosophy in Stellenbosch. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brümmer completed his studies through longer stays at Harvard Divinity School, Mansfield College at Oxford, and Utrecht University. In the Netherlands, he earned his doctorate with a dissertation on the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd.<sup>2</sup> In this period, Brümmer discovered that he himself lacked the equipment for independent philosophizing. He filled this void in with British analytical philosophy during the 1960s.

From the beginning of his professorate in Utrecht, Brümmer took an active course in developing the discipline entrusted to him. An organizational change was the formation of a discipline group for Philosophy and Ethics, in which Brümmer co-operated with colleagues as Hannes de Graaf, Ton van den Beld, Egbert Schroten, Antoon Vos, Theo Zweerman and Henk Manschot. Within this group, considerable confessional and professional differences existed, but this did not prevent a productive working together in the task of integrating philosophy and theology in a certain way. The direction taken by Brümmer found an initial expression in *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse. Een inleiding voor theologen en andere belangstellenden* (1975).<sup>3</sup> This book was intended to train Brümmer's theological students in using a set of analytical instruments suitable for improving the critical grade and precision of thought in theology.

Some of the reactions to this book led Brümmer to the conviction that he had to work out his methodological ideas in a substantial program of philosophical theology. For the substantial application of his insights, Brümmer chose to focus on a central part of Christian theology, the doctrine of God. Besides his own

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the following information is taken from Brümmer's autobiographical essay "Kronkels in mijn denkweg," in *Wijsgerige theologie in beweging: Een selectie uit de essays van Vincent Brümmer*, ed. by Gijsbert van den Brink et al., Utrechtse Theologische Reeks, vol. 14 (Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, 1992), 7-27. For a more recent version in English, see Brümmer, "Meanders in my Thinking: A Brief Intellectual Autobiography," in his collected works: *Brümmer on Meaning And the Christian Faith*, Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works (Aldershot: Ashgate), 2006, 3-27.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *Transcendental Criticism and Christian Philosophy: A Presentation and Evaluation of Herman Dooyeweerd's "Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea"* (Franeker: Wever, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> The English version was published in 1981: Vincent Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1981). For a further analysis of this foundational book, see section 17.1 below.

## Introduction

publications on this subject, a series of dissertations has been produced under his supervision, covering important areas of the doctrine of God.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, the contours of a “flourishing Utrecht school” became gradually visible in the theological world. On the basis of a substantial literary production, supported by a vital international network, the research group under Brümmer’s direction gave philosophical theology after Utrecht fashion a clear profile. From the late 1990s onward, decisive changes took place. First, in 1997 the research group shifted its official program from the focus on the doctrine of God to the question of “Identity and change in the Christian tradition.”<sup>5</sup> Second, after Brümmer’s retirement in 1997, the theological faculty of Utrecht changed its policy concerning the perspectives of philosophical theology. After some years of vacancy, Brümmer’s chair was taken in 2000 by Dirk-Martin Grube, a philosopher who does not originate from nor has close affinity with the Utrecht School. By these changes, the institutional capacities of what used to be the core of Utrecht School have been limited.

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<sup>4</sup> These contributions will be analyzed in more detail in chapters 18 and 19 below. In order to introduce the most significant participants in this research program, this footnote lists the main publications dealing with the doctrine of God:

Works by Vincent Brümmer: *What Are We Doing When We Pray? A Philosophical Inquiry*. (London: SCM Press, 1984); *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Dissertations on the doctrine of God under Brümmer’s (co-)supervision, in chronological order:

A. Vos, *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid: Een kritische analyse van het absolute evidentialisme in wijsbegeerte en theologie*, Dissertationes Neerlandicae Series theologica, vol. 5 (Kampen: Kok, 1981); L.J. van den Brom, *God alomtegenwoordig*, Dissertationes Neerlandicae Series theologica, vol. 7 (Kampen: Kok, 1982), republished as Luco J. van den Brom, *Divine Presence in the World: A Critical Analysis of the Notion of Divine Omnipresence*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, vol. 5 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993);

F.G. Immink, *Divine Simplicity* (Kampen: Kok, 1987);

Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, vol. 6. (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992);

Gijsbert van den Brink, *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, vol. 7 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993).

To this list can be added the dissertation by Eef Dekker, not supervised by Brümmer, but co-supervised by Antonie Vos: Eef Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas: Vrijheid, genade en predestinatie in de theologie van Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993).

The series of dissertations in the doctrine of God is completed by Arjan Markus, *Beyond Finitude: God’s Transcendence and the Meaning of Life*, Contributions to Philosophical Theology, vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004). Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot supervised this dissertation.

A collection of insights concerning the doctrine of God is given in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, ed. by Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot, Contributions to Philosophical Theology, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999); this is the English version of the earlier volume *Hoe is uw Naam? Opstellen over de eigenschappen van God* (Kampen: Kok, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Documented in *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Marcel Sarot and Gijsbert van den Brink, Contributions to Philosophical Theology, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999).

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In the description and analysis of the Utrecht School, I will focus on the earlier research program centered on the doctrine of God. In order to grasp the general characteristics of their theological method, a broader selection of the research group's literary production will be taken. The discussion of the Utrecht School's doctrine of God will naturally concentrate on the direct contributions to this subject.

The structure of this part is simple: in chapter 17, I will describe the different aspects of the Utrecht School's *method* of theology; chapters 18 till 20 will examine the contributions to the *doctrine of God* by Utrecht School members. The concluding chapter 21 will discuss the connection between method and content in the Utrecht School doctrine of God, thus bringing the two strings together.

## 17. Approaches of the Utrecht School

The title of this chapter is deliberately ambiguous. It points to a diversity of approaches within the Utrecht School, while at the same time acknowledging that such diversity is partly construed from the outside by the spectator. In his contribution to a discussion of the Utrecht School, Gerrit de Kruijf discerns two groups within the School: an analytical group led by Vincent Brümmer, and a more speculative or ontological group around Antonie Vos.<sup>1</sup> It could be argued, however, that such a division is too rough to do justice to the complexity of the different aspects of the Utrecht approach.

In the subsequent discussion, I will treat four characteristics of the Utrecht School:

1. Conceptual inquiry;
2. Ontology and modal logic;
3. Historical orientation on medieval and Protestant scholasticism;
4. Apologetic attitude.

It will turn out that each member of the School varies his emphases among these aspects, but that in different proportions all these features are typical of the Utrecht approach to theology.

### 17.1. Conceptual Inquiry

The first element of the Utrecht approach that came to full development is the usage of *conceptual inquiry*.<sup>2</sup> Vincent Brümmer's first effort was, as we have seen, to produce a set of instruments enabling theologians to analyze critically and with precision the concepts of Christian doctrine.

The foundational work in this respect is Brümmer's *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry* (1981; previous Dutch publication 1975). A survey of this book makes it clear what the Utrecht School basically understands by conceptual analysis. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, Brümmer received decisive impulses for his own philosophical method from the British tradition of analytical philosophy. In contrast with the continental tradition of idealist and hermeneutical philosophy, analytical philosophers are primarily interested in the functioning of language in concepts and propositions. A central figure in the background of Brümmer's approach is Ludwig Wittgenstein. Though Wittgenstein is not mentioned very often in *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, its approach shows crucial similarities to

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<sup>1</sup> G.G. de Kruijf, "Inleiding," in Eef Dekker et al., eds., *Openbaring en werkelijkheid: Systematische theologie tussen empirische werkelijkheid en christelijke zineroaring* (Zoetermeer: Boeken-centrum, 1994), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch equivalent of *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry* is *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse*; a title that suggests "conceptual analysis" as the English term. However, Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 73-74 explains that the term "analysis" focuses too much on the elementary *building blocks* of language, while Brümmer wants to investigate the *relations* between concepts, presuppositions and implications. Apparently, Brümmer more strongly sensed the disadvantages of the term "analysis" in English than in Dutch.

Wittgenstein's view of language and language games. In a few articles on Wittgenstein, Brümmer witnesses his indebtedness to the tradition of analytical and linguistic philosophy initiated by "Wittgenstein II." The significance of Wittgenstein for systematic or philosophical theology lies, according to Brümmer, first in the shift from a "name model" of language to a "tool model" (see below), and second in the conception of language games.<sup>3</sup>

In the introduction to his book, Brümmer explains the different *sorts of questions* one can investigate: questions of facts, questions of meaning, and conceptual questions. He shows that these questions require different procedures to be answered, and argues that conceptual questions are the most relevant for philosophy. Philosophy does not produce a system, but insists on clarifying the meaning of factual and metaphysical questions and answers. This meta-inquiry makes philosophy an *ancilla theologiae*. Philosophy taken as conceptual analysis performs a task that is essential to theology itself: theologians must be aware of the meanings, implications and limits of the concepts they use. A fundamental conviction concerning the nature of religious language and concepts is expressed in the following sentence:

"Religious language is not some form of glossolalia: The concepts we shall examine in this book are therefore ordinary everyday concepts, even though in expressing the Christian faith we use them in a religious context."<sup>4</sup>

The method of conceptual inquiry must be understood in the framework of the *speech act theory* of language. This theory, presented by J.L. Austin, considers speaking as an intentional action that follows constitutive rules. Language is analyzed here on three levels: first, as a *locution* (the uttering of a sentence, the sequence of words); second, as an *illocution* (the conventional aspect of the speech act, determining its intentional meaning); third, as a *per-illocution* (the causal aspect, the intended response of a hearer to the performed illocution).

In actual speech, all three aspects are intimately connected. Still, in theoretical analysis we can discern the three levels and examine the success or failure of locution, illocution and per-illocution according to the rules that hold for them. In discussing the success or failure of the *illocutionary* act, the idea of *language game* comes into play. It is the factual and social context that provides the conditions for a successful illocution. The truth or effectiveness of an illocution may depend on the factual circumstances to which they appeal, the sincerity of the attitude they express, and the maintenance or violation of the commitments they establish.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on Austin's classification, Brümmer distinguishes the following types of *illocutionary acts*:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vincent Brümmer, "Wittgensteins bijdrage tot de theologie," in *Wittgenstein*, ed. by Etienne Kuypers (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1991), 217-242; esp. 229-241; "Wittgenstein en de natuurlijke theologie," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48 (1994): 306-318; "Wittgenstein and the Irrationality of Rational Theology," in *The Christian Understanding of God Today*, ed. by J.M. Byrne (Dublin: Columba Press, 1993), 88-100.

<sup>4</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 1-5. The quotation is found on pages 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 9-15.

<sup>6</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 15-25.

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- *Constatives*: speech acts that assert the existence in reality of a certain state of affairs; constatives can also be called propositions, and can be judged on their truth or falsehood.
- *Expressives*: speech acts that express a conviction or belief, an attitude or an intention; they are properly stated in the first person present tense. We should not interpret them as autobiographical constatives, but as a distinct category. Expressives are judged on sincerity or insincerity. Concrete speech acts often combine a constative and an expressive element. Expressives presuppose both the existence of the state of affairs they refer to, and the presence of grounds for the attitude expressed in them. I cannot thank a God who does not exist or who does no good to me.
- *Commissives*: speech acts by which one commits oneself to something. Since a concrete speech act often combines the commissive illocution (obligation) with an expressive element (intention), commissives can be judged on fulfillment or violation and on sincerity or insincerity. Just as expressives, commissives presuppose the factual possibility of keeping and violating the stated obligation. The promise to do the impossible is senseless.
- *Prescriptives*: speech acts that lay an obligation upon the hearers (the reverse of commissive illocutions). The success of a prescriptive illocution is connected with the factual possibility of doing what is commanded, the freedom of the hearer to accept or reject the obligation, and the authority of the speaker over the audience (or at least an agreement between speaker and audience). In concrete speech acts, prescriptives often occur together with expressive aspects, which in turn have constative presuppositions.

Actual speech acts can contain illocutions in several ways. *Assertion* means that a sentence directly makes a statement. Assertions are governed by the laws of logic (the Law of Identity; the Law of Non-contradiction; the Law of the Excluded Middle). Brümmer states that without these laws we cannot assert anything. He interprets paradoxes, to which theologians sometimes appeal, as only apparent contradictions that can be expressed as true assertions. Next to assertion we have *implication*: illocutions that are either presupposed by or follow from the explicitly made assertion. We encounter an undeniable implication if one sentence cannot be asserted without at the same time asserting a second sentence, and contextual implication in which the connection between sentences depends on the actual (e.g., moral or social) context. Besides implicative connections between illocutions, there is also an implicative relation between illocutions and per-illocutions: it would be contradictory to ask people to accept the gospel while not at the same time really aiming at their acceptance.<sup>7</sup>

Following on the explanation of language in terms of speech acts, Brümmer focuses on *words* and *concepts*. He gives a critical discussion of the classical model of words as *names* for the things they refer to. Fundamental to this theory is the assumption of a correspondence between words or concepts (which are often not clearly distinguished) and things in reality. The correspondence may be natural or

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<sup>7</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 26-31. On pages 32-33, Brümmer illustrates the distinctions of the preceding discussion with the example of the Apostles' Creed: what is asserted, expressed, implied etc. in it?

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conventional, or both in different respects. The influential version of this model provided by Plato considers words as (conventional) signs for concepts that function as (essential) names for things. Brümmer lists some decisive difficulties in the name model of language:

1. It is not clear in what sense concepts can be mental representations of things. John Locke built a theory of knowledge on the basis of sense experience: from individual sensations, our mind forms "simple ideas" as a representation of the individual sensation; subsequently, the mind abstracts a general idea from all related simple ideas, and thus a concept as a generic mental representation is formed. Brümmer states that the step from individual experience to general, abstracted concept cannot be convincingly argued. Thus, the idea of a concept as the mental representation of a *class of things* cannot be maintained.
2. Not all words are names or referential signs. Our language contains many words without a referential functions (e.g., articles, prepositions, conjunctions). At best we can try to rescue the theory by claiming that these non-referential words are always combined with referential words in a sentence. But even then, the name model fails to do justice to the reality of language.
3. Language is more than linking referential names; we can perform speech acts with totally different intentions and functions. Words only make sense within the whole of a speech act.
4. The statement that words correspond to reality reduces language to the constative function. In fact, language does more than reflect some states of affairs.<sup>8</sup>

Against the rejected *name model*, Brümmer argues for a *tool model* of words and concepts. Drawing on Wittgenstein's terminology, Brümmer distinguishes between concepts as the thought forms or mental skills we exercise and words as the means or tools by which we exercise these skills. Mastering a concept means being able to use a word correctly. Brümmer describes concepts as mental capacities that are acquired and learned. This learning process is never completed, since it is infinitely complicated.<sup>9</sup>

Central in Brümmer's view of concepts is the procedure of *classification*. Classification is based on characteristics given in experience, and depends on the recognition of similarities and differences. Classification has to do with *connotation* (description in terms of content) and *denotation* (reference in terms of the set of entities to which the description applies). During our lives, we become accustomed to patterns of classification which together form our mental set. Language plays a crucial role in the formation of mental set. The interaction between the mental skill of classification and actual language takes place within our *life form*: the social, cultural and physical environment we live in. This life form accounts for our interests and for the possibilities we have in classifying things. Brümmer points to the contingency and relativity of these life forms and the adherent concepts. It is true, some concepts are basic to all culture and to all human thought. But many

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<sup>8</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 35-46.

<sup>9</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 46-55.

concepts that were often considered essential and universal are in fact subject to cultural change.<sup>10</sup>

Having explained his basic view of language and concepts, Brümmer applies these insights to theology. In the history of theology and philosophy, people have often asked questions concerning the essential nature of things: what is *x*? One can look for the kind of entities referred to by the word *x*, or enumerate the factual characteristics of *x*, or search the key for the explanation or meaning of *x*, or finally investigate the presuppositions and implications of the concept *x*. All these questions (except the last) start from the *name model* of concepts. Conceptual inquiry on the basis of the *tool model*, which Brümmer promotes, can be described in three points:

1. It is a critical reflection on the conceptual skills that we command intuitively, with the purpose of tracing the systematic relations between them.
2. In this way the whole complex of conceptual skills imbedded in our forms of life is recorded descriptively and improved systematically.
3. Thus the process of cultural change is guided critically in so far as it determines our forms of thought.<sup>11</sup>

Conceptual inquiry, thus understood, is precisely the task systematic theology should perform. Doctrinal problems can be reduced to conceptual questions concerning the presuppositions and implications of concepts and the relations between concepts. Brümmer states that, though the Church's message is distinctive, the Christian faith is expressed in ordinary everyday concepts. Therefore the theologian must acquire clarity concerning the most basic conceptual forms of ordinary life: evaluative, epistemological, and ontological concepts.<sup>12</sup>

The third Dutch edition of *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse* (1989) contains a new chapter on "Definition and interpretation." Brümmer views "definition" as the explanation of the meaning of words, and "interpretation" as the explanation of the meaning of sentences and texts. In line with the "tool model" of concepts, Brümmer states that definition is a way to explain the conceptual usage of a word. This can take place in various ways:

- by providing a synonymous term;
- by illustrating a word by means of examples;
- by explaining the conceptual function of a word;
- by referring to the class of entities denoted by the word;
- by explaining the predicative function of a word (e.g., indicating the prescriptive or expressive usage of the word).

Besides these activities that belong to the discipline of lexicography, Brümmer discerns conceptual analysis as an examination of the *mental activity* that is performed with the aid of concepts. Thus, conceptual analysis is more than (descriptive) philosophy of language; it aims at creative and innovative contributions to philosophy. On the basis of conventional, *descriptive* definitions of words, philosophy can propose stipulative, *prescriptive* definitions for the purpose of philosophical argument. According to Brümmer, such stipulations must

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<sup>10</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 56-63.

<sup>11</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 65-78.

<sup>12</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 78-81.

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conform to conditions of a formal, communicative and pragmatic kind. Within these requirements, innovative proposals for the usage of concepts can be developed in order to make our forms of thought more logically consistent and culturally relevant.<sup>13</sup>

For the method of the Utrecht School, Brümmer's approach of "interpretation" is an important element. Interpretation aims at explaining the meaning of sentences and texts. Speech acts and texts are principally open to different specifications of their meaning and explanations of their presuppositions and implications. Some interpretations intend a precise reconstruction of the author's intentions, while others view interpretation as a process of dialogue between text and reader. Brümmer pleads for "rational interpretation" as a reconstruction of the conceptual horizon of both the text and the reader. Rational interpretation aims at conceptual innovation by bringing out the conceptual potential of a text; often this reaches beyond the original intentions of the text's author.<sup>14</sup>

In the remainder of the book, Brümmer discusses three groups of concepts: axiological, epistemological, and ontological concepts. My review of these discussions focuses on their relevance for theology.

Concerning *axiological* concepts (value judgments), Brümmer refutes the theories that reduce these to *constative* speech acts (intuitionism<sup>15</sup>, naturalism<sup>16</sup>) or *expressive* speech acts (emotivism<sup>17</sup>). The best way to account for both the objective and the subjective component in value judgments is to interpret them as *prescriptive* speech acts. A value judgment is a general prescriptive: it does not directly force someone to take a certain attitude, but states that, in general, object *x* is worthy of approval or disapproval. Making a value statement implies that the speaker takes the recommended attitude, but also appeals to other people's agreement. The presuppositions of a value judgment are: (a) people are free to agree or disagree with it, and (b) it is based on an agreement (commitment) concerning the basic norms.

Discussion about value judgments can arise about the presupposed norms (e.g., is it good for a car to have a low fuel consumption?) or about the application of these norms to a certain object (e.g., does this car in fact have a low fuel consumption?).<sup>18</sup>

A more general axiological concept is "meaning." Brümmer defines "meaning" as the "total of prescriptive properties" of an object. Meaning is normally expressed in gerundive statements: *x* is adorable, admirable, reprehensible, etc. "Meaning" can be associated with an impression caused by the object (e.g., Yahweh is great), but it furthermore requires the appropriate attitude toward the

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<sup>13</sup> Brümmer, *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse*<sup>3</sup>, 80-91.

<sup>14</sup> Brümmer, *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse*<sup>3</sup>, 91-97.

<sup>15</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 90-94.

<sup>16</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 94-99.

<sup>17</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 101-107.

<sup>18</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 109-118.

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object (e.g., to fear and honor Yahweh). Meaning is often ascribed to things by comparing them to other things: I look on  $x$  as  $y$ .<sup>19</sup>

Norms and meaning function within the broader context of views of life. Brümmer defines a view of life as “the total set of norms, ideals and eschatological expectations in terms of which someone directs and assesses his way of life.” He argues that, in order to be successful, a view of life must be self-consistent. In this respect, the basic conviction, in which a view of life identifies the primary determinant of being (e.g., God), is important. The view of life must be consistent in assuming the appropriate attitude towards this unique being, and in relating all its convictions to the basic conviction. Although not all people in fact face the ultimate questions, it is rational to do so. Moreover, discussion about the ultimate questions is possible; not only within the terms of a specific view of life, but also on the basis of common criteria for the proper functioning of views of life. Brümmer lists five criteria:

1. freedom from contradiction;
2. unity (coherence);
3. relevance;
4. universality;
5. impressiveness.

He concedes that on the basis of these criteria it is not possible to determine what the only exclusively true view of life is. Still, he maintains that everyone chooses for a view of life, on certain grounds that are open to criticism. Thus, rational discussion about the view of life is possible.<sup>20</sup>

Brümmer’s discussion of *epistemological* concepts is of direct importance for theology. What is the relation between believing and knowing? What is truth? What is sufficient evidence?

“Believing” is defined by Brümmer as “accepting that something is true.” This presupposes: (a) understanding something; (b) having evidence in favor of it; and (c) assenting to it.

Brümmer argues that we do not choose to believe; we are convinced by the evidence. Moreover, believing is connected to acting. *Constativ*e beliefs (I believe that  $p$  is the case) often imply *prescriptiv*e beliefs (I ought to act as if  $p$  is the case). But in order to explain this connection, Brümmer argues that we have to consider “I believe that  $p$ ” as “I express my expectation that my possibilities in the world are determined as assured in  $p$ .” As an *expressiv*e speech act, belief has both a *constativ*e and a *prescriptiv*e element.<sup>21</sup>

“Knowing that  $p$ ” implies, for Brümmer, “believing that  $p$ ” and “ $p$  being true.” But what is truth? It is mainly for *constativ*e speech acts that we ask after the truth. After a review of different theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, performative), Brümmer gives his own analysis. Fundamental is the definition of proposition  $p$ :

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<sup>19</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 119-129. I follow Brümmer’s orthography of the divine name.

<sup>20</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 131-143.

<sup>21</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 153-167.

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$p$  is a constative in which the speaker gives his hearer an assurance on the way our possibilities for action are determined.

In relation to this proposition,

“ $p$  is true” is an evaluative judgment in which the speaker pronounces the constative  $p$  to be successful: the assurance regarding our possibilities for action is successful because we are able to act as assured.

Truth is related to the actual state of affairs, not as a direct representation, but as the affirmation of our assurance concerning the state of affairs. This involves indeed the possibilities of action, as the pragmatists urge. But truth is not merely decided on the question whether it “works.”<sup>22</sup>

When can belief be justified in regard to truth? Brümmer rejects the strict, rationalist criteria of self-evidence or deduction from self-evident axioms. That requirement would render most knowledge irrational. The rationalist view presupposes that acts of knowledge do require justification. In accordance with his earlier statement, Brümmer holds that belief and knowledge are not acts we decide for, but are convictions *given* to us. This does not lead to an irrationalist approach: in entertaining our beliefs, we have to be open to criticism. The basic question is: do I keep contradictory beliefs? Brümmer argues that holding contradictory beliefs is logically impossible: I cannot act as if  $p$  and not- $p$  are both true. Justification of beliefs is a matter of openness to evidence contradicting our beliefs. Brümmer states a gradual difference between belief and knowledge: knowledge is the domain of beliefs for which we have provisionally “closed the case” and which we have accepted as generally true. In the light of new evidence, however, our knowledge can be challenged and we have to weigh the proof again.<sup>23</sup>

Most interesting is Brümmer’s application of his theory of knowledge to religious belief. At the example of Job’s saying “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” Brümmer illustrates the difficulties of a rationalist theory of knowledge. We would be forced either to search for a rational justification for Job’s statement, or to separate knowledge from belief. Brümmer shows that rationalist theology fails to do justice to the proper character of religious belief: it is not reducible to empirical data, nor are its knowledge claims universally acceptable. Existentialist theology, on the other hand, interprets religious claims as prescriptives or expressives, leaving aside the constative aspect. Brümmer argues that faith as a personal relationship is connected to and presupposes the belief that some things (e.g., God’s promises, Christ’s resurrection) are true. Job is justified in saying “I know that my Redeemer liveth” if he truly believes it, if it is consistent with his other convictions about reality, and if he is convinced by sufficient evidence. As Brümmer reminds us, all these criteria function in someone’s personal context.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 169-181.

<sup>23</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 183-204.

<sup>24</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 205-215.

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The universality of such religious knowledge claims is determined by the *ontological* concepts. Brümmer explains that we have to distinguish between referential questions (what  $x$  are we talking about?), epistemological (how can we know about  $x$ ?), and ontological questions (what does it mean for  $x$  to exist?). Concerning the existence of God, the three sorts of questions are often confused. Concentrating on the ontological question, the ascription of “existence” to God seems to be difficult on theological and philosophical grounds. In theology, there is a tradition that denies “existence” to God, because he is beyond the order of existence. In philosophy, positivists claim that “existence” is limited to empirically observable entities. Thus, God does not exist.<sup>25</sup>

Following Immanuel Kant, some philosophers have argued that “existence” is not a predicate, but a necessary presupposition or precondition for predication. However, the consequence would be that we can only talk about existent things or that we cannot deny the existence of fictitious entities; both of which are absurd. We can discern between the *internal* question, whether an entity exists within a certain language game (e.g., Cinderella’s stepmother) and the *external* question, whether the reality described in the language game as such exists (e.g., the Queen of England). Within a language game, existence functions both as a predicate and as a condition for predication.<sup>26</sup>

The real problem arises when we turn to “real-world-language.” Brümmer argues that we cannot say about a language game as a whole that it exists in the real world; only with respect to the entities that exist in the language game can we ask whether they exist in the real world. The decisive point concerning real world language is that it is about the things that determine our possibilities of action. We cannot arbitrarily construct a world; we are thrown into the real world. Thus, the question of existence is a *practical* question. Because of these practical implications, the real world language has the primacy over all other language games. Moreover, in the real world the existence of an entity implies that we can locate it as determining our possibilities of action. This holds also for God: if he is the primary determinant of meaning, we must be able to indicate and locate his influence on our lives.

In reality, we can distinguish between “facts” and “states of affairs.” A state of affairs is a complex of things and relations, that can be described and that can change. A fact is a momentous, indubitable description of a state of affairs. A state of affairs is questioned in terms of logical possibilities (e.g., the Napoleonic Empire); a fact is questioned in terms of the difference a state of affairs makes to the possibilities of action (e.g., Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo). Contrary to illusions and fictions, real states of affairs affect our possibilities of actions, and thus exist in the real world.<sup>27</sup>

What does this entail for God’s existence? Here, the duality of the ontological and epistemological questions returns. In order to answer the ontological question, we have to indicate the situation(s) in which God’s existence makes a difference; in answering the epistemological question, we must refer to the situation(s) in which

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<sup>25</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 219-223.

<sup>26</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 225-234.

<sup>27</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 234-248.

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we find evidence for claiming that we know of God's existence. These two situations need not be identical. Epistemologically viewed, we need to have access to the situation of evidence in order to have knowledge of God's existence. Ontologically, we need not have direct access to the situation in which God exists; the minimum requirement is that it is logically possible for this situation to exist. But on this level, the question remains in which language game God is said to exist. If he exists in the real world, does not his existence among other entities devalue him? If God does not "exist" in real world terms, what is to be said about God's existence then?<sup>28</sup>

If God is called "the primary determinant of meaning," this suggests that he has no descriptive characteristics, but only prescriptive properties. What is said about God serves to prescribe attitudes that are appropriate towards God. Against Paul van Buren, Brümmer argues that these prescribed attitudes towards God cannot be reduced to attitudes towards non-metaphysical entities (creatures). Since the existence of God is a basic conviction of the Christian view of life, the prescribed attitudes cannot be interpreted in a way that results in a denial of God's existence. Moreover, the existence of God cannot be limited to a fictitious existence in the Christian "narrative." The Christian way of life is not merely *descriptive* nor merely *prescriptive*, but *subscriptive*: I subscribe to this way of life, and thus I believe that the *factual presuppositions* of this way of life (the existence of God being the most fundamental) are true.<sup>29</sup>

Having claimed that, in the Christian view of life, God exists necessarily as the primary determinant of meaning, Brümmer continues stating that God's existence is factual. But in what situations can we encounter God? Indeed we cannot *perceive* God or *meet* God in the usual way. We could state that God's existence is known indirectly, through his effects in creation and providence, history and salvation. Epistemologically, this argument is problematic: the experience of event *x* as a work of God is not directly evident from observable facts, but is ambiguous. The experience of God involves being impressed by God's glory and holiness, and this in turn presupposes some degree of belief in God. While the argument on the grounds of my experiencing God's works is thus not effective as a *proof*, it can justly function as a *testimony* of the grounds on which I claim to know that God exists. Ontologically, the reference to God's works is not sufficient to point to God's existence: God cannot (ontically) be reduced to his works. The same holds for an appeal to eschatological verification of God's existence: it reduces God's existence to the future, and does not account for his present existence. Brümmer takes recourse to the *commissive* element of faith: as a Christian, I commit myself to a way of life "in the sight of the Lord" (*coram Deo*), and I can only consistently live this way if I also claim that God exists.<sup>30</sup>

The final section of *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry* explains how the factual existence of God can be consistent with his being the Wholly Other. Brümmer briefly mentions a few attributes of God that guarantee his uniqueness in existence, and thus gives a rough sketch of a doctrine of God that is consistent with his

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<sup>28</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 249-257.

<sup>29</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 257-268.

<sup>30</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 268-282.

method of conceptual inquiry. First, God exists necessarily. In the application of Anselm's ontological argument we have to distinguish, according to Brümmer, between "God" as a *title term* and "Yahweh" as a *proper name*. As a title term or function term, God must necessarily exist in order to meet the definition of "God." The necessity of God's existence is a *logical* implication of the concept *aliquid quo majus nihil cogitari potest*. The same does not hold for Yahweh. The necessity of Yahweh's existence depends on whether or not Yahweh is God. Within the framework of the Christian faith, the existence of Yahweh is *theologically* necessary. All other entities exist theologically contingent. The second attribute of God is his eternity. Brümmer argues against a mere interpretation in terms of timelessness; this would not account for Yahweh's actions in time nor for his personal existence. Eternity means that Yahweh's existence as determinant of our possibilities of actions is not temporally limited. Therefore, his existence differs from the existence of all other entities. The third attribute, omnipresence, is an essential characteristic parallel to eternity: it denies spatial limits to God's existence. The final property mentioned by Brümmer is God's independence (*aseitas*). We cannot ask for a cause of God's existence nor can we assert the possibility of God's non-existence. God's independence is theologically necessary. All these attributes are at once the expressions of God's uniqueness, and the undeniable implications of the basic conviction of the Christian faith.<sup>31</sup>

## **17.2. Ontology and Modal Logic**

The field indicated in the title of this section is mainly the contribution of Antonie Vos to the Utrecht School. Although we have touched on ontological and logical issues in the survey of Vincent Brümmer's conceptual inquiry, the quest for a consistently Christian ontology is more specifically the subject of Vos's writings. As we will see below, this quest is strongly connected to the investigation of scholastic philosophy and theology, mainly of the tradition that has John Duns Scotus as a culminating point. Vos joins the new approach in the study of medieval philosophy, which has revealed the revolutionary character of Scotus's conceptual innovations. Moreover, the discovery of Scotist logic and ontology can fruitfully be linked with contemporary developments in modal logic. In an even wider perspective, the Utrecht contributions to ontology and logic fit well into the recent reappraisal of theism and of the cognitive claims of religious belief.

This section moves around two focal points: first, Vos's dissertation *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid (KN)*, and second, the further writings by Utrecht School members on John Duns Scotus.

### **17.2.1. Knowledge and Necessity**

As the subtitle indicates, *KN* aims at "a critical analysis of absolute evidentialism in philosophy and theology." Absolute evidentialism is a theory that combines two principles:

- i. the principle of certainty: if *a* knows that *p*, then *a* knows that *a* knows that *p*;  
and

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<sup>31</sup> Brümmer, *Theology & Philosophical Inquiry*, 282-290. I will return to Brümmer's views on God and his attributes, briefly mentioned here, in sections 18.1 and 18.2 below.

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ii. the principle of necessity: if *a* knows that *p*, then it is necessary that *p*.

The conclusion of these two principles:

iii. if *a* knows that *p*, then it is necessary that *a* knows that *p*, expresses the full meaning of absolute evidentialism.<sup>32</sup>

Vos claims that absolute evidentialism permeates the whole history of Western thought, and that only Christian faith and theology have the power to resist its force. *KN* firstly discusses the history of this dominant idea, secondly provides a critical analysis of the logics of belief, knowledge, and faith, and thirdly spells out the consequences for metaphysics and doctrine of God. The critical analysis of absolute evidentialism centers on the notions of necessity, reality, possibility, and challenges the tendency to merge epistemological evidentialism into metaphysical necessitarianism.<sup>33</sup>

From the first Greek philosophers on, a strong connection between reason and being has been established. In *Parmenides*, ontological truth and epistemological truth are intimately joined. Parmenides developed the first system of logic, in which he claimed that all true propositions are strictly equivalent. Given that one proposition is necessarily true, the whole system of propositions is necessarily true. To this epistemological necessity corresponds the necessity of being: to Parmenides, all being is one and necessary. Thus, there is no need to distinguish between logical and physical necessity: (necessary) knowledge and (necessary) being are equivalent. In the final analysis, the basic premises of absolute evidentialism are present already in Parmenides.<sup>34</sup>

*Socrates* is known for his notion of *ignorance*. His device for teaching people is to convince them of their ignorance. After this clearance of prejudices, he provides definitions that lead to true knowledge. On the tacit basis of the knowability of truth, Socrates states that knowing one's ignorance is certain knowledge: iff [if and only if] *a* does not know that *p*, then *a* knows that *a* does not know that *p*. Far from being skeptical, this principle is in fact the inversion of the strong epistemic rule "if *a* knows *p*, then *a* knows that *a* knows that *p*."<sup>35</sup>

*Plato* follows Socrates in respect to ignorance. Moreover, he makes an exclusive disjunction between knowing and not knowing, the latter including mere "opinion." In Plato's view, knowledge is immediately related to objective reality. True knowledge implies necessary being. The objectivity of subjective knowledge is envisaged in the Realm of Ideas. The necessity of knowledge implies for Plato the necessity of existence of the knowing subject, and thus the immortality of the soul.<sup>36</sup>

*Aristotle*, though in important respects differing from his teacher Plato, continued the absolute evidentialist view of knowledge. His theory of science elaborates the idea of absolute, necessary knowledge by means of the principles of comprehensibility, evidence, and necessity. Aristotle rejects the Platonic dualism between the concrete objects and the eternal Ideas, but maintains the immortality

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<sup>32</sup> Vos, *KN*, XIII.

<sup>33</sup> Vos, *KN*, XIII-XVII.

<sup>34</sup> Vos, *KN*, 1-13.

<sup>35</sup> Vos, *KN*, 13-16.

<sup>36</sup> Vos, *KN*, 16-20.

of the soul. On the ontological level, his claim that whatever is possible is also actualized (the *principium plenitudinis*) excludes any true, synchronic contingency, and thus results in a determinist and necessitarian world view.<sup>37</sup>

Looking back on ancient Greek philosophy, Vos concludes that it is determined from the beginning by the principles of evidential knowledge and necessary reality. The sensation of experience-independent knowledge, together with a transfer from religious notions to human knowledge, resulted in the strong connection of logic, theory of knowledge, and metaphysics that is characteristic of all Greek philosophy up to the Neo-Platonic synthesis of Plotinus and Proclus.<sup>38</sup>

How did Christian thought react to the absolute evidentialism permeating ancient philosophy? Vos argues that the history of Christian philosophy during the Middle Ages shows the continuous attempt at emancipation from ancient philosophical thinking, an attempt that proceeded in several stages.<sup>39</sup>

In the writings of Augustine, a magisterial transformation of ancient philosophy into Christian thinking is performed. However, the mixture of ancient and new elements in Augustine's own thought is rather complex. Therefore the work of Augustine's remote disciple Anselm of Canterbury is more illuminating as a piece of Christian emancipatory thinking. On the one hand, Anselm shares basic convictions of ancient philosophy: if *a* knows that *p*, then *p*; if it is possible that *a* knows that *p*, then necessarily *p*.

On the other hand, Anselm keeps room for contingency in the divine foreknowledge. His speaking about *rationes necessariae* does not refer to *a priori* logical necessity, but to a softer form of *a posteriori* factual necessity. Moreover, Anselm's theological thinking states the priority of faith over knowledge: what is to be known is first to be believed. In this context of faith, experience and piety, Anselm holds the truth implication of faith: if *a* believes that *p*, then *p*.<sup>40</sup>

More than a century after Anselm, the Franciscan scholar Bonaventura proceeds further towards a philosophy of contingency. Drawing on the Augustinian thesis that the eternal Ideas exist in the mind of God and are thus not directly accessible to the human mind, Bonaventura develops a strongly empiricist theory of knowledge. However, since the mind is able to evaluate the truth of sensible knowledge, Bonaventura maintains on the logical level the most important elements of absolute evidentialism. In his view of God's foreknowledge, he continues Anselm's distinction between necessity of the consequent (*necessitas consequentis*; Anselm: *necessitas praecedens*) and necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*; Anselm: *necessitas sequens*). The revolutionary step is that for Bonaventura the contingent contents of God's knowledge imply that this knowledge *itself* is contingent and variable. He does not spell out how this relates to the eternity of God's single act of knowing. Moreover, on the ontological level Bona-

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<sup>37</sup> Vos, *KN*, 20-30. As Vos argues, Aristotle developed a (meta)physics of contingent change within the framework of necessary being. Therefore the diachronical contingency of change does not affect the structures of his ontology.

<sup>38</sup> Vos, *KN*, 35-38.

<sup>39</sup> Vos, *KN*, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Vos, *KN*, 40-48.

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ventura keeps to the diachronic interpretation of contingency and passes the chance to break decisively through the ancient determinism.<sup>41</sup>

Typical of Thomas Aquinas is the fact that he performed a complete confrontation with the works of Aristotle, which were rediscovered during the thirteenth century.. Whereas in his general theory of science he stays within Aristotelian borders of absolute evidentialism, his theory of theological science shows a different picture. The truths of faith are not self-evident, but are given by revelation. Within the framework of *sapientia* (nurtured by divine revelation), theology operates by understanding the first principles (*intellectus*) and by deducing true propositions from these principles (*scientia*). Thomas's position is ambivalent: while he denies the claims of absolute evidentialism in his view of theology, his general theories of knowledge and science maintain these claims. Ontologically speaking, Thomas does not reject the *principium plenitudinis*. In the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, Thomas includes the merely possible and the contingent facts in the objects of God's knowledge. Since he understands God's knowledge as an immanent, immutable act, Thomas states that God's knowledge of the contingent is in itself necessary. The result is that although the ancient necessitarianism of Aristotle is principally destroyed, yet Thomas does not succeed in fully elaborating the idea of contingency.<sup>42</sup>

The full emancipation of Christian thought comes in the philosophical theology of John Duns Scotus. Whereas Plato, Aristotle and Thomas provided a philosophy focusing on universal entities, Duns pays fundamental attention to individual beings as the primary objects of knowledge. He understands knowledge basically as an active phenomenon, not as merely receptive. By directing knowledge towards individual entities, Duns can dismiss the implication of necessity in knowledge. Although Duns insists on the difference between opinion (without truth implication) and knowledge (with truth implication), he states that even contingent facts can be evidently and certainly known. Thus a non-necessary, empirical fact can be the premise of certain knowledge. Evidence no longer entails necessity. Given this renewal of the theory of science as such, Duns has created room to determine the status of theology. Human theology is understood by Duns as *sapientia*, not *scientia*; still it contains the truth claim and is opposed to mere opinion. Most significant in Duns's thinking is his elaboration of the idea of contingency. The decisive maneuver is performed in terms of *willing*: is "a wills that p on moment t" consistent with "it is possible that a does not will that p on moment t"? Duns contemporaries generally rejected this possibility; they held that the alternative for "a wills that p" is only possible at a different moment of time. Duns's innovation is the discovery of synchronic contingency: a wills that p on moment t<sub>1</sub>, and it is possible that a does not will that p on moment t<sub>1</sub>. On this ground, Duns rejects the common view that, once p is actual, p is necessary. The time index does not affect the metaphysical status of things. A contingent state of affairs does not become necessary by coming into existence. For Duns, the synchronic contingency of our world is preserved in God's knowledge of all things. The contingency of God's knowing contingent things is consequent on the

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<sup>41</sup> Vos, *KN*, 49-58.

<sup>42</sup> Vos, *KN*, 58-68.

freedom of alternativity in God's will: God's will decides over the actual existence of things, and God knows these things as willed by him.<sup>43</sup>

William of Ockham shows a more radical breach with absolute evidentialism. The free and contingent revelation of the sovereign God does not combine with determinism and necessitarianism. The created world and its orders are radically contingent. Ockham's theory of knowledge places emphasis on individual entities that can be known. Within the larger realm of knowledge, scientific knowledge is concerned with general propositions that can be demonstrated by syllogistic reasoning. In this strict, demonstrative knowledge, Ockham maintains the rules of absolute evidentialism: what is known is true and is evident. But scientific knowledge is merely one form of knowledge broadly speaking. In assessing the status of theological knowledge, Ockham holds that theology contains both contingent and necessary propositions, which can be known partly by intuition, partly by abstraction. Ockham distinguishes sharply between faith and knowledge: both share the truth implication, but "believing that *p*" excludes "knowing that *p*," and faith works without evidence (in the sense of scientific demonstration). Whereas Ockham goes with Duns Scotus in denying absolute evidentialism in his theory of knowledge, he rejects the idea of synchronic contingency. For Ockham, "contingent" means nothing more than "changeable in time." In respect to God's ordinate power (*potentia ordinata*), things are necessary; freedom and contingency are placed under God's absolute power (*potentia absoluta*). In the doctrine of God, this leads to a separation between God's free will and God's good nature. In his attempt to save freedom and contingency on God's side, Ockham comes to a dualism between an indeterminist theology and a practically determinist ontology.<sup>44</sup>

Vos's conclusion regarding the Christian reaction to antique philosophy is that it partly succeeded in emancipating itself from absolute evidentialism. Only Duns Scotus's theory of synchronic contingency is a full, though uncompleted, alternative. The Middle Ages show the inability of balancing necessity and contingency in a Christian ontology: some thinkers kept to the antique necessitarianism, others went too far in separating contingency from necessity.<sup>45</sup>

In "modern" times, initiated by the Renaissance and humanism, the relation between Christianity and ancient philosophy becomes more complicated. The primarily philological turn *ad fontes* leads to a revival of ancient philosophical ideas. Passing over the constructive efforts of Christian medieval thinking, 16th century thinkers connected again to Aristotle and other Greek and Latin philosophers. Even in Martin Luther, who professedly opposed Aristotelianism in theology, the conceptual structures remain strongly Aristotelian. In Luther's writings, especially *De servo arbitrio*, the certainty of faith is anchored in the certainty, immutability and necessity of the operational complex of God's foreknowledge, will and power. The tight connection between evidentialism and determinism in Luther was loosened by Melancthon and other Protestants, but

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<sup>43</sup> Vos, *KN*, 68-87.

<sup>44</sup> Vos, *KN*, 88-98.

<sup>45</sup> Vos, *KN*, 98-104.

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absolute evidentialism has regained influence in theology here. In a way similar to Luther's, John Calvin worked out a doctrine of predestination based on God's foreknowledge, will and power (effective causation). Although Calvin granted some room to a disjunction of certainty and necessity and to a distinction between different sorts of necessity, the main thrust of his theology is strongly theocentric (the glory of God is the central motive behind all God's works). Whereas Calvin views God himself as free in his will, the resultant world order is necessary on the ground of God's decree. Theology and philosophy after the Reformation have, according to Vos, developed in different directions without effectively overcoming the dominance of absolute evidentialism. Since the 19th century, a determinist worldview has been dominant in wide scientific and cultural circles, despite the fundamental crises that ravaged several sciences (mathematics, physics, logic). Neither liberal nor neo-orthodox theology has succeeded in withdrawing from this permeating influence.<sup>46</sup>

The overall conclusion of Vos's historical survey is that in antique philosophy the dominance of absolute evidentialism (implying determinism) was almost complete; that Christian theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages contained fertile tendencies to overcome it; and that after the Reformation the influence of absolute evidentialism increased again.<sup>47</sup>

After this historical review, Vos provides a systematic analysis of absolute evidentialism in logic and the theory of knowledge. He discusses subsequently the concepts of belief, knowledge, and faith.

Against the absolute evidentialist logic, Vos takes his starting point not in certain and necessary knowledge, but in "belief."<sup>48</sup> A "doxastic" logic is needed to refute the maximalist pretensions of absolute evidentialism. Vos's statement is that "belief" is implied in "faith" and "knowledge." Fundamental conditions for beliefs include a propositional content, a linguistic expression, a consciousness, and some rational (plausible) grounds. Now the different types of opinions can be identified and related to each other. Vos introduces a "doxastic opposition square," indicating which opinions can and cannot be held together. A doxastic logic requires at least *superficial* consistency: I cannot at the same time think that  $p$  and not-think that  $p$ . Vos develops a theory of doxastic alternatives, in which we can determine what propositions are implied or excluded, or not-implied or not-excluded by a given opinion. On two points Vos's doxastic logic keeps away from absolute evidentialist ideas of knowledge: first, it does not require *implicit* consistency (if  $p$  follows from  $q$ , then my thinking that  $q$  does not imply my thinking that  $p$ ); second, it does not contain the certainty implication of opinion (if I think that  $p$ , I do not necessarily think that I think that  $p$ ; the possibility of erring is open). Conclusion: a doxastic logic is a promising starting point for rejecting the

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<sup>46</sup> Vos, KN, 105-130.

<sup>47</sup> Vos, KN, 131-134.

<sup>48</sup> "Belief" is the translation of the Dutch "mening"; cf. the Summary of Vos, KN, 394-401. It is used here alternately with "opinion" (substantive), "doxastic" (adjective) and "think" (verb). As will become clear below, Vos distinguishes "belief" from "(religious) faith."

maximalist knowledge claims of absolute evidentialism: opinion and error are compatible.<sup>49</sup>

The next step in Vos's argument is an open confrontation with the logic of knowledge in absolute evidentialism. Following on the doxastic logic of belief, the epistemic logic of knowledge is built on the truth implication: if *a* knows that *p*, then *p*. But since the history of absolute evidentialism is characterized by the confusion of epistemic and modal categories (knowledge and necessity), Vos refuses to take maximalist epistemic claims as his starting point. Following on the common sense usage of "knowing," he works out a model of epistemic alternatives accounting for the difference between actual and potential knowledge: when it is *possible* that I know *p*, it is not necessary that I *actually* know *p*. Therefore, Vos rejects the claim that our epistemic alternatives are fully consistent: if *p* implies *q*, my knowing *p* does not imply my knowing *q*.<sup>50</sup>

Besides the rejection of full epistemic consistency, the denial of the certainty implication of knowledge is crucial to Vos's epistemic logic. Many philosophers state: if *a* knows that *p*, then *a* knows that *a* knows that *p*. Knowledge is said to include reflexive certainty. Vos argues that knowledge need not be reflexive and directly evident. Moreover, the certainty implication means that all epistemic alternatives are excluded: knowledge is stated to be necessary and immutable. These consequences have to be rejected, according to Vos.<sup>51</sup>

A next element of absolute evidentialism is the strict separation of knowledge and belief: if *a* knows that *p*, *a* does not believe that *p*, and vice versa (cf. Ockham's view mentioned above). Vos rejects the strict disjunction, and argues that knowing implies believing. If *p* is an element of one of my epistemic alternatives, then *p* is also an element of some of my doxastic alternatives.<sup>52</sup>

Vos's epistemic logic is rounded off by a model of epistemological evaluation, which intends to reflect the gradual development and the pluriformity of epistemological concepts. The pivotal term is "more reasonable than," by which the different steps on the ladder of knowledge can be distinguished, varying from "probable" to "known a priori." Important in this system of epistemological evaluation is that Vos disconnects certainty and necessity: a contingent (non-necessary) state of affairs can be self-presenting and thus be certain.<sup>53</sup>

The comparative theory of epistemic concepts enables Vos to unmask the maximalist pretensions of absolute evidentialism: it unjustly promotes one type of knowledge into the standard model of knowledge. By connecting knowledge and necessity, not only is the world made necessary (without alternatives), but the knowing subject is also made necessary and thus eternal. The inherent claim of omniscience renders impossible the human ideal of reasonable thinking.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Vos, *KN*, 135-171.

<sup>50</sup> Vos, *KN*, 172-182. While rejecting full consistency of our actual knowledge, Vos states that reality is "consistent in depth" (172, 181).

<sup>51</sup> Vos, *KN*, 182-187.

<sup>52</sup> Vos, *KN*, 187-193.

<sup>53</sup> Vos, *KN*, 193-200.

<sup>54</sup> Vos, *KN*, 200-209.

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Having discussed belief and knowledge, Vos turns to the logic of faith. His aim is to liberate Christian faith and theology from the dominance of absolute evidentialism. Faith is a mixed concept: it has a subjective and an objective pole. For the objective pole, Vos establishes a theory of pistic alternatives, parallel to the doxastic and epistemic alternatives mentioned before. An important step is Vos's claim that faith implies truth: if I believe (in the sense of faith) that  $p$ , then I cannot believe (in the sense of opinion) that  $p$  is not true. The subjective pole comes into play by the statement, that if I believe (religiously) that  $p$ , then I believe (have confidence) in God. While the subjective pole is essential to faith, Vos states that propositions of faith can be analyzed detached from existential faith.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the truth implication, Vos introduces the consistency criterion of pistic propositions: because I receive faith from God, my believing includes my openness to accept all the implications of faith. This is a theologically motivated form of "implicit faith." Contrary to the traditional disjunction of faith and opinion, Vos states that believing (religiously) that  $p$  cannot combine with denying or doubting (doxastically) that  $p$ . Vos also rejects the traditional disjunction of faith and knowledge: my believing that  $p$  does not contradict my knowing that  $p$ .<sup>56</sup>

Does faith have its own logic? Vos notices that much traditional theology claims a logic of faith containing paradoxes or open contradictions. He rejects this escape and advocates the Anselmian quest of *fides quaerens intellectum*. While asserting the consistency of pistic and theological propositions, Vos rejects the tendency of both defendants and opponents of the Christian faith to make all propositions of faith either necessary or impossible. The ideal of relative rationality, established before, should guide theology and Christian philosophy. Anticipating his discussion of the metaphysics of the doctrine of God, Vos shows that central statements of John Calvin's doctrine of divine knowledge, will, and power, culminating in double predestination – if one follows some simple rules of logic – entail an absolute determinism that is inconsistent with the asserted freedom of God. In these and similar parts of Reformation theology, Vos discerns a fatal attempt to overbid ancient absolute evidentialism by a Christianized variant of it. Instead, Vos proposes a rethinking of theology on the track set by John Duns Scotus.<sup>57</sup>

The third main part of *KN* contains the application of Vos's refutation of absolute evidentialism to metaphysics and doctrine of God. My review will be limited to the metaphysical argument and give only a brief indication of the theological consequences; these will be discussed in more detail in section 18.3 below.

In absolute evidentialism, metaphysics and the theory of knowledge are intimately connected. The claim that all knowledge is necessary is equivalent to the claim that all actuality is necessary. In addition to an alternative epistemology, Vos presents an alternative metaphysics. Crucial to this alternative is the concept of *possible worlds*, understood as "maximal states of affairs." Possible worlds contain necessary, impossible, possible, and contingent states of affairs. A necessary state

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<sup>55</sup> Vos, *KN*, 210-217.

<sup>56</sup> Vos, *KN*, 217-228.

<sup>57</sup> Vos, *KN*, 228-239.

of affairs holds in all possible worlds; an impossible state of affairs is exemplified in no possible world; a possible state of affairs holds in at least one possible world; a contingent state of affairs holds in at least one possible world, but not in all possible worlds. Moreover, there is a possible world called *Actua*, that contains all actually occurring states of affairs, or facts. In contrast to the possible world metaphysics, absolute evidentialism implies a determinist account of reality: whatever is the case is necessarily the case. There is no real, simultaneous alternative for everything that occurs. Since Vos claims that real contingency is part of reality, contingency must also have its place in logic: there are contingent propositions, and these are necessarily contingent. The opposite view is inconsistent, even when it is clothed with divine omniscience.<sup>58</sup>

The metaphysics of possible worlds serves as the framework of a *theory of properties*. Crucial to this theory is the distinction between essential and accidental properties. Vos develops a general theory of properties in order to provide a rethinking of the doctrine of divine attributes. A property is, according to Vos, something characteristic of its bearer. It is important to separate the theory of properties from the substance-accident thinking, and to restate it in terms of predicate logic. With help from the possible worlds theory, Vos defines a whole series of different sorts of properties. We need not review his complete argument, but list the most important concepts:

- (1) a *possible* property *P* of *a* occurs in at least one possible world;
- (2) an *essential* property *P* of *a* occurs in all possible worlds in which *a* exists;
- (3) an *accidental* property *P* of *a* is a possible property of *a* which *a* does not have in all possible worlds in which *a* exists;
- (4) a *factual* property *P* of *a* is a property that *a* has in *Actua*;
- (5) a *necessary* property *P* of *a* is a property that *a* possesses in every possible world;
- (6) an *impossible* property *P* of *a* is a property that *a* has in no possible world in which *a* exists;
- (7) a *necessary entity* *a* exists in all possible worlds;
- (8) all sorts of properties – possible, essential, accidental, factual, necessary, impossible – are *essentially* in the way they are.<sup>59</sup>

Vos provides a further discussion of the relation between actual, possible, and necessary entities, which can be summarized in the following propositions:

- (9) all entities have both essential and accidental properties;
- (10) an *Eternal City* is a possible world containing only necessary entities which have no accidental properties;
- (11) there is only one *Eternal City*, which is not identical with nor a model for the actual world (*Actua*);
- (12) properties *P* of *a* can have a possible world-index (*a* has *P* in *W*), and this indexed property is then essential to *a*.<sup>60</sup>

A further step is the investigation of essence, nature and individuality of entities. We can sum up Vos's reframing of the theory of properties as follows:

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<sup>58</sup> Vos, *KN*, 240-254.

<sup>59</sup> Vos, *KN*, 278-287.

<sup>60</sup> Vos, *KN*, 287-296.

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- (13) an essence *E* is an essential property *P* of *a*;
- (14) a common essence *E* is an essential property *P* of *a* that is also essential for *x* differing from *a*;
- (15) a transcendental property *T* is a common essence of all entities in all possible worlds (*ens, unum, verum, bonum*);
- (16) an individual property is a property of *a* that is not a property of any *x* differing from *a*;
- (17) an individual essence is an essential individual property;
- (18) all individual essences are equivalent;
- (19) there is a graded order of properties running from transcendental properties (most general) to individual essences (most specific);
- (20) the haecceity of *a* is the individual essence of *a* that is present as the stable component in all individual forms of *a* (and expressed by *a*'s proper name);
- (21) the nature of *a* is either the haecceity or the common nature of *a*.<sup>61</sup>

As Vos concludes, this theory of properties is based on the essential – accidental distinction, and provides a broad specter of properties. It will serve to give room to contingency in the doctrine of divine attributes (see section 18.3 below).<sup>62</sup>

### **17.2.2. Contingency and Freedom: Duns Scotus**

In the above survey of Vos's dissertation *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid* we have seen that Vos considers John Duns Scotus as *the* revolutionary Christian thinker who has to be followed. In the years after his dissertation, Vos further studied the thought of Duns Scotus. This also had an important bearing on the historical interpretation of classic Reformed theology (see section 17.3 below). While Vos initially saw Thomas Aquinas as the godfather of Reformed scholastic theology, he soon discovered that in fact Duns Scotus's views on the divine knowledge and will provided the proper thought structures of Reformed theology. To stimulate the research on Scotus, Vos initiated a research group *Johannes Duns Scotus*, which has produced several publications.<sup>63</sup>

Most important for our purpose is the elaborate commentary on a key text from Duns's writings: *John Duns Scotus. Contingency and Freedom. Lectura I 39*.<sup>64</sup>

The introduction to this volume gives, besides biographical and bibliographical information,<sup>65</sup> an indication of the scholastic genre of Duns's lecture: it consists of five "questions" concerning the relation of God's foreknowledge and future contingent actions. Each question is provided with a current opinion and some arguments. After a central argument taken from Scripture, Duns starts to develop

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<sup>61</sup> Vos, KN, 296-311.

<sup>62</sup> Vos, KN, 311-313.

<sup>63</sup> This research group operates a website: [www.dunsscotus.nl](http://www.dunsscotus.nl). As Vos' magnum opus, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, was published after the research for this section had been completed, I could not include it in my discussion. It gives a coherent exposition of notions and arguments that can be found separately in earlier publications from Vos and the Scotus group.

<sup>64</sup> A. Vos Jaczn. et al., *John Duns Scotus: Contingency and Freedom; Lectura I 39; Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994); this is the English version of *Johannes Duns Scotus: Contingentie en vrijheid; Lectura I 39* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1992).

<sup>65</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I 39*, 11-19.

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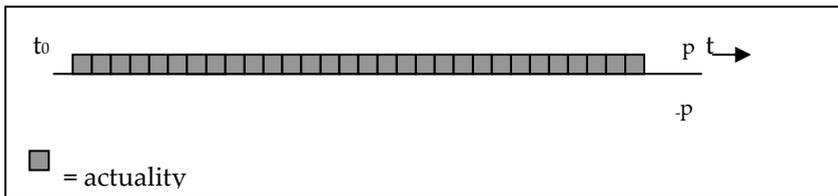
his own answer to the questions. The lecture is rounded off by a refutation of the initial opinions and of objections against Duns's solution of the problem.<sup>66</sup>

Traditionally, the discussion of God's foreknowledge is loaded with the antique ideal of necessary knowledge: how can God's perfect, necessary knowledge be stated together with the contingency of future events? Duns's opponents could either deny the possibility of God's knowing the contingent future, or concede that in some way God's immutable knowledge imposes necessity on its objects. Duns's conceptual innovation is to disentangle immutability and necessity and to develop the concept of "synchronic contingency." The commentators sum up three points in which Duns rejects the earlier thinking:

- the principle of plenitude: the Aristotelian axiom that all true possibilities are actualized at some time;
- the equivalence of immutability and necessity, and of mutability and contingency;
- the idea that true knowledge is a determinate, infallible, immutable and necessary knowledge of necessary states of affairs.

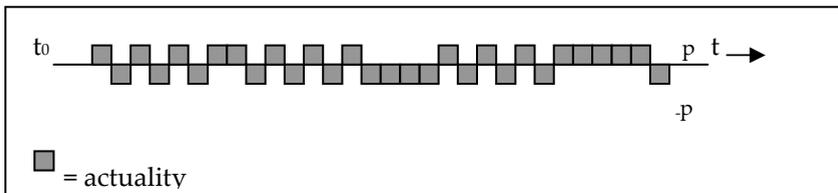
According to Vos c.s., Duns provides a correct middle position between (ancient) necessity thought and (postmodern) extreme contingency thought. He maintains that God exists necessarily and has essential properties, but at the same time acknowledges non-necessary reality and divine accidental properties (see section 18.3 below).<sup>67</sup>

In order to understand Duns's concept of contingency, we can contrast it with other explanations.<sup>68</sup> The extreme contrast is with *Parmenides*, who squarely rejected all contingency:



According to Parmenides, all states of affairs are necessary, and there is only one possible course of events.

In *Aristotle's* philosophy, the idea of contingency is introduced and is understood in terms of temporal change:



<sup>66</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 20-27.

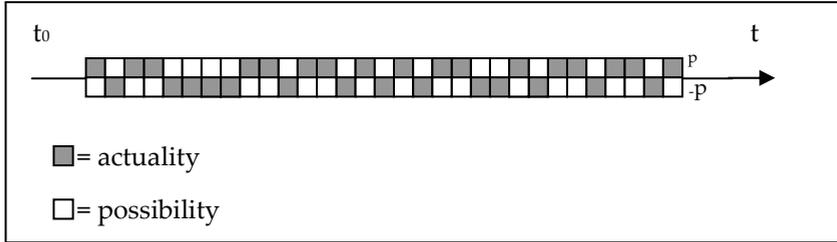
<sup>67</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 27-32.

<sup>68</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 32-36.

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The states of affairs can change from moment to moment, but on each moment, one state of affairs occurs without an alternative (and thus is necessary). Aristotle's view of contingency can be called "diachronic contingency": it equals contingency with change, and necessity with changelessness. Most non-Christian thinkers and several Christian thinkers have held to Aristotle's view of contingency.

In *Duns Scotus*, we find for the first time a different account, namely "synchronic contingency":



Synchronic contingency means that for one moment of time, there is a true alternative for the state of affairs that actually occurs.

The commentators spell out the immense theological significance of this concept:

It provides the indispensable basis for a theology that speaks about God as the in freedom creating and loving Person, about creation as the contingent reality that rests in God's creative action, and about man as a creature that in freedom responds to God's initiative. The proper nature of God, world, man and their mutual relations can only be understood within the ontological room of contingent being.<sup>69</sup>

For the doctrine of God properly speaking, this means that a distinction should be made between God's essential and accidental properties (see also section 18.3 below). God does not only have a necessary existence and essential properties (like justice, goodness, omniscience), but in his relation to created reality he performs contingent deeds and has accidental properties (like knowing the contingent future, loving me, raising Christ from the dead).<sup>70</sup>

Duns's concept of contingency is closely related to possible worlds semantics (see section 17.2.1 above). Vos c.s. explain that, contrary to modern logic, Duns included factual occurrence in the definition of contingency. Moreover, he distinguished between logical possibility (*possibilitas logica*) and real potency (*potentia realis*). The latter is the power to actualize a (logically) possible state of affairs. Duns identifies the divine and human *will* as the power to realize these states of affairs; the functioning of the will corresponds to the contingent basic structure of reality. God's will is seen as the highest cause of actual contingency, while the logical possibility of things is a necessary, irreducible property.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 36.

<sup>71</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 37-42.

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In the discussion of the central question, how God's knowledge relates to future contingent events, it is important to use a correct concept of necessity. Duns distinguishes between absolute necessity (*necessitas consequentis*) and hypothetical necessity (*necessitas consequentiae*). Absolute necessity resides in the state of affairs (thing or event) itself: there is no (logical) alternative for it. Hypothetical necessity poses a relation between two states of affairs; while these can in themselves be contingent, the relation is necessary. The difference can be seen in the logical formulas of an implication.

Absolute necessity is expressed as follows:

$$p \rightarrow Nq \text{ (if } p, \text{ then it is necessary that } q)$$

For example: if I drop a stone, it is necessary that it falls down. Here the falling down itself is said to be necessary, due to gravity.

Hypothetical necessity has the following formula:

$$N(p \rightarrow q) \text{ (necessarily, if } p, \text{ then } q)$$

For example: necessarily, if it rains, I get wet. Neither the raining nor my getting wet is necessary in itself, but provided that it rains (and I stand in the open air without an umbrella), I will necessarily get wet.

This distinction has a crucial application in the question of God's foreknowledge. Duns's opponents commonly hold that the necessity of God's knowledge transits to the objects of God's knowledge. Formalized in a proposition: if God knows that  $p$ , it is necessary that  $p$  ( $GKp \rightarrow Np$ ). Against this necessity thought, Duns states that there is merely a *necessitas consequentiae* between God's knowing that  $p$  and  $p$ 's occurrence: necessarily, if God knows that  $p$ , then  $p$ , and vice versa ( $N(GKp \rightarrow p)$ ;  $N(p \rightarrow GKp)$ ;  $p \Rightarrow GKp$ ).<sup>72</sup>

Scotist ontology, with its central concept of synchronic contingency, is worked out in different directions by the Utrecht scholars.

Guus Labooy's dissertation on *Freedom and Dispositions* explores the relevance of contingency for the science and practice of biological psychiatry.<sup>73</sup> He observes the dominance of reductionist, deterministic approaches in psychiatry, and argues that these approaches cannot do justice to irreducible features of reality.<sup>74</sup> The concept of "disposition" used in psychiatry is best explained in terms of a possible world semantics that leaves room for alternative events. This concept can on the one hand account for the determinacy and regularity of patterns of behavior, while

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<sup>72</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I* 39, 48, 162-165.

<sup>73</sup> G.H. Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities: Een wijsgerig-theologische begripsanalyse met het oog op de biologische psychiatrie* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000), 1-10. An English version is also available: Guus Labooy, *Freedom and Dispositions: Two Main Concepts in Theology and Biological Psychiatry; A Systematic Analysis*, Contributions to Philosophical Theology, vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>74</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 11-53 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 13-77).

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on the other hand preserving the essential human freedom and responsibility.<sup>75</sup> In terms of anthropology, Labooy places the will in a central role, against positions that explain human acts in causal terms.<sup>76</sup> In a strong phrase, Labooy states that the occurrence of either the dispositional effect or the dispositional alternative is not caused: it is a matter of “strict chance” (Dutch: “streng toeval”).<sup>77</sup> Concerning God’s agency, Labooy argues that God’s special providence can act either through the “normal” dispositional pattern or through the “exceptional” dispositional alternative.<sup>78</sup> He concludes that Christian thought based on contingency is helpful in dealing with fundamental problems of mental health and psychiatry.<sup>79</sup>

In a collection of essays on the incarnation, members of the Utrecht School take up a different line from Scotus’s thought: a supralapsarian understanding of Christology. The introductory essay by Henri Veldhuis notices a dominantly infralapsarian answer to the question of God’s motive for the incarnation: it is a means for salvation as a reaction to sin, and thus in ontological terms is accidental. Veldhuis argues, however, that creation and incarnation can and should be related on a deeper, essential level. A Christology that starts with God’s inexhaustible love for his world has deep and far reaching consequences for our understanding of creation, sin and redemption. It presupposes a deep continuity between “nature” and “grace” that can help to fill the gap between God’s revelation and (modern) rationality.<sup>80</sup>

The initial sketch by Veldhuis is filled in by Nico den Bok with a discussion of two traditional answers to the motive for the incarnation. These answers function in a (patristic and medieval) context that shows a wide variety of both infralapsarian and supralapsarian motives for the Son of God becoming man. The first proposal by Anselm of Canterbury focuses on reconciliation: God became man in order to redeem man from sin. Duns Scotus provided a thorough analysis and discussion of Anselm’s argument, and it is in Scotus’s recapitulation that Den Bok presents Anselm’s position:

- (1) It is necessary that man is redeemed.
- (2) This redemption is impossible without satisfaction.
- (3) Only God can give satisfaction.
- (4) Christ’s suffering is the most appropriate way of giving satisfaction.

Scotus’s critical discussion focuses on propositions (3) and (4). The statement that only God can give satisfaction is based on the presupposition that only an infinite deed can satisfy God for the infinite violation of his honor. Anselm argued that the required deed of satisfaction must exceed the possibilities of creatures, and thus can only be performed by God incarnate. Scotus instead claims that a genuine

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<sup>75</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 59-63, 91-101, 142-164, 167-174 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 79-89, 135-146, 183-207, 212-225).

<sup>76</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 165-174 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 209-225).

<sup>77</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 124-128 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 158-166).

<sup>78</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 201-206 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 251-259).

<sup>79</sup> Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, 232-253 (English: *Freedom and Dispositions*, 290-315).

<sup>80</sup> Henri Veldhuis, “Moderniteit en motieven voor de menswording: Een eigentijds pleidooi voor verdieping van de incarnatie-leer,” in *Wat God bewoog mens te worden: Gedachten over de incarnatie*, ed. by Nico den Bok and Guus Labooy (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003), 12-32.

act of love towards God does in itself exceed creaturely limitations, and can suffice as satisfaction for sin. A perfect act of love towards the infinite God, performed by free human will, can at once fulfill God's initial demand of love and compensate for the contrary deed of sin. God factually does more by sending his Son to suffer and die for us; this is contingent, not (absolutely) necessary. We believe what God actually has done, and subsequently we can see that God had good reasons for this: by Christ's suffering and satisfaction we are more deeply connected to God than we were as creatures. This is a hypothetical necessity: given that God chose to send his Son, it is convenient that he did it this way.

Besides this accidental motive for the incarnation, Duns gives an essential motivation: Christ was – apart from sin – pre-destined to become man. In creation, God aimed at a human nature that found its glory in perfect communion with God. Christ *is* this perfect human nature in communion with God. Thus the incarnation is motivated by God's will fully to share his love with mankind. In the final analysis, the motive for incarnation is identical with the motive for creation: God wishes to be in loving communion with man. The occurrence of sin, and its reparation, is accidental in this connection. Scotus incorporates the infralapsarian argument for the (necessity of) incarnation in this supralapsarian framework.<sup>81</sup>

Antonie Vos examines the lines of supra- and infralapsarism in Reformed theology.<sup>82</sup> He discusses 20th century contributions to the discussion, which focus on the problem of a semi-temporal "before" and "after" in the order of God's decrees of predestination, creation, and fall. Within these conditions, the discussion results either in a preference for the "more modest" infralapsarian understanding or in the rejection of the question of infra and supra as "too speculative."<sup>83</sup> Subsequently, Vos argues that earlier Reformed theology as exemplified by Gomarus continues a Scotist line of argument. Crucial is the distinction between a temporal order (which has to be denied in God's decree) and a structural order of priorities (which is affirmed). Vos presents Duns Scotus's doctrine of predestination as follows :

- (1) Predestination is an act of God's *will*.
- (2) It is a *structuring* act of God's will,
- (3) that has a *personal* address as it concerns somebody.
- (4) The point of view of this act is eschatological communion.
- (5) This act presupposes existence of the object, although the existence is not the object of the will;
- (6) God's act of will implies God's knowledge of this act.
- (7) God's act of predestination is eternal,
- (8) and non-necessary.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Nico den Bok, "De twee klassieke motivering van de menswording: Anselmus en Scotus," in *Wat God bewoog*, 38-58. Text and translation of Duns Scotus's discussion of Anselm's argument are given on pages 59-75. Cf. also the contribution by Gijsbert van den Brink, "Verzoening als motief voor de menswording bij Anselmus en in de Heidelbergse Catechismus," in *Wat God bewoog*, 94-114.

<sup>82</sup> Antonie Vos, "Supralapsarisme en de gereformeerde theologie," in *Wat God bewoog*, 175-197.

<sup>83</sup> Vos, "Supralapsarisme," 177-186.

<sup>84</sup> Vos, "Supralapsarisme," 186-189.

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Scotus distinguishes four structural moments in God's decree of predestination:

- (1) God willed for a certain number of elect the glory of communion with him as the ultimate goal;
- (2) God fore-ordained final grace as the instrument and *conditio sine qua non* for attaining this ultimate happiness;
- (3) God foresaw that the elect would fall in Adam;
- (4) God foresaw a history of salvation decreed by his absolute good-pleasure, in virtue of Christ's suffering that atoned the trespasses of the first man (Adam).

Vos states that this Scotian doctrine of election is God-centered and Christ-centered. Moreover, in God's eternal and decisive will we find contingent structural moments: God is not necessitated to decide for this course of action. This is an important confirmation of the insight that eternity and immutability should not be confused with necessity and determinism.<sup>85</sup> In later Reformed theology, the supralapsarian line of Christology and predestination is rarely continued. Vos presents one exception: Alexander Comrie. This 18th century Scottish/Dutch theologian taught the eternal election of the man Jesus Christ as the first and ultimate decree in which the election of other people is comprised. A consequence of this insight for Comrie is that the incarnation (unity of God and man in Christ) would have taken place even without the occurrence of sin. In the final analysis, Vos argues, this doctrine moves around God's immeasurable goodness which is central both for God and for us: God is the source of our final happiness.<sup>86</sup>

These sketchy extrapolations suffice to show that the Scotist ontology based on the concept of synchronic contingency has, according to this line of the Utrecht School, the potential to result in a complete reworking of theology and Christian philosophy.

### **17.3. Historical Orientation**

From the preceding sections, it has already become clear that the agenda of the Utrecht School shows similarities to the enterprise of scholastic philosophy and theology, both medieval and Protestant. The most substantial connection with scholasticism is in the search for a fully Christian ontology (see section 17.2). However, the method of conceptual inquiry or analysis (see section 17.1) is not at all different from scholasticism as a scientific, analytical approach in theology. Providing clear definitions of concepts and examining their logical implications and mutual relations are activities fundamental to scholastic theology.

Since this study has a systematic objective, I cannot fully examine the historical research performed by Utrecht School members. The following survey focuses on

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<sup>85</sup> Vos, "Supralapsarisme," 189-192. The statement that Scotus's doctrine of election is fundamentally christological rests on the presupposition that in Jesus Christ the union of God and man is prototypally realized.

<sup>86</sup> Vos, "Supralapsarisme," 192-197. One could probe the relation between this Scotist supralapsarian and christological doctrine of election and Karl Barth's doctrine of election; cf. A.J. Plaisier, "Motieven voor incarnatie bij Barth," in *Wat God bewoog*, 198-216.

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the interaction between the historical and the systematic aspects of the Utrecht orientation on the scholastic tradition.

The historical research of the Utrecht School mainly follows the “tradition history” approach. This means that much attention is paid to the role of institutions and chains of tradition throughout the centuries. It is stated that the development of knowledge and thought is not a matter of individuals, but that schools and universities, religious orders and the proliferation of writings are crucial in transmitting and expanding knowledge. For this reason, much effort is invested in tracing back the lines of thought and the usage of concepts and arguments.<sup>87</sup>

This tradition historical research has focused on two areas: the larger tradition of the medieval Church and theology, and the more specific tradition of Reformed scholastic theology. Concerning the former, the central thesis is that a tradition of *fides quaerens intellectum*, drawing on the thought of Augustine, stretches from Anselm of Canterbury via a chain of Augustinian thinkers and from the 13th century onwards primarily through the Franciscan order into the scholastic theology of the Reformation.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the mainline of the tradition is typically not drawn via Thomas Aquinas, but through the Franciscan intellectual tradition. Behind this preference lies a philosophical evaluation of the respective merits of Thomas’s and Duns Scotus’s thought (see section 17.2.1 above). It is assumed that Aquinas performed a half-way synthesis between Christian faith and Aristotelian philosophy, while Scotus proceeded further in reworking Aristotelian philosophy into a truly Christian way of thought. Typical of the Utrecht research on the Augustinian tradition is the combination of historical and systematical interest. I will provide, briefly, some examples of this combination.

First, in 1994 Antonie Vos published a monograph on *Johannes Duns Scotus*.<sup>89</sup> He starts by sketching the background of Scotus’s life and work in the medieval world of schools and universities, and the specific place of Franciscan theology at the 13th century Oxford university.<sup>90</sup> Typical of the high medieval university is that all sciences employ the “scholastic method” as a procedure of transmitting and elaborating the authoritative tradition.<sup>91</sup> The development of theology within the setting of schools and universities is based on crucial insights in the nature of reality as God’s creation: from Augustine onward, Christian thought maintains contingency against different philosophical attempts to rule it out. The third quarter of the 13th century, with the Parisian Condemnations of 1277 and the

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<sup>87</sup> See Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 55-59 (on medieval scholasticism) and 98-104 (the educational centers of the Calvinist Reformation); cf. also Antonie Vos, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” in Van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 99-119.

<sup>88</sup> Besides the studies on Duns Scotus mentioned in section 17.2.2 above, one could also think of Nico den Bok’s dissertation *Communicating the Most High*. See a survey of its contents below.

<sup>89</sup> Antonie Vos Jaczn., *Johannes Duns Scotus*, Kerkhistorische Monografieën 2 (Leiden: Groen, 1994).

<sup>90</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 1-22.

<sup>91</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 6.

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creative theology of Henry of Gent, forms the fertile soil for Duns Scotus's career as philosopher and theologian.<sup>92</sup>

Vos then describes Scotus's life, which was rather short, largely devoted to theological study, and in the final years characterized by feverish theological and philosophical research activity until his early death in 1308.<sup>93</sup> Despite the brevity of his life, Scotus exerted an enormous influence on the history of Western thought by his revolutionary discovery of (synchronic) contingency. Characteristic of his thought are the focus on individuality, the central role assigned to the will (divine and human), and the exactness of logical analysis.<sup>94</sup>

In Duns Scotus, faith, existence, and spirituality go hand in hand. The foundation of this harmony is the expecting, hopeful orientation to God as the highest good. Knowledge and desire are both ultimately directed at God. Scotus's spirituality is determined by love for and joy in God, who shows his grace in Jesus Christ. At the basis of his theology lies the same integration of necessary truth (God's essential goodness) and contingent truth (God's free grace) that forms the heart of his spiritual existence.<sup>95</sup> The two moments of nature and grace, which are separated in Renaissance and Enlightenment thought, cling together in Duns's thought and experience. The directedness of the will toward the good is central in Duns's anthropology. Through sin, the will is directed toward something different from God as the highest good, and through faith, the proper object of the will is restored.<sup>96</sup> As the most decisive source of Duns's thinking, Vos identifies Holy Scripture: during the Middle Ages, theology was above all reading of and reflection on the "holy pages."<sup>97</sup> Contrary to popular understanding, scientific theology in Duns's days was not dominated by Aristotle. Aristotle's philosophical works served as a textbook, on the basis of which the Christian philosophers and theologians freely developed their own thought.<sup>98</sup>

The basic structures of Duns Scotus's thought as just indicated are further elaborated by Vos in the remaining chapters of his monograph, subsequently devoted to ethics,<sup>99</sup> free will,<sup>100</sup> justification,<sup>101</sup> predestination,<sup>102</sup> creation,<sup>103</sup> sacraments,<sup>104</sup> Jesus Christ,<sup>105</sup> the triune God,<sup>106</sup> and the philosophical doctrine of

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<sup>92</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 8-14.

<sup>93</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 23-37.

<sup>94</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 60-63.

<sup>95</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 64-69.

<sup>96</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 69-73.

<sup>97</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 73-76.

<sup>98</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 76-80.

<sup>99</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 82-102.

<sup>100</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 103-116.

<sup>101</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 117-135.

<sup>102</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 136-155.

<sup>103</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 156-174.

<sup>104</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 175-200.

<sup>105</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 201-216; here is a connection with the "supralapsarian Christology" mentioned in section 4.2.2.2 above.

<sup>106</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 217-245.

God.<sup>107</sup> Given the subject of this study, I will pay more detailed attention to the chapters on Trinity and philosophical doctrine of God.

Embedded in the spiritual adoration of the trinitarian life, Duns took the intellectual challenge of thinking through the concept of one essence in three persons. Vos shows that Duns had a strong awareness of the importance of a consistent concept of Trinity: if monotheism per se does not allow for a certain plurality within the Godhead, the Christian faith is in great trouble. Duns not only refutes the claim that God's oneness and threeness are inconsistent, but goes as far as to argue that the trinitarian concept of God is the only consistent concept of God.<sup>108</sup> For Duns, the argumentative starting point of this doctrine is the insight that God has the mental powers of intellect and will as the principles of action, and that these mental powers work first and foremost within God himself. The "persons" of the Trinity are understood starting from the intra-trinitarian "processions" or "productions" (the classic concepts *generatio* and *spiratio* are modes of bringing forth). In God's essential nature, "producer" and "product" are of the same sort: divine persons. Moreover, there are precisely *two* fundamental principles of action or production: nature/intellect and will. Nature or intellect is a *one way directed capacity*: things are known in the way they are. The will is a *two way directed capacity*: it can choose between alternatives. Thus, there is in God one person who only *produces* (the Father), one person who only *is produced* (the Spirit), and one person who *both is produced and produces* (the Son).<sup>109</sup> In a clarification of the classic doctrine of the Trinity, Duns states that "essence" and "relation" occur in each of the Persons of the Trinity: the Son receives the divine essence from the Person of the Father. Moreover, Duns defends the Western *filioque* by explaining that if the Spirit proceeds only from the Father, no individual difference between Son and Spirit can be held.<sup>110</sup> Finally, Vos argues that because in Duns's understanding of the trinitarian relations the dimensions of intellect (necessity) and will (contingency) are constitutive, the same dimensions are constitutive for all reality. The concept of Trinity is foundational to all theology and ontology. The trinitarian concept of God makes it clear that no absolute necessity reigns over God, but that freedom, will, and contingency are utterly anchored in God's own being.<sup>111</sup>

Concerning the doctrine of God proper, Vos starts with Duns's efforts in the "proofs" for the existence of God. Duns has an independent position between Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. Structurally parallel to Thomas, Duns starts in created reality: from created, finite beings, he concludes to the first, infinite being. The difference with Thomas is that Duns does not use physical analogies, but argues on a metaphysical or ontological level: God gives being to anything else, and in turn does not receive his being from elsewhere. In brief, given the possibility of contingent beings, it is also possible that there exists a necessary

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<sup>107</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 246-271.

<sup>108</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 217-218

<sup>109</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 218-224.

<sup>110</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 225-229.

<sup>111</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 229-234.

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being (not receiving existence from elsewhere). If a necessary being is possible, it is necessary.<sup>112</sup>

God, as the First Being, is the ultimate and excellent good. Duns argues for the unity and infinity of God. Given that there is a first and ultimate, perfect and necessary being, there can be only one God. The properties ascribed to God exclude the existence of an equal being that is not identical to God.<sup>113</sup>

The further doctrine of God by Duns Scotus makes it clear that the necessity of God's own existence does not transfer to the entities that are known and willed by God. Although God is the First Cause, this does not imply that he always works necessarily, as the philosophers (Aristotle, Averroes, Avicenna) have it. If the necessity of God's being transfers to his omniscience, a hard determinism follows. Vos explains that the exact point of Scotus's theory is the denial of this transfer. Contingent propositions are known certainly but contingently by God (cf. section 17.2.2 above). To be sure, God's knowledge of contingent facts is not dependent on God's will, according to Scotus. The *actuality* of contingent facts is *determined* by the will; but God's knowledge itself knows these facts *immediately* and *contingently*. As Vos states, the kernel of Scotist ontology is to see our reality as constituted by God's wise will; that reality is the best place to live.<sup>114</sup>

As a second example of the Utrecht School's historical-systematical research in the patristic and scholastic tradition, I point to Nico den Bok's dissertation *Communicating the Most High*, on the doctrine of the Trinity by Richard of St. Victor. Through an analysis of the thought of the Victorine Richard, Den Bok arrives at a systematical contribution to the recent discussions on Trinity, especially around the idea of "social Trinity." As Den Bok is uncomfortable with the rapid identification of "relation" as the core of personhood (divine and human), he searches for a fuller understanding of God's being a Person. This involves an analysis of God's mental powers (intellect and will), and an answer to the question whether God is one Person or three Persons.<sup>115</sup>

In recent trinitarian theology, a *monopersonal* understanding of Trinity is defended by Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, although their conceptions of Trinity have an opening for God's self-communication to creatures. A combination of monopersonal and social notions of Trinity is found with Piet Schoonenberg and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Within the currently dominant trend of social trinitarian thought, Den Bok distinguishes between "weak" and "strong" forms. Weak social Trinity (Walter Kasper, Bruno Forte) puts emphasis on the relational and interpersonal aspects of God's being without squarely stating the existence of three persons (as independent centers of love and activity) in God. Strong social Trinity (Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Cornelius Plantinga, Richard Swinburne) describes God's being as a communion of three independent persons, and claims that human community is a proper analogy of God's being persons-in-communion. In strong social trinitarianism, God's existing as three persons is a

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<sup>112</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 246-253.

<sup>113</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 254-258.

<sup>114</sup> Vos, *Scotus*, 258-271.

<sup>115</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 7-16.

necessary property: God does not choose to be Father, Son, and Spirit, but must be so. Moreover, social trinitarianism cannot avoid the conclusion of speaking about “three Gods” as three individual subjects of willing and loving. While Richard of St. Victor is recently celebrated as a “founding father” of social trinitarianism, the conceptual structures of his doctrine of the Trinity and personhood have not been sufficiently investigated.<sup>116</sup>

As Den Bok notices that most usage of the concept of “person” in trinitarian discussions is imprecise and vague, the elucidation of central notions in the concepts is fundamental for his investigation. He argues that the pivotal questions are: (1) what are personal *relations*, and in what sense they are essential and/or free? (2) what concept of the *will* is involved in personhood, and is there one will or three wills in God? (3) what concept of *individuality* is applicable to God, and how is it to be understood in regard to the One and the Three? Relating these three questions to each other, Den Bok argues that conceptual analysis is served by distinguishing between different levels of freedom, will, and individuality. This also implies that the trinitarian term *persona* and the modern term “person” should not be equated beforehand.<sup>117</sup>

In a brief survey of Richard’s life and works, Den Bok points out that he was both a mystical and a systematic thinker, involved in monastic revival as well as scholastic rise. By his basic hermeneutics of the “four senses” of Scripture (literal, moral, doctrinal and eschatological), Richard lays a strong connection between reading the Scriptures, being personally involved, and thoroughly thinking through ontological questions. In three respects, Richard’s theological method is still instructive: first, his reasoning is directed not only at abstract universal concepts, but specifically at *individual* properties; second, his hermeneutics involves a strong connection between “reading” texts and “knowing” reality; third, Richard develops a nuanced theory of knowledge, certainty, evidence and proof.<sup>118</sup>

Richard’s magnum opus *De Trinitate* is a fine piece of “faith seeking understanding” in a specific form: starting from the texts of Scripture and Creed, Richard proceeds through a ladder of similitudes from visible things to the invisible God. While faith provides the basic insights, Richard insists on finding the reasons for the things believed. Richard’s trinitarian theology has high aims: he wants to provide good reasons for God’s being one substance in three Persons. In order to arrive from knowledge of visible things to understanding the invisible God, Richard employs a distinctive procedure by listing an exhaustive enumeration of disjunctive properties. A being can be either eternal and existing by itself, or eternal and not existing by itself (this option is in fact impossible), or non-eternal and existing by something else, or non-eternal and existing by itself. From the actual occurrence of non-eternal entities that exist by something else, Richard proves that there must also be an eternal being that exists by itself. This is the famous *ratio Richardi*: Richard’s proof of God’s existence. Richard argues that there are “necessary reasons” (*rationes necessariae*) why God must be one substance in three Persons. He does not presume, however, to think that his proofs yield full

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<sup>116</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 17-52.

<sup>117</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 53-93.

<sup>118</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 95-149.

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comprehension of God's being. Finding some reasons within God's being gives joy, but still seeks further contemplation and increasing knowledge. Understanding and incomprehensibility are advocated at once by Richard.<sup>119</sup>

Richard has a detailed account of the concept of "person" in trinitarian context. It is important to note that this trinitarian concept "person" may differ from our modern understanding of person. Furthermore, we should realize that the question whether the Trinity consisted of *three* personal, individual substances or formed *one* personal, individual substance was already known to Richard from the patristic and early scholastic tradition. Richard defines a person as "a being existing in itself alone by way of a rational *existentia*." *Existentia*, in turn, comprises the substance and the origin of a person. Richard's definition implies that *three* "persons" can together be *one* "substance." Richard focuses on individual, personal existence, but in this a general or common nature or substance is presupposed. An important result of Richard's thought is that being a "person" is an essential property: a personal being cannot be conceived without its being personal. Richard argues that it is important that the divine "persons" are not merely *a* "person," but are each *this* specific, individual "person." However, Richard applies this notion of individual personal existence also to the Trinity as a whole. This argument is based on the premise of God's being "from himself" (*a se*): if a being exists by itself, it has all its properties by itself. But then these properties must be identical with that being, and that being is self-identical and thus single (it cannot be multiplied, since then it would not exist by itself). The oneness of God implies that the divine nature itself is individual and incommunicable, that is, it cannot be transferred to other beings. For the divine "persons," this means that their "production" must remain "within" the one divine substance and differs radically from the forth bringing of entities outside God.<sup>120</sup>

The specific way in which the divine "persons" relate to the individual divine "substance" is explained by Richard in terms of *will* and *relation of origin*. Concerning God's will, a difficulty in Richard's view is that he does not clearly distinguish between a willing that has alternatives (*arbitrium*) and a mere willing of the good without alternatives (*voluntas*). He argues, however, that the will involved in the "production" of the divine Persons is a "natural" and immutable will, without alternatives. Concerning the relation of origin, Richard shows that all beings have such a relation. The specific, individuating property of the divine Persons in this respect is that (a) the divine substance as such exists by itself, and that (b) the divine Persons exist in different modes of origin, the Father being not-produced but only producing, the Son both produced and producing, the Spirit only produced and receiving his being from two originators rather than from one.<sup>121</sup>

Richard's argument for the existence of three divine Persons has the "principle of divine plenitude" as its background. As the best possible being, God is supreme love, happiness and glory. This requires other persons, Richard argues, since love presupposes other-directedness, mutuality, and unity of will. Whereas two persons

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<sup>119</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 151-201.

<sup>120</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 203-242.

<sup>121</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 243-281.

sufficiently account for these features of love, love is only perfected if these two have a companion in love, a third person. The necessity of three persons being established, Richard further argues that only if these persons are divine, the highest love can be shared among persons who are supremely love worthy. Moreover, the persons need to be related to each other in order to provide perfect communion of love. In Richard's account of the three Persons, Den Bok argues, there remain two problems. The first is, how the relations of origin between Father, Son and Spirit combine with the aseity of the divine substance. The second problem is, that Richard's argument for the Trinity seems to reduce the divine persons to hypostatized properties.<sup>122</sup>

Concerning the unity or plurality of the divine will, Den Bok argues that Richard focuses on the one common object instead of the subject(s) of God's willing. While Richard explains that the relations of origin of the divine Persons are entirely willed by each of the Persons, Den Bok argues that from the perspectives of the persons individually there is a difference in the content of their wills. Den Bok further shows that the *ad extra* operations of the Trinity (the mission of the Son and the Spirit) are rooted in the *ad intra* personal relations. God's love towards man is an effect of God's trinitarian love. Richard does not *divide* the redemptive actions over the three Persons, however: the triune God has only *one* face, namely Jesus Christ, in whom we know the Father through the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that, whereas in Richard's theology the internal structure of the Trinity and the trinitarian *opera ad extra* strongly reflect the triad of power – wisdom – love, a full identification of the Persons with the mental powers is not performed. Moreover, Den Bok argues that Richard's emphasis on the unity of the divine substance prevents an analysis of the trinitarian communion of love in terms of "social Trinity."<sup>123</sup>

Den Bok further shows that Richard connects human personhood and individuality to his understanding of the Trinity. Fundamental differences between God and man, however, are that many humans share one human nature, while God has only an individual, incommunicable nature, and that man is made up of soul and body whereas God is a Spirit. Similarities between anthropology and the doctrine of the Trinity reside in the fact that Richard transfers the notion of individuality from God to man. Also, the occurrence of both essential and accidental properties, and the capacities of knowledge and will (love) are common to God and man; according to Den Bok, Richard attributes these concepts to God and man univocally. In the human will, Richard distinguishes between *desiderium* (affections), *consilium* (wisdom or deliberation) and *arbitrium* (decision or consent). Richard ascribes freedom to the human will, both in the sense of being free from compulsion and willingly consenting and in the sense of choice between alternatives. The *motives* for willing may arise from the outside, but the proper *act* of the will belongs to the will itself and as such is not *caused* by anything else. Richard's anthropology comprises also the notion of relationality: man is, through his knowledge and will, related to all other beings, and primarily to God. The

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<sup>122</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 283-327.

<sup>123</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 329-374.

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relation to God is essential for man; the true direction is lost through sin, but is restored by God's Spirit.<sup>124</sup>

In a concluding analysis, Den Bok makes the following statements:<sup>125</sup>

1. Richard distinguishes between an essential and a non-essential dimension in God. The trinitarian relations belong to the former, God's creative and redemptive actions belong to the latter.<sup>126</sup>
2. Richard does not ascribe to the Trinity three centers of willing and acting, but treats the triune God as one individual.
3. Having the same individual divine substance, the three Persons are distinguished only by their relations of origin (*a nullo, ab uno, ab utroque*).
4. Richard does include the notion of willing into his doctrine of the Trinity, but he does not address the question whether the three Persons perform different acts of willing, and he understands this will as natural spontaneity instead of alternative choice.<sup>127</sup>
5. Richard's concept of divine persons should not be equated with the modern concept of person. The latter can be defined as the subject of contingent willing, but this does not apply to the trinitarian persons.
6. Seen in its own historical context, Richard's trinitarian theology effectively develops a threeness of Persons, based on the notions of the mental powers and of the relations of origin, within a predominantly *monopersonal* understanding of Trinity. In later centuries, this synthesis proved hard to maintain; still it contains promising possibilities for rethinking the doctrine of the Trinity.

We can conclude from the two preceding examples that the historical and systematic investigation of medieval scholastic theology (building on patristic thought) yields important insights in central questions of systematic theology. Vos and others argue that the penetrating inquiries by the medieval scholastics deserve to be extrapolated in a renewed Christian theology and ontology. The doctrines of God and Trinity are connected to the issues of necessity and contingency, personhood and freedom, and result in a distinctive Christian view of reality.

Concerning the specific tradition of *Reformed* scholastic theology, the Utrecht School members take effort to correct popular views on its character and its relation to both the medieval tradition and the Reformation (cf. also part I, section 2.2.3). As Willem van Asselt points out, much scholarship from the 19th and 20th centuries draws on the presupposition that Reformed scholasticism is a decline from the original understanding of faith by the Reformers; it is said to display *discontinuity* with the Reformation in both method and content. Van Asselt argues that we should interpret Reformed scholasticism from a *double continuity*: first, the Reformed scholastics fully shared the theological convictions of the Reformers, and

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<sup>124</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 375-429.

<sup>125</sup> Den Bok, *Communicating*, 431-475.

<sup>126</sup> On the relation between immanent and economic Trinity, cf. further Den Bok, *Communicating*, 487-496.

<sup>127</sup> On the importance of contingency vs. necessity in relation to God's will *ad intra* and *ad extra*, cf. further Den Bok, *Communicating*, 477-487.

continued a theological approach in which Scripture is the source and norm of doctrine; second, the Reformed scholastics reconnected to the earlier tradition of scientific theology, not in order to undo the Reformational discovery of the gospel, but in order to elaborate the message of the Reformation into a full-grown theology, in which future generations could be instructed.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the return to a scholastic way of theology is no mere repristination, but participates in the contemporary development of new philosophical perspectives (cf. part I, chapter 4 on Reformed Orthodox method). In an international context, the establishment of Protestant universities and academies boosted the creative study of both philosophy and theology, which were viewed as closely intertwined. Of specific importance is the hypothesis that Reformed theology in its basic tenets reflects distinctively Scotist thinking.<sup>129</sup> Whereas the traces of Scotism are not easily found on the surface (the Reformed only sparingly quote their authors), the Utrecht scholars argue that their fundamental conceptual structures reflect a Scotist view of the doctrine of God and especially of necessity and contingency.<sup>130</sup>

The historical component of the Utrecht School's research in Reformed scholasticism has produced a number of book publications. First, in 1995 the working group "Oude Gereformeerde Theologie" published a volume titled *De scholastieke Voetius*. The introduction to this volume gives a description and appraisal of 17th century scholasticism and of the role played by Voetius as a professor in the Utrecht academy. It is suggested that thorough study of Voetius's theology provides a key to the systematic power of Reformed theology in the Post-Reformation era. Moreover, Voetius gives an interesting combination of highly sophisticated doctrinal theology and a profound exercise of practical piety. The volume contains a translation of parts of Voetius's disputations, and a commentary to each text. The commentaries sometimes touch upon the question of a Thomist or Scotist reading of Voetius.<sup>131</sup>

In the remainder of the volume<sup>132</sup>, four disputations are presented on the following themes:

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<sup>128</sup> An initial statement was made in: Willem J. van Asselt, "De erfenis van de gereformeerde scholastiek," *Kerk en Theologie* 47 (1996): 126-136. Cf. for an expanded version: Willem J. van Asselt, "Studie van de gereformeerde scholastiek: Verleden en toekomst," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 50 (1996): 290-312. A presentation in English of the "New School" in the research of protestant scholasticism is found in the "Introduction" by Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 11-43.

<sup>129</sup> Antonie Vos Jaczn., "De kern van de gereformeerde theologie: Een traditiehistorisch gesprek," *Kerk en Theologie* 47 (1996): 106-125.

<sup>130</sup> See the volume produced by the Utrecht working group "Oude Gereformeerde Theologie" *Reformed Thought on Freedom. The Concept of Free Choice in the History of Early-Modern Reformed Theology*, ed. by Willem J. van Asselt et al., Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), which examines the views of important Reformed theologians on necessity and contingency in the context of the *Locus de libero arbitrio*.

<sup>131</sup> W.J. van Asselt, E. Dekker, "Rond Voetius' *Disputationes Selectae*," in: *De scholastieke Voetius*, 1-33.

<sup>132</sup> The appendices provide an analysis of Voetius's usage of syllogistics (*De scholastieke Voetius*, 161-166) and a survey of all Voetius's *Disputationes Selectae* (*De scholastieke Voetius*,

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- God's knowledge and will;
- God's omnipotence;
- The merit of Christ;
- The practice of faith.

For the sake of brevity, I restrict myself to reviewing the first two of these, in which central parts of the doctrine of God are at stake. The commentators on the first disputation, on the divine knowledge and will, show that Voetius ascribes to the divine will a central role in the actualization of reality. They argue that the distinctions made by Voetius in God's essence and attributes should not be understood as speculative attempts to grasp God in human thought, but as efforts in pure and nuanced theological language while avoiding contradictory statements. It is further argued that Voetius's use of the concepts of *scientia simplicis intelligentia* and *scientia visionis* (cf. part I, section 7.2 above) differs from the original meaning in Thomas Aquinas's theology. God's knowledge comprises more than the actual states of affairs: God knows all possibilities. It is by an act of God's will that states of affairs pass from mere possibility to actuality. While Voetius does not advocate a "voluntarism" apart from the logical and actual make-up of things, he clearly follows Duns Scotus by stating that God knows all future events on the basis of his will.<sup>133</sup>

The second disputation deals with God's omnipotence. Voetius pays extensive attention to the question how God's omnipotence relates to (logical) possibilities and impossibilities. He firmly argues that alleged entities that contain a logical contradiction (e.g., a square circle, an independent creature) are per definition impossible. It does not make sense to claim that such impossibilities are nevertheless possible for God. Voetius rejects both the late medieval nominalist view of God's *potentia absoluta* and the radicalizing of this view by his contemporary René Descartes. Voetius maintains that the realm of God's omnipotence exceeds the actual reality (God can actualize different possible worlds), but refuses to employ this possibility in a de-stabilizing way.<sup>134</sup>

A second book stemming from the historical research in Reformed scholasticism is the *Inleiding tot de gereformeerde scholastiek* (Introduction to Reformed scholasticism). This volume, authored by Willem van Asselt and some of his senior or graduate students, gives a basic discussion of the most important aspects of Reformed theology between 1550 and 1790. After a description of Aristotle's philosophy as it was received in scholasticism (focusing on logic and metaphysics),<sup>135</sup> the importance of the theology of Augustine for medieval and Reformed scholasticism is pointed out, especially concerning the doctrine of God and the issue of free will and predestination.<sup>136</sup> The development of scholastic method at

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167-193).

<sup>133</sup> "I. Gods kennis en wil," in: *De scholastieke Voetius*, 34-54 (translation by A.J. Beck and W.J. van Asselt: 34-42; commentary by A.J. Beck and E. Dekker: 43-54).

<sup>134</sup> "II. Gods almacht," in: *De scholastieke Voetius*, 55-85 (translation by G. van den Brink and A. Vos: 55-68; commentary by G. van den Brink: 69-85).

<sup>135</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 31-46.

<sup>136</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 47-53.

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the medieval schools and universities is sketched,<sup>137</sup> followed by the story of its continuation in Protestant theology after the Reformation.<sup>138</sup> Scholastic method should be distinguished from doctrinal content, as is shown from the fact that it allowed for considerable variety of doctrinal positions. A survey of the adventures of Reformed scholasticism in the periods of Early Orthodoxy (1560-1620),<sup>139</sup> High Orthodoxy (1620-1700),<sup>140</sup> and Late Orthodoxy (1700-1790)<sup>141</sup> shows that each of these periods saw different theological and philosophical frontiers, which affected the elaboration of Reformed doctrine. The final chapter of the volume addresses the actual importance of scholasticism. The central question of the argument is: how is it possible that the Reformed scholastics remained so faithful to Scripture? Is that due to their correct method, or is it a fruit of a pious heart in spite of a dangerous method? The author, Maarten Wisse, argues that the strong presence of logic in scholasticism has no substantial impact on doctrinal content: logic is merely an instrument of controlling the consistency of statements; it has no say over the content of these statements and thus cannot have a narrowing effect on doctrine. Doctrinal failures are not caused by logical reasoning, but by hidden premises. Sound logic helps to discover and refute these premises. In stead of rejecting logic, one should fight wrong premises. Faithfully dealing with Scripture is impossible without the usage of logic. The limited significance of logic and argumentation is that it follows on practical life: theological propositions arise from the daily experience in life with God.<sup>142</sup>

The volume *Reformation and Scholasticism* contains the contributions to a symposium held at Utrecht in May 1997. In addition to members of the Utrecht School, scholars from different directions discuss aspects of Reformed scholasticism. We can discern some differences in views between adherents of the “new school” in researching Protestant scholasticism and representatives of older directions (Augustijn, Van ‘t Spijker, Broeyer). The *Introduction* by Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker presents the new approach to scholasticism in contrast to older scholarship (see above). Richard A. Muller demonstrates that the definition of “scholasticism” needs to be reviewed because of negative biases in the older approach. The charge of “predestination” as a “central dogma” in Reformed scholasticism does not hold in particular. Muller pleads for following the scholastics in their own definitions of scholasticism: scholastic writers gave a balanced account of the status, *principia* and methods of theology, which proves that “deductive rationalism” or “rigid Aristotelianism” do not fit as proper descriptions. “Scholastic” theology is a distinctive literary genre, differing from catechetical and exegetical work. Finally, Muller argues that Reformed scholasticism was in constant development, interacting with contemporary exegesis and philology and with innovative philosophical discussions. As

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<sup>137</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 54-66.

<sup>138</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 77-90.

<sup>139</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 91-113.

<sup>140</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 114-141.

<sup>141</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 142-162.

<sup>142</sup> Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 163-173.

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scholasticism was eclectic in character, the sources of thought show a wide variety.<sup>143</sup>

Cornelis Augustijn (late professor emeritus of the Free University, Amsterdam) examines Luther's and Melanchthon's views of scholasticism under the programmatic heading *Wittenberga contra scholasticos*. The central objection against scholastic theology by Martin Luther is that it follows Aristotle in defining man by his "natural abilities" in stead of describing man as a sinner. Moreover, Luther was highly critical of the usage of logic in theology; instead, he advocated persistent scrutiny of the biblical texts by means of proper grammar. Philip Melanchthon shared Luther's negative view of man's natural abilities, but took a different direction concerning the method of theology. Melanchthon introduces the *loci* method into Protestant theology: all topics of doctrine are dealt with in the proper (salvation-historical) order. As the background of Melanchthon's educational reform, Augustijn points to the humanist taste for original sources and natural languages instead of abstract concepts. Augustijn concludes that with both Luther and Melanchthon, a new way of theology is developed.<sup>144</sup>

Willem van 't Spijker gives a survey of Reformed theology as it developed during the 16th century. After the first Reformational period, the 1530s and '40s saw an educational reform in order to put the academy in step with the new church formations. Elements from older scholastic training were combined with a humanist emphasis on philology and rhetoric. In the next decades, the interconfessional discussions between Lutherans, Calvinists and Zwinglians stimulated the renewed usage of scholastic, argumentative elaboration of doctrine. Indicating some important theological themes, Van 't Spijker argues that the place of Scripture as the primary source and norm of theology is maintained over the years, but that the role of logical reasoning in explaining Scripture and defending doctrine increases. A second theme is the doctrine of grace: initially common to all Protestant parties, it became a matter of controversy in relation to the "Calvinist" doctrine of predestination. In conclusion, Van 't Spijker acknowledges the variety of scholastic approaches and the profound spiritual unity between Reformation and scholasticism. He argues, however, that scholastic theology served polemics rather than ecumenical ideals.<sup>145</sup>

In Antonie Vos's article, we hear statements we have already encountered: Protestant scholasticism is placed within the larger intellectual tradition continuously running from ca. 1200 until 1800. Vos emphasizes the role of educational institutions (universities, academies, schools) in the transmission and development of science and knowledge. Reformational scholasticism, as Vos names it, is both a fruit from the Reformation and a child of preceding scholasticism; as a scientific phenomenon, it should be studied in the context of the early modern university. One remarkable insight arising from such study is the

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<sup>143</sup> Richard A. Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review and Definition," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 45-64. Cf. also part I, section 2.2.3.

<sup>144</sup> Cornelis Augustijn, "Wittenberga contra Scholasticos," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 65-77. Cf. part I, section 2.3.2.

<sup>145</sup> Willem van 't Spijker, "Reformation and Scholasticism," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 78-98.

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fact that, from the 16th until the 18th century, the universities allied to the Reformation show a strong theoretical continuity and a striking degree of intersubjectivity in theological teaching and research. Since 1800, this glorious “unified science” has been abandoned, and a discouraging plurality of paradigms remains. In the tradition of Reformed universities, a distinctive approach to the central questions of theology and metaphysics is developed by theologians such as Junius and Gomarus, who developed a theory of contingency, necessity and divine foreknowledge in which the divine will plays a decisive role. A rediscovery of Reformed systematic theology with its background in patristic and medieval Christian thought is needed, not only in order to understand our theological past, but also in order to find a viable path for the future theology of the Church.<sup>146</sup>

The next four contributions pay attention to specific scholastic writers. Harm Goris (Catholic Theological University of Utrecht) examines Girolamo Zanchi’s doctrine of God in comparison with Thomas Aquinas.<sup>147</sup> According to Goris, Zanchi’s theology is properly scholastic but also incorporates humanist elements. He points out that Zanchi is well acquainted with Aquinas and largely follows his approach to the doctrine of God. An important difference, however, is that Zanchi assumes a “natural order” among God’s attributes, which was ruled out by Aquinas’s strong view of simplicity. In Goris’s analysis, the doctrine of simplicity, though verbally maintained by Zanchi, “becomes in fact theologically idle and inoperative because of the introduction of a natural order among God’s attributes.” While the name of Duns Scotus is not mentioned by Zanchi, Goris states that “the similarity with the view of the *Doctor Subtilis* is striking.”<sup>148</sup>

Eef Dekker describes the debate between the Catholic controversialist Robert Bellarmine and the English Reformed William Ames on the issue of free will.<sup>149</sup> An important result of this study is “that the dividing lines do not run exactly along the Protestant-Catholic divide.” Systematic positions on freedom and necessity and on the relation between intellect and will occur on both sides of the confessional divide. Dekker concludes that Ames advocates a Scotist position, while Bellarmine nominally maintains a Thomist position but gives several indications of a Scotist conception.<sup>150</sup>

Another English theologian, William Whitaker, is the subject of the contribution by Frits Broeyer (Utrecht University).<sup>151</sup> Polemicizing against Catholic authors and defending English Calvinism, Whitaker employed scholastic techniques and sources to prove the truth of the Reformed position. He especially quoted Thomas Aquinas, whose writings he had extensively read, in favor of Protestant views on the authority of Scripture and on grace and election. Though the decisive influence on Whitaker’s thought came from Calvin, and the patristic and medieval

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<sup>146</sup> Antonie Vos, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 99-119.

<sup>147</sup> Harm Goris, “Thomism in Zanchi’s Doctrine of God,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 121-139.

<sup>148</sup> Goris, “Thomism,” 139.

<sup>149</sup> Eef Dekker, “An Ecumenical Debate between Reformation and Counter-Reformation? Bellarmine and Ames on *liberum arbitrium*,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 141-154.

<sup>150</sup> Dekker, “Ecumenical Debate,” 154.

<sup>151</sup> Frits G.M. Broeyer, “Traces of the Rise of Reformed Scholasticism in the Polemical Theologian William Whitaker (1548-1595),” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 155-180.

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authorities are appealed to partly for tactical reasons, Broeyer argues that Thomas Aquinas's way of theologizing substantially affected Whitaker's theology.

The third English divine, John Owen, is presented in an article by Sebastian Rehnman (Uppsala, Sweden).<sup>152</sup> Rehnman sketches Owen's training in arts and theology at Oxford, and points out how the different influences of Calvinism and Aristotelianism, patristic thought (mainly Augustine) and scholasticism (mainly Thomism), humanist literature and Baroque philosophy each left their traces in Owen's writings. Rehnman argues that the Reformed insistence on Scripture as the cognitive principle of theology allowed for a wide and eclectic appropriation of philosophical arguments and concepts.

In Carl Trueman's essay, we find a final investigation in English Reformed church and theology.<sup>153</sup> Trueman follows the approach of Quentin Skinner: a method that seeks out the intended communication of texts within their historical, social, and cultural contexts. Applying this linguistic approach to British Puritanism, Trueman argues that it is a European and ecumenical movement. Entering more deeply into John Owen's theology, Trueman deals with the question of its alleged Aristotelianism. He offers three qualifications to this label: first, Aristotelianism in a large sense was the dominant educational vocabulary in the 17th century; second, no serious alternatives (such as Platonism) were available; third, Aristotelian vocabulary allowed one to express totally different conceptions of reality.

Two antagonists of Dutch 17th century theology, Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius, are presented by Andreas Beck and Willem van Asselt respectively. Beck's article on Voetius's doctrine of God states that, as an example of Reformed scholastic thought, Voetius's theology must be understood in line with the *philosophia christiana* from the Church Fathers to the Middle Ages. After a sketch of the whole structure of Voetius's doctrine of God, Beck's main thesis is that the divine will has the central role, and that the emphasis on God's decrees is intended to avoid the idea of an emanation of reality out of God's own being. Concomitant to the decisive place of God's will is an ontology of synchronic contingency: God can act otherwise than he in fact does. Beck offers evidence for a Scotist reading of central parts of Voetius's doctrine of God. He argues that a fundamental division in Voetius's doctrine of God is made between *theologia necessaria* (God's essence) and *theologia contingens* (God's acts). The precise balance between these two dimensions prevents Voetius from both necessitarian determinism and arbitrary voluntarism.<sup>154</sup>

Van Asselt's article on Cocceius refutes the popular opinion that Cocceius developed an anti-scholastic, biblical and federal theology. To start with, biblical exegesis and federal thought stand in firm continuity with medieval scholasticism.

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<sup>152</sup> Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 181-203.

<sup>153</sup> Carl Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 253-275.

<sup>154</sup> Andreas J. Beck, "Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 205-226. A fuller exposition of this material is given by Beck in his dissertation *Gisbertus Voetius*.

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Furthermore, “biblical theology” as opposed to “dogmatics” is, applied to Cocceius, an anachronism. Third, the opposition assumed between Cocceius and “scholasticism” presupposes an unwarrantedly negative view of scholastic theology. Van Asselt argues that Cocceius and Voetius agree in rejecting some extreme forms of scholasticism while accepting scholastic methods as a form of “common sense” in teaching. It is true, Cocceius seems to be more reluctant in employing scholastic terminology that is not explicitly biblical. In many concrete discussions, however, he uses scholastic arguments in order to refute an *extreme* scholastic conception. The Cocceian innovation is not the replacement of doctrinal theology by biblical theology, but the attempt to give a dynamic interpretation of salvation history and of the relationship between Old and New Testament.<sup>155</sup>

The last two essays in *Reformation and Scholasticism* apply scholasticism to questions of contemporary systematic theology. According to Luco van den Brom, scholastic method is not an outdated option for systematic theology. Van den Brom points to Karl Barth, who approved of the scholastic method of thorough questioning, but rejected the systematization and rationalization that became apparent in, for instance, the formal Scripture principle. In assessing the actual significance of scholasticism, Van den Brom states that its basic approach needs to be updated in view of the confrontation with natural science and with the results of modern biblical exegesis. In defense of the “Utrecht School,” Van den Brom claims that the elucidation of the internal coherence and consistency of the concepts of the Christian faith is an important task of theology.<sup>156</sup>

Bert Loonstra’s essay deals with the significance of Reformed scholasticism for discussions on hermeneutics. Scholastic theology from the 17th century displays some outdated hermeneutical positions. Aprioristic reasoning and dogmatic bias often prevented a proper historical understanding of the biblical texts. On a deeper level, the assumption of the unity of Scriptural revelation played a role in supporting a logical systematizing of the biblical message. This assumption of one single truth has been abandoned in modern hermeneutics. Loonstra regrets the *absolutizing* of *relativity* in modern hermeneutics, and argues that truth has both an objective, immutable aspect (ontologically) and a relative, personal aspect (epistemologically).<sup>157</sup>

As the above survey amply shows, the historical research of the Utrecht School not only serves antiquarian interests, but also has a systematic and an apologetic aspect. As will be shown below (section 17.4), many Utrecht scholars share the conviction that the Enlightenment has brought about a major change of thought and belief, which obscures the past of Christian and Reformed thought. This re-

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<sup>155</sup> W.J. van Asselt, “Cocceius Anti-Scholasticus?” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 227-251. This article draws on Van Asselt’s earlier monograph on Cocceius, first published in Dutch as *Amicitia Dei*, later in English under the title *The Federal Theology of Johannes Coccejus*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>156</sup> Luco J. van den Brom, “Scholasticism and Contemporary Systematic Theology,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 277-293.

<sup>157</sup> Bert Loonstra, “Scholasticism and Hermeneutics,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 295-306.

examination of their own Reformed tradition attempts to remove the false myths concerning scholastic Reformed theology, and to bring back to the fore its vitality and fundamental correctness.

### **17.4. Apologetic Attitude**

The research done by the Utrecht scholars has an apologetic dimension, implicitly or explicitly. We can distinguish two levels of apologetic attitude here, one general, the other specific.

First, a general apologetic function lies in the clarification of the concepts of Christian belief. Atheist criticism often takes the shape of claiming that the central concepts of Christianity are inconsistent and mutually contradictory. By providing a clear conceptual analysis of the contents of the individual concepts and of their (implicative) relations, the Utrecht scholars contribute to the intellectual justification of the Christian faith. Examples of this enterprise are found in chapters 18 and 19 below.

Of preliminary importance is the reflection on *epistemological* questions: how can religious knowledge be understood and justified? Within the Utrecht circle, we can discern at least three different approaches to this question. First, the appeal to Wittgenstein's idea of "language games"; a concept that serves to guarantee a relative independence of religious language and practice, while at the same time maintaining a low-profile connection with everyday life knowledge and practice. In this approach, it is simply taken as a fact of life that people have religious beliefs. Religion needs no ultimate justification in the face of rational requirements. At the same time, religious language is understood in close affinity with everyday language. As will be clear from the above exposition of section 4.2.1, Vincent Brümmer deals with the epistemological problem mainly in this way.<sup>158</sup>

A second, not completely different, approach originates in the work of some American philosophers around Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. They have argued that the prevalent idea of (scientific) knowledge, namely that knowledge is limited to propositions that are self-evident or are duly inferred from self-evident propositions (foundationalism), is inadequate. Christian faith is not dependent on external, rational grounds for its intellectual justification; it stands in its own right. Members of the Utrecht School have frequently joined this epistemological approach (commonly known as "Reformed Epistemology") and continued on the lines drawn by Plantinga *cum suis*.<sup>159</sup> A difference between the Plantinga line and the Wittgenstein approach is that the former is more "realist" and the latter more "linguistically oriented."

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. the references given in footnote 3 above. Marcel Sarot and Eef Dekker count Brümmer among the "Wittgensteinian fideists": "Iets dat in fatsoenlijke families niet voorkomt? Inleiding op een discussie over de rationaliteit van christelijk geloof," in *Christelijk geloof en rationaliteit*, ed. by Eef Dekker and Marcel Sarot (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000), 13-14. They describe this position as a reaction to foundationalist rationalism.

<sup>159</sup> See Dekker and Sarot, *Christelijk geloof*, passim. Cf. also the contribution by Antonie Vos Jaczn., "Plantinga's wijsbegeerte tegen de achtergrond van de Amerikaanse filosofie," in Cusveller and Van Woudenberg, *Kentheorie*, 17-33.

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In the third place, both of the preceding options can be historically traced back to the *fides quaerens intellectum* tradition. Faith is not *a priori* justified on rational grounds, but faith is given first, and afterwards seeks insight into its own rationality. Many publications from the Utrecht School refer to the *fides quaerens intellectum* adagium and to the Augustinian-Anselmian tradition that is its elaboration (cf. section 17.3 above). In this line of arguing, the epistemological question is broadened to the question of anthropology. It is argued that man has a natural desire for God. Through sin, this desire is no longer directed towards God, but to substitutes for God. As long as the intimate knowledge of God is missed, man remains empty and unhappy. God's work of revelation and redemption redirects the natural desire towards its proper goal: God.<sup>160</sup>

Second, the apologetic attitude of the Utrecht School is particularly directed at the Enlightenment as the decisive factor behind contemporary Western culture. They show that the Enlightenment not only changed the belief contents of average people in Europe, but also created its own "myth" in constructing a picture of the medieval and early modern past. One of the central contentions of several Utrecht scholars is that employing Enlightenment thought patterns is not unavoidable, but that, to the contrary, it is both possible and fruitful to reconnect to the previous era of Christian European thought: scholasticism in its medieval and post medieval forms.

A direct confrontation with the Enlightenment is performed by Henri Veldhuis in his dissertation *Een verzegeld boek*. He examines the concept of nature in the theology of J.G. Hamann (1730-1788), a famous antagonist of Immanuel Kant. Veldhuis's study takes the aforementioned Augustinian anthropology as a starting point: nature as created by God is dependent on and directed towards God's grace. Renaissance and Enlightenment thinking has enforced a separation of nature and grace. Typical of Hamann's reaction to this separation is the fact that he understands "nature" in close connection to "language" (*Sprache*). All reality is founded in and structured according to the creative and redemptive Word of God. A specific problem to be investigated in Hamann's theology is the relation between the historical, contingent meaning of God's speech acts and the alleged supra-historical, necessary truth of reason: does Hamann's protest against Enlightenment rationalism still allow for sound rational patterns of thinking?<sup>161</sup>

Veldhuis sketches Hamann's early years, in which he was influenced by aspects of Enlightenment thought and culture, but already developed an anti-rationalist attitude focusing on emotion and beauty.<sup>162</sup> In 1758 a process took place which

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. Benno van den Toren, *Breuk en brug: In gesprek met Karl Barth en postmoderne theologie over geloofsverantwoording* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995). Although this dissertation was defended at Kampen Theological University (Koormarkt), Van den Toren is closely connected to the Utrecht circle. Central in his defense of apologetics is the Augustinian anthropology with its "natural desire." Cf. also Van den Toren's contribution "De apologetische betekenis van Plantinga's kentheorie," in Cusveller and Van Woudenberg, *Kentheorie*, 119-131.

<sup>161</sup> Henri Veldhuis, *Een verzegeld boek: Het natuurbegrip in de theologie van J.G. Hamann (1730-1788)* (Sliedrecht: Merweboek, 1990), 15-41.

<sup>162</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 42-64.

Hamann experienced as his conversion. During a stay in London, Hamann came into a crisis and experienced strong impressions in reading the Bible. From a sense of utter misery and sinfulness, Hamann came to a strong conviction of God's love. He elaborated a supralapsarian view of creation, in which everything is directed at receiving God's love. Our goal is to be good and happy in God, and sin consists in our resistance against this goal. In accordance with his supralapsarian thinking, dominated by the love of God, Hamann described Christ's incarnation and reconciliation as a condescending expression of God's love.<sup>163</sup> Hamann does acknowledge a revelation of God in nature, but this is subordinate to the revelation in God's spoken Word.<sup>164</sup>

Following his conversion and his initially developed opinions, Hamann acquired his well-known "Socratic" style. This is not just a matter of style, but is intended as a reflection of the disclosure-concealment structure of God's condescending revelation. Hamann advocates a "reading" of nature in which not only the separate letters are understood, but which understands nature as God's creation and thus discovers the internal coherence of nature. The typological structure of created reality holds in a special sense for human nature: man as the image of God, in the unity of soul and body, reflects God's glory. Sin has obscured this reflection, but in man there still is the desire for harmony with God. This desire is hidden, but is kept alive and acted upon by God.<sup>165</sup>

An important refinement of Hamann's views on language and nature took place in his confrontation with his former disciple, J.G. Herder. Herder had stated that language is developed by man through his own natural capacities. Contrary to this, Hamann argues that language is a gift of God, and that God himself uses our language to reveal himself. While of supernatural origin, language itself has a natural, created form. Utilizing the Lutheran *theologoumenon* of the *communicatio idiomatum*, Hamann argues that language is the result of both divine and human influx.<sup>166</sup>

The ultimate test for Hamann's views is his confrontation with Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamann is among the first of Kant's contemporaries who understood the purport of this work. Kant and Hamann have a common ground in accepting David Hume's empiricist critique of rationalism. However, whereas Kant maintains the possibility of *a priori* knowledge, not originating in the senses, Hamann holds that all knowledge is grounded in empiric and linguistic reality. In the Enlightenment, Hamann discerns a threefold attempt to purify reason: first, to liberate it from any dependence on tradition and faith; second, to separate reason from experience; third, to eliminate concrete language as the instrument and criterion of thought. Since the third purification is doomed to fail, Hamann states that even the first two purifications (Kant performs the second) are impossible. In Hamann's view, empirical reality, which exists independently of us, has a spiritual meaning by which it is transcendent in horizontal and vertical directions. This meaning of reality enables analogically both God's revela-

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<sup>163</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 65-87.

<sup>164</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 87-96.

<sup>165</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 103-163.

<sup>166</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 165-191.

tion and our speaking about God. The meaning of reality is of a contingent, historical nature and is ultimately founded in the relation to God. Reason therefore is not constitutive, but receptive.<sup>167</sup>

Veldhuis's epilogue spells out the actual significance of Hamann's theology and his critique of Enlightenment. Veldhuis shows that Hamann continues classical Christian insights concerning the "natural desire" in man towards God and God's supralapsarian attitude of love towards his creation. The bipolar connection between nature and grace provides a hermeneutical starting point for understanding empirical reality as God's world. God's redemptive actions aim at the elevation of mankind; for Hamann, this is not an optimistic, pedagogical sort of elevation (as it is in Lessing and other Enlightenment thinkers), but it stems from God's deepest condescendence and requires our deepest humility. In the dialectics of nature and grace, letter and spirit, condescendence and elevation, man as created in God's image can know God in a sacramental, mediated way. Veldhuis concludes that the starting point Hamann's hermeneutics (i.e., reason is based on concrete contingent, historical language) is right; he states, however, that Hamann is mistaken in eliminating necessary and eternal truths from (theological) knowledge. As Veldhuis's final conclusion is illuminating in understanding the Utrecht School project, I quote it in full:

The necessary truths of theology, except the nucleus of the doctrine of God, concern the implicative structures of contingent reality, which provide the latitude for an inexhaustible metaphorical creativity. Moreover, it is only experience (of faith) that gives us this contingent reality of which theological reflection examines the implicative structures. Reason does not situate as an autonomous instance in an isolation dimension of necessity above or against faith, but it explores the implicative structures of the reality that is given to it in faith. We *cannot* say with Hamann: "*Intellectus est verbum.*" We *can* affirm with Anselm and Hamann the hermeneutical precedence of the "*Verbum.*" Hamann's elaborate and still actual hermeneutics shows that the crisis of Enlightenment can only be overcome from a new hearing, "tasting and seeing" of the sacramental "*verbum.*" However, more than Hamann did, theology must take seriously the "*Verbum quaerens intellectum.*" Many contemporary theologians and philosophers agree with Hamann's famous dictum: "*System ist schon an sich ein Hindernis der Wahrheit*" .... By that, they pay – just as Hamann did – too much tribute to Enlightened reason's striving for absolute power.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 263-294. Interestingly, Hamann's protest against Kant for isolating reason is complemented by his defense of rationality against Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819). Whereas Jacobi advocated an immediate sense of certainty (belief), Hamann pointed to the Incarnation of the Logos as an argument for the mediated character of our knowledge of God. See Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 294-305.

<sup>168</sup> Veldhuis, *Verzegeld boek*, 329-366. The quotation (given in my translation) is found on

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An interesting piece of concrete apologetics is Antonie Vos's defense of Christ's bodily resurrection in *Het is de Heer!*<sup>169</sup>

In the first place, he addresses the alleged inconceivability of the resurrection: based on empiricism and necessitarianism, Western thought tends to exclude the possibility of the event of resurrection on logical, physical and historical grounds. Vos shows that the principles of induction, analogy and correlation, developed by Ernst Troeltsch, rest on an invalid philosophy. To be sure, our faith in Christ rests not in rational proof of the resurrection, but in Christ's actual presence in our lives.<sup>170</sup>

Secondly, Vos refutes the common distrust in the early testimonies of the empty tomb. He argues that Jewish believers expected a realistic, bodily resurrection at the end of times, not in the middle of time. The fact that the early church did not cultivate Christ's tomb is additional evidence for its being empty. The explanation in terms of deliberate deception by either the disciples or the adversaries of Jesus is rejected as well: only morally inferior minds can think up such allegations! The rapid development of resurrection belief is not due to psychological mechanisms or wishful thinking, but can only be explained by the actual reality of Christ's resurrection. We have to assume a bodily continuity of the risen Lord.<sup>171</sup>

In the next chapter, Vos argues for the trustworthiness of the witnesses of the risen Lord. To state it precisely, we have no eye witnesses of the resurrection event itself, but many witnesses of Christ's appearance to his family, friends and disciples. On penalty of irrationality, we cannot discount their testimony. As Vos puts it:

"Christian faith is not weak, rationally and scientifically. I hardly ever encounter a person who attempts to prove *unbelief*. There is no reasonable alternative for the explanation of the empty tomb but the acceptance of the fact of Christ's resurrection."<sup>172</sup>

A more detailed critical analysis is devoted to the argument of H.J. de Jonge (professor of New Testament, Leiden University). According to De Jonge,

"a strict historian cannot in principle view as trustworthy the report that a dead person revives and leaves his grave, because such a resurrection would be completely unique and would violate all known order."

Vos shows that behind this principle of historical analogy lies a methodological and ontological determinism that was refuted by Christian thought in the Middle

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pages 365-366. The perceptive reader will notice strong resemblances between Veldhuis's evaluative remarks and the elements of Scotist thought presented in section 17.2.2 above.

<sup>169</sup> Antonie Vos Jaczn., *Het is de Heer! De opstanding voorstelbaar* (Kampen: Kok, 1990). Vos's book was occasioned by F.O. van Gennepe's denial of the bodily resurrection, published in articles in the magazine *In de Waagschaal* XVIII (1989) issues 4, 8, 14.

<sup>170</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 9-30.

<sup>171</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 31-45.

<sup>172</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 46-72.

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Ages. Moreover, De Jonge's denial of the bodily resurrection as an historical event makes it impossible to maintain any specific divine involvement in the life of Christ. If God is not able to revive his Son, what else could he do? De Jonge's historicist absolutism leads to atheology, which he can only escape by inconsistency.<sup>173</sup>

The next part of Vos's investigation reviews the 19th century debate between modernist and orthodox theologians. He shows that the modernist denial of Christ's resurrection led to an orthodox reaction (representatives: J.J. van Oosterzee, J.H. Gunning, H.E. Gravemeijer; A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, G.C. Berkouwer; G.H. Kersten) based on a dichotomist view of death as separation of soul and body and a corresponding theory of resurrection as "reanimation." Vos argues that F.O. van Gennep was right in rejecting this "reanimation theory." On the other hand, the proposal to let the corporeality of Jesus disappear in a metaphysical and eschatological existence of Christ fails to do justice to the biblical testimony as well. A middle road is to be searched out.<sup>174</sup>

Both the ultra-orthodox and the ultra-modern position suffer from two problems: first, they lay the personal identity of Christ's human nature in the material identity of his body (and then either accept or deny this identity); second, they import an anthropological dualism of soul and body in their Christology (and either maintain or reject the unity of both after the resurrection). The further complication that lies in the conflict between ancient and modern astronomy can be solved by developing an adequate theory of heaven as the place where Christ is after resurrection and ascension. According to the methodological principles developed earlier in his study, Vos states that one singular event (Christ's bodily resurrection) can occasion a radical revision of our view of reality and space. Referring to Luco van den Brom's dissertation on divine omnipresence (see section 19.4 below), Vos argues that God exists in a more-than-three-dimensional space. The body of the risen Lord exists in this same multi-dimensional space.<sup>175</sup>

The denial of both the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Christ has fatal consequences for the Christian faith. It is essential to maintain a corporeal identity of Christ before his death and after his resurrection. At the same time, reality has profoundly changed by the resurrection, since Christ has direct access to all points of our three-dimensional reality. Christ was heard, seen, and touched after his resurrection, but his presence was flexible, dynamic and momentous, not continuous.<sup>176</sup>

### **17.5. Utrecht Method Analyzed**

For the sake of clarity, I will here give an initial analysis of the Utrecht School method in its different aspects. The discussion here will be provisory, as important questions will recur in the context of the doctrine of God.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 73-89.

<sup>174</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 90-114.

<sup>175</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 115-135.

<sup>176</sup> Vos, *Het is de Heer!*, 136-154.

<sup>177</sup> In their introductory essay "Contemporary Philosophical Theology" (9-32) to the volume *Understanding*, Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot list seven characteristics common to

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The first point to be made concerns the genre of theology exercised by the Utrecht scholars. Brümmer is most clear: he is engaged in philosophical theology. This sub-discipline is to be placed between philosophy of religion as a philosophical enterprise and systematic theology as a branch of theology. Others, like Vos, are more strongly connected to traditional systematic or dogmatic theology, though they extensively employ philosophical argumentations. If, within the field of systematic theology, biblical theology takes a place in the right, and doctrinal (confessional) theology occupies the centre, philosophical theology is found on the left. The choice for this distinctive approach could be partly pragmatic, since Brümmer was appointed to the chair of philosophy of religion.<sup>178</sup> Still, the Utrecht School members are convinced of the need and legitimacy of this method of theology. The typical genre of philosophical theology entails a number of characteristics:

- *a positive view of rationality in theology.* Although this point is not always made explicit, the enterprises of either conceptual inquiry or modal ontology or apologetics presuppose the acceptance of reason as a suitable instrument in theology. Against ancient and recent suspicions of reason as an enemy of faith, the Utrecht scholars frankly employ it as a tool for clarifying the Christian faith and its cognitive claims. The exact way in which this attitude works out can vary. Brümmer seems to take the rationality of faith for granted, and opts for a rather low-profile, everyday elucidation of religious concepts. Vos launches an incisive criticism of the absolutist pretensions of reason that permeate the history of ancient and modern philosophy, thus reducing rationality to more modest proportions. On the other hand, he is convinced that “reality is consistent in depth,” and therefore he proceeds to develop an ontology by means of rigorous logical analysis.
- *a focus on concepts and propositions.* Given the rational emphasis, the conceptual and logical aspect of language forms the centre of interest in the Utrecht School. Brümmer describes “concepts” as “thought forms” or “mental skills.” Typical of concepts is that we can thoroughly inquire into their contents, their implications and presuppositions, and the relations between different concepts. Explaining, for instance, the concept “blue,” we point to its being a color (more general concept), its being attached to material objects (individuation), and being visually perceived (mode of knowledge); we can relate it to “red” as a different color, and so on. In Antonie Vos’s approach, emphasis is not only on separate concepts, but

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the Utrecht approach: (1) faith seeking understanding; (2) consonance with the Christian tradition; (3) a personal concept of God; (4) sophisticated theological realism; (5) emphasis on logical consistency; (6) the ideal of comprehensive conceptual coherence; (7) commitment to the needs of our time. Several of these features appear under different labels in my own description; others have to wait for the subsequent analysis of the Utrecht School doctrine of God. My analysis in this section is limited to the findings of sections 17.1 to 17.4.

<sup>178</sup> For other members of the Utrecht School, there are similar biographical factors contributing to their stance in theology. Antonie Vos, Eef Dekker, Henri Veldhuis, and Gijsbert van den Brink – to name a few – completed studies in both theology and philosophy, and some of them also lectured in departments of philosophy.

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especially on propositions as expressing states of affairs. Whereas traditional logic focused on the subject-predicate relation, modern propositional logic takes the whole expression into analysis. Relevant questions concern the truth values, the modes of implication, conjunctive and disjunctive propositions, and the modal status of propositions.

- *a distinct set of criteria.* As we have seen before, the most important criteria are listed by Brümmer: 1. freedom from contradiction; 2. unity (coherence); 3. relevance; 4. universality; 5. impressiveness. In these five criteria, we find some that elaborate the rational point of view (1, 2, 4), while others reflect Brümmer's emphasis on the practical embeddedness of religion in a life form (3, 5). In later contributions, Brümmer as well as his disciples mention also "consonance with the tradition" as a norm for philosophical theology. As we will see below, the importance of the respective criteria is weighed differently by the various Utrecht School members.
- *participation in philosophical discussions.* In many of the Utrecht School publications, the immediate discussion partners are not only theologians, but also or mainly philosophers. As I indicated in regard to Brümmer, there is a lively exchange especially with British and American philosophy of religion. The discourse includes language-oriented analytical philosophy (Wittgenstein), atheistic criticisms of religion (Ayer), and revised philosophical theism (Plantinga, Swinburne, Helm).
- *universal application.* Although all members of the Utrecht School are rooted in Christian faith and theology, the method of philosophical theology reaches beyond the borders of the church and traditional theology. For instance, Brümmer's conceptual inquiry is applied to religious language in general and to Christian faith specifically. Brümmer thinks of "God" as a general title-term, to which "YHWH" corresponds as a proper name of which it is claimed that it rightly occupies the title-term (cf. section 18.1 below). Similarly, Vos's ontology and theory of properties are on the one hand explicitly motivated by Christian faith and thought, on the other hand they give a universal framework for describing reality.

In the second place, after giving an initial impression of philosophical theology after the Utrecht fashion, we further have to discuss the different approaches that are combined in it. On the basis of the preceding description, it seems appropriate to distinguish two main lines — conceptual inquiry and modal ontology — which are both possibly combined with the additional features of historical orientation and apologetic attitude.

Important in Vincent Brümmer's method of conceptual inquiry is his adherence to analytical and linguistic philosophy. Fundamental is the speech act theory, which describes language as the performance of different sorts of acts (illocutions: constative, expressive, prescriptive, commissive, performative). This is linked to Wittgenstein's idea of language games, each presupposing their own context or "life form." This approach implies a farewell to the traditional focus on the constative function of language and to the corresponding "name model" of concepts. In classic terms, Brümmer rejects a "realist" view of language and

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advocates a “nominalist” model: concepts are no eternal abstract entities, but are at our disposal for use in classifying and interpreting our life experience.

Concerning theological concepts, Brümmer’s statement that these are “everyday concepts” with a specific application provides a significant insight. For the actual enterprise of conceptual analysis, this means that Brümmer approaches religious concepts from the common fields of philosophical thought: axiology (moral philosophy), epistemology (theory of knowledge), and ontology (philosophy of being). In analyzing religious concepts, their being imbedded in a life form implies that analytical questions typically should take the form: what does  $x$  mean in living *coram Deo*? While emphasizing the practical relevance of religious beliefs and the commissive or prescriptive character of religious claims, Brümmer is open to acknowledging the factual, constative presuppositions of such claims. The relativism imminent in the Wittgensteinian talk of language games and life forms is countered by relating these to “real-world language”: according to the Christian faith, the world really is as belief in God claims it to be, God being the primary determinant of meaning and the ultimate warrant of our life before him.

For the concrete task of conceptual inquiry, Brümmer lists the following three points:

1. It is a *critical reflection* on the intuitive exercise of conceptual skills, with the purpose of tracing the systematic relations between them;
2. In this way the whole complex of conceptual skills imbedded in our forms of life is *recorded* descriptively and *improved* systematically;
3. Thus the process of *cultural change* is guided critically in so far as it determines our forms of thought.

In view of the inquiries performed by Brümmer himself (see sections 18.1 and 18.2 below), it is legitimate to concentrate on the first two aspects: systematic clarification of the intuitive usage of concepts, and coherent systematic description of our world view; the third component regarding the cultural change process is more the result than the immediate objective of inquiry.

On the basis of his method of conceptual inquiry, Brümmer developed a theory of metaphors that turned out to be very significant for his further contributions to philosophical theology. We will return to the metaphor theory in section 21.3.2 below.

The second strand in the Utrecht School follows lines that are initially different from Brümmer’s approach. I will address the question of continuity and compatibility between these two approaches later on.

Antonie Vos’s initial project is to refute a necessitarian, absolutist theory of being and of knowledge (which is, according to Vos, profoundly pagan), and to provide an alternative, distinctively Christian philosophy. The theory of knowledge is developed by constructing a differentiated set of logics of opinion, knowledge, and belief. The theory of being (ontology) is formed by an extensive theory of entities and properties, based on the crucial distinctions between necessary – contingent and essential – accidental. In the framework of possible worlds semantics, Vos shows how an ontology can be held that does justice to the variety of events, properties and beings in the world. This ontology also applies to

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God (see section 18.3 below), or rather is fundamentally conceived from the Christian belief in God as the Creator of the universe.

Vos's later work, in which he is joined by other scholars, focuses on the elaboration of the concept of synchronic contingency that was discovered by John Duns Scotus. Whereas earlier (and much later) thinkers could only explain contingency in terms of change (diachronic contingency), Duns Scotus succeeded in conceptually establishing the structural alternativity and contingency resident in God's creation. Vos c.s. show that this insight has the potential to produce a complete reworking of Christian doctrine and philosophy. The free will of God, reflected on the creaturely level by human free choice, receives a central role in the actualization of the world. Things are no longer seen as necessary and determined, but as contingent, open to being otherwise, and freely chosen.

This second line in the Utrecht School is combined with the additional aspects of method discussed above. Through historical research, contemporary philosophical theology is connected with patristic and scholastic thought. Three elements of this historical orientation are worth mentioning here. First, the Utrecht scholars explicitly subscribe to the Anselmian adagium *fides quaerens intellectum*. The quest for conceptual and ontological clarification is not alien to the Christian faith, but is properly implied in it. On this basic level, the two main approaches within the Utrecht School (Brümmer and Vos) are on a par. Second, the historical research of medieval and Protestant scholasticism focuses on the conceptual apparatus related to contingency and necessity. Vos, Van Asselt, and others give an interpretation of classic Reformed theology as a theology of contingency and freedom. In this respect, the historical research supports the systematic position. In the other strand (Brümmer) this aspect is present less explicitly and in less detail: traditional positions are often sketched as options of thought that are further qualified according to one's own criteria (see several sub-sections of 4.3 below). The third element of the historical orientation forms the transition to the next point, the apologetic attitude. Consequent on the discovery of a truly Christian ontology, historical research in the Utrecht School takes pains to restore a true picture of classic, pre-Enlightenment theology. It is claimed that, on the historiographic level, post-Enlightenment scholarship has misrepresented the older theology and has unjustly cast it in deterministic, necessitarian terms.

The final component of the Utrecht approach to systematic or philosophical theology is its apologetic attitude. I have identified a general and a special level of apologetic activity. In general, the Utrecht approach of theology contributes to the defense of the Christian faith in the face of reason. In slightly different ways it is argued that religious knowledge is not irrational. The reverse side of this claim is that the belief content of Christian faith is elaborated in accordance with criteria such as logical consistency and coherence. More specifically, the Utrecht School opposes the influence of Enlightenment thought in theology. Utrecht scholars argue that the Enlightenment advocated the impossible position of human autonomy and independence from God. Instead, the Utrecht thinkers continue classic Christian anthropology framed by Augustine that assumes a "natural desire" for God in mankind. Although suppressed and distorted, this desire remains a point of contact for God's revelation and thus a basis for apologetics. In addition, the Utrecht critique of the Enlightenment includes the neglect of the

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concrete, historical, contingent nature of reality and revelation. The Enlightenment propagates an ideal of abstract, universal rationality that fails to do justice to faith and life. Parallel to this critique, an alternative epistemology is developed that maintains space for contingent acts of God (with the supreme example being Christ's resurrection).

As the above analysis makes clear, the Utrecht School shares a common orientation on the rational elucidation and defense of the Christian faith. It also contains differences of approach and emphasis. Anticipating the final analysis in chapter 22 below, we notice that the methodological approach of the Utrecht scholars presupposes and implies a number of substantial theological and philosophical positions on issues such as:

- the being of God;
- the nature of created reality as contingent;
- the rationality of the Christian faith;
- human freedom (against the Enlightenment on the one hand, and against determinism on the other hand).

## 18. The Doctrine of God: Foundations

In the Utrecht School, we cannot speak of a single doctrine of God as a unified, systematic whole. Although there are fundamental insights held in common, the different aspects of the Utrecht method indicated in the previous sections may lead to different emphases and even different doctrinal positions in the doctrine of God. Within the framework of the common project, the nuances and differences will become clear in the following description.

As Van den Brink and Sarot point out, the second half of the 20th century saw a revival or indeed a new birth of philosophical theology. During the first decades, this new discipline focused on the doctrine of God as central both in religion and in Western philosophy. The logical, semantic and hermeneutical analysis of the concepts used in Christian God-talk not only served to strengthen the position of theism over against atheism, but also resulted in a new, sometimes critical and innovative articulation of the basic beliefs concerning God.<sup>1</sup>

In the following two chapters, I examine the Utrecht contributions to the doctrine of God. I will loosely follow the traditional order of divine attributes. The structure of what follows is complicated by the fact that in the Utrecht School we encounter two different approaches of the doctrine of God as a whole: Vincent Brümmer's and Antonie Vos's accounts. After the fundamental publications by Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God* and *The Model of Love*, I insert a discussion of Vos's theory of divine attributes, and subsequently discuss the contributions on simplicity (Immink), immutability (Vos), (im)passibility (Sarot), omnipresence (Van den Brom), knowledge (Vos and Dekker), omnipotence (Van den Brink), and transcendence (Markus).

### 18.1. A Personal God

Although Brümmer's *Speaking of a Personal God* is not chronologically prior to some other contributions by Utrecht scholars, it addresses fundamental issues for at least the Brümmerian strand of Utrecht philosophical theology. It expounds a model of God as a personal and relational being. Brümmer's discussions both provide a further clarification and elaboration of his methodology and give examples of the application of his insights in central Christian doctrines.

In the first two chapters, Brümmer reprises his views on the task of philosophical theology and discusses the possibility and nature of God-talk. For Brümmer, philosophical theology should break through the dominance of the modernist epistemological question "How do you know?" Rather than providing proofs for the existence of God or grounds for justification of religious faith, theology should ask semantic and hermeneutical questions about the meaning and interpretation of faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Van den Brink, Sarot, *Understanding*, 9-28.

<sup>2</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 1-4.

## *The Doctrine of God in the Utrecht School*

Brümmer discusses three possible entrances into philosophical theology. The first is conceptual *recollection*. Ever since Socrates and Plato, philosophy had been understood as aiming at recollection: on the basis of sense perception and by abstractive reasoning, our mind finds back the ideas or concepts that reside in it latently. Both in the classical and the modern forms, philosophy as recollection is not only reproductive, but also creative. Besides the tension between the conservative and innovative aspects of recollection, a problem with this approach is the question, whose concepts are recollected: the individual philosophers' or the concepts of an alleged collective memory?<sup>3</sup>

The second entrance into philosophical theology is conceptual *imagination*. This approach picks up the problem, whose concepts are "recollected" in philosophy. On the one hand, to presuppose a collective memory for all humankind would be to deny our historicity. On the other hand, philosophy is more than purely subjective and individual. It seems best to view philosophical analysis of concepts as an invitation to other people "to think like this." Moreover, philosophers take as their starting point not only their actual convictions, but also potential and imaginary concepts. This brings into philosophical analysis a vivid dynamic between "recollection" and "imagination."<sup>4</sup>

The third component, conceptual *innovation*, is necessary to make concepts suitable to the practical needs of life. However, innovation has its limits. It takes place within a community, for which the innovative proposals must be intelligible and recognizably adequate. Brümmer avoids the relativist pitfall by listing four criteria, which I quote here:

1. Is this innovation proposal internally *coherent*? And is it coherent with other conceptual forms which I am unable to set aside with integrity?
2. Is this innovation proposal *adequate* to the demands of life as I experience these in my cultural and historical situation?
3. Is this innovation *intelligible* to me, in the sense of being sufficiently consonant to the cultural tradition which constitutes my horizon of understanding for me to "know what to make of it"?
4. Can I accept this innovation with *integrity*?

In these criteria, person-relative elements and inter-subjective, logical considerations are combined. Neither can be disposed of, since we have both to accept personally certain views as our own, and to participate in a scholarly (and religious) community.<sup>5</sup>

Brümmer concludes his first chapter by distinguishing between philosophical theology, confessional theology, and personal faith. Each addresses its own community, although its claims may be modified in regard to other communities of belief. Typical of philosophical theology is that it strives for clarification and testing of given concepts. It transcends confessional boundaries and is not directly based on faith, but focuses on (religious) views of life. Though not being

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<sup>3</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 4-17.

<sup>4</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 20-27. The quotation is found on page 25 (*italics* in the original).

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confessionally limited, philosophical theology tends to begin with certain religious beliefs, and then turn to the Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*.<sup>6</sup>

An important step in any doctrine of God is to answer the question “Can we speak about God?” This is done by Brümmer in the second chapter of *Speaking of a personal God*.

Brümmer claims that our words and concepts reflect our form of life. And since our life is a unity, our concepts and thoughts must be coherent.

Religious concepts are no exception and have no special conceptual status. They are ordinary concepts, used in a specific area of life, namely the area of faith.

Directed towards the idea of a personal God this means:

When we relate to God through words and actions in the liturgy, or when we think or talk about God and our relationship with him in doing theology or in preaching, we are using the same concepts that we use in our thinking about each other and in our relationship with each other. We speak about God and with God in personal terms.

From different sides, this view is attacked. Both defenders and enemies of the Christian faith maintain that it is characteristically full of paradoxes. This is argued on religious (“God is the Holy One”), epistemological (“we have only limited knowledge of the infinite God”) and semantic (“words shift in meaning when used for God”) grounds. While acknowledging some elements of truth in this position, Brümmer states that it would in fact entail the end of theology. He confronts the issue on the semantic level: what happens to concepts when they are applied to God?<sup>7</sup>

A strong form of denying the applicability of our concepts to God is the view of the infinite qualitative difference between God and us. The nucleus of this position is expressed in this statement: Everything that we say about God with human concepts is incorrect (because these concepts are not applicable to God) and should therefore be qualified by affirming the contrary. Thus, paradoxes are not only possible, but even necessary in speaking about God. Among Barthian theologians, starting from the insight that God is the Wholly Other, it is usual to state that God is indescribable. Brümmer points to three problems in this position. First, we cannot believe plain contradictions: if Christian belief is contradictory, it is impossible. Second, in what sense is God indescribable, and how do we distinguish this from the indescribability of, for example, emotional experiences? Third, it seems odd to state that God is indescribable: at least this negative qualification should then apply to God. An appeal to revelation is not helpful to overcome the “infinite qualitative difference”: strictly speaking, even “revelation” is a concept that would not apply to God. Brümmer argues that the legitimate concept of revelation allows for a limited but adequate knowledge of God on our part.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 27-32.

<sup>7</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 33-37. Quotations on page 34.

<sup>8</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 37-43.

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The possibilities and limits of this knowledge of God are further examined by an analysis of the concept of *analogy*. This concept is designed to express that words about God are no mere *equivocations*, nor is there complete *identity* between properties in God and properties in creatures. Traditionally, an analogy can be “of attribution” if one entity has a property in the original sense, the other entity in a derived sense. Or it can be “of proportionality” if both entities have a property, each in its own way, appropriate to their distinct natures. An analogy of attribution would strictly speaking state that God is the source of a property, not that he has the property himself. Thomas Aquinas modified this concept by stating that God has every property in a *perfect way*. A decisive problem for Brümmer is that Thomas does not explain in what way God possesses his properties. Even if we understand God as the highest norm of all perfections, this does not enable us to infer from the fact that we have these characteristics that God also has them.<sup>9</sup>

A fundamental problem with the traditional use of analogy is that it is based on the *name model* of language (cf. section 17.1 above). Brümmer proposes instead to follow the *tool model* of language: analogy then exists between two *uses* of a word in different contexts. We can use the verb “to see” for both a spectator on earth and God in heaven. The right exercise of our conceptual capacities includes our knowing what aspects of the word “to see” are relevant. In relation to God’s eyes, it does not make sense to ask about God’s eyebrows (as Wittgenstein remarked). We commonly distinguish between “literal” and “metaphorical” meaning in the different uses of a concept. The main question is: which implications of the concepts that we use in speaking about people are also valid for the parallel concepts which we use in speaking about God? Arguing from the relational parables in the Bible, Brümmer argues that the major implication of most God-talk is *gerundive*: it commands a certain attitude towards God (e.g., to honor and trust him). Knowledge of God aims at a life *coram Deo*.<sup>10</sup>

Brümmer states that in theology the model of God as personal and relational is useful, although he warns that even such general models have their limits. As introduction to the problems dealt with in the remainder of *Speaking of a personal God*, Brümmer offers a games-theoretical matrix explaining the differences between a personal and a causal relation between God and man. In a causal relationship, there is a strict connection between God’s decision and the human act; in a personal relationship, God’s Yes or No leaves open the possibilities for human Yes or No. Brümmer’s fundamental statement is that God does not *manipulate* but rather *inspires* man to love him. In order to show the conceptual potential of the “personal model” of God, Brümmer discusses four problems that occur in traditional theology.<sup>11</sup>

The first question to be dealt with is *irresistible grace*. Brümmer notices that most theologians of the Christian tradition have maintained the irresistibility of God’s grace. However, the “impossibility” to resist grace can be stated in different ways.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 43-52.

<sup>10</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 52-59.

<sup>11</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 59-67.

<sup>12</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 68-69.

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First, is could be considered a “conceptual impossibility”: by definition of grace, it is excluded that anyone can effectively reject it. Brümmer argues that in that case God’s acts of revelation and calling to faith do not count as acts of grace: many people resist the call. Moreover, if the possibility of saying No to God is conceptually excluded, the relationship between God and man is not viewed as a personal relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Second, is it then “factually impossible” to resist grace? Besides the counter-examples that refute this claim, the factual impossibility of saying No to God would presuppose a causal, manipulative relationship instead of a personal relationship. It would imply God’s being the complete cause of our act of faith, and thus the destroying of our free, personal agency. The relationship between God and man is symmetrical in that both parties can say Yes or No; it is asymmetrical in that God decides for a personal, rather than a causal relationship.<sup>14</sup>

In the third place, one could think of the “normative impossibility” of resisting grace. Then the relationship is understood as an agreement of rights and duties. From a Reformed point of view, the problem with this model is that it renders our acts meritorious: we can earn reward or punishment. Brümmer argues that the Canons of Dordt unjustly fall back on a causal model to avoid these consequences; instead we should adopt the model of personal relationship.<sup>15</sup>

This latter model provides the fourth form of irresistibility: it is “rationally impossible” to reject God’s grace. The relationship with God is a relationship of love. Love means reciprocal identification; it cannot be compelled or earned. In a loving relationship it is *rationally impossible* to reject the bestowed love, just as it is rationally impossible to act against one’s conscience. Where the love of God is experienced as an undeserved favor, it is impossible to reject this favor.<sup>16</sup>

From this analysis, Brümmer returns to the traditional Reformed position as expressed in the Canons of Dordt. He argues that the Dordt divines did not dispose of a sufficient philosophical model to deal adequately with their problem. They failed to speak of the relation between God and man consistently in personal terms. These are not absent, but are overruled by the theocentric, anti-Pelagian motif. Moreover, they understood salvation more as a state that is brought about in us than as a personal relationship. The Aristotelian philosophy based on a logic of subject and predicate left them without the philosophical apparatus needed to articulate the relational character of faith. Third, their adherence to a causal model prevented them from a proper analysis of the modal concepts of (im)possibility and necessity. Presenting his own view, Brümmer states that we must choose to enter into the loving relationship with God, and God convinces, inspires and motivates us to do so. Thus, it becomes rationally impossible for us to resist grace, and all remains *Soli Deo gloria!*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 70-72.

<sup>14</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 72-77.

<sup>15</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 77-80.

<sup>16</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 80-82.

<sup>17</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 83-89.

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If one presupposition of the personal model is that humans are free agents, able to do evil and to reject God's grace, what does *God's freedom* imply *in relation to evil*? Traditionally, Christians hold that God does not only in *fact* not sin (*impeccantia*), but is in an absolute sense *unable* to sin (*impeccabilitas*). If God were to "do" evil, this could mean that he brought it about himself, or commanded or permitted others to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Is it *conceptually* impossible for God to do or approve of something evil? Brümmer argues that it is an analytical truth that, if *x* is God, *x* cannot do something he does not approve of, and that, if *x* is God, *x* cannot approve of something evil. The same does not hold for Yahweh: it is not a *logical* truth that Yahweh cannot do or approve of evil, but a truth within the framework of the Christian faith. However, the Christian faith includes some more convictions concerning Yahweh that seem to run counter his *impeccabilitas*. First, if Yahweh is *omnipotent*, how is it impossible to exclude the approval of evil from his power? Second, if Yahweh's *will* is the ultimate standard of good and evil, does his acting then become capricious and amoral? Third, if God would not have the possibility of doing evil instead of good, would he still be *praiseworthy*?<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the first problem, Brümmer states that although God can bring about every coherently describable state of affairs, this does not mean that anything produced or approved by God can count as evil.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning God's will as ultimate standard, Brümmer distinguishes between absolute and relative values. Relative values are related to and measured on other standards; an absolute values is its own ultimate standard. To be the ultimate standard of good, Yahweh's will must be available (and it is, by revelation), universally applicable (and in faith it is, even in the face of affliction), and consistent (contrary to pagan gods, Yahweh is one and unchangeable in his will). Thus, the Christian believer can safely hold that Yahweh's will is the ultimate standard of good. This does not render Yahweh's will irrational: though he is not submitted to external criteria, he is rational in being consistent to himself.<sup>21</sup>

To conclude: it is theologically necessary to state that Yahweh is not the author or approver of evil. However, if this is true only *de dicto* (a Christian statement about God) and not *de re* (God's actual being), the believer has insufficient warrant to trust in God. In addition to *impeccantia*, we need a concept of *impeccabilitas*. The best way to account for God's inability to do evil is to speak of his divine disposition to never act out of his character; in this disposition, God's will is accompanied by his omniscience and his freedom from all constraints. To this faithful God, we can trust our lives.<sup>22</sup>

If God and man are *personal agents*, how do their *actions* relate? Brümmer develops his position in discussion with Austin Farrer and Maurice Wiles. Both accept the idea of "double agency," understanding it as "God acting through

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<sup>18</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 90-92.

<sup>19</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 92-95.

<sup>20</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 96-101.

<sup>22</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 101-107.

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secondary causes." Farrer explains the duality of agency as an instance of analogical predication, leaving the precise nature of the "causal joint" undecided. Wiles opts for a form of deism: God's one action of creating and sustaining the world is the master act, all events in creation are sub-acts, and there is no causal joint between them. For different reasons, both Farrer and Wiles are unable to ascribe particular actions to God as the agent.<sup>23</sup>

Brümmer recalls the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions for an action: my choice is a necessary condition for my action, but not the sufficient or complete cause. So God's causal action upon us can never be the complete cause of our acting (that would remove our agency), but rather a contributory and in that sense necessary cause.<sup>24</sup>

What does it mean to ascribe a particular event to God? To ascribe an act to an agent presupposes: first, that the agent is able to perform or not-perform the act (this always holds for the omnipotent God); second, that the agent acts knowingly (this always holds for the omniscient God); third, that the act is intended by the agent. The latter criterion provides the key for ascribing events to God: while in one sense the whole world exists through the action and permission of God, the ascription of particular events is suitable when God acts *intentionally* through them.<sup>25</sup>

How do we know God's intentional acts? Brümmer argues that we have no empirical evidence for this knowledge. Only because we know God's character from revelation and tradition, we can "by the eye of faith" discern God's actions in the world. This "seeing God at work" is a matter of practicing faith, and provides religious meaning to the world.<sup>26</sup>

The final problem dealt with in Brümmer's *Speaking of a personal God* is the question of theodicy. While it is clear the evil is never intended by God as such, many Christians state that evil is approved by God as an unintended by-product of his own purposes. The specific theodicy under discussion is the "free will defense": in creating humans with a free will, God accepts the risk of moral and physical evil in the world. As a final test of his personal model of God and man, Brümmer reflects on a discussion between Richard Swinburne and D.Z. Phillips, in which Swinburne defends a theodicy that is judged as morally insensitive by Phillips.<sup>27</sup>

Swinburne's theodicy is based on the idea that human freedom and responsibility are intrinsic values worth the price of allowing moral and physical evil. Brümmer argues that this statement is insufficiently evident, but it can be corroborated by stating that freedom and responsibility are necessary for man's flourishing and forming a noble character. However, it can be questioned whether evil is always an occasion for developing virtue (instead of promoting further evil),

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<sup>23</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 108-113.

<sup>24</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 113-115.

<sup>25</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 115-125.

<sup>26</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 125-127.

<sup>27</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 128-131.

and it is not obvious that virtues can only be acquired on occasion of evil. So Swinburne's argument fails.<sup>28</sup>

More fundamentally, it seems inappropriate to develop a theodicy at all. Isn't it sheer *hubris* to judge God's moral priorities, and isn't this inconsistent with the claim that God's will is the ultimate standard of good?<sup>29</sup>

Attempting to provide a firmer basis to the free will defense, Brümmer distinguishes the relation of personal love between God and man from the manipulative relation and the relation of agreement on rights and duties. God does not obtain our love by force or obligation, but makes himself vulnerable to our choice for or against him. Our freedom and responsibility is not an intrinsic value, but is valuable as the fruit of God's love for us. God's offering his love implies the possibility of our rejection. A free will defense based on the model of personal love can account for the *possibility* of evil, not for its *actuality*. As the rejection of God's love is rationally impossible, evil is by definition *pointless*. No theodicy should make a point of the pointless!<sup>30</sup>

What consolation does a free will defense theodicy offer? Consolation is not only person-relative, but also worldview-relative. Only people who accept existentially the corresponding moral universe can find consolation in the free will defense. They can then experience their suffering as a participation in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Being an *argument*, the free will defense cannot provide *pastoral* consolation in times of suffering; but it can help to prepare within the community of believers an attitude in which suffering is experienced in relation to a loving God.<sup>31</sup>

*Speaking of a personal God* ends with some reflections on the relation between theology and philosophical inquiry. On the one hand, the preceding discussions took their position within the Christian faith and dealt with central theological problems. On the other hand, philosophical tools have been used and applied to theological issues. Brümmer emphasizes the need of conceptual clarification in theology. However, this should be balanced by speaking recognizably within the community of believers and showing the applicability to everyday life. Metaphors and conceptual models must be understandable from the tradition, and must sometimes be changed in the face of changing circumstances. Philosophical, systematic and contextual theologies are mutually dependent and complementary. In the end, on all three ways theology does no more than offer *proposals* for understanding reality; it is up to the believer to accept or reject these proposals.<sup>32</sup>

## **18.2. The Love of God**

In *The Model of Love*, Brümmer elaborates the approach presented in *Speaking of a personal God* by an extended discussion of the concept of love. Alongside with the substantial treatment of this theme, we find again important additions and

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<sup>28</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 131-137.

<sup>29</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 137-139.

<sup>30</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 139-145.

<sup>31</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 148-151.

<sup>32</sup> Brümmer, *Personal God*, 152-158.

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clarifications on Brümmer's theological method. The first part of the book discusses the role of metaphors and models in systematic theology. The second and third parts investigate influential conceptions of love (basically "romantic love" and "neighbor love"). The fourth part expounds Brümmer's own model of love in terms of relationship and attitude.

In the first chapter, Brümmer gives an exposition of the role of metaphors and models in systematic theology. Much of what said here resembles the discussions we dealt with in sections 17.1 and 18.1 above. Still there are important new aspects in the methodological part of *The Model of Love*.<sup>33</sup>

As love seems to qualify as the key model for Christian God-talk, two basic questions arise: what is love, and, how should we deal with conceptual models? Taking the second question first, Brümmer explains that, in our mental activity, comparison and classification are central. Similarities and differences are given to us in experience. However, to make these similarities and differences structural in classification is our own choice, in which we are trained by tradition and community. Basic to classification is that we compare A to B; thus, all our thinking is of a metaphorical nature. Following Sallie McFague, Brümmer states that a metaphor means "A is like B," while containing the whisper "it is *and it is not*." Metaphors tend to fixate into a mental set, in which the whisper "it is not" becomes overheard. Then we need new, "iconoclastic" metaphors that help us to look at the world anew.<sup>34</sup>

In science, metaphors are very important: the breakthrough of scientific insights often occurs by someone's looking at a phenomenon as, for instance, an apple or a bathtub. Developing a metaphor into a conceptual model — a sustained and systematic metaphor — is typical of scientific enterprise. A good conceptual model helps to examine and explain a whole range of phenomena. Still, one has to realize that the phenomena under study are not really as the model views them (gas molecules *are* no billiard balls, but in some relevant respects *behave* like billiard balls). Moreover, a conceptual model helps to see certain aspects, but filters out other aspects. Scientific models are principally complementary.<sup>35</sup>

Metaphors are used in religion as well. Brümmer emphasizes that religious metaphors serve, not to explain and describe facts, but rather to understand the *meaning* or sense of our lives and of the world. Basic to religious metaphors is that they have *commissive* force: they help us interpret ourselves as living *coram Deo* and lead us into specific attitudes and forms of action. Still, the dominance of the commissive aspect does not exclude, but in fact presuppose a *constative* component: we can only act according to our belief if we accept its factual truth. According to Brümmer, this view can be called "critical realism" since it combines

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<sup>33</sup> The argument concerning metaphors presented in the next four paragraphs was published earlier by Brümmer in his article "Metaphorical thinking and systematic theology," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 43 (1989), 213-228.

<sup>34</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 3-10.

<sup>35</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 10-13.

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the emphasis on the existential meaning of religious talk with the recognition of its “reality depicting” character.<sup>36</sup>

In systematic theology, many metaphors and models are used as complementary. We can, however, take one step further and look for a “root metaphor” or comprehensive *key model* which can coherently integrate our way of understanding life and world as a whole. Different key models will generate different “theologies” (patriarchal, deterministic, feministic etc.). Brümmer lists four criteria for selecting a key model in systematic theology (we are familiar with these criteria from section 17.1, where they occur in a slightly different form): consonance with tradition; comprehensive coherence; adequacy for the demands of life; personal authenticity. Systematic theology calculates the price tag of a proposed model on all four aspects. It does not produce definitive formulations of the faith, but offers possible conceptual designs to believers.<sup>37</sup>

In calculating the conceptual price for taking the love of God as a key model, one has to investigate the different conceptions of love in the Christian tradition. Theology cannot distil a concept of love from the Bible, but must construct such a concept in dialogue with the Bible.<sup>38</sup>

In parts II and III of *The Model of Love*, Brümmer discusses traditional conceptions of love. We will not review these discussions in full detail, but focus on the results that bear on Brümmer’s own model of (divine and human) love.

Under the many aspects adherent to the concept of love, the idea of romantic love is very influential. Though it will seem inappropriate to many Christians to associate God with erotic or even sexual love, investigation of the model of love must include this form of love and sort out the aspects that apply to God.<sup>39</sup>

A famous analysis of love was provided by José Ortega y Gasset. He defined love as *exclusive attention*. Among all objects in the world, one single object demands our lasting and exclusive attention. While in many contexts obsession is pathological, exclusive attention in love is normal. In Ortega’s view, love is not a matter of choice: we *fall* in love, although we consent to it. A difficult question in romantic love is, whether it is based on knowledge of the beloved or on fantasies attached to the beloved. Ortega argues that in the knowledge of the lover, the beloved is more real than anything else; it is knowledge, not of an object, but of a person. In applying Ortega’s views to the love of God, Brümmer concludes that the exclusiveness of love causes a problem, namely, how can loving God be combined with loving other people? Moreover, is the love of God deterministic or a matter of choice? As concerns knowledge and love, Brümmer argues that God’s perfections are the ultimate ground for our loving him; we do not project on him our own preferences and desires.<sup>40</sup>

In romantic love, the *desire to be united* with the beloved is a strong component. In different forms of Christian mysticism, this is applied to the believer’s relation to

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<sup>36</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 13-19.

<sup>37</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 19-29.

<sup>38</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 29-35.

<sup>39</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 39-41.

<sup>40</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 41-56.

God. In describing the state of mystical union, Christian mystics differ. The most far reaching form of union is the mystic's *merging* into God's being. Three objections can be brought against this interpretation of the mystic union: first, it seems to entail pantheism and to disregard God's otherness; second, it seems to deny the personal existence of both God and man, and thus is inconsistent with a model of love in personal and relational terms; third, one can hardly form a coherent idea of what merging into God (either corporeally or non-corporeally) would mean. To be sure, many mystics describe only an *experience* of being seized beyond one's personality, while at the ontological level maintaining the difference between God and man. The only viable explanation seems to be one that views mystical union as an intense and continuous personal relationship with God. By living in the presence of God and conforming to the will of God, the believer is transformed into the likeness of God, his or her personal existence being preserved.<sup>41</sup>

The transforming of our life and character into the likeness of God implies *self-sacrifice* and *suffering*. With help from the medieval myth of Tristan and Iseult, Brümmer points out that passionate suffering is maintained by cultivating the distance between lover and beloved: the attractiveness of the beloved consists precisely in her being unattainable, and the lover is endowed with martyrdom. Moreover, it can well be argued that God's love for man and man's love for God include suffering and the overcoming of large obstacles. It is important that suffering and pain are not desired as such, but only as a possible participation in the Cross of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

Next to the forms of romantic love, Brümmer discusses *neighborly love*. In two important respects, neighborly love differs from romantic love: it is not sexual, and it is not exclusive, but directed to people in general. In applying neighborly love to the love of God, we must clearly distinguish between the dimensions and relations in which it takes place. Neighborly love is approached in two different ways: first, as *eros* or need-love; second, as *agape* or gift-love.<sup>43</sup>

A famous defender of *eros* is Plato. Plato distinguishes between things that are loved for some higher goal and things that are loved for themselves. The final objective of love (the *proton philon*) is the Good and the Beautiful: love aims at the everlasting possession of the good. Two objections are often raised against Plato's account of love. First, it seems to treat persons merely as instantiations of the good: an individual is not loved for herself, but for the perfections actualized in her. Second, one's striving for happiness is understood by critics as spiritualized egoism. Plato's position can be adapted in order to avoid these criticisms. Still, the question is: can it be adopted by Christians? An important affirmative answer is provided by St. Augustine. Within basically Platonic structures, Augustine states that God is the ultimate object of our love. The love of God includes our self-love and neighborly love; Augustine places them by means of the terms *frui* (enjoyment, directed to God) and *uti* (use, directed to ourselves and our neighbors). In contrast to Plato, Augustine states that God does love us. This is not a need-love (presup-

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<sup>41</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 57-79.

<sup>42</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 80-106.

<sup>43</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 109-110.

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posing imperfection in God), but a gift-love: in loving us, God does not seek his own advantage, but our advantage. In evaluation, Brümmer argues that Augustine's analysis unjustly places man's ego in the center of love and thus cannot escape the risk of eudemonistic egoism.<sup>44</sup>

The opposite of *eros*: *agape* or gift-love, was firmly advocated by the Swedish bishop Anders Nygren. Nygren states that *eros* is the egocentric love of the Greeks, while *agape* is the theocentric love of Christian faith. Nygren notes four substantial differences between the two kinds of love: *eros* moves upward, *agape* comes down; *eros* is born from want, *agape* from abundance; *eros* is conditional on the value of its object, *agape* is unconditional and value indifferent; *eros* recognizes value in the object, *agape* creates value in the object. Nygren furthermore distinguishes four dimensions of love: God's love for me, my love for God, my love for my neighbors, and my love for myself. God's love for me is pure *agape*, unmotivated and spontaneous love. It is God's nature to love us in this way. My love for God is like *eros* in that we desire God as the highest good, but it is like *agape* in that I give myself to God. My love for my neighbor is mixed: from the *eros* point of view, I love the divine element in my neighbors; from the *agape* side, I serve as a channel that transmits God's love to other people. The fourth dimension, self-love, is treated negatively by Nygren: as the utter form of *eros*, self-love does not suit Christians. Brümmer's main objection to Nygren's analysis of love is that it depersonalizes the relation between God and man: if God is necessitated to love, and man is no independent centre of activity, a personal model of love is impossible. One could either accept Nygren's views in quietist resignation, or reject Christianity at all, or challenge the appropriateness of Nygren's position.<sup>45</sup>

Having cleared the way by a critical discussion of several views of love, Brümmer now comes to his own treatment of love in terms of a personal relationship (part IV of the book).

Brümmer starts with the question whether love (as an emotion) can be understood apart from its experience. Brümmer argues that love is more than a feeling: it is a feeling-*attitude*. Attitudes are intentional, evaluative, and dispositional. As an *intentional* attitude, love is social: directed towards other people. Being *evaluative*, love is a positive attitude towards a particular object: motivated by, but not conditional on certain values. Love is *dispositional*: beyond merely passing emotions, it entails a constant behavior and a policy to seek the good of the beloved. A final characteristic, that distinguishes love from other attitudes, is its aiming for reciprocity. This makes love a *relational* attitude.<sup>46</sup>

Brümmer proceeds by an analysis of different sorts of relations: manipulative relations, agreements of rights and duties, and mutual fellowship (cf. section 18.1 above). It is important to note that neither of these types occurs in the purest form in the real world. The impurity of human relations is due to inconsistency of character. If a conceptual model of relationship should include God's relationship

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<sup>44</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 110-126.

<sup>45</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 127-146.

<sup>46</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 149-156.

to us, we cannot reckon with inconsistency in God, and thus can ascribe a pure form of relation to God.<sup>47</sup>

A *manipulative* relation is impersonal: it is asymmetrical, *A* being a personal agent, *B* merely *A*'s object of manipulation. Although love contains some manipulative moments, as an attitude of commitment it presupposes personal freedom from both sides. Brümmer argues that views of love that do no justice to the personal integrity and autonomy of both partners (God and man) will fail. Our entering into a relation of love with God depends on God's free grace, but the reciprocity of the relation requires our free choice (a capacity bestowed on us by God the creator). So, love between God and man must be personal.<sup>48</sup>

There are two kinds of personal relations. An *agreement of rights and duties* is personal inasmuch as both partners have the freedom to enter or leave the relationship, and to act according to the agreement. However, this sort of relationship is instrumental: both pursue their own interest. It is distinctive of a *relationship of mutual fellowship* that one identifies with the interests of the other. Such a relationship is of intrinsic value: it cannot be replaced by a relationship with another person. Not some actions of mine, but my value as a person is at stake in this relation. When *God's* love bestows value on us, we are confirmed in our identity. Mutual fellowship involves taking a risk, since love cannot be coerced or obliged. And I continue loving a person despite her eventually acting contrary to my expectations. Love as mutual fellowship requires constant decisions to be faithful to each other. Only God is absolutely constant in his love for us.<sup>49</sup>

Having presented the paradigm of love as a relationship of mutual fellowship, Brümmer discusses different aspects of love that turned out problematic in the previous parts of the book. The first question is the relation between sexuality and love. It is clear that these can occur apart from each other. When love and sexuality are conjoined, sexuality can either be a  *motive* for love, or an  *expression* of love. The next problem is, whether love is "free" or "necessitated." In an important sense, love is free: I choose to love you. In another sense, once I love you, I cannot arbitrarily stop loving you: leaving you would imply my being untrue to myself. The necessity of faithful love is not a sign of weakness, but is intrinsic to love. Concerning the loving relationship with God, we are free in it, but still are so strongly motivated by God's love for us, that it becomes "rationally impossible" for us to reject God's love.<sup>50</sup>

A peculiar problem in relationships is their break-up and restoration. Theologically speaking, the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation is at stake here. Different relationships can go wrong in different ways. A manipulative relationship fails when either the active or the passive partner falls short. In both cases, the active partner is completely responsible for restoring the relationship. An agreement of rights and duties breaks down when one party does not fulfill her obligations. It can be restored either by satisfaction, or by punishment, or by condoning. A relation of mutual fellowship fails if one party no longer treats the

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<sup>47</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 156-157.

<sup>48</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 158-163.

<sup>49</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 163-173.

<sup>50</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 173-181.

other's interests as his/her own. Love is replaced by selfishness. This can only be restored by forgiveness, which paves the path for renewed mutual fellowship. Forgiveness implies the recognition of the failure and the subsequent damage, and requires penitence and conversion on the guilty side. Penitence cannot earn forgiveness, nor can satisfaction or punishment be consistent with forgiveness. In brief, Brümmer's central argument here is the sharp distinction between the modes of restoration of an agreement of rights and duties and of a mutual fellowship.<sup>51</sup>

These general observations immediately bear consequences on the doctrine of divine grace and atonement. Brümmer rejects a model in which sin is understood, not in relational terms, but as a state or condition. Here, only God is able to cure man from sin. Brümmer states that this (traditional, Calvinist) view renders man an impersonal object of divine manipulation. Moreover, God seems to be the author of sin, and the necessity of Christ's death for our salvation is difficult to see when all derives from God's eternal decree. The opposite view argues along the lines of rights and duties: the guilt towards God must be resolved, either by satisfaction or by punishment, or God must condone our guilt. In the traditional interpretation, Anselm of Canterbury adhered to this view, while avoiding a theology of (human) merit by making Christ the subject of satisfaction. Brümmer objects to this interpretation of atonement on two grounds. First, when the relation between God and us is viewed as an agreement of rights and duties, neither God nor I am irreplaceable in the relation: the relation becomes impersonal. Second, if the Son of God has to pay the price to the Father, the unity of will of the triune God is violated.<sup>52</sup>

This brings Brümmer to approach atonement in terms of forgiveness: we cannot force or earn the restoration of the relationship, but we are freely forgiven our unfaithfulness. Whereas this reconciliation with God is fundamentally like reconciliation and forgiveness between other people, there are four differences. First, God can be counted on to forgive us. Second, the confession of sins is not needed to inform God about them, but is my acknowledgement that places me again as a person before God. Third, since God is the ultimate standard of good, all evil deeds (not only these immediately directed against him) injure him and must be forgiven. Fourth, when I receive God's forgiveness, I cannot refuse to forgive myself, because I am actually restored in relationship with God.<sup>53</sup>

Brümmer's final chapter returns to the different attitudes of love that were reviewed in parts II and III of the book. In advance, Brümmer is aware "that God is not like other people"; we must examine the limits of the model of love in talking about our relationship to God.<sup>54</sup>

Is love to be understood as *exclusive attention*? Brümmer rejects the idea of a love for God that excludes love for our neighbors. Also a hierarchical ordering of objects of love goes wrong in treating the lower object as instrument for the higher purpose. Positively seen, Brümmer holds that in love the beloved is valued as

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<sup>51</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 182-188.

<sup>52</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 188-196.

<sup>53</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 196-205.

<sup>54</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 206.

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irreplaceably individual, incomparable to external standards. The various dimensions of love: love to God, to neighbors, to myself, are incommensurable. In the highest sense, God's love to us is not "equalizing," but respects the individuality of all men and women. We should love all creatures indiscriminately, just as God does.<sup>55</sup>

As to love as the *striving for union*, Brümmer argues that the understanding of love as mutual fellowship excludes any self-annihilating absorption into God: we remain distinct individuals. While love does not entail *identity*, it implies *identification*: I identify with you by treating your interests as my own. By serving your interests as my own, I love you as myself. As our ability to know the other's interests and to pursue them is limited in time, energy and integrity, we can only have full mutual fellowship with a few people. This fullness of identification is aimed at in romantic love. The strictures on our loving abilities do not apply to God: he can fully love all of us.<sup>56</sup>

How does love react to *suffering*? Brümmer argues that the proper response to vulnerability is to accept it for the sake of love itself. Love longs for enjoyment, but is able to endure temporal separation. Divine love longs for our loving response, and is infinite in patience. The cross of Christ is the perfect revelation of God's suffering on account of our evil. If God's love requires his suffering, the traditional doctrine of impassibility should be rejected (cf. section 19.3 below). From our side, we have to learn that loving God is risky and requires patience. While we can trust God's love, we may never count upon it as if it were something to be earned.<sup>57</sup>

In dealing with need-love (*eros*), Brümmer first elucidates the concept of identity. I can describe myself as an *object* by means of given characteristics, and as a *person* by referring to my conscious choices. Still, these choices are not completely at my disposal. Constitutive in being a person is being acknowledged and valued by other persons. I seek the ultimate Good, and I need to be confirmed in my own identity. Whereas we need to be loved, can the same be said about God? Brümmer rejects the Platonic idea of a self-sufficient, "narcissistic" God who needs nothing. In the sense of self-existence, God is not dependent on us. But in the actual mode of existence, God's love "needs" the reciprocation of our love.<sup>58</sup>

The final check of Brümmer's model is the question, how gift-love and need-love relate in reference to God. In unconditionally identifying with the other's interests, love on Brümmer's account does in fact resemble Anders Nygren's *agape*. Still, this does not exclude the legitimacy of desire for God. Pure giving without receiving is not love, but mere beneficence. Because of the reciprocity of love, gift-love and need-love are complementary. For God to create objects of love, there must in some sense be need-love. From our side, love for God does entail a desire for self-fulfillment. This fulfillment we cannot achieve; only God can bestow it on us.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 206-214.

<sup>56</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 214-223.

<sup>57</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 223-232.

<sup>58</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 232-239.

<sup>59</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 239-244.

### **18.3. A Theory of Divine Attributes**

Alongside with Brümmer's program of conceptual analysis, we have to deal with a substantial contribution to the doctrine of divine attributes by Antonie Vos. As we have seen before (section 17.2.1), Vos's dissertation aims at the rebuttal of absolute evidentialism and the establishment of an alternative, Christian metaphysics along Scotist lines. The project culminates in an elaborate general theory of properties and its application to the doctrine of divine attributes.

Vos claims that the traditional theory of divine properties is hindered by its allegiance to Aristotelian philosophy, which results in a necessitarian account of the doctrine of God. While Christian theology has principally emancipated itself from ancient necessitarian thinking, there remains a strong strand of determinism in the doctrine of God. The basic axioms of absolute evidentialism, which Vos has attempted to refute, are often treated as typically suitable in speaking about God: God's omniscience is said to have precisely this structure. The doctrines of omniscience, immutability, uniqueness, simplicity and infinity are commonly seen as the seats of fire of determinism; therefore Vos's revision of the theory of divine properties focuses on these topics.<sup>60</sup>

A basic statement is made about the relation of essential and accidental predicates in God. According to Vos, all entities have both essential and accidental properties. Traditionally, it was always denied that God has accidental properties. At the background, the Aristotelian foundation of accidents in materiality and potentiality played a role: theology wanted to exclude the idea of additional qualities outside the proper being of God. Vos argues, however, that the denial of accidents in God both contains a grain of truth and is self-contradictory. Vos pleads for a strictly logical revision of the essential-accidental distinction.

According to Vos, the claim that all divine properties are *essential*, causes difficulties in the case of *relational* properties. If God has a relation *R* to *b* and if this is an essential property of God, the result is that *b* exists necessarily in all possible worlds (since God exists in all possible worlds, together with his essential properties). The denial of accidental (relational) properties in God here leads to the consequence of a strictly necessary world. The other extreme position, stating that God has only accidental properties, is equally false. Vos argues that a sound maintenance of both essential and accidental properties is crucial to a consistent doctrine of God.<sup>61</sup>

Vos's treatment of the doctrine of divine immutability is molded in *modal terms*: mutability and immutability are interpreted not in a temporal, diachronic sense, but in terms of possible worlds. The traditional theory of immutability remains within the borders of Actua (actual world), and thus entails necessitarianism. Vos notes that the theological doctrine of immutability is inspired by two motives: first, to honor the ineffable glory of God, second to express the consistency of the relation of faith in God. His revision of this doctrine centers around three aspects: God's monadic properties, his essential properties, and his nature. Concerning monadic properties (depending solely on the subject, without external relation), Vos argues that if a monadic property is accidental, then the subject changes from

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<sup>60</sup> Vos, *KN*, 314-318.

<sup>61</sup> Vos, *KN*, 318-324.

world to world. However, since God does not change, his monadic properties are invariable. God cannot be wise in one possible world and unwise in another. The same holds for essential properties of God: because of God's being unsurpassable, he cannot possibly have the opposite of his actual essential properties. The final step is made by investigating God's (individual) nature: this comprises all God's properties. If there were variability in God's nature, there could be two or more Gods and divine natures. The impossibility of essential change in God entails, however, that all collections of divine properties (= divine natures) are equivalent, and if equivalent, identical. Ergo, there is only one God. Stated otherwise, being God (*divinitas*) is not a common nature (attributable to different individuals) but an individual essence or *haecceitas*.<sup>62</sup>

Concerning God's uniqueness, Vos starts by showing that all entities are unique: there is at least one property that no other entity possesses. But this is not the point of the theological claim that God is unique. What is meant here, is that "being God" is a unique property, an individual essence which God shares with nobody. There is only one God. Vos does not agree, however, with the traditional consequence that all God's properties are strictly equivalent or identical (see on this doctrine of divine simplicity also the next chapter, section 19.1). It is not necessary to fixate God's properties into one absolutist, necessitarian identity.<sup>63</sup>

In dealing with the theory of divine simplicity, Vos appeals to the axiom that distinctions that can be made equivalent may be eliminated. In attempting to articulate a concept of God that is both logically consistent and religiously adequate, Vos argues that for God the distinctions between essential and necessary (since God exists in all possible worlds), between nature and *haecceitas* (since God's nature is his individual essence) and between existentiality and universality (since there exists only one God) can be eliminated. The crucial insight in all these distinctions is that God's nature is individual, is a *haecceitas*. This insight expresses the element of truth in the traditional ascription of incommunicable attributes to God: God's unique essential and accidental properties cannot be shared with other entities.<sup>64</sup>

A central and intricate part of the traditional doctrine of God is the claim that in God existence and essence coincide. Vos interprets the claim of coincidence not as strict *identity*, but as strict *equivalence*. He agrees with the tradition that "existence" is an essential and necessary property of God. He argues, however, that in the context of a modern theory of identity and properties the claim of identity between existence and essence is wrong. Two predicates are only identical if the one can be substituted by the other. For God's existence and essence, this is not the case. Vos concludes that the traditional (Thomist) statements on this question are overstatements; instead, he points to the Scotist *distinctio formalis a parte rei* as a helpful device in the doctrine of God.<sup>65</sup>

Vos briefly discusses the concept of God's infinity. One significant aspect is the insight that God is unsurpassable. The other, more quantitative aspect of a theory

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<sup>62</sup> Vos, *KN*, 324-336.

<sup>63</sup> Vos, *KN*, 336-341.

<sup>64</sup> Vos, *KN*, 341-351.

<sup>65</sup> Vos, *KN*, 351-359. Cf. in this study, section 5.4.1.

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of infinity opens the possibility to combine God's infinity with actual infinity in the created world. The infinity of God is thus no longer a threat to plurality and freedom in our world, as it was in absolutist metaphysics until the 19th century.<sup>66</sup>

Vos's theory of divine properties culminates in a discussion of God's omniscience. In absolute evidentialism, all knowledge is necessarily true, and all knowing subjects are omniscient. To the contrary, Vos holds that *knowing that p* is an accidental, not an essential property. Even omniscience (in human subjects) can be accidental (limited to some, not all possible worlds). Absolute omniscience, which applies to God, consists of knowing about all states of affairs in all possible worlds. Given these qualifications, absolute omniscience, if it occurs, is a necessary property. Now absolute omniscience is more valuable if its subject actually exists, than if it only exists in a possible world but not in *Actua*. This insight has two important consequences: first, from the necessary character of absolute omniscience we cannot conclude that the objects of knowledge are necessary themselves; second, if God is unsurpassable, then it follows from his absolute omniscience that God exists in *Actua*. The latter consequence is most thrilling and fascinating: from a hypothetical statement of a possibly omniscient divine being, Vos proceeds towards a substantial and assertory theology claiming the actual existence of God. So we can establish an epistemic proof of the existence of God, in the sense that some people are on reasonable grounds convinced by this argument for God's existence. It is at least more unreasonable to reject beforehand the possibility that there is some omniscient being!<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Vos, *KN*, 360-368.

<sup>67</sup> Vos, *KN*, 368-384.

# 19. The Doctrine of God: Elaboration

## 19.1. Simplicity

The doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) is the subject of F.G. Immink's dissertation *Divine Simplicity* (1987). At the outset, Immink states that DDS is a complex of, on the one hand, *theological notions* and, on the other hand, *logical reasoning*. The relation between theological motives and logical argumentation determines the structure of DDS. Immink notices that, though recent Protestant theology shows a critical attitude towards DDS, it was endorsed by the great majority of the Christian tradition. Immink focuses his study on the scholastic version of DDS (which elaborates on insights found already in the Church Fathers) and on recent criticism of it.<sup>1</sup>

In his preliminary exposition of DDS, Immink distinguishes between a *logical* and a *hermeneutical* version of the doctrine. Where DDS is understood as a logical characterization of the exalted divine being, this doctrine claims an identity between God and his properties, and between each of God's properties. Significant theologians have elaborated this basic idea in slightly different ways. Anselm of Canterbury starts with God's unique and independent existence as the being "than which nothing greater can be thought." He understands "greatness" in an evaluative sense as "excellence." This excellence implies the lack of composition and the possession of perfect unity. Thomas Aquinas combines the denial of any composition in God with a logical analysis of the rejected forms of composition. Aquinas distinguishes eight possible forms of composition, some of which are conceived from an Aristotelian framework (form – matter, potentiality – actuality), others from a more Augustinian-Platonic framework (God – essence, essence – existence; on the same grounds, the logical distinctions of *genus* and *differentia* and of substance and accidents do not apply), while other denials of composition are simply motivated by the biblical account of God (composition out of parts, composition of God and a created entity).<sup>2</sup>

In recent Protestant theology, the scholastic version of DDS has been heavily criticized. H. Cremer, for instance, argued that DDS shows the intrusion of the Greek idea of God as a pure and absolute Being into Christian thinking. According to Cremer, the biblical revelation of God takes place in the concrete history of the mission and death of Jesus, the Messiah, and has nothing to do with philosophical constructions. Similarly, Emil Brunner understood DDS as concerned with "das Eigenschaftslose Absolute." The threefold method of the classical doctrine of God (*via negationis-via eminentiae-via causalitatis*) originates in Greek, Platonic philosophy, says Brunner. A more careful discussion of the classical concept of God is given by Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg states that the reception of philosophical concepts for God is justified by the biblical claim of God's universality. In

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<sup>1</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 11-15.

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the Early Christian appropriation of philosophical ideas, Pannenberg discerns three important aspects: first, the thought of God's being the origin of reality; second, the statement of God as the ultimate unity; third, the recognition of God's being wholly-other and inconceivable. Whereas Pannenberg agrees with the latter element, he argues that the God of biblical revelation is a personal agent who acts contingently, and can therefore not be ornated with the philosophical concepts of ultimate cause and final unity.<sup>3</sup>

After the exposition of the logical version of DDS, Immink turns to a kerygmatic or hermeneutical defense of the doctrine. Surprisingly some theologians, notably Karl Barth and K.H. Miskotte, found important theological motives in DDS despite their criticism of the scholastic account. Basing his doctrine of divine simplicity on the mystery of God's Name, Karl Barth argues that the core of DDS is the assertion of God's reliability: "in all that he is and does, he is wholly and undividedly himself." Barth connects simplicity with God's freedom, which means that God is so different from created reality that he can at once have and hold communion with this reality. Finally, Barth asserts the unity of God, which Immink understands as the consistency in God's actions. K.H. Miskotte, the second kerygmatic defender of DDS, rejects logical reasoning about a pure and abstract concept of simplicity. Just as Barth did, Miskotte starts with God's Name, and sees DDS as an explanation of the Name pointing to God's uniqueness and unity. The uniqueness is conceived by Miskotte in terms of God's concrete revelation. Moreover, God's unity is based on his uniqueness: it is no logical unity, but the unity of consistency in the history of salvation. According to Immink, both Barth and Miskotte discovered important theological notions in DDS, but they unjustly neglected the logical factor in this doctrine: it is, even in their version, not simply revealed in the Bible, but contains a substantial amount of logical thinking.<sup>4</sup>

As a final step of the preliminary exposition of DDS, Immink states that the scholastic theologians defending DDS were at the same time Christian philosophers. This renders the combination of theological motives and philosophical reasoning quite natural to them. Immink reflects briefly on the reception of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy in scholastic theology. A concrete occasion for Immink to investigate the complex of theological and logical motives in DDS is the criticism by Alvin Plantinga, who claims that the stated identity of God with his properties and of the properties mutually is untenable.<sup>5</sup>

As the first step of his analysis, Immink provides a rather intricate discussion of logical distinctions in different philosophies. A basic distinction in modern logic is between (logical) *subject* and (logical) *predicate*. The subject is usually understood as an individual, the predicate as a property ascribed to the subject. How do individuals and properties relate? Most modern philosophers state that an individual is more than a "bundle of properties." Contrary to the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, they argue that there are not only common essences (exemplified in individuals) but also and basically individual essences (possessing essential and

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<sup>3</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 15-20.

<sup>4</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 20-26.

<sup>5</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 26-35.

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contingent properties). Moreover, philosophers like Plantinga argue that universals do exist (realism), but in the mode of an abstract entity. Properties cannot be the (logical) subject of a proposition in the sense individuals can. The fact that properties have merely “abstract” existence is a reason for Plantinga to deny God’s being identical with his properties. Besides being a *realist* concerning universals, Plantinga is an *essentialist* concerning necessary properties. This is explained by Immink with help of the possible world theory. Normally speaking, a possible world is a maximal state of affairs or a coherent collection of possible states of affairs. For Plantinga, states of affairs have abstract existence, and only when they “obtain” they have actual existence. The actual world is a maximal state of affairs in which every thinkable state of affairs is either included or precluded, and which actually obtains due to God’s creative activity. The possible world model provides the opportunity to distinguish between actual-possible, essential-accidental, and necessary-contingent existence of both individuals and properties. Plantinga argues that most individuals exist in one possible world (for instance, the actual world) but not in all possible worlds: they exist contingently. Others, particularly God, exist in all possible worlds: God exists necessarily. Moreover, Plantinga holds that essential properties exist necessarily (in all possible worlds) as abstract entities, although they are not necessarily exemplified in individuals in all possible worlds. Concerning properties, Plantinga distinguishes between unique properties or individual essences (such as “being-Socrates”) that exist necessarily in all possible worlds in which the relevant object exists, and abstract properties or essences that exist necessarily in all possible worlds. In brief, Plantinga is both a realist and an essentialist of some kind, and these features determine his position on DDS.<sup>6</sup>

The second philosophical theory discussed by Immink is Plato’s realism and especially his theory of the Forms. According to Plato, the Forms constitute the realm of (eternal) Being and sensible objects constitute the realm of the transient. The predication of universal properties to concrete entities is for Plato not just a common name, but it refers to objectively existent Forms. Forms exist by themselves, individuals by participation. Forms are not known from sense-experience, but by reason. Forms are ontologically superior to sensible objects. This latter idea entails the view of “graded reality.” Besides the hierarchy between Forms and their resemblances, there is a hierarchy within the Realm of Forms: the highest Forms are simpler and more unified than the lower. The highest Form is Goodness. How does this hierarchy of Forms relate to God? Plato has no distinct view of God; for him, the “divine” is a quality of the Realm of Forms, and it is particularly equivalent to Goodness. In conclusion, Immink states that Plato’s philosophy has a strong tendency towards oneness and simplicity. This is not the simplicity of a personal God, however, but the unity of the impersonal Forms. Immink denies that Christian thinkers simply took over a Platonic conception of God; they rather utilized Platonic thoughts to explicate the basically personal view of God held on biblical grounds. For Immink, it is significant that Christian theologians rejected

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<sup>6</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 36-51.

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Plato's realism as such by claiming that the Platonic Forms exist in the mind of God and are subjected to him.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Plato accounts for realism in Western philosophy, Aristotle is responsible for the essentialist strand. In his *Categories*, Aristotle gives his theory of predication. Fundamental to this theory is on the one hand the distinction between substance and accidents, on the other hand the distinction between individuals and their *species* and *genera*. Within substance, Aristotle distinguishes between first and second substance. First substance is equivalent to the particular or individual subject of a proposition. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle gives the priority to individuals instead of universal properties. Moreover, first substance is understood as a material object, subject to change. In Aristotle's further distinction of essential and accidental properties, the emphasis is on durability: properties that *always* apply to a substance are essential, properties that only *sometimes* apply are accidental. Although Immink notes that Aristotle's usage of "second(ary) substance" is somewhat obscure, he argues that it must be understood as a *species* term (for instance: in "Socrates is a man," "Socrates" is first substance, "man" is second substance). This second substance can be the subject of a further proposition (for instance: "a man is an animal," in which "animal" is the *genus* of which "man" is the *species*). Aristotle's *Categories* aims at classification, and states that an enumerable plurality constitutes a (natural) kind. By assuming natural kinds and by hypostatizing properties, Aristotle arrives at an essentialist theory of predication. His essentialism holds for the common nature or common properties of a class of individuals, not for purely individual properties. In relation to God, the scholastic theologians state that this theory of predication and classification does not apply.<sup>8</sup>

After the investigation of logical theories, Immink comes to *Alvin Plantinga's* rejection of DDS. The problems Plantinga has with DDS derive philosophically from his realism and essentialism and theologically from the intuition that God is sovereign and self-existent (Immink refers to this intuition as SAI: Sovereignty-Aseity-Intuition).<sup>9</sup>

Granted the independent and necessary existence of God's properties (since they are abstract entities), do they not compromise God's absolute control over everything? Plantinga acknowledges that the doctrine of divine simplicity avoids that conclusion by claiming that God is identical with his properties: this doctrine denies the independence of the properties. However, it entails (according to Plantinga) the even more problematic statement that God *is* a property, and thus an abstract, non-concrete and impersonal entity. An illustrious option for solving the problem is Cartesian universal possibilism: there are no necessary truths, everything depends on God's decision. Plantinga rejects Cartesianism on the basis of the intuition that *some* things are impossible or necessary. However, Cartesianism seems to follow immediately from SAI, an intuition endorsed by Plantinga. Plantinga thus is forced to modify the notion of control. Because of

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<sup>7</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 51-63.

<sup>8</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 63-73.

<sup>9</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 74.

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Plantinga's claim that abstract entities exist necessarily and are thus not *caused* to exist by God's thinking them, he must exclude necessary truths from God's control. Immink points out that in stating the independent existence of abstract entities, Plantinga deviates from the classical Christian doctrine of creation: conceived as thoughts *in mente divina*, the "abstract entities" are at once dependent on God's knowing them and are still necessary truths. Although Plantinga is not a strong voluntarist as Karl Barth is in his doctrine of God, Immink states that Plantinga unjustly raises the problem of God's control over his nature. According to Immink, the first purpose of DDS is to point to the distinction between God and other beings. Consequently, we cannot separate God's being from his nature. DDS is the stopping place, preventing us from pressing the question of God's control over his own properties.<sup>10</sup>

A further problem in Plantinga's rejection of DDS is that in his own understanding of properties the traditional distinction between essential and accidental properties is omitted. Immink argues that DDS does not claim identity between God and all possible, contingent and relational properties, but only holds for the valuational and decreed properties of which God exemplifies the intrinsic maximum. DDS thus means that *God has his perfecting properties essentially*. Still, the decisive difficulty with DDS seems to be that if all properties are identical to each other and to God, God seems to be reduced to one property. However, traditional defendants of DDS do not accept Plantinga's analysis of God's properties as abstract entities, and thus are not forced to accept Plantinga's conclusion. The Christian tradition has always rejected the statement that the various properties ascribed to God are merely synonyms. Still, Immink accepts a qualification of DDS based on Plantinga's criticism: perhaps it is better to claim some substantial equivalence between God's properties in stead of a forthright identity. By this adaptation, DDS is open to further testing and explanation.<sup>11</sup>

Immink's subsequent analysis of *Anselm of Canterbury* serves to test Plantinga's suspicions against the scholastic doctrine of divine simplicity. First, Immink shows that Anselm is not a forthright realist, but a modified or Christian realist. It is true, Anselm denies the view that "universal substances" (e.g., whiteness) are mere words (*flatus vocis*). And he distinguishes between meaning and reference of words: a property does not coincide with the entity that exemplifies it. But the ontological status of logical meanings (universals) is that they are upheld by the divine mind as exemplars or eternal models. Through God's creative speech (*locutio*), the exemplary essences in God's mind are brought into real existence. The essences in created reality depend on God's speaking, while our knowledge of these essences depends on created reality. From the human perspective, Anselm maintains a realist view: the essences exist independently of our mind. From God's perspective, however, they are not abstract, independent entities (as Plantinga has it), but depend on God.<sup>12</sup>

On these grounds, Anselm holds that *truth* is eternal and depends on God as the Supreme Truth. Since God exists *a se*, he is the ultimate standard of what ought

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<sup>10</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 74-86.

<sup>11</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 90-96.

<sup>12</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 97-103.

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to be and ought to be done. Anselm assumes a hierarchy of truth (*rectitudo*), utterly consisting of conformity with God.<sup>13</sup>

God's independent existence as the ultimate standard of truth and goodness can be further explicated by describing God's nature as maximal greatness. According to Anselm, God is the *intrinsic maximum* of all perfecting properties. The decisive difference between God and other beings is that God does not have his properties accidentally, dependent on something else, but essentially and through himself. In the famous ontological argument, Anselm states that God is the Supreme Good, needing no one else yet being needed by all else in order for them to exist.<sup>14</sup>

Can anything be predicated of the Supreme Being? According to Immink, Anselm's account of God's properties has to do with plurality and unity in God. His doctrine of the Trinity maintains the unity of God's essence and the plurality of the *processiones*: Father, Son and Spirit. For Anselm, as for the other patristic and scholastic writers, the relations of the Trinity do not alter the "substance" or essence of God. Therefore, the non-relational properties are ascribed to God as unity. God's nature, then, is constituted by perfecting properties of which God uniquely exemplifies the intrinsic maximum. Moreover, Anselm defends the identity of God with his properties. This safeguards God's aseity in respect to his properties and precludes an interpretation of these properties as accidental qualities. In the end, Immink criticizes Anselm for overstating his case: in order to uphold God's aseity and the essential possession of properties, the claim of identity between God and his properties is not necessary.<sup>15</sup>

In *Thomas Aquinas's* version of DDS, emphasis is on God's not being composed rather than on God's maximal greatness. In Aquinas's list of denied compositions, we find on the one hand predicative compositions, and on the other hand metaphysical compositions. A predicative composition exists between subject and predicate: something is predicated of someone.<sup>16</sup>

Basic to Aquinas's denial of predicative composition in God is his view of Being: God is pure and absolute being, not as an *abstractum*, but as the fullness and richness of being that exists by itself. Aquinas's view of God as Being itself is also central to his denial of metaphysical composition in God. In created beings, there is a correlation of essence (that which is) and existence (the fact that it is). Prior to God's bestowing them with existence, essences exist only *in intellectu creantis*. According to Aquinas, God's being stands on itself and is distinguished from the *esse commune*. In Aquinas's philosophy, the distinctions between form and matter and between actuality and potentiality are important components. In created reality, there is a non-identity between essence and subject; the essential form is individuated by matter and thus comes into existence. Since God is an immaterial Form, he is not composed out of form and matter. Concerning Forms, Aquinas rejects the Platonic Realm of Forms. He makes one exception: Being itself is the *prima Forma*. Besides the more trivial, predicative and copulative meanings of *esse*,

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<sup>13</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 104-110.

<sup>14</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 110-115.

<sup>15</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 115-122.

<sup>16</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 123-125.

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Aquinas takes *Esse* as absolute actuality and identifies it with God. He does so in reference to Scripture (Exodus 3:14): God is *qui est*.<sup>17</sup>

Immink continues his discussion of Thomas Aquinas by critically reviewing important aspects of his doctrine of divine simplicity. The first critical remark concerns Aquinas's claim that composition makes God's being dissoluble: while this is true for material (bodily) composition, it does not hold for logical composition. In Aquinas's rejection of material composition, his causal framework has considerable influence: he wants to avoid any possibility of change or inferiority in God. A second problem in Aquinas's version of DDS is the relation between God, his essence and his existence. The denial of any distinction between God and his *Esse* seems to entail the absolute incomprehensibility of God. Still, Aquinas maintains the possibility to know God and to speak about him; he only denies that God can be defined by means of *genus* and *differentia*. According to Immink, the impossibility of including God in the Aristotelian classification model is mainly caused by the inherent obscurity of Aristotle's theory of the natural kinds. The impossibility to identify God in terms of substance and accidents points to the inner deficiency of this model of thought.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude: Aquinas's treatment of DDS is flawed by logical complexities due to his following Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. Aquinas's final identification of God as pure Being is more abstract and empty than Anselm's description of God as maximal greatness. Moreover, it can do no justice to the biblical account of God as acting in salvation history.<sup>19</sup>

The last scholastic theologian examined by Immink is *Girolamo Zanchi*. Immink understands Zanchi's scholastic theology as an intellectual reflection on God's revelation in Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

In *De natura Dei* (cf. in this study part I, chapters 5 till 7, *passim*), Zanchi proceeds from knowing who God is to knowing what and how he is. Immink argues that *biblical revelation* (especially the divine names) *determines* Zanchi's doctrine of God, while *logical reasoning serves our understanding* of revelation. Reason is not a second source of our knowledge of God (contributing to its validity), but merely aims at forming a coherent concept of the revealed God (contributing to the intelligibility of the knowledge of God).<sup>21</sup>

In Zanchi's initial discussion of God's names, he distinguishes between first order and second order predicates: the first class directly indicates God's essence and contains properties solely proper to God; the second class of attributes signify God's perfections that can also (in a lesser degree) be predicated of other beings. Central in Zanchi's doctrine of God is the emphasis on God's independence and majesty. He moves between imperceptibility and actual knowability, and between unity of essence and plurality of attributes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 125-134.

<sup>18</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 134-143.

<sup>19</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 143-145.

<sup>20</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 146-150.

<sup>21</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 151-155.

<sup>22</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 155-157.

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Zanchi states a strong connection between God's properties and God's actions. What Scripture tells us about God and his actions informs us towards a concept of God. Most important in Zanchi's concept of God is God's simplicity: there is nothing in God that is not God. God is all he is by virtue of one and the same attribute, namely, his deity. In the whole of his doctrine of God, Zanchi distinguishes between incommunicable (non-relational) and communicable (somehow relational) attributes of God. God's nature as such is incommunicable, while some of his perfections are shared by creatures. For defending God's simplicity (in the sense of non-composition), Zanchi has biblical and rational grounds. The biblical arguments are mainly derived from the name Yahweh and from God's being a Spirit. The rational grounds comprise God's eternity, perfection, and immutability.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, Immink states that the official source of DDS for Zanchi is Scripture, while in fact his thinking is influenced by Aquinas. The practical implication of DDS pointed to by Zanchi is that it warrants God's sincerity and trustworthiness.<sup>24</sup>

Immink's final evaluation, under the heading "God and Logic," returns to the distinction between theological and logical motives in DDS mentioned at the outset.

The theological motives discerned by Immink in DDS are God's otherness, aseity, and unity. The *otherness* of God is biblically founded on God's holiness. In salvation history, God reveals himself as distinct from other beings. God's otherness should not be misunderstood as if God were Wholly Other and totally beyond our grasp. The biblical emphasis is on God's greatness and moral dignity. God is not beyond all logical categories and distinctions (as Aquinas has it); his otherness is qualified, and has an evaluative aspect.<sup>25</sup>

The *aseity* of God is normally understood as referring to both God's being and God's actions. Kerygmatic theologians as Barth and Miskotte proposed to limit God's independence to the freedom of his operations. Immink states, however, that independence is also a characteristic of God's mode of being: while all depends on him, he depends on nothing else. God's aseity can only be properly understood in a critical dialogue with philosophical ontology.<sup>26</sup>

God's *unity* as an aspect of his simplicity does at least indicate that God is coherent in all his perfections and actions. Immink rejects both the scholastic claim of identification of God with his perfections and the Barthian thesis that God is identical with his revelatory actions. Over against the latter, he maintains God's ontological independence. Concerning the former, Immink states that it is sufficient to say that God has his properties essentially and as the intrinsic maximum. Further consequences of the unity of God are the indestructibility and the trustworthiness of God: he will always act in accordance with his perfecting properties.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 157-162.

<sup>24</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 163-167.

<sup>26</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 167-168.

<sup>27</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 168-170.

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From a *logical* point of view, the strong and weak sides of the logical models employed in DDS are detected. Whereas Christian theologians modified the basic ideas proffered by Plato and Aristotle, there remain some problems: in Platonic thinking, the concept of graded reality urges one towards ascribing more reality to the general than to the individual entity; the same holds for the concept of common natures in Aristotle. For this reason, both models fail as a framework for a Christian doctrine of God. The modern realism of Plantinga avoids the generalizing pitfall, but has the problem of asserting independently existing properties. Immink states that a logical distinction between God as individual and his properties cannot be avoided.<sup>28</sup>

What happens to God's transcendence, aseity and unity in logical terms? Concerning God's transcendence, Immink claims that Anselm is most successful in understanding it in an evaluative sense as maximal greatness. Aquinas and Zanchi, however, end up blurring all distinction in speaking about God. The claim of identity between God and his properties is too strong. In respect to God's aseity, Christian theology has to reject any submission of God to the Platonic pantheon of the Forms. Anselm, following Augustine, succeeded here by situating the eternal Forms in the divine mind. In order to maintain God's unity, Immink states that it is sufficient to ascribe God's properties essentially to him. Since God has his properties essentially, he is indestructible, everlasting and fully coherent.<sup>29</sup>

Immink's final appraisal of DDS contains the following elements:

1. If we have to accept relational properties as genuine properties of God, we cannot reject the distinction between *essential* and *accidental* properties in God.
2. Even in God's case we cannot coherently deny the logical distinction between an individual and his properties. The traditional DDS intends at least to express the equality and similarity between God and his properties.
3. The Christian theologian is justified in searching for a logical characterization of God's lofty being, performed in critical dialogue with (ancient or modern) philosophy.
4. Although we must distinguish between the concept of God and its referent, we can ask whether the doctrine of simplicity refers to the God of biblical revelation. Properly understood, DDS is indeed an attempt at elaborating the biblical insights of God's otherness, aseity, and unity. In practice, some philosophical concepts of God may fall short of biblical revelation, while others may be true of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

### **19.2. Immutability**

On God's immutability, we have no monographic publication from the Utrecht School. However, two shorter pieces by Antonie Vos provide sufficient information for this section.

First, we have the discussion of God's immutability in Vos's dissertation *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid* mentioned in section 18.3 above. Here, I sum up the most important points. We have to keep in mind the alternative theory of properties developed by Vos (see the end of section 17.2.1). God's immutability has often been framed

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<sup>28</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 170-172.

<sup>29</sup> Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 172-176.

in terms of diachronic change and has been limited to the actual world (*Actua*). The result is that if all change in God is denied, the whole actual world becomes necessary. Therefore, Vos advocates an interpretation in terms of different possible worlds. Then the question becomes: what variety is or is not excluded for God in the different possible worlds? Vos argues that accidental or relational properties of God do vary from one possible world to another, since the objects they relate to do exist in one possible world but not in another. The invariability of God holds for his monadic and essential properties or, in summary, for his nature. Viewed in this way, the immutability of God's nature leads to the conclusion that there is only one God.

Second, Vos contributed a chapter on God's immutability to the volume *Understanding the Attributes of God*.<sup>30</sup> This contribution starts with the observation that the unanimity in which the tradition confessed the immutability of God has broken down in recent times. On the philosophical level, a metaphysics of immutable unity has been replaced by a functional, relational and historical metaphysics of which process philosophy is an important exponent. Theologically speaking, a cleavage is sensed between the historical and relational language of the Bible and the static and abstract language of the traditional doctrine of God. In a world that changes permanently, how can God be immutable?<sup>31</sup>

Whereas traditional theology simply read off God's immutability from Scripture, the situation is more complicated now. Indeed there are strong claims of God's immutability that indicate the difference between God and the created world, but also state the ontic and ethical gap between the God of Israel and the so-called gods of other peoples. But how about the *sorry*-texts, which seem to imply a change of mind in God? Vos argues that the relevant Hebrew verb *nacham* is properly understood as

"one's dissociating oneself from a certain attitude or action of the past, the present or the future, not implying failure or loss of control."

Instead of witnessing any capriciousness of God's agency (as the Dutch theologian A. van de Beek takes it), the *repentance*-texts testify the good, merciful and comforting reasonableness of God's agency. Methodologically, Vos warns that we cannot immediately derive a theological theory of immutability from the biblical texts. What is necessary, however, is to construct a theory that stands the test of compatibility with the relevant texts.<sup>32</sup>

Next, Vos provides a systematic analysis of different theories of God's immutability. In the traditional position as recently presented by Nelson Pike, God's eternity understood as timelessness entails the absence of actual change and the ascription of unchangeability to God. Taking up the main results of his own dissertation (*Kennis en noodzakelijkheid*, see sections 17.2.1 and 18.3 above), Vos argues that this interpretation of immutability has led to necessitarianism in both pagan Greek philosophy and in parts of Christian theology. Early Christian

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<sup>30</sup> Antonie Vos, "Always on Time. On God's Immutability," in Van den Brink and Sarot, *Understanding*, 53-73.

<sup>31</sup> Vos, "Always on Time," 53-54.

<sup>32</sup> Vos, "Always on Time," 54-57.

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theology tried to combine the freedom and contingency inherent to the Christian message of creation and salvation with the statement of an ontological difference between God and the world. This patristic intuition was correct, but its elaboration suffered from the incorrect coincidence of immutability and necessity. The absolute exclusion of all change in God's essence and existence, knowledge, will and decree leads to the denial of the reality of relations between God and creatures. When on account of the biblical narrative God's relation to, for example, Saul changes, the tradition understands this as a merely nominal change, whereby a true change takes place only in Saul, not in God. Vos shows that, if the basic idea of the equation of changelessness and necessity is accepted, the dilemma of eternity vs. time cannot be adequately solved.<sup>33</sup>

The ontology behind much traditional theology is the Greek claim that reality is one. The one-possible-world-model of Greek philosophy could not satisfy Christian thinking. Still, it took a long time before an alternative conceptual model was developed that could do justice to structural contingency. Vos here points to the revolution brought about by John Duns Scotus's introduction of the concept of *synchronic* (as opposed to diachronic) contingency. In this framework, the actual world is no longer seen as the only possible world. Consequently, the identification of immutability and necessity is eliminated. God is without change; but this does not make necessary whatever God does or knows.<sup>34</sup>

The renewal of the ontological framework leads to a doctrine of immutability in a new key. The different understanding of key concepts such as necessity and change makes the interpretation of historical positions in philosophy and theology extremely difficult. Even in an ontology leaving room for contingency, different models can be applied. Vos distinguishes between old actualism, new actualism, and the canonical model. Common to old and new actualism is the fact that both start their reflection in the actual world. On this starting point, the old actualism of Duns Scotus and Reformed scholasticism understands "contingent" as: (a) true in *Actua*; (b) willed by God and (c) possibly not the case. The decisive notion is that the actual state of affairs is not necessary, but can be otherwise. New actualism differs from old actualism in stating not two possible worlds, but infinitely many possible worlds. In all these worlds, however, the number of individual objects is the same as in *Actua*: there are no purely possible objects. The canonical model (technically denoted as S5) allows for purely possible entities in addition to states of affairs derived from *Actua*. Not only God's actual creatures can behave differently, God could have created other entities as well. Vos argues that it is incorrect to exclude the merely possible from the category of contingent things: the existence of a thing in *Actua* does not change its ontological status in terms of necessity vs. contingency. A renewed doctrine of immutability should do justice to the insight that God's knowledge and will relate to created entities and to not-created but still possible entities alike.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Vos, "Always on Time," 57-61.

<sup>34</sup> Vos, "Always on Time," 61-67.

<sup>35</sup> Vos, "Always on Time," 67-73. In retrospect, we can add two observations to this survey of Vos's discussions of divine immutability. The first remark is that in the earlier discussion God's immutability is applied to God's monadic, essential properties and his nature. This

### **19.3. Passibility and Corporeality**

Marcel Sarot's dissertation entitled *God, passibility and corporeality* takes up a theme that is controversial in respect to the classic tradition of the doctrine of God. Up to the 19th century the ascription of *impassibility* and *non-corporeality* (spirituality) to God was taken as self-evident. During the last century, the scenery has radically shifted: starting in Britain and North America, a passibilist position has conquered most of Western theology. Sarot notices an ongoing debate between passibilists and impassibilists. His own study wishes to contribute to the scholarly discussion of the theme by focusing in detail on aspects of the matter that are often neglected. The discussion concentrates on the arguments *pro* and *contra* passibilism. The confrontation of the passibilist position (which Sarot himself holds) with counter-arguments serves to develop an account of passibility that can meet the criticism. An important addition is the question of corporeality: if God is said to have feelings, does not that require his having a body?<sup>36</sup>

Like other scholars in the Utrecht School, Sarot includes extensive methodological discussions in his introductory chapter. Philosophical theology characteristically poses two sorts of questions: (1) questions about the logical relations between the concepts of the Christian faith; (2) questions about the relations of these concepts to the concepts used in other contexts. As to the criteria of theology, Sarot distinguishes sharply between philosophical and confessional theology. Philosophical theology should meet the standard of intelligibility, coherence and consistency and aims at a general, universal consensus. Confessional theology additionally includes consonance with the (confessional) tradition and adequacy to human experience, and is limited to acceptance within the confessional community. Sarot argues that tradition (including the Bible) and experience are too poly-interpretable to serve as a viable criterion in deciding on questions concerning God's (im)passibility. He concludes that the fore-mentioned criteria of intelligibility, coherence and consistency provide sufficient clarity in discussing the topic of his study.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the question of criteria, theological method comprises a "basic logic" of the concept of God. Sarot argues that the Christian doctrine of God is rightly described as "perfect being theology." On the basis of a syntactical and semantical analysis, Sarot shows that "God" is a title-term, implying the highest thinkable rank. Only great-making properties apply to God. The practical implication of the fact that God is "a Being greater than which cannot be conceived" is that he is worthy of total and exclusive worship. Moreover, within a coherent view of life, God is the primary determinant of meaning. Sarot drives the issue home by stating

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leads to the statement of (synchronic, structural) invariability in a possible-worlds-model. In contrast, the later contribution in *Understanding* does not mention this structural invariability, but instead claims the diachronic changelessness of God (and his will and knowledge) together with the structural (synchronic) contingency of God's actions. The second remark is that Vos's article "Always on Time" does not satisfy the expectations raised by the title. Vos does explain how God relates to contingent things, but does not explicitly connect this to a solution of the time – eternity dilemma.

<sup>36</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 1-10.

<sup>37</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 11-16.

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that the perfection of God is not an addition to, but an exemplification of the fore-mentioned criteria for philosophical theology: intelligibility, coherence, and consistency.<sup>38</sup>

The final methodological consideration deals with the question whether the *concept* of God as perfect being is truly a concept of the *God* we believe in. For example, if God does sometimes repent from a previous act, is he then less than perfect? Sarot answers that this depends on our standard of perfection. The theologian will admit as few “imperfections” as possible in respect to God. But some alleged imperfections merely indicate an inadequate conception of perfection.<sup>39</sup>

Concerning the central concept of his study, impassibility, Sarot notes that the original meaning of “impassible” is “incapable of being acted upon by an outside force.” To this meaning were attached the connotations of “incapable of experiencing emotions” and “incapable of suffering.” Theologians often confuse God’s not being causally influenced (by an external force) with his not being influenced at all (e.g., by inner motion). Whereas Sarot agrees with the exclusion of God’s being causally manipulated, he claims that “being personally influenced” is possible for God. Finally, he provides a stipulative definition of impassibility as “immutability with regard to one’s feelings, or the quality of one’s inner life.”<sup>40</sup>

Sarot proceeds by testing and qualifying the hypothesis that God is passible. The first step is to discuss arguments against passibilism. The position presented as passibilist is an extreme one that will be qualified as to make it invulnerable to the impassibilist objections. Sarot is not interested in historical or intentional interpretation and subtle variances, but aims at rational interpretation (in Vincent Brümmer’s words: “the one that produces the most fruitful conceptual suggestions relevant to our present situation”) of the central argumentative structure of the discussion. An important presupposition of Sarot’s investigation is that he does not endorse the traditional views of God’s eternity and immutability.<sup>41</sup>

The first category of arguments against divine passibility is derived from the nature of the experiences involved in it: experiences of feeling, emotion, pain, suffering are intrinsically bad or evil. The argument that emotional experiences involve evil takes three lines: first, it is argued that people “undergo” emotions passively and are not in control of them; second, it is argued that emotional experiences are a-rational and hence become irrational; third, it is stated that these experiences are negative, consisting of the lack of something good. In response to the first two arguments, Sarot argues that it may *seem* that by emotions we are *caused* to feel and to act in a certain way, but that in fact it is possible to be in *control* of emotions. Emotions always imply a certain evaluation according to (moral, aesthetic etc.) standards. We can influence our evaluations and thus change our emotional response. The fact that *evaluation* is involved in emotion indicates that emotions are not wholly irrational. Concerning God, we can state that if he

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<sup>38</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 16-22.

<sup>39</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 22-25.

<sup>40</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 25-30.

<sup>41</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 31-32.

experiences a passion, it will still be a disciplined and controlled passion. The third argument, that emotional experiences involve negativity, is refuted by Sarot by stating that it can be quite appropriate to have negative (painful) feelings in face of a negative situation. We can conceive of God's freely accepting suffering as subservient to a morally good end. The sum of Sarot's discussion is that God can be passible, if this passibility is understood as neither *passive* nor *irrational*.<sup>42</sup>

A pervasive presupposition of the classical doctrine of God is God's *unconditionedness*: his being and existence are not conditioned by other entities. Impassibilism is directly derived from this presupposition. Sarot distinguishes between a "Greek impassibilism" and a "Judaeo-Christian impassibilism": the former starts with a concept of "being" and applies it to God, the latter answers the question "why is there being at all instead of nothing" by identifying God as the ultimate source of being. Sarot asserts that God is self-existent in the sense that he is not originated by something else, but that this does not exclude his being influenced in his mode of being. God can freely allow himself to be influenced by the world without losing control over his feelings. From the unconditionedness of God, his *immutability* is immediately derived. If everything changes, God as the source of everything must remain unchanged. Sarot admits that change in God is only possible if he changes himself. Moreover, God is immutable in some respects and mutable in others. Here Sarot distinguishes between first-order attributes (mercy, love, wisdom) and second-order attributes (infinity, immutability). The first-order attributes comprise God's moral character and God's abilities. In respect to these, God is immutable. But feelings or emotions do not belong to either God's moral character or God's abilities; thus, God can change with respect to feelings. A further concept related to unconditionedness is God's "eternality," understood as God's existing outside time (contrasted with "sempiternality" as everlasting existence in time). By a brief argument based on God's foreknowledge (God knows changing things; therefore his knowledge must follow the changes), Sarot rejects eternality in favor of sempiternality.<sup>43</sup>

A third and final objection against passibility is taken from God's blissfulness ("the fullest happiness that is imaginable"). It is often argued that (a) God's perfection entails his happiness, and (b) our happiness depends on God's blissfulness. But does God's blissfulness exclude all passibility? Sarot argues that experiencing pain is often the appropriate reaction to a state of affairs. Can we call perfect a God who lacks this proper reaction? Sarot shows that happiness does not rule out all suffering. The sources of happiness remain at God's disposal even when he suffers in some respects: he has joy about the repentance of sinners, he knows about the good outcome of difficult situations, and finally he enjoys the inner-trinitarian love-life. These resources make it possible for God to be blissful while allowing a certain amount of unhappiness.<sup>44</sup>

The conclusion of this initial confrontation with objections against passibilism is that a passibilism can be maintained, if qualified at the following points:

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<sup>42</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 32-43.

<sup>43</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 43-59.

<sup>44</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 59-65.

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- a. experiences of pain and suffering are always subject to his will and therefore perfectly rational;
- b. God is immutable in moral character and abilities, even if he is changeable in his feelings;
- c. God's suffering is embedded in exceeding happiness.<sup>45</sup>

If passibilism is tenable, what reasons are there to opt for it? Sarot presents five arguments in favor of passibilism.

The *first* argument is taken from divine *omniscience*. It is stated (by Charles Hartshorne, among others) that in order to be omniscient, one should have experiential knowledge of feelings. Sarot argues that one need not *actually have* a feeling in order to know it. Still, experiential knowledge adds to purely intellectual knowledge. Sarot denies that God must undergo the whole range of emotions, but states that at least a limited number of experiences is required for God's having full knowledge of our experience. Not only through the incarnation, but in his own divine nature he must know what our feelings are.<sup>46</sup>

A *second* important argument in favor of passibilism is the *consolation* we receive from God. At first sight, the opposite claims that God comforts us because he partakes of our suffering *and* that God comforts us because he is exalted above our sufferings are on a par. When it comes to serious, life-threatening suffering, however, God's suffering with us is a greater comfort than his merely knowing about the good outcome of our lives. Thus, a passible God can be of greater consolation than an impassibilist God. God's suffering with us does not prevent his effectively helping us.<sup>47</sup>

In the *third* place, the *love* of God is presented as a reason for his passibility. Sarot argues that we have to distinguish between love as *benevolence* and love as *mutual fellowship* (cf. Brümmer in section 18.2 above). God's love for us is often viewed as benevolence, to the effect that there is only action on his part (no reciprocity), and that the objects of God's love are in principle replaceable. To the contrary, Sarot argues that God's love must basically be understood as mutual fellowship. This involves feelings on God's part. Two aspects of the interpretation of love as benevolence must be incorporated in the ascription to God of love as mutual fellowship: God cannot be manipulated by his fellows in love, and he is unselfish in entering into this fellowship.<sup>48</sup>

A *fourth* and common argument in favor of divine passibility is derived from the *suffering of Christ*. Sarot discerns two different lines in this argument. The first claims that Christ being God incarnate, the suffering of Christ implies the suffering of God. Sarot shows that this assumption rests on a defective understanding of Christology: while there is a *communicatio idiomatum* in the person of Christ, it is still possible to distinguish between the suffering of the human nature and the non-suffering of the divine nature. The second line of arguing from the incarnation understands Christ as the ultimate revelation of the Father: in his suffering, it is

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<sup>45</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 65-66.

<sup>46</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 66-77.

<sup>47</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 77-80.

<sup>48</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 80-91.

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made clear that the Father suffers as well. Sarot affirms this argument and defends it against impassibilist objections: it can hardly be seen how the suffering of Christ reveals a God who cannot suffer.<sup>49</sup>

The *fifth* and final argument reviewed by Sarot is the *problem of evil*. Many hold God responsible for the occurrence of evil in the world, and state that the only way out of immorality is God's suffering with us in the face of evil. Sarot challenges this assumption: the infliction or allowance of evil does not become good by God's compassion with us. In his view, the passibility of God in the face of evil can only be argued on the ground of God's love: because God loves us, he makes himself vulnerable to evil from our side and in our world.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the last-mentioned conclusion is that, as a characteristic of God's love, suffering is not a peripheral but a central element of the doctrine of God. It is also intimately connected to God's revelation in Christ. Before definitively opting for passibilism, however, Sarot first investigates the more far-reaching consequences of a passibilist position.<sup>51</sup>

A widely neglected problem is the relation between divine *passibility* and *corporeality*. Traditionally, both passibility and corporeality of God have been denied. Since recently the passibility of God is often advocated, we should ask whether emotions in God require a body. Sarot starts his investigation on this point with Thomas Aquinas's analysis of emotions.<sup>52</sup>

Aquinas provides a general theory of *passiones* (including both feelings and emotions) and applies it to the question of divine *passiones*. The most general *passio* is the undergoing of any change. More properly speaking, a *passio* is the acquiring of one quality by losing another. Aquinas's theory of the passions is clearly set up in the Aristotelian framework of act and potency, movement and change. Passion involves bodily movement, and the soul partakes in experiencing passion by its union to the body. Besides sensitive passions, Aquinas speaks of intellective apprehension and appetite that exist outside sensitive experience.<sup>53</sup>

Concerning divine emotions, Aquinas realizes that Scripture seems to ascribe some emotions (regret, compassion, anger, love) to God. His strategy to cope with this problem is first to sort out the emotions that are unbecoming to God because they involve an evil object or imply imperfection in God. The remaining "passions," love, joy, and pleasure, are affirmed in respect to God, but viewed on analogy of intellective appetite, not accompanied by bodily changes. Aquinas's solution for the ascription of anger and repentance to God is to explain them on account of a likeness in effect to our emotions (God's punishing sinners is an effect of something like God's anger) or on account of a preceding affection (God's "anger" follows on God's love). In conclusion: for Aquinas the incorporeality of God is a reason to deny the occurrence of divine emotions. He does ascribe

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<sup>49</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 91-96.

<sup>50</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 96-101.

<sup>51</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 103-104.

<sup>53</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 104-114.

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emotion-like acts of will to God, and furthermore explains emotion statements about God as metaphorical.<sup>54</sup>

In recent theology, few thinkers discuss the connection between passibility and corporeality. Sarot finds only two (religious) philosophers: Janine Marie Idziak and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Idziak, providing a strictly philosophical (non-theological) analysis of emotions, argues that God cannot have the bodily sensations normally involved in emotions. She holds open the possibility for God to have states of experience that *feel like* bodily sensed emotions. The other component of emotions discussed by Idziak is the occurrence of physiological changes. Whereas normally these changes belong to emotions, Idziak states that hypothetically emotions can occur without physiological changes.<sup>55</sup>

Nicholas Wolterstorff follows a different line of analysis: he describes an emotion as

“a physiologically abnormal state caused by the subject of that state’s evaluation of his or her situation.”

On the ground of God’s not having a body, Wolterstorff concludes that God does not have emotion in this sense. Still, he holds that God can have *suffering*, not as a sensation caused by something else but as the affective color of some events of consciousness.<sup>56</sup>

The above review occasions Sarot to conclude that many thinkers lay a strong connection between emotions and corporeality. Contemporary psychology confirms a *factual* connection, but that is not the same as a *logical* or *conceptual* connection between emotion and body. The passibilist theologian should concentrate on the specific experiences he wants to ascribe to God: do these require God’s having a body? Sarot then argues that love is the central emotion, which presupposes God’s passibility and in effect causes God’s suffering. By focusing on the strong emotion of love, the question of divine corporeality is posed on the right level.<sup>57</sup>

A tacit assumption of Sarot’ preceding argument is that religious language has unequivocal cognitive significance. Now he proceeds to provide explicit arguments in order to prove that all language is metaphorical, and that this does not preclude its cognitive significance.<sup>58</sup>

It seems obvious that emotion terms like “pain,” “suffering,” “sympathy” and “vulnerability” do not literally apply to God; they are metaphors. Is an abstract definition of passibility as “mutability with respect to feeling or the quality of inner life” better off? Sarot argues that such a definition contains metaphorical elements as well.<sup>59</sup>

But what is a metaphor? The classical theory of metaphor, which has been and is very influential in theology, treats metaphor as a rhetorical device or ornament.

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<sup>54</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 114-119.

<sup>55</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 119-124.

<sup>56</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 124-126.

<sup>57</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 126-132.

<sup>58</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 133-135.

<sup>59</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 135-139.

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A fundamental assumption is that metaphorical language can be translated back into literal language. Sarot rejects this assumption and argues that all language is metaphorical. Sarot advocates a “network theory of meaning” in which general concepts refer to “family resemblances” between different entities. In drawing upon these family resemblances, all language is metaphorical.<sup>60</sup>

The next step in Sarot’s argument is to deny the translatability of metaphors into literal language. Not only the expressive or affective value, but also the cognitive content is strongly tied to the metaphor itself. For application in theology, it is necessary to shift the discussion from simple metaphors to theoretical models (sustained and systematically developed metaphors) used in science. A model provides analogies (positive, negative, and neutral) that allow for scientific explanation and prediction. Models do not have a merely fictional character, but are a critically realist presentation of reality. Both in everyday life and in science, metaphors import cognitive claims and are (partly) true or false. Understood along these lines, theological models are symbolic representations of aspects of reality that are not directly accessible to us.<sup>61</sup>

The remaining question concerning the cognitive value of theological metaphors is that of their (in)compatibility. Sarot argues that testing the compatibility of metaphors cannot be performed in general, but only in concrete cases. The emphasis must be on the systematic function of the metaphor. On the example of divine anger, Sarot shows that for some theologians the systematic function is to express God’s effective judgment (incompatible with an emotional account of anger), while others point to the affective component of God’s judgment (compatible with emotions).<sup>62</sup>

Taking up his claim that a “passible” God must have emotions – particularly love –, Sarot returns to the question whether having emotions requires having a body.

The initial difficulty is the definition of “emotion.” Surveying the psychological literature on emotions, Sarot lists 8 constituents of emotion:

1. the feeling-dimension: bodily feelings involved in the experiencing of an emotion;
2. the cognitive or evaluative dimension: the appraisal of the object of emotion or of the emotional state itself;
3. the external causes (stimuli) of an emotion;
4. the physiological changes involved in emotion (heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension etc.);
5. expressive behavior involved in emotion (shouting, crying, blushing);
6. the disruptive dimension of emotion (disorganizing the usual patterns of behavior);
7. the adaptive dimension of emotion (emotion as the proper response to one’s needs);
8. the motivational dimension (emotional “hunger”).

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<sup>60</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 139-144.

<sup>61</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 144-151.

<sup>62</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 151-159.

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Of these, only the feeling-dimension and the physiological changes require the possession of a body.<sup>63</sup>

The first constituent of emotion to be discussed is “feelings.” A closely related concept is “sensations.” The problem with bodily sensations is that some of them are tactual sense-perceptions informative of the surrounding world, while other bodily sensations are only informative of the state of one’s own body. These two kinds of sensations have different functions, but are strongly connected: sense-perception implies bodily sensation, and all bodily sensations *can* count as sense-perception.<sup>64</sup>

How are these sensations connected to the body? Sarot lists 7 characteristics of bodily sensations:

1. localization;
2. genuine duration;
3. intensity;
4. quality;
5. the inclination to act towards the body;
6. changes in the body of the subject of the sensation;
7. information provided by the sensation about the current state of one’s body.

Of these, numbers 2, 3 and 4 do not necessarily require a body. The informativity of bodily sensations (7) does factually occur always, but it is conceivable that there are sensations which are not informative of the body. Changes in the subject’s body (6) are not necessary for having a sensation, and thus remain out of consideration. Do sensations always cause the inclination to act towards the body (5)? Sarot denies this assumption and states that we can conceive of different strategies to react to bodily sensations (e.g., whistle a magic tune). The only remaining issue then is the locatedness<sup>65</sup> of sensations. Whereas Sarot concedes that some sensations are not located in the sense-perceptors and are even located outside the body, he holds that all sensations are located inside the body or in relation to the body (this is true even for “phantom limb pain”). Though some sensations (e.g., pain) are unlocalizable and diffuse, they are still located. Sarot concludes that the idea of unlocated sensations is absurd, and that unlocated sensations cannot be ascribed to (an incorporeal) God.<sup>66</sup> In addition, he argues that for humans all emotions – except weak or calm emotions – essentially entail the occurrence of sensations.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 160-164.

<sup>64</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 177-184.

<sup>65</sup> Sarot specifies a difference between “location” as “the place where something is situated,” “locatedness” as “the property of being located” and “localization” as “the act of identifying where something is” (187).

<sup>66</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 184-195.

<sup>67</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 196-206. Interesting from a methodological point of view are the three procedures by which these discussions can be decided: (1) by *introspection* (this provides a subjective answer to the *factual* question whether sensations and physiological changes occur in emotional states); (2) by *measurement* (this answers the *factual* question objectively); 3. by speculative imagination or *thought experiment* (this gives an answer to the *logical* question whether sensations etc. could and should occur in emotions).

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From his inquiry into emotions, Sarot concludes that a “passibilist” God having the relevant emotions (primarily love) must in some sense be corporeal.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, his final chapter develops a “theory of divine corporeality” in interaction with three different approaches from recent theology and philosophy of religion: Charles Hartshorne, Grace Jantzen, and Luco van den Brom.

Hartshorne, the founding father of process theology, states that each entity has both material and mental predicates, and that the most adequate analogy for the God – world relation is that of mind – body. Defining a body as “that much of the world which the mind immediately knows and controls and suffers,” Hartshorne concludes that God’s unsurpassable intimacy with all things entails that the world is God’s body. In evaluating Hartshorne’s theory, Sarot points to the *dipolarity* between “existence” and “actuality” of his concept of God: in the former, abstract, pole, God is necessarily corporeal, while the latter, concrete, pole depends on the actual and contingent state of the world. In decisive respects, God’s corporeality depends so much on the world process, that God has no (responsive) feelings of his own. Hartshorne’s theory fails to account for the most important “emotion” of God: love.<sup>69</sup>

Grace M. Jantzen’s contributions to the idea of divine corporeality stand at the background of her opposition to the “disastrous dualisms” (spirit – matter; soul – mind; God – world) that permeate the Western, Christian tradition. She advocates a holistic anthropology, and a holistic theology analogously. Jantzen argues that, in order to be personal, God must have the abilities of *perception*, *action*, and *presence*, each of which presupposes some sort of embodiment. Eliminating the God – world dualism and ascribing a body to God does not make us lose sight of God’s transcendence, she argues, as a person never is reducible to her physicality. Taking up this latter point, Sarot argues that as it stands Jantzen’s model fails on the same point as Hartshorne’s, namely to account for God’s *responsive* feelings; following the line of personal transcendence, however, this failure can easily be amended.<sup>70</sup>

The third discussion partner is Luco van den Brom (see the next section for an exposition of his theory of divine spatiality and omnipresence). While Sarot has some initial sympathy for this theory, he argues that it does not really solve the problems concerning the relation of God and space. Finally, the reality of our world cannot exist in God’s more-than-five-dimensional spatiality, but reduces to a mere geometrical fiction.<sup>71</sup>

The final test to Sarot’s view of divine corporeality is to confront it with three objections:<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 206-208.

<sup>69</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 210-219.

<sup>70</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 219-226. There is a peculiar point in Sarot’s argument for “responsive” feelings: he gives the example of feeling a headache in reaction to one’s having the flu and thus being unable to go to work. It would be mistaken, Sarot says, to take the headache as a flu symptom, because in fact it is a “psychogenic” pain. The possibility of psychogenic feelings, opened here by Sarot, suggests the possibility that part of God’s “responsive feelings” might be “psychogenic” as well instead of “corporeal.”

<sup>71</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 226-234.

<sup>72</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, 234-243.

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1. It is absurd to conceive of the world as a body in the sense of an organism with interrelated parts (organs). Sarot's reply is that "organism" should be taken in a non-biological sense. The Bible speaks about the church in bodily terms, so why not think of the cosmos as an organism?
2. Defining the world as God's body amounts to identifying God and world, which compromises God's transcendence and autonomy. Sarot argues that, indeed, God does not transcend time and space, but that he is *mentally transcendent*. While God and world are mutually dependent, the world's dependence on God is most profound: it owes its existence to God, who is independent in view of his own existence. Moreover, God's autonomy and control over the world can be sufficiently maintained in a "corporeal" model.
3. If the world is God's body under God's control, humans have no free will. Sarot argues that God's control does not exclude free will of "parts" of his "body" on their own level.

Sarot's final conclusion is that the connection between divine passibility and corporeality is firmly established, and that there are sufficient grounds to affirm both attributes of God.

### **19.4. Omnipresence**

After Antonie Vos (see section 17.2.1), Luco J. van den Brom was the second disciple earning a doctorate under Vincent Brümmer's direction (1982). Concerning the theme of his study, divine omnipresence, and his way of treating it, it is relevant to notice that he studied mathematics and natural sciences before changing to theology.<sup>73</sup>

Van den Brom starts his investigation with a discussion of the concept of God. The concept "God" sounds familiar but is far from univocal: people attach entirely different meanings to the word "God." It can be interpreted either as a proper name or as a predicate. Some thinkers — the Logical Positivists — even argue that "God" is a meaningless word as God's existence cannot be empirically verified or falsified. Following the analysis by Nelson Pike, Van den Brom concludes that "God" functions both as proper name and as title term (similar to "Caesar"). The term "God" differs from "god(s)" in that "God" is unique. Concerning the debate between natural theology vs. revelation theology, Van den Brom notices a difference between the question (i) *what* is implied, precisely, when somebody calls God "God" and (ii) *who* it is who is properly called "God." He argues that the biblical identification of YHWH as "God" presupposes a concept "God" with a known content.<sup>74</sup>

The understanding of what it means to call YHWH "God" is found in the context of *worship*. The Bible clearly claims that YHWH alone must be worshipped.

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<sup>73</sup> Van den Brom, *God alomtegenwoordig*, "Voorwoord." For the further description and analysis, I will use the English version of 1993, *Divine presence in the world*. Van den Brom does not indicate on what points this version is revised and expanded. At least some bibliography and some discussion occasioned by the reception of the original thesis have been added. On page 267, the reviser failed to adapt the section numbers 5.2 and 5.3 to the new ordering of chapters (7.2 and 7.3).

<sup>74</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 1-8.

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“God” is a reverential predicate: God deserves reverence and adoration. These consist not merely of rituals, but comprise a whole cluster of dispositions: praying, praising, obeying, thanking, confessing etc. All these dispositions presuppose a personal relationship with God and involve a direct address to God.<sup>75</sup>

The basic properties of God accounting for his being worthy of worship are his holiness and his glory. *Holy* is not an ordinary predicate like “red” or “fluid,” but is expressive and invites people to take a certain attitude towards God. God’s holiness makes an impression on people, makes them focus on God, and invites all people to worship. Van den Brom interprets “holiness” as a second order predicate: it is not directly predicated of God himself, but of the other characteristics God shows in his actions. According to Van den Brom, holiness is a necessary, defining characteristic of the concept of God: stating that God is not holy is a contradiction in terms. Of specific importance is Van den Brom’s claim that God’s holiness causes us to worship him, not in a manipulative way, but as an invitation that leaves intact our personal freedom. We encounter God as “I” and “Thou.” The freedom we have does not diminish divine grace: our possibility to react depends on God’s preceding invitation. Anticipating the remainder of his study, Van den Brom states that God’s holiness as his being totally unique and worthy of all worship implies God’s being other than a material object: a material object can be manipulated and can be hidden, but with God this is impossible.<sup>76</sup>

Concerning the *glory* of God, Van den Brom emphasizes that it is a special property which God would still possess even if he did not reveal himself. God’s glory is manifest in his mighty acts, and is connected with dignity, majesty, and beauty. By his glory, God makes a profound impression upon people, bringing them to acknowledge his glory. Glory is a first order predicate: it tells something about how YHWH actually is. Although God’s glory gives all ground for us to worship God, he does not force us into worship. God’s glory, as much as God’s holiness, invites us into a personal relationship in which we directly address God by our praises and thanks. This personal relationship consists of the total recognition of God’s unique glory. Again, the glory of God implies that he is transcendent, so that we cannot hide from his glory, nor can we limit God’s glory to a certain place.<sup>77</sup>

The next preliminary step in Van den Brom’s research is to investigate divine personhood and agency. In *human persons*, Van den Brom distinguishes autonomous and relational features. Autonomous features are: (1) a person is conscious of himself or herself; (2) a person is capable of performing certain actions. Besides, persons have relational characteristics: (1) they can communicate; (2) they can co-operate and negotiate; (3) they have responsibilities for each other. Van den Brom states that it is necessary that the same characteristics apply to *God as a Person*.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 8-12.

<sup>76</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 12-21.

<sup>77</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 21-28. Van den Brom’s exposition of God’s holiness and glory contains insightful remarks on God’s transcendence; for a further discussion of divine transcendence, see section 19.7 below.

<sup>78</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 34-37.

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Whereas he is rather brief on God's personhood, Van den Brom devotes an extensive discussion to divine agency. The starting point is that we not merely worship God on authority of other people, but on the ground of God's being worthy of worship. The Bible here refers to God's Mighty Acts [capitals are Van den Brom's]. Now in general actions can be intentional or unintended (accidental). With intentional acts we are able to elucidate our intentions, although these are sometimes vague and not clear to outsiders. What is important is that motives or intentions reveal something of myself as a person. Concerning divine actions, the category of unintended actions is excluded beforehand. Moreover, God does not perform actions with unintended side-effects (although we do not always have full knowledge of God's intentions), but his acts always express his intentions and character.<sup>79</sup>

A crucial difficulty in speaking about God's Mighty Acts is the problem of identifying them. How can we know that a certain event is God's action? God is not empirically observable, so how can we be certain that He, and not a chain of causal factors, is ultimately responsible for an event? Normally, we can identify an agent by means of his or her body. But how can we distinguish the actions of a disembodied agent? Van den Brom argues that we can imagine a disembodied agent performing basic actions (actions not requiring other actions prior to them) by using material objects as his/her "body." In the case of God, being omnipotent, we could argue that *all* his actions are basic actions. But if only the *effects* of God's actions are observable, we can never be sure what *mental* acts lie behind them, so that we cannot maintain the idea that all God's actions are *basic*. What further counts in identifying God's actions is his intentions: only when these are known, we can ascribe a certain event to God's agency. On the example of the people of Israel's crossing of the Reed Sea, Van den Brom explains that the consistency of this event with God's purpose to bring his people into the promised land allows for its identification as an act of God.

If on the basis of intentions and ability a certain action is identified as God's, a further problem is how we can separate this action from other events that are *not* God's actions.<sup>80</sup> Since God's actions can be known on account of his intentions, it is important to realize that God has no unconscious motives and no inconsistency in his intentions: he is omniscient and trustworthy. Thus, the ultimate intention of God to save the world comprises all God's actions. Anything that contradicts this intention cannot be an act of God. Although God's intentions are made known in revelation, we still cannot fully grasp and fathom them. Besides the problem rooted in the deficiency of our knowledge, there is the difficulty that God's actions consist in three kinds: first, God's bringing about certain things (*creatio ex nihilo*); second, God's bringing about concomitant things (such as the Laws of Nature [capitals by Van den Brom]); third, God's permitting some creatures to bring about other things (including evil). It is particularly the third category that requires the concept of "double agency" to explain how both God and creature are involved in causation.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 37-45.

<sup>80</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 45-59.

<sup>81</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 59-68. Van den Brom borrows the idea of "double agency"

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At the end of his preliminary discussions of the concept of God, Van den Brom concludes that God's personal characteristics are *exclusive*: there is no other being like YHWH. YHWH is the most worthy being imaginable who both exists and is worthy of worship. The further investigation is devoted to elucidating the relation between the One who is worshipped and our empirical world, especially in respect to spatial terms.<sup>82</sup>

What is implied in someone's being localized? It means that we can ask where he or she is, and answer by indicating a topographical place or a point in a coordinate system. Moreover, to be in a place, an entity must have limited extension. Concerning material objects, it is further the case that no two objects can be in precisely the same place. And finally, a material body cannot be simultaneously at location *P* and location *Q*. A human being, having a body, follows the same rules. Located at *P*, he or she can act, communicate, cooperate and negotiate at *P*, but not simultaneously at *Q*. Moreover, two persons *X* and *Y* cannot simultaneously occupy the exact location *P*.<sup>83</sup>

How about God? If God is localizable, this entails the following: he is aware of being "there"; he acts and communicates "there"; he has limited extension, and thus is not simultaneously present at *P* and *Q*.<sup>84</sup> For the concept of worship, this has some disastrous consequences, which Van den Brom spells out through a series of hypothetical situations. If God and a worshipper are together at *P*, they can entertain a relationship. The worshipper, however, can withdraw from God's limited radius of action, and then God is no longer worthy of worship. It is also conceivable that two worshippers on different places *P* and *Q* come to different justified conclusions on God's worthiness of worship, and that God's worthiness of worship can be transferred from *P* to *Q* by God's moving from *P* to *Q*. It is even so that, God's being limited to *P*, a person *X* can prevent God from being worshipped by hindering person *Y* to come to location *P*. Finally, if God is limited to location *P*, location *Q* can be occupied by another deity. Then we have alternating and conflicting objects of worship, to the effect that true religious life becomes impossible. Conclusion: the claim that YHWH is worthy of exclusive worship entails the claim that he is present everywhere to receive our worship, i.e. he is omnipresent.<sup>85</sup>

But what do omnipresence and spatiality mean? Van den Brom first investigates the concept of spatiality in order to "generate a striking image or an illuminating metaphor to cope with the notion of divine omnipresence." The importance of spatiality is that "place" is a decisive concept in identifying objects

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from Vincent Brümmer (and indirectly from John Lucas). His criticism of Brümmer's usage of the concept is that God's contribution is limited to providing the general ("standing") conditions by which human action takes place. Thus it does not involve particular intervention by God in the course of things.

<sup>82</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 68-70.

<sup>83</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 71-74.

<sup>84</sup> In that case, it could still be argued that God's radius of action is unlimited, on analogy of a magnetic field, but in the final analysis this boils down to the denial of God's being of limited extension.

<sup>85</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 74-84.

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and differentiating between objects that are otherwise very similar. Two features of material objects are relevant here: first, an object cannot simultaneously be at two places nor can two objects be at the same place simultaneously; second, an object can change its place, and different objects can occupy the same place at different moments of time. The former feature points towards an absolute understanding of space, the latter towards a relative understanding. Van den Brom gives a detailed discussion of the most important theories of spatiality.<sup>86</sup>

The *idealistic* theory of space states that space does not exist independently, but is only an outward appearance. As a moderate idealist, Immanuel Kant argues that space is the subjective condition which enables us to make observations, the only means by which we can become conscious of the things outside us. There is, according to Van den Brom, an inconsistency in Kant's theory, since he insists on the real (though not observable) existence of the thing in itself while denying that the spatial conditions of this "thing in itself" are really existent: the threat of complete or extreme idealism is imminent in Kant's philosophy.<sup>87</sup>

The opposite of the idealistic theory of space is the *realistic* view: space is the sum total of all places, independently of whether or not there are any objects in it. This presupposes that there is a fundamental distinction between "things" and "space." Van den Brom argues that a decisive objection against this theory (advocated among others by Isaac Newton) is the fact that the key concepts of motion and rest can only be understood in "relative" terms: it is always "in relation to" something that rest or motion are predicated. Even "absolute" rest, as the lack of motion of the universe, must be defined from some frame of reference.<sup>88</sup>

The third option, then, is the *relational* theory of space: space is given or constituted in some kind of way by things and objects. This is not to say, as Descartes did, that space (extension) is identical with the object: space is the order of *co-existing things*. The basic concept of space is "the same place": the same relation to other objects. Moreover, all objects have a "next-to-each-other-relation" that defines them. In the final analysis, space is "the generalised next-to-each-other relation extended to subsume all possible objects." Van den Brom argues that the relational theory of space, which allows for a conceptual distinction between objects and space but does not claim the independent reality of space, can stand all objections.<sup>89</sup>

After discussing the theories of space, Van den Brom now proceeds to examine the different views concerning the relation of spatiality to God.

The first group of theories affirms that God is spatial. A famous advocate of this view is Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza's concept of God is set in terms of an absolute, infinite being, a substance with infinite attributes, whereby every attribute expresses the being of that substance. Typical of Spinoza's philosophy is that he asserts that only one, single substance exists or can exist. For Spinoza, this one substance is the all-embracing whole called Nature or God. It is clear that this equation of Nature and God eliminates God's transcendence; but how precisely is

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<sup>86</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 85-91.

<sup>87</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 91-100.

<sup>88</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 100-108.

<sup>89</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 108-124.

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the relation between God and other reality defined? Spinoza assumes two basic attributes: extension and thinking. All things in the world are manifestations of either infinite extension or infinite thinking, both being attributes of God. Importantly, Spinoza endorses the “principle of plenitude”: all that can potentially exist does actually exist. Hence, God exists necessarily and everything else follows necessarily from God. There is a chain of logical necessity between God as the self-determining cause of all (*Natura naturans*) and Nature as the well-ordered system of infinite variety (*Natura naturata*). Now Spinoza claims that God has infinite extension, comprising all other extended beings. This entails a realistic, absolute conception of space. In a critical analysis, Van den Brom states that Spinoza’s pantheism cannot do justice to the relational understanding of space, and, more importantly, does not allow for a truly personal relation of worship between God and the believer. There is no reason to call Spinoza’s god “God.”<sup>90</sup>

A non-pantheistic theory that positively relates God to space was developed by Isaac Newton. As we saw before, Newton held a realistic view of space. He conceives of God as an entity who is extended like absolute space, but without any relationship to anything external on the basis of which such extension could be defined. Thus, Newton does not identify God and universe, nor does he make God himself spatial. Absolute space is as it were the “sensory” through which God is present to everything. Moreover, God’s presence “everywhere” is needed for Newton because he does not allow for the idea of “action at a distance”: to act in the world, God must be present in the world. Newton exactly defines space as “a property, or a consequence of the Existence of a Being infinite and eternal.” As Van den Brom remarks, the surprising element in this definition is that space is finally cast in relational terms in respect to God’s existence: only due to God’s existence, space exists. God himself is viewed as *immaterial* infinite extension. According to Van den Brom, the substantialist framework and the relational intuition in Newton’s theory cannot be reconciled; therefore the theory does not satisfy.<sup>91</sup>

As a final member of the “spatial God” group, Van den Brom discusses process theology. He views process theology as inverted pantheism: reality is not seen as emanation from God, but the dynamics of reality contribute to God’s being. Process theology primarily thinks in “events” and “relations.” The fundamental property of God is his being maximally related to the world. God’s omnipresence is understood by process theology as God’s being *directly* related to everything in the realm of reality that is changing. As a decisive objection against process theology, Van den Brom states that it depicts God merely as the passive receptor of all changes, not as an active and intervening subject. Such a “god” is not worthy of worship.<sup>92</sup>

Van den Brom’s conclusion is that all attempts to ascribe spatiality to God have failed.

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<sup>90</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 126-148. In addition to his exposition of Spinoza, Van den Brom refers to Grace Jantzen as presenting a modified form of Spinozism; cf. Marcel Sarot’s positive appraisal of Jantzen reviewed in section 19.3 above.

<sup>91</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 148-161.

<sup>92</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 161-169.

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Would it be better then to define God's omnipresence as "spacelessness"? Van den Brom realizes that the majority of classical Christianity adheres to this view.

Foundational to the doctrine of divine omnipresence are the views of Augustine. Originally, Augustine treated God as a being who is extended in space, infinitely large, and all-pervasive in the real world. The decisive problem with this view is that it makes God divisible: one created entity is in contact with a different, greater or smaller, part of God than another. Therefore, Augustine proceeded to deny all quantity to God. Typical of Augustine's mature position are the phrases "God is everywhere completely alike" (*ubique simul totus*) and "God is spaceless" (*non in loco*). Augustine employs several analogies to explain how God, being non-corporeal, can be present to everything; the most important analogue is the soul. Still, a serious problem is the question how a non-spatial God can act in a spatial world. Although non-corporeal action is logically possible, it cannot account for God's acting at different places, but only explain God's acting in the world as a whole.<sup>93</sup>

Elaborating on Augustine's intuitions, Anselm of Canterbury built his doctrine of divine omnipresence on the observation that there is a force that conserves everything from disintegration. This force is not subject to disintegration itself, since it is the highest conceivable being (God). By eliminating the possibilities that this highest being is either nowhere or somewhere (but not everywhere), Anselm concludes that God is everywhere. A complication in Anselm's theory is his realistic understanding of space, expressed in the "law of place": place is understood as the natural boundary or limit of an object contained in it. This can of course not apply to God. Anselm's conclusion is that God is present everywhere in a unique way, not "in" all places, but "with" all places. Van den Brom's criticism is that Anselm thus reduces God to a sort of universally valid rule of logic; which certainly is not worthy of worship!<sup>94</sup>

Thomas Aquinas continues the traditional line of thought in a specific way: he argues that God is the First Cause of all that exists, and that he is in a spiritual mode causally present to everything. An important presupposition of Thomas's argument is that there is in fact a hierarchy of causal factors, God being the highest. Van den Brom argues that from a modern understanding of causality, Thomas's argument does not hold water. Moreover, given the fact that Thomas describes God as non-spatial, he cannot plausibly explain how this spaceless God can be present and active in a spatial reality. Ironically, Thomas uses the term "touching" (*contingere*) to describe God's presence; clearly a spatial sounding word.<sup>95</sup>

Though it may seem odd to include Friedrich Schleiermacher in the row of Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas, Van den Brom argues that there is a structural similarity between Schleiermacher's view and Thomas'. Both describe God and created reality as a single causal system. Basic to Schleiermacher's theology is religious feeling as an awareness of total dependence. This feeling itself is spaceless and timeless. God is the ground of our existence; he is absolute, but does not exist objectively; God is not personal, but is the whole of reality. For Schleiermacher,

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<sup>93</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 171-179.

<sup>94</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 179-187.

<sup>95</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 188-200.

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God's being the Creator equals with God's sustaining all things through the laws of nature. God's most important property (strictly speaking a qualification of our religious consciousness!) is his omnipotence, which entails his omnipresence. Schleiermacher denies God's being located, because that could make God an object of manipulation. Van den Brom critically argues that, while religious experience is the utter ground of Schleiermacher's theology, experience does not prove or explain anything. Moreover, since God's omnipotence is equivalent with the whole causal order of the world, the concept of God becomes obsolete.<sup>96</sup>

In conclusion, Van den Brom states that theories claiming God's spacelessness cannot meaningfully account for the active relation between God and the world. So the search for an appropriate concept of omnipresence must continue.<sup>97</sup>

After refuting the rival theories of divine spatiality and divine spacelessness, Van den Brom develops his own solution of the problem how God's omnipresence is to be conceived. The basic concept is "dimension," understood by Van den Brom as "a way of ordering objects." To be sure, we can and should distinguish a quantitative and a figurative meaning of "dimension."<sup>98</sup>

A promising conceptualization of God's transcendence in relation to modern scientific insights was developed by Karl Heim. Heim employs a generalized concept of space as a common tool for theology and natural sciences. Heim defines "spaces" as "infinite and closed continua, each having a principle or ordering by which their contents can be distinguished." The spatial continua are separate from each other, but can also impinge on each other. Crucial for Heim is the Law of Polarity: a place is occupied by either one object or another object; an object cannot be at two places simultaneously; what happened in the past cannot also happen in the present. When it comes to divine transcendence, Heim asserts that God exists in supra-polar space, a higher dimensional system that is not subjected to the Law of Polarity. Van den Brom welcomes the idea of God's higher dimensionality, but argues that the Law of Polarity still holds in respect to this higher dimension. God's being omnipresent in his own dimensional system includes God's being co-present to the whole of three-dimensional space. Van den Brom states that, in his own dimensional system, God has extension and a specific form of corporeality. If God has at least two dimensions more than our familiar three, he cannot be limited or *divided* by three-dimensional space. Moreover, God's co-presence from his higher dimension to the whole of created space enables us to speak intelligibly about God's *agency* in the world: he can reach and influence all places. This means that decisive objections to alternative theories of omnipresence do not damage this particular proposal. And since God's higher dimension cannot be scientifically scrutinized, God's transcendence is safeguarded.<sup>99</sup>

With Karl Barth, we have a conceptualization that starts precisely at the opposite point of Heim's: given that God is omnipresent in himself, how does creation fit in? Basic to Barth's doctrine of God is the understanding of God's

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<sup>96</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 200-212.

<sup>97</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 229-230.

<sup>98</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 231-233.

<sup>99</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 233-251.

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agency in terms of love and freedom. Barth attempts to explain how the act of creation does not impose limitations on God's freedom and love. The reason is that God is eternally co-present with himself in the Trinity. The relation of nearness and remoteness between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the basis and presupposition of God's making room for creation within his own space. A problematic feature of Barth's position is that he speaks about a "movement" of God. He deems this necessary to warrant that God is alive and personal. Van den Brom argues that it would be better to speak (in stead of "motion") about variations in divine presence: God is in a special way present in his Word, on Mount Sinai, in Zion, and in Jesus Christ.<sup>100</sup>

Van den Brom's conclusion is that the concept of God's own, higher, dimensional system allows for an adequate explanation of divine omnipresence. It maintains both God's transcendence and God's agency in the world.<sup>101</sup>

The final part of Van den Brom's study works out some possible consequences of the higher-dimensionality model of divine omnipresence. It first relates to God's work of creating and sustaining the universe, then discusses some criticisms of the concepts, and finally draws some relevant lines to different theological themes.

Concerning the relation of God's omnipresence to creation, two pairs of questions interfere: first, does the act of creation entail a change in God from spacelessness into spatiality or was God spatial "before" creation? and second, is God's presence to the world analogous to a three-dimensional field, or should we think of a higher-dimensional presence?<sup>102</sup>

Van den Brom argues that important truths concerning God seem to imply that God is *temporal* instead of timeless. Van den Brom argues that both a realistic and an idealistic account of divine timelessness are insufficient: they would render impossible God's will and deeds. Similarly, the position that God exists "outside" time is inadequate, and unjustly describes *time* in *spatial* terms. Van den Brom therefore concludes that God is *temporal*. Concerning the question whether there is a genuine beginning in time of creation, or that there is just an eternal process of God's sustaining the world, Van den Brom states that this cannot be argumentatively decided: creation as a distinct act is an article of faith.<sup>103</sup>

But what does God's being present in or with creation mean? To be present can be construed as perceiving or being conscious of a place. Van den Brom argues, however, that God's presence understood as merely "monitoring" is insufficient: God must really be present in a spatial mode. Here a problem arises: God is not only present "here," but also "there" and "everywhere." In theory, God's presence can be understood either as a homogenous field in three-dimensional space, the centre of which is located at one point, but the radius of action being infinite, or as a presence in a higher dimensional system that includes the three-dimensional system. The former option entails the problem that, if God's presence is part of the

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<sup>100</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 252-263. For Barth on divine omnipresence, cf. in this study part II, section 12.3.1.

<sup>101</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 263-265.

<sup>102</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 266-268.

<sup>103</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 268-281.

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three-dimensional system, God's "body" (as it were) must have been created alongside with created reality; this would easily lead to pantheism. Moreover, a field within our dimensional space can be "divided" by other objects, which must be impossible with God. And finally, God's acting should be construed as major fluctuations in God's sustaining field, which would cause major (and local) changes in the Laws of Nature. The latter option, taking God's presence in terms of a higher dimensional system, avoids these difficulties. It can account for true transcendence of God and for true, intervening agency on God's part. Finally, this conception implies that God's mode of existence need not change by the event of creation: within his own higher spatiality, God makes room for our space.<sup>104</sup>

Van den Brom argues that his model of multi-dimensionality is well compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity: the unity of the divine being can be seen as God's infinite extension in his own higher-dimensional space, whilst the three Persons would denote the special variations in this infinitely-extended divine being. The Persons are like different, but dynamically interrelated dimensions in one super-dimensional space.<sup>105</sup>

After this systematic climax of his argument, Van den Brom briefly refutes some criticisms brought on by Willem Drees and Marcel Sarot. Drees's objection is that Van den Brom's model is not plausible from the perspective of the natural sciences. Van den Brom replies by stating that his theory does not aim at solving problems in natural sciences, but at showing the compatibility of theological doctrine with scientific concepts of space. Marcel Sarot states that in the multi-dimensional model, our three-dimensional reality can not truly exist. According to Van den Brom, Sarot confuses logical possibility and physical possibility; the model developed by Van den Brom is not *homoemorphic* (similar in all aspects) to physical or material reality, but *paramorphic* (similar in some, different in other aspects).<sup>106</sup>

Van den Brom finally gives some applications of his theory, under the proviso that these are not the only possible explanations of certain problems. The following topics are reviewed:

- the *resurrection of Christ*: Christ's rising from the dead can be understood as his entering into a higher-dimensional space, from which he can "step in and out" of our reality;

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<sup>104</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 281-296.

<sup>105</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 296-299.

<sup>106</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 299-304. To my mind, Van den Brom could (in addition to his model-theoretical argument) further settle the discussion in favor of his theory by the following argument: Sarot's objection against the inclusion of our reality in God's more-dimensionality rests on its material and temporal character. A sheet of paper as an exemplification of a two-dimensional surface still is three-dimensional because of its "thickness." Therefore, according to Sarot, two-dimensionality does not occur in the actual world but is merely a geometrical fiction. Van den Brom's account would similarly reduce our material-temporal world to a fiction in God's spatiality. This is not conclusive, however, if God's higher-dimensionality could *preserve* the material and temporal nature of our reality while at the same time *providing* the superior abilities of perception, presence and action required for God's being God.

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- *heaven*: instead of the “naïve” local interpretation of heaven, Van den Brom advocates an understanding in terms of a higher dimension, or an alternative “space” in higher dimensions;
- the *ascension of Jesus*: elaborating on what is said about Christ’s resurrection and the reality of heaven, the ascension can be seen as Christ’s departure to the higher dimensionality;
- the *Holy Spirit* and *Jesus Christ*: both can be viewed as specific manifestations of God’s influence from the higher dimensions into our reality (a “local fluctuation in the divine being”); according to Van den Brom, this allows for a new substantiation of the “two-nature” Christology;
- the idea of *concursum*: in God’s providential care, our human (free) agency can easily be incorporated without changing its character on its own dimensional level;
- *eschatological re-creation*: our bodies will be removed from the three-dimensional limitations and will be enabled to enter into the higher dimensions, i.e. heaven.<sup>107</sup>

### **19.5. Knowledge**

Throughout the Utrecht School publications we find several allusions to divine knowledge:

- in Antonie Vos’s *Kennis en Noodzakelijkheid* (see sections 17.2 and 18.3 above), God’s omniscience is both a potential source of absolute evidentialism and determinism (if understood wrongly) and a positive ground for an argument for the existence of God (if rightly understood);
- in Marcel Sarot’s *Passibility and Corporeality* (see section 19.3 above), God’s omniscience serves to prove that God must have some experiences of emotions and suffering;
- both Luco van den Brom (*Divine presence*, see section 19.4 above) and Gijsbert van den Brink (*Almighty God*, see section 19.6 below) sometimes discuss God’s omniscience as a concomitant or qualifying concept.

A more in depth treatment of questions around God’s knowledge is given by Eef Dekker in various publications. A first, indirect discussion is found in his dissertation on Jacob Arminius, *Rijker dan Midas*. Dekker’s contribution to the volume *Understanding the Attributes of God* approaches the matter more frontally. His attention then turns to the question of “middle knowledge” (cf. sections 7.2 [Reformed Orthodoxy] and 12.2.2 [Karl Barth] above): Dekker published a full monograph on *Middle Knowledge* in 2000, and in the same year edited a multi-authored volume on the same topic.<sup>108</sup>

Eef Dekker’s dissertation *Rijker dan Midas* investigates the theology of Jacob Arminius on the respective concepts of freedom, grace, and predestination and their mutual relations. Although it has a historical aspect, it is a highly systematic

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<sup>107</sup> Van den Brom, *Divine presence*, 304-316.

<sup>108</sup> As the latter volume does not contain an independent contribution by Dekker, but rather is a collection of discussion papers by other authors, I omit it from analysis.

study. While it is not a direct treatment of God's knowledge, it reveals important insights that are closely related to the question of God's (fore)knowledge.

Already in the first chapter, Dekker develops a conceptual set of instruments which he employs in the analysis of Arminius's thought. Dekker makes it clear that Arminius's theology is part of the scholastic tradition and is connected to the wider theological context of his days, notably the Roman Catholic "Gnadenstreit." Dekker follows L.M. de Rijk's definition of scholasticism as "a method applied in philosophy (and theology) characterized by the use (for both instruction and research) of a constantly recurrent system of concepts, distinctions, definitions, propositional analysis, techniques of reasoning and disputation."<sup>109</sup>

For Arminius's theology, the interaction between Reformed scholasticism and Spanish (Roman Catholic, mainly Jesuit) scholasticism is utterly relevant. Dekker argues that we must inquire into the depth structures of Arminius's views on grace and predestination, and thus should pose the following questions:

- What is the modal status of reality?
- In which manner does God know reality?
- How does reality relate to God's will?
- Is God free, and what does that mean?
- Is man free, in respect to reality and in respect to God?

The answers to these questions nearly immediately result in a doctrine of predestination. Dekker invokes the distinction between a "diachronic" and a "synchronic" view of contingency, which we have dealt with before (see section 17.2 above). His claim is that only "synchronic contingency" warrants the freedom of both God and man. He furthermore introduces the idea of "two degrees of freedom": some theological positions have no freedom at all (even God is necessitated to will the actual state of affairs); others assume one "degree" of freedom: God is free in choosing this or that alternative, man is bound to the choice made by God; the third group of theologies upholds two "degrees" of freedom: not only God, but also man is free. Dekker's conceptual set of instruments for analyzing Arminius is based on these assumptions, and furthermore employs modern modal logic and possible world ontology. A crucial distinction in this context is between (absolute) *necessitas consequentis* ( $p \rightarrow Nq$ ) and (implicative) *necessitas consequentiae* ( $N(p \rightarrow q)$ ). The study of Arminius's doctrines of grace and predestination focuses on his modal ontology and his account of the degrees of freedom.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 8. The quotation (in my translation) is taken from De Rijk, *Middeleeuwse Wijsbegeerte*, 111 (or, in the first edition used by Dekker, 110).

<sup>110</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 1-18. While the main argument of Dekker's study is systematic, historical accuracy is clearly present. Its results are found in the second chapter (on Arminius's life and work, pages 19-53) and in several appendices to the book. While I skip the historical details in the main text, I provide the most significant facts, taken from Dekker's chapter 2, here:

1. Arminius received his pre-university training in Marburg, where Ramist logic was taught.
2. His first stay in Geneva was rather short and was followed by a longer and fruitful stay in Basel, where Arminius studied under Jacobus Grynaeus. He appears to have been excellent in logic and disputation.

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Dekker's systematic analysis of Arminius's writings starts with the questions of modality and degrees of freedom. It turns out that Arminius's view of necessity and contingency deviates from the standard conceptuality of his contemporaries, and that it tends to confuse "proper" and "improper" necessity. The dimensions of modality, causality, and freedom merge into each other. Arminius's conceptual deviation explains why he and Gomarus had difficulty in understanding the other's position and intentions at the deepest conceptual level. Behind the lack of conceptual clarity, Dekker discerns the clear intention of Arminius to maintain two degrees of freedom.<sup>111</sup>

In Arminius's graduation theses *De Natura Dei* (1603) and in some other texts, he discusses divine knowledge. Besides traditional statements on the nature of divine knowledge, Arminius introduces the concept of "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*) borrowed from Luis de Molina. Besides pure possibilities and realized facts, Arminius counts among the objects of God's knowledge the "hypothetical entities and the order, connections and other aspects they could have." Arminius's formulation, the quotations from Scripture (1 Samuel 23:11-12; Matthew 11:21), and related concepts such as *conservatio*, *motus*, *auxilium*, *concursus*, *permissio*, evidence his dependence on Molina's theory of middle knowledge. Arminius states that, in virtue of his infinite essence, God can have certain knowledge of even the hypothetical events, and denies that this knowledge imposes necessity on them. The certainty of this knowledge lies in God's knowing what a free human agent would do, if certain circumstances were provided. It is an intriguing fact that the inclusion of middle knowledge in Arminius's theses did not provoke any discussion; probably Molina's theory was not yet widely known among Reformed theologians.<sup>112</sup>

Together with God's knowledge, the divine will is crucial in any view on freedom, grace, and predestination. Arminius's graduation theses deal with God's will as the second capacity of the divine life. In accordance with the tradition, Arminius takes "the good" as the proper object of God's will. The will is closely

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3. It is not clear which influences during Arminius's study were decisive for his later opinions.
  4. During his years as pastor in Amsterdam, Arminius developed some deviant views on predestination, but did not publicly express them. The development of his thoughts was occasioned by biblical exegesis for his sermons on Romans, confrontation with both anti-predestinarian (Dontclock, Coornhert) and strict-predestinarian (Beza, Perkins) views, and cognizance of the writings of Roman Catholic authors (Bellarmine, but especially Molina) on the doctrine of grace.
  5. While Arminius was, at the time of his appointment as a professor of theology in Leiden, judged to be orthodox by Franciscus Gomarus, he became soon suspect for his views on grace, predestination, and other matters. His writings in this period show the implicit continuation of his adherence to the Molinist theory of "middle knowledge," but only at the end of his life did Arminius explicitly attack a supralapsarian, strict account of predestination.

<sup>111</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 54-75.

<sup>112</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 76-103. Concerning the proliferation of Molina's ideas, Dekker points to the fact that Arminius became acquainted with these around 1597, but did not publicly embrace them.

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connected to the intellect or wisdom of God: the intellect does not only know all entities, but also judges their “goodness.” This raises the question, how much room the will has to decide. Dekker states that Arminius is incoherent in this matter: on the one hand, he assumes that God can choose between alternatives, on the other hand, he states that God’s will follows the judgment of God’s intellect. A significant contribution by Arminius to the doctrine of God’s will is the tripartite distinction between direct and indirect will, and permission. By his *direct* will, God brings about something by physical causation; this amounts to absolute necessity of the consequent. God’s *indirect* will leaves intact the contingency of creatures, and operates by argumentative or circumstantial suasion. While the direct and indirect will are first-order acts of God’s will, the divine *permission* is a second-order act: the (positive) act to refrain from willing or not willing. An important motive for Arminius to speak not only about first-order acts, but also about second-order acts is to create room for free, human agency. The permissive acts of God always include an act of the human will, and are specifically concerned with sinful acts. Parallel to the direct and indirect will, Arminius distinguishes between *mediate* and *immediate* causation by God. As mediate cause, God works upon the secondary cause to produce its act; as immediate cause, God works not through the secondary cause, but directly on its act. Surprisingly, immediate causation takes place when human beings do sinful acts: God gives his general *concursum* here, but is not responsible for the sinful character of the act. The latter statements reveal a strong similarity between Arminius’s views and Luis de Molina’s theory.<sup>113</sup>

The counterpart of God’s knowledge and will is man’s freedom. Arminius is emphatic in stating that “freedom as spontaneity” is not sufficient: there must be true alternativity (the possibility of the opposite choice). Arminius is not fully clear on the question, whether this freedom regards only the act of the will, or also the power of effectuation; in most cases, he seems to restrict it to the former. Besides the (formal) freedom of indifference, Arminius discusses also (material) “Christian freedom.” While formal freedom is essential to man regardless of his soteriological state, material freedom is accidental to the state (before and after the fall, in grace and in glory). Relating man’s freedom to God’s freedom, Arminius is eager to maintain true human freedom in respect to God’s will. An inconsistency arises, however, when Arminius allows the theoretical possibility that God overrules man’s freedom. Contrary to this, Dekker argues that a freedom that is essential cannot be overruled even by God. Dekker shows that it is not fully clear whether Arminius’s anthropology should be placed on the classic, Augustinian line, or on the early modern line of “separation thinking” (namely, separation between nature and supernature). At least, Arminius’s insistence on human freedom does not lead him to the Pelagian assumption that man has it in his own power to will the good.<sup>114</sup>

In Arminius’s doctrine of predestination, all themes mentioned thus far converge. Arminius’s earliest utterances on predestination in his exegesis of Romans chapter 9 state that God’s decree follows the human choice to love or not love God. The type of predestination advocated by Arminius is “property

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<sup>113</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 104-132.

<sup>114</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 133-156.

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predestination”: God chooses the properties (faith in Christ) that are needed in order to be saved. Besides the “property predestination,” Arminius also knows about “individual predestination.”<sup>115</sup> Arminius’s final exposition of predestination distinguishes four decrees of God:

- (1) A determinate and absolute decree to appoint his Son Jesus Christ as Mediator, Redeemer, Priest and King, in order to overcome sin through his death and to acquire and distribute the lost salvation to mankind.
- (2) A determinate and absolute decree to gracefully accept those who repent and believe, and to save them in Christ, while leaving the unrepentant and unfaithful people under his wrath.
- (3) A decree to produce the means necessary for conversion.
- (4) A decree to save individual persons on the basis of his foreknowledge of their rightly using the means ordained by God.

The structure of Arminius’s doctrine of predestination is clear: the election and appointment of Christ precedes all; the “property predestination” and the “ordination of the means” follow the first decree; “individual election” follows from man’s acceptance of grace, which God knows through his middle knowledge.<sup>116</sup>

In conclusion, Dekker states that Arminius’s theology is before all designed to safeguard two degrees of freedom. This emphasis determines Arminius’s theory of modality and contingency, his doctrine of God (knowledge and will), and his doctrines of grace and predestination. In the theoretical elaboration of this motive, Arminius borrows largely from Luis de Molina. Dekker evaluates Arminius’s basic intention very positively: Arminius places himself in the main line of the Christian tradition. Any theology should, according to Dekker, do justice to the two degrees of freedom. Despite his laudable intentions, Arminius is incoherent in the deepest structures of his thought, the theory of necessity and contingency. Therefore, Dekker performs a “transposition” of Arminius’s theology to repair the inconsistencies. This transposition requires a possible world ontology, which in turn entails a real freedom for both the divine and the human will (two degrees of freedom). The theory of middle knowledge and the distinction between the direct and the indirect will of God are helpful in explaining how divine freedom and human freedom are related. A theology taking seriously Arminius’s motives puts a radical emphasis on the need of conversion, and thus does not lead to “easy-going Christianity.” Dekker states that God’s initiative in predestination is sufficiently

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<sup>115</sup> In his article “Jacobus Arminius and his Logic: Analysis of a Letter,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993): 118-142, Dekker discusses a letter in which Arminius investigated some logical sequences concerning “being saved” and “not being saved.” The results of the article are in summary included in *Rijker dan Midas* (192-197). Dekker’s conclusions are surprising, given the main thrust of Arminius’s theology: Arminius states that, if someone is saved, this is necessarily so, and the person certainly knows it. The other feature of Arminius’s “logic of predestination” is that man viewed as man falls under God’s providence, while man viewed as elect (or reprobate) falls under God’s predestination. Dekker concludes that both statements are inconsistent.

<sup>116</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 178-231.

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respected since it is up to God to choose the world order that leads to the conversion of the elect.<sup>117</sup>

In his article “You Know When I Sit Down and When I Rise Up,” Dekker turns from his Arminius study to a thematic discussion of God’s knowledge. He starts by claiming that “omniscience” is a biblical notion. Although some theological concepts seem to derive from (Greek) philosophy, the content of such concepts is taken from the Bible. Remarkably, “omniscience” is precisely *not* a predicate of the philosophical deity of the Greeks. The question is: can we uphold a coherent concept of God’s omniscience?<sup>118</sup>

According to the Bible, God knows everything, even the deepest secrets of creation and of the human heart, and conditionally future events. God knows not only past and present, but also the future. In Dekker’s view, the secondary range of “repentance” texts does not, on careful analysis, contradict the “dominant” picture of an omniscient God.<sup>119</sup>

The theological tradition has developed a full-fledged doctrine of divine omniscience. The problem of the relation between divine foreknowledge and human freedom is often solved by appealing to God’s eternity as his simultaneously seeing everything. Duns Scotus, however, pointed to the decisive role of God’s will in establishing the course of events. An outright attempt to reconcile God’s knowledge and human freedom was performed by Luis de Molina in adding the *scientia media* to the forms of God’s knowledge; this knowledge of counterfactuals is conditional on human free choice.<sup>120</sup>

In recent discussions of God’s omniscience, attention focused on the “eternity” of God’s knowledge and of its relation to human freedom. To place these issues in a wider framework, Dekker gives the following elements of a proper concept of omniscience:

1. God knows with cognitive perfection;
2. God has “limited” experiential knowledge;<sup>121</sup>
3. God knows all possibilities and all factualities, including the future, in an absolute way;
4. God is essentially omniscient.<sup>122</sup>

Addressing the problem of the coherence between this form of omniscience and human freedom, Dekker discerns three possible reactions: first, the denial of God’s knowledge being absolute; second, affirmation of God’s absolute knowledge and denial of human freedom; third, the denial of a real conflict between God’s knowledge and human freedom. The former two reactions are “incompatibilist”;

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<sup>117</sup> Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas*, 232-255.

<sup>118</sup> Dekker, “You Know,” 161-162.

<sup>119</sup> Dekker, “You Know,” 162-165. Cf. Antonie Vos’s position mentioned in section 19.2 above.

<sup>120</sup> Dekker, “You Know,” 165-167.

<sup>121</sup> This statement is directed against the claim, put forward among others by Marcel Sarot, that God must have experiential knowledge in order to be omniscient (see section 19.3 above).

<sup>122</sup> Dekker, “You Know,” 168-170.

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the latter is “compatibilist.” To test these philosophical positions, Dekker gives an interesting argument:

- (1) It is now true that Anne will have corn flakes for breakfast tomorrow.
- (2) It is impossible that God ever does not know something that is true.
- (3) Therefore, God has always known that Anne will have corn flakes for breakfast tomorrow (from (1) and (2)).
- (4) If God always knows something, then it is in nobody’s power to bring it about that God has not always known it.
- (5) Therefore, it is not in Anne’s power to bring about that God has not always known that she would have corn flakes for breakfast (from (3) and (4)).
- (6) Therefore: it is not in Anne’s power not to have corn flakes for breakfast tomorrow.

The conclusion of this reasoning fits with the determinist view; determinists have no urge to attack one of the premises. Dekker argues that the attempt to attack premise (1) fails, since there is strong plausibility that propositions about the future are true (or false, but not indefinite). Premise (2) is denied either on the ground that the actions of free human agents cannot be absolutely foreknown, or by appealing to a “timeless” notion of eternity. The former strategy diminishes God’s knowledge; the latter fails because “timeless” necessity is still necessity imposed on human actions. Most fruitful, in Dekker’s view is to attack premises (4). Following Alvin Plantinga, Dekker introduces the idea of “counterfactual power over the past”: we can do other than we in fact do, and in that case God knows the other thing instead of what we actually do. To this concept of “counterfactual power” belongs an ontology that allows for *alternative chains of events*; even if the past is (actually) unchangeable, it does not become necessary. This alternativity of events is crucial in the theory of middle knowledge, but can also be maintained apart from this theory. Dekker concludes that a coherent and viable concept of omniscience is available to Christian believers.<sup>123</sup>

Dekker’s research on divine omniscience ended with his monograph *Middle Knowledge* (2000). It is a highly philosophical analysis and discussion of the concept itself, different versions, and important objections or qualifications made to it. In this survey, I will as much as possible leave out the technicalities, and concentrate on the issues that are relevant to the theological doctrine of God’s knowledge. Of course, the very fact that he subjects “middle knowledge” to philosophical analysis tells us much about the method of the Utrecht School.

Dekker starts his study with the claim that it is highly useful to take into account the special theory of divine knowledge called Middle Knowledge. By means of two crucial quotations from Luis de Molina’s foundational work, Dekker gives the nucleus of the theory of Middle Knowledge:

I Finally, the third type [of God’s knowledge, in addition to his “natural knowledge” of all possibilities and his “free knowledge” of all actualized states of affairs] is *middle*

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<sup>123</sup> Dekker, “You Know,” 170-178. Besides the “counterfactual power over the past,” Dekker mentions the stronger idea of “backwards causality,” but argues that the latter is not necessary to explain the compatibility of God’s foreknowledge and human freedom.

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knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, he saw in his own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things – even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite ...

II ... it should likewise not be said that this knowledge (i.e. Middle Knowledge] is *natural* in the sense of being so innate to God that he could not have known the opposite of that which he knows through it. For if created free choice were going to do the opposite, as indeed it can, then God would have known *that very thing* through this same type of knowledge, and not what he in fact knows.

It is important to note that this hypothetical knowledge of what free agents would do under certain circumstances is pre-volitional, i.e. structurally preceding the act of God's will.<sup>124</sup>

Dekker makes it clear that, in order to maintain Middle Knowledge, we must adhere to "possible world" semantics and ontology, and must accept the idea of "counterfactuals." As we have seen before (section 17.2), a possible world is a maximally consistent state of affairs, including or excluding everything. Dekker uses the *S 5 model* of possible worlds, which implies that the modal status of entities (necessary, contingent, possible, impossible, essential, accidental) is itself necessary. Moreover, the *S 5 model* is consistent with *synchronic contingency*. The concept of Middle Knowledge is best taken in the version of Creation Situation: prior to his decision to create a specific world, God finds himself in a situation in which many possible worlds are known by him. The Creation Situation contains a fixed set of necessary truths (existing in all possible worlds), and variable sets of contingent truths. The difference between these sets of contingent truths makes up the difference between actualized and not-actualized possible worlds. The concept of Middle Knowledge aims at solving the problem of the relation between God's certain foreknowledge and human freedom.<sup>125</sup>

But since God fore-knows all events, it seems that even our free acts are necessary anyway. To refute this inference, Dekker examines the notion of "counterfactuals" and "counterfactual power over the past." These notions must be verified if the concept of Middle Knowledge is to be coherent at all. A counterfactual (shorthand for contrary-to-fact-conditional) has the general form

- (1) If circumstances H were to obtain, a person P would (freely) do X.

Or, to give a concrete example:

- (2) If Curley were to be offered \$20,000, he would accept this bribe.

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<sup>124</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 1-7.

<sup>125</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 7-20.

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Many philosophers have difficulties with the idea of counterfactuals, and Dekker discusses the most important objections. He concludes that counterfactuals hold for the past and the present as well as for the future. The temporal index is irrelevant; counterfactuals are precisely about freedom in the sense of synchronic contingency. An important metaphysical statement is that counterfactuals belong to the very basis of possible worlds ontology.<sup>126</sup> When the concept of counterfactuals is thus terminologically clarified, philosophers still object that counterfactuals are “groundless”: we cannot identify a basis for their truth. Dekker’s response is that counterfactuals are “counterfactually” grounded, namely in the possible world (differing from *Actua*) in which they are true. In that case, *Actua* can indeed contain the counterfactual.<sup>127</sup>

While the coherence of Middle Knowledge is established by the verification of the idea of counterfactuals, it is a matter of further inquiry whether it adequately solves the problem of incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free choice. Central to the adequacy question is the problem of “counterfactual power over the past”: do I have the power to do something such that if I were to do it, God would have had a different knowledge from what in fact he has? The basic problem is: who brings it about that a counterfactual is either true or false? Dekker argues that, given a precise description of the circumstances in the antecedent, the truth of the consequent depends on the free action of the specified agent. This dependence is to be viewed as “counterfactual” dependence: since God’s Middle Knowledge is pre-volitional (structurally prior to the decree to create the world), there are no actual agents and factual acts of their wills. Dekker maintains two principles here: first, God’s knowledge is always in accordance with the actual state of affairs (if *p*, then God knows that *p*); second, counterfactual action cannot be reduced to non-counterfactual items.<sup>128</sup> The question of dependence of counterfactuals being settled, Dekker addresses the problem of “changing the past.” He holds, presupposing synchronic contingency, that there are different, alternative “pasts”: the actual past is not necessary, but could have been otherwise. This means that, if we were to act contrary to what we actually do, the past would be “rewritten” as to fit with our counterfactual act. Dekker claims that this notion of “counterfactual power over the past” is indispensable in the Molinist theory of Middle Knowledge, which in turn is insuperable in accounting for both God’s foreknowledge and true human freedom.<sup>129</sup>

Turning to the more theological side of the matter, Dekker first discusses the relation between Middle Knowledge and eternity. He argues that God’s willing something to happen in time is consistent with God’s own existing timelessly. But does not the idea of eternal foreknowledge deprive us again of our freedom, and thus render superfluous the whole idea of Middle Knowledge? Dekker’s response is twofold: first, he claims that Middle Knowledge, contrary to the “Boethian

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<sup>126</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 24-44. On pages 53-57, Dekker makes it clear that we should not interpret the “would” of a counterfactual as a mere probability, nor as an inexorability or definiteness.

<sup>127</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 44-52.

<sup>128</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 61-75.

<sup>129</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 75-91.

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eternal presence" view, can account for God's *will* being involved in contingent states of affairs; second, he states that God's eternity contains "contingent parts" as well as "necessary parts." Furthermore, some theological objections against Middle Knowledge are discussed:

- It endangers God's sovereignty. Dekker admits that God's absolute control is partly limited, but this can only be avoided at the price of human freedom.
- It deprives God of his freedom. The alleged reason is, that God does not have "counterfactuals" of his own. Dekker rejects this argument, and states that in the Creation Situation, God has the freedom to pick out another alternative.
- Middle Knowledge does not get us beyond mere omniscience. Dekker admits that Middle Knowledge cannot be fully deduced from God's essence, but maintains that it better explains how God's knowledge can be reconciled with human freedom.<sup>130</sup>

The final step in Dekker's argument is to discuss some "background problems." The first is the nature of free will. Here, Dekker claims that disposing of alternative possibilities is fundamental to free will. This alternativity is warranted by metaphysical (synchronic) contingency. In Dekker's view, there are different layers in freedom: formal freedom, understood as the possibility to perform or not perform an act; and material freedom, as the ability to perform a good act. The former freedom is foundational to the latter. In relating human free will to the divine will, Dekker uses the concept of "concurrency," described as follows:

God's concurrence at moment *t* contributes to act *X* in such a way that, were free agent *P* not to contribute to *X* at *t*, God's concurrence at *t* would not occur either.

In brief, God's concurrence is counterfactually correlated to free human acts.<sup>131</sup>

The second "background problem" concerns the notion of "actualizing a possible world." Middle Knowledge presupposes that God actualizes part of the world, while created agents actualize another (smaller) part of it. How to account for God's choice to actualize a certain world? Dekker concludes that several *possibilist* theories fail to give a satisfactory explanation. For this reason, he develops an *actualist* theory, in which the possible worlds are seen as conceptually realistic in the mind of God; the actuality of our real world, however, depends on God's choice to make it this way.<sup>132</sup>

The overall conclusion of Dekker's study is that the concept of Middle Knowledge is tenable. It is true, one needs to endorse some metaphysical intuitions rather than others, but these can well be argued for. Dekker modestly explains the relevance of Middle Knowledge: it

really provides ... an explanation of a small piece of omniscience. If we are to take human freedom seriously (in the relevant sense), and if we believe that God is omniscient in a sense which includes knowledge of the future, then we have

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<sup>130</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 91-105.

<sup>131</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 106-123.

<sup>132</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 123-141.

reason to adhere to a version of the doctrine of Middle Knowledge. For it does explain how we could think of the relationship between God's decree and human free choice in a way which does not deny foreknowledge.<sup>133</sup>

## 19.6. *Omnipotence*

In the preceding sections, we have touched upon the issue of God's omnipotence several times. Both the personal model of God (Brümmer) and the modal ontology approach (Vos) require a conceptual analysis of this divine attribute. Gijsbert van den Brink's dissertation *Almighty God* (1992) performs this inquiry. Van den Brink starts by signaling the fact that the phrase "almighty God," once universally accepted and used by Christians, is now subjected to radical modification and even straight rejection. Van den Brink's study attempts to take up the challenges to the doctrine of omnipotence, and to develop a tenable and plausible concept of God's almightiness.<sup>134</sup>

The first chapter, however, is largely devoted to methodological preliminaries. Van den Brink argues that all science is guided by methodological and substantial presuppositions. This does not count against science; it rather means that scientists should pay *some* attention to their presuppositions, and then continue their research. This is precisely what Van den Brink wants to do in his study. As a piece of philosophical theology, his study moves on the borderline between philosophy and theology. This makes it important to clarify the epistemological status of religious belief and the criteria to which (systematic) theology must conform.<sup>135</sup>

Discussing the status of religious belief, Van den Brink criticizes the "foundationalist" view of knowledge, which accepts only propositions that are self-evident and propositions that are appropriately inferred from self-evident propositions. In modern forms, foundationalism excludes the existence of God from proper knowledge. Christians have tried to conform to these standards by producing "proofs for God's existence" or by postulating "revelation" as an independent source of self-evident knowledge. It is better, Van den Brink says, to challenge the claims of foundationalism itself. First, its requirements are not self-evident themselves. Second, the question what propositions are self-evident is undecided. Third, it is not evident why only *rational* grounds count in judging truth claims. Fourth, religious belief is not dependent on self-evident propositions, but forms a life form of its own. After refuting foundationalism, Van den Brink scans two alternative religious epistemologies. In the first place the "cognitivist" option advocated by Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga states that religious belief can be "basic" without being rationally self-evident. Van den Brink's objection is that Plantinga maintains the basic structure of foundationalism, and that he makes the status of "basic belief" arbitrary on a person's choice.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*, 146-149 (the quotation is from the last page).

<sup>134</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 1-7.

<sup>135</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 7-10.

<sup>136</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 11-20.

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Is it better, then, to give an “experientialist” account of religious knowledge: is belief always based on experience? Van den Brink objects to the reduction of faith to experience by referring to other phenomena that shape and interpret religious experience. Here, he gives a detailed discussion of George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach to religion. Lindbeck views religion not as a matter of individual decision, but as a comprehensive network of practices, beliefs and experiences. Does this make religion (and Christian faith) merely relative, dependent on person and community? Van den Brink argues that religious claims, though not *grounded* in rational considerations, can still be *defended* by rational arguments.<sup>137</sup>

This brings Van den Brink to the question of the status and functions of religious doctrines. Following on Lindbeck, he describes doctrines as “the usage rules for religious discourse within a particular religious tradition.” Doctrine and theology are *second order* activities, analogous to grammatical rules in relation to the *first order* activity of language usage. Van den Brink notices that theology often tended to concentrate on the *contents* of doctrine, with negligence of its *function*; modern theology shows the opposite tendency. A multi-functional view of doctrine is needed: it is regulative with respect to first order religious practice, but has also the function of spelling out the ontological implications of one’s adherence to this particular form of life.<sup>138</sup>

Van den Brink closes his preliminaries by listing three criteria for systematic theology. These presuppose that theology can and should pose *ontological* questions. The first criterion is “harmony with the tradition,” for Christians primarily the Bible and secondarily the credal documents of the church. To this criterion, the first part of Van den Brink’s study is devoted. The second criterion for theology is “comprehensive conceptual coherence.” Doctrine should not be selective, nor unintelligible: it must explain the *meaning* of the Christian claims. The second part of Van den Brink’s investigation corresponds to this criterion. The third criterion is “adequacy to the demands of life.” Van den Brink realizes that this criterion receives some over-emphasis in recent theology. Adequacy or relevance is person-relative, but must always be established in connection with the universal validity of the Christian faith. The third part of Van den Brink’s study draws some consequences affecting our view of life. Van den Brink warns that the three criteria should be held in continuous interaction. In this context, he sees philosophical theology as a truly theological sub-discipline, that cannot dispense with the criterion of correspondence to the tradition.<sup>139</sup>

Van den Brink starts his investigation of the concept of omnipotence with its “historical location.” In his view, a study of the doctrine’s historical ramifications helps one understand the objectives and intentions of the traditional position. Van den Brink’s historical part is centered around three issues: first, the early Christian development of the omnipotence concept as affirmed in the Apostle’s Creed; second, the medieval discussion of the distinction between God’s ordained and

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<sup>137</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 20-25.

<sup>138</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 25-33.

<sup>139</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 33-42.

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absolute power; third, the relation between divine omnipotence and the ontological status of the “eternal truths” as advocated by René Descartes.<sup>140</sup>

Concerning the idea of divine power in the Early Church, Van den Brink discusses the influential view of Peter Geach, who claims that there is a substantial difference between the biblical concept of “almightiness” and the Greek, philosophical concept of “omnipotence.” On the basis of the different terms used in Greek (*pantokrator*, *pantodynamos*) and Latin (*omnipotens*, *omnitens*), Van den Brink comes to a more nuanced classification of the aspects of the Christian concept of divine power:

A-power = God’s universal dominion over all and everything;

B-power = God’s power shown in the creation and preservation of the world;

C-power = the capacity to realize all possible states of affairs.

He states that a gradual shift, first from A- to B-power and later from B- to C-power, took place without ever eliminating the other elements of the concept. Remarkably, Van den Brink argues that in the Apostle’s Creed, the initial word *pater* indicates God’s being the Creator of the world, to which the next word *pantokrator* adds the confession of God’s sustaining and governing activity. Whereas the connection between A- and B-power was already established in early Greek Christianity, the Latin Church Father Augustine was important in making the shift to God’s capacity to bring about all possible states of affairs (C-power). This is not an implausible move, as God’s actual dominion and providence seem to logically presuppose a “background” capacity to mobilize whatever serves God’s purposes. In conclusion, Van den Brink notes that the early shifts in the meaning of omnipotence require a (conceptual) analysis of the *nature* of (God’s) power.<sup>141</sup>

In medieval theological reflection on God’s omnipotence, the distinction between ordained (*ordinata*) and absolute (*absoluta*) power (*potentia*) was rather dominant. It was first advocated by bishop Peter Damian, who objected to the idea that God’s power fully coincides with God’s actual will and actions: this would impose a limitation on God and thus damage God’s perfection. Originally, none of the theologians using the distinctions wanted to state two different powers in God, nor was the “absolute” power thought of as operational. It served as a background concept to uphold God’s freedom in opposition to the classical, Aristotelian “principle of plenitude” (the idea that all genuine possibilities are actually realized). In the later discussion, some complications concerning the distinction arise. A tendency to “operationalize” God’s absolute power occurred, merging with the identification of the “absolute” power with God’s “extraordinary” power to act outside the normal laws of nature or even the moral laws. Later 15th century theologians draw this approach to the extreme by speculating about the ultimate possibilities for God, including the idea of the divine lie. This undermined the trustworthiness of God and the stability of the world order, which the initial advocates of the distinction sought to warrant. Luther’s and Calvin’s protest to the distinction was mainly directed against this extreme operationalization of God’s absolute power. Van den Brink concludes that, despite the later extremism, the

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<sup>140</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 43-46.

<sup>141</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 46-67.

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distinction remains useful in emancipating Christian thinking from the ancient philosophical necessitarianism.<sup>142</sup>

A specific problem in defining the scope of God's omnipotence is the existence of necessary, abstract entities or "eternal truths," such as numbers, possible worlds, laws of logic, and universals. On the one hand, it seems contrary to the Christian faith to make these truths independent of and equally necessary to God. On the other hand, to assume that God can *ad libitum* change eternal truths undermines the basis of human thinking and knowledge. René Descartes gave a remarkable solution to this dilemma, although it is difficult to establish a coherent interpretation of his utterances. It seems that Descartes attributes to God, who has established "eternal truths" as the laws of creation, the power to change them. This "universal possibilism" runs against the stated foundation of Descartes' philosophical enterprise: *cogito ergo sum*. A crucial role in Descartes' argument is played by the freedom of the divine will (upon which the "eternal truths" are contingent) and by the incomprehensibility of God's power. Our rational capacity does not dictate the possibilities of God's will. According to Descartes, God has eternally determined himself to choose the eternal truths; whereas these are *immutable*, they are not *necessary*. Seen from the tradition of Christian theology, Descartes could have escaped the dilemma between dependence of truth on God and dependence of God on eternal truth by assuming that the eternal truths exist in the mind of God. This safeguards both their *eternity* and their *dependence* on God. The traditional solution implies a logical equivalence between God's knowledge and God's creative will. Descartes made an operational distinction between knowledge and will, since he attempted to find an independent starting point for physics: the physical laws do not (immutably) depend on God's omniscience, but are (logically mutable) instantiations of God's (immutable) will. Moreover, Descartes ideal of clear and distinct human knowledge requires the assumption of physical laws *outside* the (infinite and incomprehensible) mind of God. Descartes' view on the status of "eternal truths" serves the autonomous enterprise of human rational science.<sup>143</sup>

Van den Brink's historical investigation has set the agenda for the subsequent conceptual analysis: the *nature* of power, the *referent* of omnipotence, and the *scope* of omnipotence have to be examined. The importance of conceptual analysis lies in showing that a coherent concept of divine omnipotence can be upheld, contrary to some modern allegations that this concept leads to contradictions. Van den Brink admits that the procedure of conceptual analysis presupposes an analogy between our concepts and God; an assumption that may turn out false.<sup>144</sup>

Concerning the first problem, the nature of power, Van den Brink notices that there is an overwhelming variety of studies and definitions of power. A common distinction is made between *power over* other people (the *conflictual* interpretation of

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<sup>142</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 68-92.

<sup>143</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 93-113.

<sup>144</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 113-119. It is remarkable that Van den Brink speaks about the "analogy" between our concepts and God, since Vincent Brümmer rejects the "analogy" view in favor of "univocal" predication of concepts to God (see section 18.1 above).

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power) and *power to* bring about actions or states of affairs (the *ability* interpretation of power). Van den Brink argues that “power over” is always reducible to “power to”; therefore the latter is basic. This insight also leads Van den Brink to rejecting the “zero sum” theory of power. It is important to apply these basic insights also to divine omnipotence: it is “power to,” not primarily “power over.” Moreover, “power” is a dispositional concept, which means that certain abilities are present even when they are not actually exerted. A concept related to “power” is “authority.” Here we can distinguish between *de jure* and *de facto* authority; within the latter category we can say either that someone is *in* authority or that he or she is *an* authority. In this final case, a person does not only influence our conduct, but also our beliefs. In conclusion, Van den Brink states that with respect to God, “power” is to be positively connected with God’s “authority” and to be viewed as “the ability to bring about states of affairs,” not necessarily including a conflict with other powers.<sup>145</sup>

The second conceptual problem concerns the quantifier “omni” in omnipotence. Philosopher J.L. Mackie has initiated the debate over the “Paradox of Omnipotence”: can an omnipotent being make things he cannot subsequently control? The conclusion seems evident: omnipotence is an incoherent concept. Van den Brink notices that there is increasing consensus as to the solution of the dilemma: either God’s omnipotence is understood as essential, and then the actions ascribed to God in the paradoxes are construed as (logically impossible) contradictions; or God’s omnipotence is accidental, and then there is no harm in limiting it. A complete lack of consensus shows, however, in the question of defining omnipotence itself. Van den Brink’s contention is that a definition should be kept simple, and can be further qualified by analysis of the relevant aspects. Concerning the concept of omnipotence, he discusses seven aspects:

1. Logical impossibility and necessity. It can hardly be decided whether or not God’s omnipotence extends to the logically impossible and the logically necessary.
2. Omnipotence in relation to time: should a time-index be included in a definition of omnipotence, and does omnipotence include the ability to change the past?
3. Omnipotence and essentialism: does God’s power also govern essential truths? If God’s power is limited to contingent truths, the problem is that omnipotence seems to become meaningless.
4. Omnipotence and unity: can there be two different omnipotent beings? Van den Brink argues that this cannot be logically excluded.
5. Omnipotence and omniscience: can God create a being that has knowledge not known by God himself? Van den Brink argues that this is but a variant of the “Paradox of Omnipotence.”
6. Omnipotence and goodness: if God is unable to do or bring about evil, doesn’t he stop being omnipotent? According to Van den Brink, it can be stated that God “is able” to do evil, but that he “can” not do evil because of his good and faithful character.

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<sup>145</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 119-134.

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7. Omnipotence and freedom: it is hard to account for free human actions on a strong concept of omnipotence. One could argue for a “weak” form of divine permission; or affirm indeed that God exhausts all power; or hold that God’s determining power peacefully accords with voluntary human actions (compatibilism).

In conclusion, Van den Brink gives a brief definition:

Def.:  $x$  is omnipotent =  $x$  has the power to do all things.

In addition, Van den Brink notices that most conceptual problems concerning omnipotence are construed and can be solved in parallel ways; all amount to an implicit difference between a literal, philosophical concept of omnipotence and a theologically qualified conception.<sup>146</sup>

It is to this distinction that Van den Brink turns in the third place. He states that the aforementioned discussions show that the most crucial question concerning omnipotence cannot be settled by means of a context-free analysis of the involved concepts alone, but must be examined from the religio-theological context. According to Van den Brink, omnipotence is ascribed to God for two different reasons. The first reason is that omnipotence is included in the very *concept* of God. This can be argued in an inductive or a deductive way. The inductive argument fails on the different accounts given by religious people of the power of the deity. The deductive argument, forcefully developed by Anselm, results in a concept of omnipotence that gives rise to the insoluble problems of the “Paradox of Omnipotence.”<sup>147</sup> Therefore, Van den Brink turns to the second reason for ascribing omnipotence to God: God has revealed himself as omnipotent through covenantal *actions*. Van den Brink distinguishes the “Abrahamic” conception of omnipotence from the “Anselmian” conception. He does not endorse a simple dilemma here, but points to the concrete convergences and differences between both approaches. In Anselm’s argument, Van den Brink acknowledges the intention of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Van den Brink rejects the accusation of “Greek” thinking: the Greek gods were not almighty, nor does pagan philosophy include omnipotence in its concept of God. This means that the Christian concept of omnipotence, even in the Anselmian mode, can only be understood from the biblical tradition, witnessing a *personal* conception of God.<sup>148</sup> In the context of God’s actions and promises, we encounter the exclamation “Nothing is impossible for God!” Thus, God’s acts of redemption seem to presuppose “unrestricted possibilities for action.” Van den Brink lists five differences between the two concepts, which are schematized here:

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<sup>146</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 134-158.

<sup>147</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 159-167.

<sup>148</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 167-176.

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Anselm	Abraham
“omnipotence” functions as a constative in the context of reason	“almighty” functions as an expressive in the context of worship
“omnipotence” is derived from a pre-conceived concept of God <i>and</i> power	“omnipotence” is disclosed in the realization of God’s promises by his actions
God is necessarily omnipotent	God can resign from using his power
God’s omnipotence includes everything that is logically possible	God’s omnipotence is bound to God’s (moral) nature
Omnipotence is examined in respect to the upper logical limits	God’s omnipotence includes weakness

In conclusion, Van den Brink subscribes to Peter Geach’s thesis that we should distinguish between a philosophical and a properly Christian concept of omnipotence. Whereas the philosophical concept can be *understood* coherently, a Christian cannot *believe* in it. What Christians believe in, is God’s “almightiness” as God’s ability to do all things which are compatible with his nature.<sup>149</sup>

As the final step of the conceptual analysis, Van den Brink returns to the question of the relation between God’s omnipotence and “eternal truths.” The concept of omnipotence is now understood as the biblical conception of “almightiness.” Van den Brink distinguishes four positions on this problem. First, universal possibilism states that “nothing is impossible for God” should include the possibility that God changes logical laws and other “necessary” truths. Van den Brink argues that this position cannot be definitively refuted. The problem remains, however, that universal possibilism runs counter to our elementary intuitions and forms of life. Moreover, it would damage the *trustworthiness* of God. The second position, universal creationism, starts with the claim that the Creator – creature distinction is exhaustive, that is, all things are either God or created by God. In creation, God could have made different truths or logical frameworks; once they have been created, the actual truths are valid. As an objection against universal creationism, Van den Brink states that if God created “properties,” he must have created his own properties and thus his own nature. This amounts to an unacceptable split between “God” and his “nature.” As a third position, theistic activism (advocated among others by Karl Barth) argues that necessary truths are indeed necessary, but are constantly dependent on God’s creating them. Van den Brink makes the same objection as to universal creationism: theistic activism implies that God creates his own nature. Moreover, the claim that the “eternal truths” are in fact necessary severely diminishes the freedom of God and the freedom of creatures. The fourth position, labeled as standard independentism, makes a clear cut distinction between things that are under God’s control and entities (such as logical laws) that exist independently of God. A way to maintain this strict distinction is to conceive of abstract concepts as merely linguistic tools to cope with reality. Van den Brink argues that this is unsatisfactory: there is a reference to extra-linguistic reality in concepts and logic. Where all four positions

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<sup>149</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 176-184.

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fail, Van den Brink offers his own solution: we can understand abstract entities as *participating in the mind of God*. In this way, the laws of logic and other necessary truths are not viewed as independent of God, nor are they inadequately seen as “under God’s control”; they simply co-exist with God as divine thoughts.<sup>150</sup>

The final part of Van den Brink’s study takes up the third criterion for systematic theology: adequacy to the demands of life. Granted that a coherent conception of almightiness can be developed, can we live with it? Van den Brink’s aim is to show that this conception is indeed preferable to others. The problem of practical adequacy of the doctrine of almightiness circles around two issues: human freedom and responsibility, and the problem of evil.<sup>151</sup>

In Christian thinking, there is a tension or even contradiction between the following statements:

- (1) God creates human agents such that they are free with respect to certain actions and, therefore, morally responsible for them.
- (2) God is omnipotent in the sense that he has (sovereign, providential) control over all existent states of affairs.

Is it possible to combine these claims in a conceptually coherent way? Van den Brink argues that the two statements occur throughout the Bible; therefore, a biblical concept of “almightiness” must face this difficulty as well. A radical solution to the dilemma is to interpret God’s almightiness as “omnidetermination”: solely God’s will and power are responsible for all states of affairs. The only possible understanding of human freedom here is the compatibilist: man voluntarily does what God determines him to do. Van den Brink argues that the compatibilist view of freedom is insufficient: we are only morally responsible for actions we can avoid performing. Acknowledging that we are “slaves of sin,” Van den Brink maintains the natural, contra-causal freedom to act otherwise. But is this sort of freedom compatible with God’s omnipotence? The most promising solution to the dilemma is to maintain that God *has* all power, but qualify this by stating that God’s *exercise* of this power is self-limited. On analogy of an electrical circuit scheme, Van den Brink argues that God can choose either to act *through* a free human action or to act solely, *without* interceding human actions.<sup>152</sup>

The problem is deepened, however, in the Christian doctrine of grace: how does God bring people to faith? Does the stated (libertarian) freedom of man lead to an Arminian view? Van den Brink argues that in many cases, apparent contradictions can be solved by taking into account different perspectives: from one side, *x* can be true, while from the other side *y* can apply. It should be realized that viewing things from different perspectives requires not only intellectual flexibility, but also a complete change in one’s “perceptual set” and attitudes. After reviewing different forms of theological “perspectivism,” Van den Brink offers his own perspective by introducing the metaphor of the *beggar*. While it may be intuitively repulsive, Van den Brink argues that it accounts for the typical asymmetry in the God-man relationship. God gives us an infinite gift that changes our lives. If we do

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<sup>150</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 184-203.

<sup>151</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 204-206.

<sup>152</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 206-226.

not accept it, we do not receive it; in that case we are responsible for missing the gift. If we do accept the gift, still God is fully responsible for the whole event. Van den Brink claims that the beggar perspective overcomes the lacks of the other approaches. It does not draw on modern autonomy nor does it give up the essential freedom of man, and it has a rich tradition in Christian history. Together with other possible metaphors, it is useful to describe the decisive constitution of the personal relationship of faith in God.<sup>153</sup>

The final difficulty to which the concept of God's almightiness should be confronted is the problem of evil. Van den Brink describes it as "the most incisive and enduring challenge to the Christian doctrine of almightiness." Often, not only God's almightiness, but his very existence is at stake here. Is a theodicy possible? Van den Brink argues that, instead of justifying God, a theodicy seeks to explain our *talk* about God on the basis of his own revelation. A theodicy acknowledges that Christian believers cannot take the evil in the world for granted.<sup>154</sup>

Crucial to Van den Brink's theodicy-argument is the so-called free will defense, which rests on two assumptions: first, God is able to bring about all those states of affairs which are logically possible *for him* to bring about; second, it is logically impossible (for God) to *make* a person do something *freely*. Given these basic assumptions, the fact that so much evil in the world is utterly pointless can be countered by appealing to God's having morally sufficient reason for permitting its existence. But we cannot succeed in this by merely exclaiming that God's reasons are hidden to us, or by explaining away the occurring evil in connection to a higher good. Van den Brink gives a surprising answer to the question of pointless evil: instead of counting against theism, it is in favor of a "free will defense" theism, since the possibility of doing true evil is constitutive of moral responsibility. This does not explain away the existence of pointless evil: it is merely the *possibility* of evil that is a prerequisite for morality, while the *actuality* of evil is still deemed wrong.<sup>155</sup>

Granted that the free will defense adequately responds to the existence of evil, how does it fit in with God's power? If a person's act depends on her own choice, then God does not control this act. Van den Brink argues that his concept of "almightiness" allows for God's giving up part of his power. A more serious objection is that the free will defense seems to bind God to creating a world with free moral agents. Van den Brink rejects the assumption that God is necessitated to create the "best possible world": God is free in creating the world as he wants it to be. Moreover, even in a world full of "free willing agents," God can choose to overrule these in order to accomplish his own purposes. Another objection against the free will defense takes the opposite direction: God cannot have the power to determine the actions of free agents. This objection is typically brought forward by process theologians, who basically assume that all "actual beings" are partially self-determining. This assumption, however, is not self-evident: it is logically possible that some beings are completely powerless. The final objection against the

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<sup>153</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 226-240.

<sup>154</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 240-246.

<sup>155</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 246-254. Van den Brink's solution coincides with Brümmer's view discussed in section 18.1 above.

free will defense is that, even if God leaves room to free agents, his not preventing the occurrence of evil is morally reproachable. It is useful here to distinguish between *responsibility* and *blame*: whereas God is co-responsible for the evil brought about by humans, we cannot blame him for permitting evil, since Christians trust that God is constantly and actively involved in the *redemption* of evil.<sup>156</sup>

In the final analysis, the success of a theodicy depends on whether we can embrace the “moral universe” of which it is a part. For Christians, God and his love are the highest good. In this universe, evil does not in itself contribute to the good, but only inasmuch as God can make something of it. The deepest example of how God does this is found in the cross of Christ: God became involved in evil and suffering in order to overcome it. Whereas Van den Brink acknowledges that, in addition to his own study, a trinitarian account of almightiness, paying due attention to the work of the Son and the Spirit, could be worked out, he claims that the results of his research are well suitable with a trinitarian doctrine of God. There is no opposition in God between his love and his power. From the perspective of a personal relationship with God as he has made himself known in his revelation, we can hope to find our way in speaking appropriately about the Almighty God.<sup>157</sup>

### **19.7. Transcendence**

The last contribution to the Utrecht School project on the doctrine of God is given by Arjan Markus, who discusses God’s transcendence in *Beyond Finitude* (2004). Besides its proper theme, its significance for our analysis lies in the fact that it rounds off the Utrecht approach to the doctrine of God, showing a convergence of different lines of thought.

A significant aspect of this study is revealed in the subtitle, which connects an attribute of God with the “meaning of life.” This reminds us of Vincent Brümmer’s explanation of religious language as functioning in the context of a “life form” and a “life view” which has (in the case of religious belief) God as the primary determinant of meaning (cf. sections 17.1 and 18.1 above).

The procedure followed by Markus in his investigation is as follows: first, he establishes a “working definition” fit for detecting relevant material; second, he discusses important strands of thinking about transcendence from, respectively, classical Greek philosophy, biblical scriptures, and subsequent theological traditions; third, he explains the idea of “meaning of life” and lists criteria for adequately ascribing meaning to life; fourth, he provides an analysis and evaluation of different aspects of God’s transcendence as proposed in important traditions of Christian thought; and, fifth and finally, he confronts the conception of God’s transcendence he has just developed with some important atheistic objections.

Surprisingly, the term transcendence is rather novel as a technical term, while the idea of transcendence occurs throughout the tradition, using other terms. Markus’s working definition provides important guidance for his inquiry: “God’s

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<sup>156</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 254-267.

<sup>157</sup> Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, 267-275.

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transcendence is God's being other than the universe in being beyond its limits and limitations."<sup>158</sup>

Markus's next step is to refine his terminology by investigating important parts of the history of the concept of transcendence. First, he looks into Greek philosophy with an emphasis on *Pre-Socratic* thinking. Against the background of Homeric popular religion, early Greek thinkers searched for the ultimate ground(s) of reality. They came upon a conception of the divine that has both strongly transcendent and strongly immanent traits. The *transcendence* of the divine implies the removal of anthropomorphic features and of all sorts of limitations in existence and capacities. On the other hand, the Pre-socratics thought of the divine as eminently *immanent* in reality: they did not state a distinct, independent and individual existence of the godhead. In a brief addition on Platonic and post-Platonic philosophy, Markus comes to the conclusion that it continues the emphasis on the non-anthropomorphic nature of the divine, while it differs from the Pre-socratics in stating the non-immanence of the divine. The last claim in turn causes a fundamental problem as to how the godhead can relate to the world of which he is transcendent. In retrospect, Greek philosophy results in a view of God's transcendence that includes an ontological difference between God and the world and an epistemological gap between the human and divine.<sup>159</sup>

The next chapter is devoted to "God's Transcendence in the Biblical Scriptures." While acknowledging the long history of development and the variety in the biblical writings, Markus argues (with biblical scholars as Walter Brueggeman and Brevard S. Childs) that we can take the final, canonical form of Old and New Testament as authoritative.<sup>160</sup>

Concerning the Old Testament, Markus scans a number of names and designations of God. This leads to the conclusion that the Old Testament views God (YHWH) as transcendent in the sense of being other than created reality and not being bound by creaturely limits of existence and capacities. Moreover, God's transcendence is combined with his being present and being deeply involved with his people and his creation. Of specific interest is the term "holy" which is attributed to God as an all-embracing characteristic. God's holiness signifies, first, his complete otherness as the eternal, omnipresent, incomparable, all-wise and majestic God; second, his righteousness and steadfast love; third, his "moral" goodness and his concomitant anger against sin. Since some aspects of God's holiness seem to point to divine "emotions," Markus enters into a discussion of the alleged anthropomorphic character of the emotions, passions or affections ascribed to God. His conclusion concerning anthropomorphic language in the Old Testament is that it should not be read in a crude, literal sense, but as metaphorical, indicating a serious likeness to human phenomena while maintaining the otherness of God. The overall conclusion from Markus's survey of Old Testament material is

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<sup>158</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 1-15. The quotation is found on page 15 (italics in the original).

<sup>159</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 21-39.

<sup>160</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 40-41.

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that God is depicted as transcendent in the threefold sense of being *non-immanent*, being *a distinct individual*, and being *non-anthropomorphic*.<sup>161</sup>

Turning to the New Testament, Markus argues that important aspects of the Old Testament conception of God's transcendence are continued. A clear distinction is drawn between God the Creator and his creation. As the Creator, God has unsurpassable power and sovereignty. A relatively new notion is the designation of God as "father." While primarily functioning in the relation between Jesus and God, it is also used for the relation between God and creatures. It indicates not only familiar intimacy, but also God's exaltedness. Besides these similarities between Old and New Testament, it is often stated that New Testament conceptions of God show a greater deal of (Hellenistic) abstraction, for instance by using predicates like "eternal," "invisible," "incorruptible" etc.. Markus argues that these predicates can well be understood at the background of the Old Testament revelation. Important in the New Testament witness is the great emphasis on Jesus and the Spirit as bringing God's presence with men very near. This confirms the conclusion regarding the Old Testament, that God's transcendence does not exclude his closest presence.<sup>162</sup>

After investigating ancient Greek thought and the biblical scriptures, Markus discusses important schools of thought from the Christian tradition: classical theism, process theology, and negative theology. As these three all elaborate notions taken from Scripture, they can be helpful in testing the concept of transcendence on its significance for the meaning of life.<sup>163</sup>

"Classical theism" is represented by thinkers such as Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. This form of theism describes God as "perfect being," possessing an array of great-making properties. The doctrine of simplicity is often seen as the key of this conception of God: there is in God no composition out of different parts. Thus, temporal differentiation is denied (eternity), as well as a change in God's essential (intrinsic) properties (immutability). The concept of simplicity entails other divine properties: aseity, pure actuality, immutability, eternity, impassibility, necessity, and incomprehensibility. In addition, God has capacities like knowledge, will, and power with the adherent passions as love, mercy, grace, and wrath. In classical theism, creation is described as *creatio ex nihilo*: creation is totally dependent on God for its existence. As continued creation (*creatio continuata*), God sustains the world by timeless causation. The relation between God and the world is a "mixed relation" in which change takes place on the part of the creation but not on God's part. Classical theism endorses a doctrine of the incarnation of the Son and indwelling of the Spirit, which combines the intimate presence of God with us, and his remaining transcendent.<sup>164</sup>

Process theism is a clearly recognizable school of Christian panentheism, stressing the unity of God and the world, or God's immanent presence. Headed by Alfred N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, process theism states that God and

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<sup>161</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 41-69.

<sup>162</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 69-86.

<sup>163</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 87-88.

<sup>164</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 88-100.

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world are *interdependent*. God is not, however, fully identified with the world, because he has self-awareness and self-identity. Process thought states a *dipolarity* in God: in his *concrete* pole, God is identical with the all-inclusive reality of the world at a given moment; in his *abstract* pole, God has distinctive essential attributes that are actualized in his concrete existence. Besides pairs of opposite properties divided among the two poles, important characteristics such as love, knowledge and power have an abstract and a concrete component themselves. God changes as his "abstract" qualities are actualized through his "concrete" existence, and thus God is the unsurpassable being who surpasses himself. Concerning creation and divine action, process theism states that everything is in process; God embraces the whole of the world process and acts by "prehension": on the one hand, God "receives" the whole of experiences, and on the other hand he "gives back" the whole of experiences to other entities. God is not only receptive, but also responsive: he makes known his own aims with the world, and thus influences the course of events by *persuasion* (not by coercion!). For God's power, this implies that it is non-coercive and non-intervening; as to God's knowledge, God knows all that can be known, which increases throughout time. Markus argues that process theism does not provide room for an orthodox doctrine of incarnation and Trinity: Jesus Christ is a mere symbol for God's responsive love, and the persons of the Trinity are mere roles played by God.<sup>165</sup>

Negative theology, as the third option, states that we can only say what God *is not*, rather than what he is. As a line in the classic Christian tradition (comprising Dionysius the Areopagite, Johannes Scottus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, and to a certain extent Thomas Aquinas), negative theology denies the application of concepts to God not in order to disaffirm them, but to show that our language and thought are not appropriate to describe God. At the bottom of this negative approach lie positive beliefs concerning God, and as the ultimate goal of negative theology we find the mystical union with God. In modern conditions, negative theology has changed in scope to the effect that the real existence or presence of God is squarely denied. In conclusion, God's transcendence is viewed by negative theology primarily in epistemological and conceptual terms: God is beyond comprehension.<sup>166</sup>

On the basis of the examination of ancient Greek thought, biblical Scripture, and Christian tradition,<sup>167</sup> Markus comes to a further definition of God's transcendence in four categories.

First, God has ontological transcendence: he is free from the limits (time, space, death) of created existence, he is independent, non-anthropomorphic, individual, and non-immanent.

Second, God has moral transcendence: he possesses perfect virtues like love, justice and mercy.

Third, God's capacity transcendence means that his power and knowledge are infinite.

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<sup>165</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 100-115.

<sup>166</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 116-127.

<sup>167</sup> Summarized in Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 128-132.

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Fourth, God is conceptually transcendent as he goes beyond the limitations of our conceptual abilities.<sup>168</sup>

Having discerned the four fundamental aspects of God's transcendence, Markus takes the important step of illuminating the idea of discovering meaning in life. This clarification is needed in order to test the aspects of transcendence on their contribution to our finding meaning in life.

Markus presupposes that "meaning of life" is more than a matter of subjective taste. The ascription of meaning is embedded in a view of life. Meaning of life can be described as "an overall evaluation of life in terms of coherence, purpose and value." "Meaning" has a strongly existential concern. Ascribing meaning to life has a structuring and a regulative function: it helps us to "place" our experiences, and gives guidance to our actions.<sup>169</sup>

In critical discussion with subjectivist and objectivist positions, Markus argues that "meaning of life" has a subjective aspect in that it must be personally experienced, an objective aspect in that it depends on and is co-determined by objective conditions, and an inspirational aspect in that it comes somehow from the "outside."<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, continuing the views of Vincent Brümmer, Markus argues that one's sense of the meaning of life is governed by a basic conviction concerning the *primary determinant of meaning*. In order to judge the validity of someone's ascription of meaning to life, Markus distinguishes between *internal* criteria (only valid within a given view of life) and *external* criteria (applicable to different views of life).<sup>171</sup>

The *external* criteria are listed in two groups of four:

- External criteria of formal adequacy:<sup>172</sup>
  - Internal consistency
  - Internal coherence
  - External consistency
  - External coherence
- External criteria of practical adequacy:
  - Existential suitability
  - Universalizability
  - Integrity
  - Inspirational quality

Two additional *internal* criteria are:<sup>173</sup>

- Continuity with authoritative sources
- Accordance with practice. The main Christian practices are, according to Markus: trusting God, worshipping God, serving God, loving God, and praying.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 132-134. The wording of the categories above is maximal; different versions of theism provide qualifications to this maximal statement.

<sup>169</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 137-144.

<sup>170</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 144-150.

<sup>171</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 150-153.

<sup>172</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 157.

<sup>173</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 158

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Markus shows his adherence to the Utrecht School (Brümmer) by stating that in the Christian faith the relation between God and the believer is understood in personal rather than impersonal terms.<sup>175</sup>

The next part of Markus's study elaborates the four categories of God's transcendence in confrontation with the criteria for ascribing meaning to life.

The first issue to be examined is God's *ontological* transcendence. In classical theism, a rather absolute degree of divine otherness and transcendence is ascribed to God, entailing attributes as simplicity, aseity, pure actuality, timelessness, immutability, impassibility, and necessity. In recent theology, this approach to the doctrine of God is often criticized as being a philosophical construct alien to the biblical, Christian faith. Markus notices that in its own intentions it is rather an interpretation of the biblical scriptures, which has thus to be judged on its accordance with these scriptures.<sup>176</sup>

Classical theism clearly maintains the biblical notion of *creatio ex nihilo* and the implied ontological distinction between Creator and creation. As to God's continuing agency in the world, classical theism states that God's agency is timeless. Divine timeless causation is understood as the single act by which God, from his timeless and changeless existence, brings into existence the universe out of nothing, sustains it, and acts in it. The fact that this is an immutable, eternal act of God does not impose necessity on creatures (here Markus appeals to the Scotist disconnection of immutability and necessity; cf. section 17.2 above). Markus argues that this is a viable and intelligible explanation of God's agency.<sup>177</sup> Difficulties arise, however, concerning the *responsive* character of God's love and agency towards creatures. The relation between God and his creation is viewed by classical theism as a "mixed relation" in which change takes place only on the part of creatures, not on God's part. In itself, this is viable, but it turns out that classical theism depicts the relation in important respects as asymmetrical, non-emotional, non-reciprocal, and thus impersonal. On these grounds, Markus concludes that classical theism is insufficient with respect to the overtly responsive character of God's agency and passions witnessed in Scripture.<sup>178</sup>

Process theism presents a significantly different view of God: God and world are seen as interdependent, while God is distinct from the world by his unsurpassability, his self-awareness, and his self-identity. Some process theologians explicitly offer their doctrine as a better expression of biblical truth than the classical theistic view. On a very fundamental level, Markus argues that process theism fails to do justice to the biblical emphasis on the ontological distinction between Creator and creation. Concerning divine agency, process theism articulates the way in which God acts in strongly responsive terms. This is, says Markus, an advantage over classical theism in the light of biblical witness. The problem of insufficient ontological distinction recurs, however, in that God's

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<sup>174</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 161-166.

<sup>175</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 166-170.

<sup>176</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 173-177.

<sup>177</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 177-184.

<sup>178</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 184-189.

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agency can scarcely be distinguished from other agents. The same picture arises regarding the love of God: process theists affirm God's love, but fail to point out the distinctly personal character of the loving relationship. The overall conclusion in face of the authoritative sources of the Christian faith is that the promising lines in process theism are compromised by its lack of an ontological distinction between God and the world.<sup>179</sup>

Markus's own position on God's ontological transcendence consists of several aspects. First, he states that for his existence God is absolutely independent. From this follows God's ontological distinctness with his personal individuality. The doctrine of creation (*creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continuata*) warrants both God's independence and his presence in and involvement with the world. A second main issue is the elaboration of God's personal reality. Markus argues that we have to ascribe *temporal* characteristics and mutability together with *eternity* to God. This entails a partial departure from the classical theistic tradition. Markus discusses four objections against his conception of God's personality: first, God transcends the category of a person; second, God's perfection prohibits the ascription of humanlike characteristics; third, mutability and possibility would imply a loss of divine happiness; fourth, this conception implies a loss of stability in God's character.

An important line of response is that some changes occur in God, while he remains the same in his essential properties and in his existence. This brings Markus to his third main statement: God has necessary existence. Here he distinguishes between ontological and logical necessity: the strongest form of necessity would be to claim that God's non-existence is logically impossible. Markus points out that indeed the *concept* or *title* of God logically implies his necessary existence; this does not entail, however, that an *occupant* of the title (YHWH, for instance) does actually exist. Thus, the logical necessity of God's existence can only be claimed in a qualified or broad sense. It means that God, understood as maximal greatness, exists in all possible worlds.<sup>180</sup>

The next category to be examined is God's *moral transcendence*.

Classical theism emphasizes God's *ontological goodness*, and derives his moral qualities from it: God is abundantly good in all that he is and does. The difficulty is that classical theists commonly define moral goodness as the will's subordination to reason ruled by the eternal law. This definition cannot apply to God since he is not subjected to any law. Is God then immoral? It seems that God sometimes transgresses morality, for instance in the command to Abraham to kill his son Isaac. Being the sole norm of moral goodness, God is himself beyond the moral law.<sup>181</sup>

Process theism ascribes moral transcendence to God. Besides moral goodness, it speaks also of aesthetic goodness: God is responsible for the beautiful ordering of the world process. A distinct category of moral goodness is hard to find in process

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<sup>179</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 197-209.

<sup>180</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 216-238. For the distinction between "title term" and "proper name," cf. also sections 18.1 (Brümmer), 19.3 (Sarot) and 19.4 (Van den Brom).

<sup>181</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 239-249.

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theism. Moral goodness is in a sense a category prior to God; it also exists as an attribute of God's abstract pole. Its realization, however, consists of a sympathetic interaction with the other entities in the world process.<sup>182</sup>

Judged from the authoritative sources (biblical scriptures), both classical and process theism fall short. The biblical ascription of goodness and holiness to God includes passions and responsiveness; this is neglected by classical theism. Process theism, on the other hand, fails to take God's moral goodness as more than his sympathetically synthesizing all experiences in the world process. Moreover, the all-encompassing "prehension" by God seems to imply that God shares our evil deeds and feelings as well.<sup>183</sup> The test from Christian practice gives an equal finish: both theistic conceptions yield confidence in a benevolent and trustworthy God.<sup>184</sup>

In his own appraisal of God's moral transcendence, Markus takes up four problems. First, he addresses the question of God as the ultimate moral norm. On the basis of God's ontological independence, it is hardly thinkable that the highest moral ideal exists independently of God. Markus defines God's moral goodness as "the sum total of God's character traits and dispositions that lead him to intentional agency in accordance with the (i.e., his own) moral ideal."

This interpretation, secondly, raises the question of whether God is arbitrary and immoral. The first reply to this suspicion is that God, due to his simplicity, always wills and acts in accordance with his essential properties (including goodness and justice). Markus holds that on the one hand human reason cannot always *see* their rationale while it can still *be there*; on the other hand he claims that some moral principles are necessary and beyond God's decision. The third problem addressed by Markus is whether God is so morally good that he can never do evil. Against this *impeccability* it is often argued that in that case God is no longer praiseworthy for his good deeds. After exploring possibilities for ascribing *impeccability* in a non-essentialist, dispositional way, Markus concludes that in regard to God his praiseworthiness is not diminished by his essential goodness, because he *wills* the good he *does*. Not because he can do otherwise, but because he willingly does the good, God is to be praised. Fourthly, Markus briefly discusses the problem of evil: is the existence of evil an argument against God's goodness? This would only hold if, first, God were to distribute the good equally to all his creatures; if, secondly, God intended primarily to cause universal happiness; and if, thirdly, God acted according to different moral standards.<sup>185</sup>

The third category of God's transcendence concerns his capacities of knowledge and power.

In classical theism, God is held to be omnipotent in the sense of "able to realize all logically possible states of affairs that are in accordance with his own nature." God's power is shown in his creating and sustaining the world. Classical theism also ascribes omniscience to God: God knows all that can be known. Does this include future contingent actions? According to one line (Boethius, Thomas

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<sup>182</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 249-253.

<sup>183</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 253-256.

<sup>184</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 256-257.

<sup>185</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 257-272.

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Aquinas), the future is present to God in his eternity, so that he can “see” the future. The other, Scotist, line gives God’s will a central role in the transition from knowledge of mere possibilities to knowledge of actuality. God’s omniscience does not impose necessity on reality.<sup>186</sup>

In process theism, God’s power is maximal because he encompasses the whole world. This power, however, is persuasive rather than coercive: God cannot causally intervene in the course of nature. Process theism ascribes omniscience (“prehension”) to God, but excludes his knowledge of the future from it.<sup>187</sup>

From the biblical scriptures, Markus derives four aspects of God’s power. First, it is not blind, but acts according to God’s intentions. Second, it is not abstract but concrete. Third, it is unlimited and universal. Fourth, God can realize all his purposes either unilaterally or indirectly. Whereas classical theism is mainly in line with Scripture (except for vagueness in assigning room for human freedom), process theism’s view of God’s power falls short in denying any causal power to God and, what is more important, denying God’s ultimate victory over evil. As to God’s knowledge, both forms of theism are roughly in continuity with the biblical scriptures. Process theism’s denial of God’s knowledge of the future breaks this continuity.<sup>188</sup>

As it comes to Christian practices, God’s power is most relevant for the practice of seeking God’s help. The classical view of omnipotence is quite satisfactorily here. Process theism, though ascribing maximal power to God, cannot account for divine intervention, and thus denies a basic presupposition for seeking God’s help. God’s eschatological victory over evil and death as the perspective of Christian hope is especially endangered by the process view.<sup>189</sup>

Balancing the discussion of God’s “capacity transcendence,” Markus starts with noticing the central problem of human freedom. He rejects the “spontaneity” view of freedom in favor of the “alternativity” view: the human will is free because it can choose otherwise than it actually does. According to Markus, both biblical scriptures and Christian practices presuppose this sort of freedom.<sup>190</sup> Concerning God’s power, Markus argues that the classical view is the most promising in that it defends a real, decisive power of God. However, it runs the risk of determinism, leaving too little room for free human agency. Against the allegation that divine and human powers are competitive, Markus points out that God is ontologically distinct and operates on a different level than creatures. Rather than causing people to act in a certain way, God causes people who freely act. On one significant point, Markus rejects classical theism, namely the idea that God’s agency in the world is identical with the one single act that God is.<sup>191</sup>

In view of God’s knowledge, Markus states two fundamental requirements for an adequate conception: God’s knowledge must be viewed as encompassing, and it must be seen as intimate, not merely intellectual. On the latter aspect, Markus

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<sup>186</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 273-278.

<sup>187</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 278-280.

<sup>188</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 281-283.

<sup>189</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 284-297.

<sup>190</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 297-298.

<sup>191</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 298-310.

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argues that this “intimate,” “experiential” knowledge of God is based on the actual world. Still, God is omniscient in every possible world (omniscience is an *essential* property). Following the classical statement that God knows also “future contingents,” does this knowledge endanger human freedom? Markus sees a possible line of argumentation in stating that there is only an implicative relation between an event and God’s knowing this event; if another event would happen, God would know this instead. In the final analysis, however, Markus retreats to an interpretation in terms of high probability: God so completely surveys all possibilities, that he can sufficiently foresee what will happen.<sup>192</sup>

The final test for God’s “capacity transcendence” is the problem of evil. It is often stated as a logical problem: given the existence of evil, God cannot be omnipotent and omniscient and all-good. Arguing from the free will of human beings, Markus refutes this argument: it is compatible with God’s nature to create a world in which evil can occur due to free and natural causes. The logical problem being defeated, there remains an “evidential” problem: the amount of evil in the world weighs heavily against the plausibility of an almighty, all-wise and all-good God. Markus points out that the weight of this argument depends on the valuation of free will: is it worth taking the risk? Finally, the occurrence of evil poses an existential problem. Markus admits that on this level the problem cannot be solved, but can at best be put in a perspective of faith.<sup>193</sup>

The fourth and final category of God’s transcendence is conceptual transcendence. This aspect is discussed in confrontation with negative theology.<sup>194</sup>

Absolute or radical negative theology originates in Greek philosophy. It can appeal to some biblical themes, but it fails to do justice to the fundamental biblical notions of revelation and divine presence. While Scripture makes it clear that God is not like human people and exceeds our comprehension, it does not follow that we can have no true knowledge of God. Markus argues that the radical interpretation of God’s incomprehensibility by Christian mystics is influenced by philosophical motifs and that a more moderate reading suits better to the biblical testimony.<sup>195</sup>

Developing his own view on God’s conceptual transcendence, Markus starts by distinguishing between comprehending or grasping God and touching or reaching God. Full comprehension is impossible, but partial understanding is possible. “Partial understanding” does not mean that we know few things about God, but that what we know is only a small part of the fullness of God’s being.<sup>196</sup>

What, then, are the limits of our understanding God? Markus distinguishes between *intelligence* limits and *rationality* limits. The former indicates the actual contents of our knowledge and understanding. The latter can be divided into rationality as a *categorial* property (humans are rational) and rationality as an *evaluative* property (it is rational to believe in God). In evaluative rationality we can in turn

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<sup>192</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 310-321.

<sup>193</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 321-329.

<sup>194</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 330-332.

<sup>195</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 332-337.

<sup>196</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 342-345.

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distinguish between *formal* and *material* rationality. Any reasoning that follows appropriate strategies in a consistent way is formally rational. Any reasoning that adequately corresponds to the circumstances is materially rational.<sup>197</sup> Applying these distinctions to God, Markus notices that God's rational capacities infinitely exceed ours. This is not to say, however, that God is absolutely beyond our intelligence. Nor is God absolutely beyond our categorical rationality: given that we think rationally, that would imply that no knowledge of God is possible at all. God's transcendence of our intelligence and rationality is partial, with the effect that we cannot comprehend him. As to formal rationality, Markus argues that it applies to our knowledge of God: we can use correct procedures of reasoning about God. This does not mean that we can comprehend God, since our formal rationality is bound to the same limits as our categorical rationality. The same holds for material rationality: we can have true and adequate beliefs about God, though partial to the extent in which God can be known by us. In conclusion, Markus states that our limited intelligence and our categorical and material rationality allow for a partial understanding of God, which is based on God's gracious self-revelation.<sup>198</sup>

The final part of Markus's study addresses the main question: how does the developed concept of divine transcendence contribute to finding meaning in life? After it has been tested on internal Christian criteria, it should also be confronted with external criteria. Markus performs this confrontation in discussion with atheist thinkers.<sup>199</sup>

The first line of attack is that the Christian faith violates the values of Western democracy and human dignity. The appeal to authoritative sources and to God's will would be especially disastrous. Markus refutes these objections, and shows that Christian faith and life can well stimulate participation in a free and democratic society. The fact that Christians sometimes have been violent in imposing their views on others does not count against this. The atheists continue to argue that belief in God's transcendence violates the intellectual autonomy of man and prevents him or her from thinking. In response, Markus shows that all views of life, including the atheist's, are regulated by ideas or persons that are authoritative.<sup>200</sup>

An important field of discussion is the external coherence and consistency of the belief in God's transcendence with other beliefs we hold. God's ontological and capacity transcendence seem especially to run against established scientific knowledge. Markus argues that a proper distinction between physical and metaphysical explanations can help to solve the tension between faith and science. This does not exclude the possibility that scientific knowledge influences the way in which Christians understand, for instance, God's agency in the world. And, the other way round, in the physical domain we can reckon with God's exceptional

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<sup>197</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 345-350.

<sup>198</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 350-354.

<sup>199</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 357-359.

<sup>200</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 362-370.

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intervention in the course of events. Only a deterministic understanding of natural laws would give problems here, but that would in itself be a metaphysical claim.<sup>201</sup>

The final test for Markus's conception of God's transcendence is its adequacy in regard to existential needs. First, there is the need for ultimate meaning in life. Atheist and nihilist thinkers have argued against this, and stated that self-created, subjective meaning suffices. Such an approach is attractive to only a few; most people need at least a "myth" that gives some support in finding meaning. He argues that the Christian view of God's transcendence provides a quite natural and suitable framework for ascribing meaning to one's life.<sup>202</sup> Second, belief in God's transcendence implies the hope of immortality. Again, atheists have argued that immortality is a useless illusion. Still, many people have difficulty accepting that life simply ends with our death. Christian faith gives consolation and perspective.<sup>203</sup> In the third place, mankind has a strong need for justice and retaliation. Belief in a supremely good and mighty God gives strength in enduring evil and fighting against it.<sup>204</sup> Fourthly, when it comes to "life events" like birth, illness, and death, God's transcendence can help to "cope" with them.<sup>205</sup> In sum, the belief in a transcendent God can in many respects inspire and help one to live an integrated and meaningful life. The discussion with the atheists shows that both sides have their difficulties: the discussion cannot be obviously decided. Therefore, Markus ends his study with an invitation to examine the Christian faith and to take the chance of being convinced by it.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 370-378.

<sup>202</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 378-387.

<sup>203</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 387-390.

<sup>204</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 391-392.

<sup>205</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 392-396

<sup>206</sup> Markus, *Beyond Finitude*, 396-401.



## 20. Putting Together the Utrecht Doctrine of God

It is hardly possible to sketch a coherent picture of a single doctrine of God arising from the different contributions discussed above. I will first summarize the methodical and substantial results of each contribution, and subsequently search for commonalities and differences.

Vincent Brümmer's contributions to the doctrine of God proper have a strong methodological and foundational character. In *Speaking of a Personal God*, he continues the argument put forward in *Philosophical Inquiry*. Religious God-talk is taken as a life fact; it is argued that we use everyday concepts in speaking about God. Speaking about God has a "gerundive" character: it prescribes a way of life *coram Deo*. Traditional claims defending God's incomprehensibility are refuted. Rather than being analogical, Brümmer argues, our language about God is metaphorical: "we understand X (God) by comparing it to Y and by noticing that X is in some way or another like Y – even though we are fully aware that X differs from Y in many other respects." In scientific theology, metaphors are extended into *conceptual models*, "sustained and systematic metaphors." Brümmer states that in theology the model of God as personal and relational is most appropriate, although he warns that even such general models have their limits. The personal relation with God differs from a causal, manipulative relation. Brümmer argues that God leaves intact our human freedom in dealing with us. This fundamental insight is worked out by Brümmer in discussing the irresistibility of grace, the impeccability of God, God's agency in the world, and the problem of evil. Brümmer's position on these questions reveals the following thoughts:

- God's relation with us is a relationship of love, and it is rationally impossible to reject God's love;
- God's inability to do evil is to be understood not in an essentialist sense, but in terms of God's faithfulness and character;
- we can speak about God's acts in relation to acts of creatures as providing the sufficient condition for their taking place; God acts intentionally;
- God's permitting evil is justified by his creating persons with a free will, since this contributes to a better world.

As is already indicated in the foregoing lines, the personal relationship with God is characterized as love. The latter concept is investigated in Brümmer's *The Model of Love*. Brümmer proposes to treat God's love as the "root metaphor" or "key model" of systematic theology. In order to "calculate" the conceptual "price tag" of this proposal, the meaning of "love" must be established. Brümmer argues that, beyond an emotion, love is an attitude, more precisely a relational attitude of mutual fellowship and identification. From this basic statement, Brümmer derives a relational understanding of sin, grace and atonement. God's loving us entails God's being vulnerable to our rejection of his love. While God is independent in his self-existence, his actual mode of existence consists of reciprocity, in which he "needs" us.

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Antonie Vos's theory of divine attributes starts from an entirely different approach than Brümmer's conceptual inquiry: it forms the culmination of his refutation of absolute evidentialism and of the development of a Christian ontology. Fundamental to this theory of properties is the proper distinction between essential and accidental attributes. This distinction must be understood at the background of the semantics of possible worlds. Whereas traditional theology commonly denied the occurrence of accidental properties in God, Vos argues that God's relational properties must be accidental (i.e., occurring in some but not all possible worlds). Otherwise, the necessity of God's own being would transfer to the objects of his relational properties, so that all reality would be necessary. The core of the doctrine of God, according to Vos, is formed by God's essential properties which he has in all possible worlds. Around this center, a rich variety of accidental properties deploys. Some attributes are elaborated by Vos by way of example. He explains God's immutability not as the absence of diachronic change, but as the synchronic invariability of God's essence throughout all possible worlds. This essential immutability guarantees that God never stops being God: he cannot lose his essential properties. Moreover, Vos deduces from the invariability of God's individual nature that there can be only one God: it is not possible for someone to be God and to have a different nature consisting of different properties. The uniqueness of God is traditionally expressed by the doctrine of simplicity. Vos opposes the strict mutual identification of God's attributes, and points to the Scotian formula of *distinctio formalis a parte rei* as a helpful device in the doctrine of divine attributes: there are some distinctions that cannot be legitimately eliminated. Other distinctions, between essential and necessary properties, between common and individual nature, and between universality and individual existence can and should be eliminated. God's nature is individual, and cannot be shared with other entities.

The doctrine of divine simplicity, touched upon by Vos, is further examined by Gerrit Immink. Basic to his investigation is the distinction between the fundamental, kerygmatic intentions of this doctrine and its logical elaborations. His most important discussion partners are Barthian kerygmatic theology and Alvin Plantinga's reformulation of theism. Immink analyses important versions of the doctrine of divine simplicity and argues that these all suffer from problems in their logical and ontological presuppositions. Disconnected from these problematic aspects, Immink argues that three legitimate theological notions are at stake in the doctrine of simplicity: God's transcendence, independence (aseity), and unity. In order to think through these notions, a strong equivalence between God and his (essential) properties is required, but not a strict identity.

God's passibility is the subject of Marcel Sarot's research. Against the traditional statement of God's impassibility, he proposes a version of passibilism that can meet the classical objections. The central thesis is that God can suffer, and can undergo changes in his inner life. The most important argument is that God's love implies God's being vulnerable. Furthermore, from an analysis of emotions Sarot deduces that God needs to have a "body" in order to localize his experiences. Sarot develops this notion of divine corporeality in connection with process theology, and concludes that the world can be viewed as the "body of God."

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In Luco van den Brom's study on divine omnipresence, we have an example of stringent conceptual analysis seeking the conceptual requirements for speaking about God's worship-worthiness in relation to space. In Van den Brom's view, the traditional understanding of omnipresence as a contrast with spatiality fails, since it cannot sufficiently account for God's agency in reality. Drawing on a relational understanding of space, Van den Brom develops a model of higher-dimensional spatiality as God's mode of omnipresence. According to this view, God is really present in the whole of our reality, but is at the same time superior to it and has all space at his disposal.

Eef Dekker's research focuses on God's foreknowledge in relation to human freedom. Interacting with the theology of Arminius, Dekker holds that two "degrees of freedom" are central: not only God, but also man is free to will alternative things. Addressing the question of God's omniscience, Dekker argues that God essentially has absolute omniscience which includes his knowledge of the future. This omniscience is strongly connected with God's will; Dekker argues that God's will determines the actualization of the future. Dekker further investigates the theory of middle knowledge. An adequate understanding of middle knowledge requires:

- endorsement of possible worlds semantics;
- usage of the *S5* model of modal logic, which is consistent with synchronic contingency;
- acceptance of the notions of "counterfactuals" and "counterfactual power over the past."

Dekker shows that the contents of God's hypothetical knowledge are "counterfactually grounded" and occur only on the basis of a free will choosing to actualize them; God's knowledge always corresponds to the actualized states of affairs. Dekker adopts the notion of "concurrence" to express the insight that only if a free human agent chooses to perform a certain act, God assists it by providing all circumstances required for the act. The result of this version of the theory of middle knowledge is that we can uphold *both* the essential omniscience of God in combination with God's will *and* the freedom of human agents.

Gijsbert van den Brink's discussion of God's omnipotence has three important perspectives. First, he examines the *historical development* of the concept. This investigation reveals important *conceptual problems* that are discussed in the second part of his study. A *systematic evaluation* follows, in which the doctrine of omnipotence is connected to other theological themes. Van den Brink describes God's omnipotence as "the power to do all things." Interestingly, Van den Brink makes a strong distinction between the "Anselmian" conception of omnipotence as a property of the "perfect being" and the "Abrahamic" view of almightiness as the redemptive power of Yahweh. Van den Brink distances himself from the traditional emphasis on "logical possibilities" in the doctrine of omnipotence (although he argues affirmatively that "eternal logical truths" reside in the mind of God). In the systematic evaluation, the question of freedom is central: God's almightiness does not result in the annihilation of human freedom.

The final contribution to the Utrecht School's doctrine of God project is given by Arjan Markus, dealing with God's transcendence. Markus is in dialogue with primarily classical theism and process theism. His research results in a sort of

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“revised theism” that incorporates fundamental insights from classical theism but corrects it with insights from process thought. Markus distinguishes four categories of divine transcendence:

- God is *ontologically* transcendent in that he exists independently, has distinct individuality, and exists necessarily;
- God is *morally* transcendent as he is the highest norm of morality and is ultimately good himself; the latter is understood by Markus in a dispositional sense of “never acting out of character”;
- God is transcendent in his *capacities* of knowledge and power: his power is decisive, but does not rule out human free agency; his knowledge is unsurpassable, though he knows the future by high probability rather than determinate certainty;
- God is *conceptually* transcendent in that we cannot fully “grasp” or “comprehend” God; this is not to say, however, that we cannot have true rational knowledge (though partial) of him.

Most of the Utrecht studies in the doctrine of God contain preliminary discussions of methodological questions. As a transition to the further analysis of the Utrecht doctrine of God, it is worth taking notice of the directions in which Brümmer’s disciples further develop his approach.

Luco van den Brom (see section 19.4 above) starts his investigation with a discussion of the concept of God, based on an analysis of relational notions from the Bible and religious experience. Van den Brom points out that the concept “God” is far from univocal: people attach entirely different meanings to the word “God.” It can be interpreted either as a proper name or as a predicate. Following the analysis by Nelson Pike, Van den Brom concludes that “God” functions both as a proper name and as a title term (similar to “Caesar”). He argues that the biblical identification of YHWH as “God” (proper name) presupposes a concept of “God” (title term).

The understanding of what it means to call YHWH “God” is found in the context of worship. The Bible clearly claims that YHWH alone must be worshipped. “God” is a reverential predicate: God deserves reverence and adoration.

The basic properties of God which account for his being worthy of worship are his *holiness* and his *glory*. Van den Brom states that God’s showing his holiness and glory is not of a manipulative, but of a personal, relational nature. A significant distinction made by Van den Brom concerning God’s basic properties is the distinction between first order and second order attributes. God’s glory is a first order predicate: it is directly ascribed to God. God’s holiness is a second order predicate: it qualifies other properties and acts of God (instead of being directly predicated of God).

Furthermore, Van den Brom explicates his view of God as a person and as an agent. He argues that all essential characteristics found in an analysis of human personhood apply to God as well. Being a Person, God performs intentional acts. It is difficult to identify God’s acts in distinction from the chain of causal factors in the created world. Van den Brom argues that the criterion is found in the consistency of certain events with God’s revealed purpose: salvation. Within God’s

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actions, Van den Brom distinguishes between God's directly bringing about something (creation), God's concurrence with the course of events, and God's permission of certain events. Particularly the third category requires the concept of "double agency": both God and man are involved in the causation of events. On this point, Van den Brom criticizes Vincent Brümmer for limiting the double agency to a general concurrence without special intervention by God.

According to Marcel Sarot (see section 19.3 above), philosophical theology deals with two sorts of questions: (1) questions about the logical relations between the concepts of the Christian faith, and (2) questions about the relations of these concepts to the concepts used in other contexts.

As to the criteria of theology, Sarot distinguishes sharply between philosophical and confessional theology. Philosophical theology should meet the standard of intelligibility, coherence and consistency and aim at a general, universal consensus. Confessional theology additionally includes consonance with the (confessional) tradition and adequacy to human experience, and is limited to acceptance within the confessional community.

Beyond the question of criteria, Sarot's discussion of method addresses the "basic logic" of the concept of God. Sarot argues that the Christian doctrine of God is rightly described as "perfect being theology." The practical implication of the fact that God is "a Being greater than which cannot be conceived" is that he is worthy of total and exclusive worship. Moreover, within a coherent view of life, God is the primary determinant of meaning.

Gijsbert van den Brink (see section 19.6 above), as a final example, expounds the "Brümmerian" methodology in interaction with the "cultural-linguistic" approach initiated by George Lindbeck. While arguing that religious claims can be defended by rational arguments, Van den Brink sides with Lindbeck in describing doctrine as "the usage rules for religious discourse within a particular religious tradition." Compared to other members of the Utrecht School, Van den Brink shows the strongest adherence to a particular confessional position. This methodological choice is consistent with the substantial move he makes from an "Anselmic" concept of *omnipotence* toward an "Abrahamic" concept of *almightiness*.

The preceding survey supports the earlier conclusion that there are different emphases and lines of thought in the Utrecht School (see chapter 17 above). I will now attempt to balance the similarities and differences concerning the different aspects of method and content.

All investigations under study have a highly argumentative character. The belief content of the Christian faith is examined in its rational, conceptual structures. Different interpretations are valued by their intelligibility, consistency and coherence. There is also a potentially fundamental difference of approach. As we have seen, Brümmer performs his conceptual analysis in the context of a "language game" and "life form" approach. This implies that concepts are valued not in regard to ultimate truth, but in terms of adequacy within the given "life form." Brümmer does endorse a "critical realism" that is interested in the "reality depicting" character of religious language, but he does not elaborate a full

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ontology. As a consequence, arguments need not always be logically coercive, but can involve a more relative, subjective preference. Vos, on the contrary, makes more far-reaching claims in striving for a Christian ontology that represents the true reality of God and his world. In this ontological climate, more stringent logical arguments are required, mainly in the form of modal logic. Of the “disciples” of the Utrecht School, Eef Dekker comes closest to Vos’s strict ontological-logical approach. Most others concentrate on the conceptual analysis with little mentioning of ontological aspects.

Parallel to this initial difference is the understanding of the divine being and attributes. All members of the Utrecht School subscribe more or less explicitly to the “perfect being” tradition as characteristically voiced by Anselm of Canterbury. The elaboration of this basic statement differs, however. In the line of Vos, we find a strong interpretation of God’s essential properties. The basic distinction here, following on the Scotist distinction between necessary and contingent theology, is between essential and accidental attributes. Essential attributes like immutability, eternity, omniscience and simplicity are maintained in considerable continuity with classical theism. With other Utrecht scholars, we find more distance from the traditional understanding of these attributes. Brümmer himself argues against the interpretation of *eternity* in terms of timelessness; this would not account for Yahweh’s actions in time nor for his personal existence. Instead, for Brümmer eternity means that Yahweh’s existence as determinant of our possibilities of actions is not temporally limited. The critical stance regarding the doctrine of eternity is reflected in Van den Brom’s, Sarot’s, and Markus’s studies. Vos, Immink, and Dekker hold a positive view of eternity as “beyond time.” The same holds for the closely related attribute of *immutability*. As to God’s *omniscience*, Sarot, followed by Markus, argues that God’s knowledge is involved in time, is partly experiential, and probable rather than certain. Vos and Dekker, to the contrary, hold to God’s absolute and eternal omniscience, while at the same time stating that God’s knowledge of contingent things is contingent itself.

Behind several arguments for or against a given interpretation of God’s attributes is the chosen foundational model: Brümmer argues that we should speak about God in personal and relational terms. This presupposes freedom on our part, and involvement and (possibility of) change on God’s part. The ontologically-oriented part of the Utrecht School spells out the presupposition of this freedom: reality is structurally contingent, and this accounts for alternativity in both God’s and our willing.

A concrete demarcation line within the Utrecht School appears in their appraisal of process theism.

In reaction to Vos’s dissertation, the famous Dutch philosopher of religion H.G. Hubbeling asked Vos whether he should not continue with process theism rather than with Alvin Plantinga’s revived classical theism. According to Hubbeling, process theology does justice to the relational character of reality and to human freedom. Hubbeling objects to Vos’s metaphysics on the ground that God’s knowledge of facts still makes these facts necessary.<sup>1</sup> Vos’s answer reveals that funda-

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<sup>1</sup> H.G. Hubbeling, “Procesfilosofie versus Plantinga: Een kritische bespreking van het werk

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mental questions are at stake here. He acknowledges the fact that process theologians like Charles Hartshorne attempt to give an alternative to absolute evidentialism, but argues that it leaves intact the basic modal structures of antique thought: contingency is understood as temporal change. Instead the possible world semantics as a theory of modal logic provides “a miraculous hermeneutical key” to the classic tradition of Christian ontology and theology. Against Hubbeling, Vos argues that contingency is ineradicable and rooted in fundamental logical theories of propositions and negation. He shows that Hubbeling’s conclusion that God’s knowledge makes things necessary rests on invalid reasoning: there is only an implicative necessity (if God knows that  $p$ , then  $p$ ), but both  $p$  and God’s knowing it can be contingent. As Vos says,

such immutable knowledge of God is perfectly consistent with free acts and contingent events. It seems scandalous, but it is deeply and comfortingly true. Nothing escapes from God’s complete and absolute knowledge, and he acts in accordance with this highest possible knowledge.

Finally, Vos rejects the pivotal notion of divine self-realization through the world process. He argues that entities (including God) are determined by their essential properties, not by accidental properties.<sup>2</sup>

In the later course of the Utrecht School, the issue of process thought returns. As we have seen, Marcel Sarot’s views on God’s passibility and corporeality show considerable affinity to process thought (see section 19.3 above). In a more restricted form, we find sympathy for aspects of process theism in Arjan Markus’s study of God’s transcendence (see section 19.7 above). In one case we encountered a direct confrontation within the Utrecht School on this matter, between Sarot and Van den Brom. The understanding of the world as God’s “body,” advocated by Sarot, is rejected by Van den Brom; against process theology, Van den Brom holds that God is not merely the passive recipient of experiences, but is an intentional and distinct agent (see section 19.4 above). On a different topic, a discussion took place between Sarot on the one hand and Nico den Bok and Eef Dekker on the other hand. From the perspective of process theology, Sarot argued that God does not have an eternal, outside-of-time knowledge of events, and cannot with certainty know the future. Den Bok and Dekker contradict Sarot’s arguments and presuppositions.<sup>3</sup>

Where does the “father” of the Utrecht School, Vincent Brümmer himself, stand on the question of process thought? The discussion volume *De liefde bevraagd* contains a contribution by J. Van der Veken, arguing for a substantial parallel

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van Dr. A. Vos: *Kennis en Noodzakelijkheid*,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 36 (1982): 238-245. After a survey of Vos’s dissertation, the last two pages give a critical discussion in which Hubbeling advocates process philosophy against Plantinga and Vos.

<sup>2</sup> A. Vos, “Procesfilosofie versus Plantinga: Een repliek,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 37 (1983): 326-333.

<sup>3</sup> M. Sarot, “Gods volmaakte kennis,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 46 (1992): 23-33; E. Dekker, N.W. den Bok, “Eeuwigheid, tijd en alwetendheid: Een antwoord aan Marcel Sarot,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48 (1994): 216-229.

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between Brümmer and process theology.<sup>4</sup> As Van der Veken says, Brümmer's existential analysis of God's love as foundational reality accords well with a conceptual elaboration in terms of process thought. The fact that Brümmer rejects classical attributes of God like aseity and impassibility points especially in this direction. However, Van der Veken argues that Brümmer's personalism (God and man are seen as distinct persons in a dialogal relation) is conceptually insufficient. Presupposing that loving God is not exclusive but inclusive, Van der Veken states that we have to think of all things in God. In this panentheist reality, God is the highest relational instance. Relation is not a merely abstract, conceptual thing, but is real and mutual, between God and the world. Moreover, the dynamics between the "abstract" pole and the "concrete" pole of God in process thought bring about a true history of God: in his covenantal relation with the world, God becomes who he is. God stands in a relation of love to all creatures, and is enriched by this universal love.

Interestingly, Brümmer's 'Socratic reply' in *De liefde bevroagd* does not enter into the issues raised by Van der Veken. Should we interpret this as a sign of uncertainty on Brümmer's part?

Taken as a whole, the Utrecht contributions to the doctrine of God show at once an affirmation and a revision of the traditional doctrine. As a whole, the classic doctrine of God as the greatest being with a distinct set of great-making properties is accepted. On several points, however, the traditional views are modified and further developed in the light of modern philosophical and theological insights and with help of a sophisticated set of instruments for conceptual and logical analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Van der Veken, "Vincent Brümmer en Charles Hartshorne: Op zoek naar een relationele ontologie," in *De liefde bevroagd: Discussies over het boek Liefde van God en mens van Vincent Brümmer*, ed. by Luco J. van den Brom (Kampen: Kok, 1997), 68-76.

## 21. Conclusions and Discussions

My way of proceeding in this concluding chapter will be as follows: first, I will give a brief statement of the most important conclusions concerning the central question of this chapter: how are method and content connected in the doctrine of God of the Utrecht School? Second, I will relate the findings concerning Utrecht to the earlier parts of this study on Reformed Orthodoxy and Karl Barth. The third and largest part of this chapter is devoted to a review of discussions that occurred on aspects of the Utrecht School. Doing so, I take stock of some significant points for the evaluation in chapter 22.

### 21.1. *Connecting Method and Content*

Concerning the main question of this study in relation to the Utrecht School, we can deduce from section 17.5 and chapter 20 above the following conclusions:

1. The Utrecht contributions to the doctrine of God clearly follow the methodological approach described in section 17.1. Pieces of the doctrine of God (normally separate attributes) are examined as concepts with a certain content, presuppositions, implications, and relations with other concepts and themes. Also the objections against different versions of the traditional attributes are carefully weighed. Brümmer's plea for "rational interpretation" is followed by most of his disciples in that they remodel historical theological positions into standardized systematic positions. The Utrecht School distinguishes "philosophical theology" as a genre from "confessional or dogmatic theology." Emphasis is on the criteria of intelligibility, consistency, coherence, and life adequacy.
2. Within this general pattern, we find some individual variants. Brümmer and most of his pupils investigate and evaluate the concepts of the doctrine of God in a "world view" approach in which intelligibility, coherence, practical relevance and authenticity together form the points of reference. Some of the Utrecht scholars (Van den Brink, Markus) keep philosophical and confessional theology closer together, and explicitly include the consonance with biblical and confessional authority in their investigations. With respect to the "worldview" approach, Vos and Dekker most clearly take a different course in arguing from the basis of a Christian ontology; as a consequence, the amount of "hard" logical reasoning is larger in their studies.
3. All Utrecht School contributions to the doctrine of God stand in the classic tradition of understanding God as perfect being (Anselm of Canterbury). Moreover, a specification of this tradition in the sense of a personal and relational understanding of God is found with all members of the School. This means that their method is substantially filled from the outset. The other way around, the "perfect being" tradition itself provides basic statements about God which imply that the great-making properties of God can be logically analyzed.
4. The personal and relational understanding of God leads to a number of adjustments made to the traditional concept of God, concerning attributes such as

immutability, aseity, and eternity. Some members of the School undergird the relational understanding of God with a theory of contingency accounting for freedom on both God's and our part.

5. The Utrecht School project in the doctrine of God aims at clarification, justification and further development of the concepts used in this doctrine. Common to the different contributions is an apologetic intention and effect: they demonstrate that the central concepts of our God language do have a rational sense. In some cases, this goes along with creative proposals such as Van den Brom's model of God's omnipresence as multi-dimensionality, and Dekker's concept of middle knowledge.

## ***21.2. Relating the Utrecht School to Orthodoxy and Barth***

In addition to these conclusions, if we relate the contributions of the Utrecht School to the previous parts of this study (Reformed Orthodoxy and Karl Barth), we can make the following remarks (which will be elaborated in chapter 22):

1. There is a considerable amount of continuity between the Utrecht School and Reformed scholastic theology. This holds for the method of theology as well as for the contents of the doctrine of God. Some qualifications, however, are in place:
  - a. In the historical component of Utrecht School research, a pervasive reinterpretation of classic medieval and Protestant scholasticism is performed.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Methodological continuity resides in the basic acceptance of rational inquiry into doctrine and the usage of conceptual analysis. In this respect, however, there are also differences. It goes without saying that the Utrecht scholars employ modern versions of logic and argumentation (analytical philosophy and modal ontology respectively) that in practice yield different results than the roughly Aristotelian instruments used by the Reformed Orthodox (but see chapter 4 on the methodological variety within Reformed Orthodoxy). A more significant point seems to be the different place of rationality in the Utrecht approach. Whereas Reformed Orthodox methodology places God's revelation first, and assigns merely an instrumental role to reason, rationality seems to play a more independent role in judging doctrinal views with several of the Utrecht thinkers. To be sure, Vincent Brümmer's list of criteria includes intelligibility within the framework of tradition, and disciples like Van den Brink and Markus put a stronger emphasis on this criterion by speaking of "consonance with the (authoritative) tradition or sources." Still, the sub-discipline of philosophical theology, in distinction from dogmatic or systematic theology, focuses more on logical consistency and coherence and life adequacy.
  - c. The latter remark concerning the different place of rational criteria smoothly connects to the relation between Utrecht School and Reformed Orthodoxy with respect to the contents of the doctrine of God. Again we meet a global continuity together with significant revisions. Most contributions to the doctrine of God by Utrecht scholars take the tradition of "perfect being theology" (classical theism) as a point of departure. While it is received mainly in

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<sup>1</sup> See section 21.3 below for some criticism of this reinterpretation.

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the medieval (Anselmian, Scotist or Thomist) form and in the modern form by philosophical theism (Plantinga, Pike, Swinburne and others), there is considerable continuity with Reformed Orthodoxy as well, as is most clear in the historically oriented part of the Utrecht School (Van Asselt, Vos, Dekker, Beck). The adherence to classical theism is surprisingly the least clear in Vincent Brümmer himself: drawing on a Wittgensteinian approach to religion, he makes the basic choice for a relational, personal understanding of God that leads to considerable revisions of traditional notions in the doctrine of God. Some traditional aspects are maintained, but in a different key.

2. The relation of the Utrecht School to Karl Barth's theology is less explicitly present in the material under study. I suggest the following insights:

- a. Generally speaking, the Utrecht School is a reaction to the dominance of Barthianism in Dutch theology. A central point of debate is Barth's rejection of natural theology. Brümmer discusses Barth's emphasis on God's Otherness and his concept of analogy, and concludes that it obscures the possibility of having any true knowledge of God. For Brümmer's conceptual analysis, the applicability of our concepts to God is crucial, and Barth cannot sufficiently account for this (see section 18.1 above). Related to this problem is the different status of revelation in the Utrecht School and Barth's theology. The Brümmerian line of Utrecht, in particular, hardly employs the concept of revelation as the basis of religious talk. Brümmer focuses on the human use of concepts within the religious "language game."
- b. In Vos's dissertation *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid* Barth is singled out for continuing the line of classic theology that does maintain the fundamental distinction between necessity and contingency. Although Vos states that Barth's elaboration fails, he intuitively stood in the right line. Objectionable in Vos's eyes is Barth's radical relativizing of rationality. In the later publications focusing on Duns Scotus, Barth is sometimes mentioned, for example in an article on Barth's view of the motives for the incarnation. Here Barth's affinity with a supralapsarian, christological approach is demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>
- c. Vos devoted a separate article to "The research problematic of Barth's dogmatics."<sup>3</sup> He places Barth's theological development and the magnificent *Church Dogmatics* in the context of 20th century thought. Vos sees a promising starting point for connecting Barth and modern thought in Barth's profound absorption of the classical tradition of Christian theology. The common foundation of Barth's and our theology should be Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Christ not only *has been* and *has spoken*, but *is still present and speaking*.<sup>4</sup> The body of Vos's article is devoted to Barth as a "scholar." Vos praises Barth for his profound affinity with the great thinkers of the Church: Augustine, Anselm, Calvin. The problem with the Barth research

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<sup>2</sup> Arjan Plaisier, "Motieven voor incarnatie bij Barth," in *Wat God bewoog*, 198-216.

<sup>3</sup> A. Vos, "De onderzoeksproblematiek van Barths dogmatiek," *Kerk en Theologie* 37 (1986): 110-127.

<sup>4</sup> Vos, "Onderzoeksproblematiek," 110-115.

thus far is, according to Vos, that the vital connection with this classic tradition is not duly investigated and valued. After Barth's lengthy struggle with the prolegomena, his dogmatics comes to full deployment in the doctrine of God in *KD II*. Vos shows that here Barth is at once fully theocentric and fully christological: God's name is the name of Jesus Christ. Moreover, methodologically Barth establishes a strong connection between revelation and reality: God is who he is in the act of revelation. Barth rejects any "resentment against the concept of being." How should his own ontology be interpreted? Vos notices that often a parallel is drawn with the strong temporalizing of God in process philosophy. It is promising, however, to elaborate another connection: the revival of classical theism in reaction to the fierce atheistic critique (Plantinga, Swinburne), supported by a rediscovery of classical, patristic and scholastic thought. Despite the superficial impression that Barth departs from the older doctrine of God (because it was insufficiently trinitarian and christological), his doctrine of God is in fact a splendid and creative continuation and reworking of classic Christian thought. Vos warns that the (technically brilliant) interpretation by Jüngel in terms of idealism and historicism brings us back to a (historized) necessitarianism that should be decidedly rejected. Instead, he proposes to take the Augustinian-Scotist ontology of contingency, will and freedom as the interpretative framework for Barth's doctrine of God.<sup>5</sup>

- d. Van den Brom found in Barth a promising model for conceiving of the spatiality of God (see section 19.4 above). Starting with God's being present with himself, Barth argued that God makes room for us in creation. Van den Brom rejects Barth's speaking of "distance" between God and the world and of God's "motion" in his presence. Instead he develops his multi-dimensional model as a consistent conceptual elaboration of Barth's intuitions.
- e. Immink counts Barth among the kerygmatic theologians who rejected the logical version of the doctrine of divine simplicity (see section 19.1 above). In this connection, Immink argues that Barth well understood important theological notions of this doctrine. Immink criticizes the voluntarism and actualism of Barth's doctrine of God. A similar criticism is found with Van den Brink when dealing with Barth's statement that the necessity of eternal truths rests in God's continuing activity to *make* them true (see section 19.6 above).

## **21.3. Critical Discussions**

The statements made by the members of the Utrecht School provoked vivid debates in the (Dutch) theological scene. A survey of these discussions helps to identify the relevant issues for my final evaluation in chapter 22.

### **21.3.1. Rationality and Consistency**

The first point under discussion is the rational character of theological inquiry. The Utrecht School focuses on conceptual clarity and logical consistency. This has met with incisive criticism.

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<sup>5</sup> Vos, "Onderzoeksprobatiek," 115-125.

## Conclusions and Discussions

An early reaction to Brümmer's method of philosophical theology was advanced by H. Berkhof, the dogmatician of Leiden. The first edition of *Wijzgerige Begripsanalyse* was reviewed by him in 1976. Berkhof confesses his initial lack of understanding and expresses his growing admiration for Brümmer's contribution to conceptual clarity in theology. The question remains, however, what is the practical relevance of formal conceptual inquiry. Is it more than endlessly whetting the knives without ever killing the pig?<sup>6</sup> On the occasion of Brümmer's book *What Are We Doing When We Pray? A Philosophical Inquiry*, Berkhof came to a further appraisal.<sup>7</sup> He notices that the task of conceptual inquiry is modest but necessary: theologians often "smuggle" illogical elements into their arguments. Cleaning up the discussion in order to focus on the essential points is a significant contribution, but philosophical theology after Brümmer does not prove faith or make it plausible. Berkhof argues that Brümmer does not advocate a "natural theology" that would be unacceptable to Barthian theologians: he continues the tradition of *fides quaerens intellectum* that includes Anselm, Thomas, and Barth! In Berkhof's view, this approach is needed against irrational fideism that refuses to *understand* what one believes. Concerning the theological substance of Brümmer's book on prayer, Berkhof states that the relational and interpersonal model of thought brings Brümmer in the vicinity of Arminius rather than Gomarus.

I conclude that Berkhof sees no fundamental problems in Brümmer's method of conceptual inquiry. He does signal dogmatic problems concerning freedom and grace, and seeks further discussion.

In 1994, a volume of discussion on the theme "revelation and reality" was published by participants of the research program of Dutch Reformed dogmaticians.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it contains a discussion between advocates and opponents of the Utrecht School.

The "Introduction" by G.G. de Kruijf gives a partly autobiographical sketch of the gradual emergence of the Utrecht School, and distinguishes between a group around Brümmer that focuses on philosophical analysis of theological questions and a group around Vos that attempts to develop a Christian ontology and a philosophical theology. These groups have in common a frontier against the Enlightenment and against Barthian theology. Against the Enlightenment, the Utrecht scholars develop a "plausibility structure" that has a place for God and theology. In connecting orthodoxy and modernity, the Utrecht School has an apologetic character. In combating the Enlightenment, the Utrecht scholars could find an ally in Karl Barth. Ways part, however, in valuing Barth's theology. As De Kruijf sees it, the group around Vos shares Barth's emphasis on God's revelation, but wants to support and complete this by showing the objective, rational reality of God's revelation. Others, around Van den Brom, criticize Barth's view of rationality: Barth's endorsement of paradoxes results in empty, obscure claims. De Kruijf sees the importance of the Utrecht enterprise in bringing faith and theology back

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<sup>6</sup> H. Berkhof, Review of *Wijzgerige Begripsanalyse*, *Kerk en theologie* 27 (1976): 172-174.

<sup>7</sup> H. Berkhof, "Het gebed en de theologische methode van Brümmer," *Kerk en theologie* 37 (1986): 42-46.

<sup>8</sup> Dekker et al., *Openbaring en werkelijkheid*.

into the center of cultural and intellectual life. His main problem, however, is that in Utrecht logic is valued beyond its proper limits in regard to revelation. Where God's revelation in Jesus Christ is decisive, De Kruijff says, logic and analysis are of limited importance.<sup>9</sup>

H. Veldhuis's contribution addresses the separation of revelation and experience since the Enlightenment. He sees the consequences of this separation on two levels: on the empirical level, the connection between experience and meaning is dissolved; on the theoretical level, the relation between reason (including logical consistency) and revelation has become problematic.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of the theology of J.G. Hamann (see also section 17.4 above), Veldhuis attempts to heal these breaches: nature and grace, revelation and experience can form a unity thanks to God's love.<sup>11</sup> In this connection, Veldhuis also enters into a discussion on the "consistency" of theology, an issue that was brought forward by critics of the Utrecht School (notably A. van de Beek). As Veldhuis states, logical consistency is a prerequisite for meaningful communication. Furthermore, theology contains eternal, necessary truths (like "God exists") and necessary connections between different truths, which together form a network of strictly scientific theology. These implicative-necessary connections do not destroy the contingency of reality, but are the ontological and logical structures that form the playing room for contingent reality. Hermeneutics and metaphorical language can only function within these basic logical structures. For this reason, Veldhuis rejects Van de Beek's denial of systematization: the occurrence of contingent, system-deterring facts only falsifies our given theories, but is no argument against classification as such. Theology should not have a cold water fear for logic, but use it in order to study the framework in which the free, creative revelation of God takes place.<sup>12</sup>

The reaction by A. van de Beek takes up the theology of Hamann.<sup>13</sup> He emphasizes that for Hamann language is primary, and language has an enigmatic, mysterious character. Contrary to Veldhuis's study of Hamann, Van de Beek states that a systematic, consistent unity cannot be found in Hamann's thinking. The only unity lies, first, in the person of Hamann and, second, in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> Language is originally speech of God who addresses us. We speak about God as the Living One who encounters us. For the doctrine of God, this has the consequence that we can only ascribe *accidental* properties to God, derived from our encounter with him. Van de Beek further argues that there remains a distance between our encountering God and God's own being. Revelation is always mediated, through Scripture, Church, and all sorts of experiences. These serve as "symbols" for God's revelation. The symbol has the ambivalence of presence and hiddenness: the ordinary means are used by God to make himself known. The intimacy of God's love is accompanied by his transcendence, so that we can never

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<sup>9</sup> De Kruijff, "Inleiding," 1-11.

<sup>10</sup> H. Veldhuis, "Openbaring en werkelijkheid: Over de wetenschappelijkheid en het werkelijkheidsgehalte van de systematische theologie," in *Openbaring en werkelijkheid*, 12-14.

<sup>11</sup> Veldhuis, "Openbaring en werkelijkheid," 15-23.

<sup>12</sup> Veldhuis, "Openbaring en werkelijkheid," 23-26.

<sup>13</sup> A. van de Beek, "Een boek met prenten en verhalen," in *Openbaring en werkelijkheid*, 27-42.

<sup>14</sup> Van de Beek, "Prenten en verhalen," 27-29.

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“grasp” him.<sup>15</sup> Van de Beek even advocates the acceptance of paradoxes and straight contradictions in our speaking about God. For him, true heresy is the attempt to eliminate the contradictions given in experience. Systematic theology should not try to find the ultimate synthesis of (God’s) reality, but watch over the pluriformity of all divergent experiences and symbols of faith. Van de Beek trusts God’s faithfulness, but refuses to make a premature system in which everything fits. While he accepts logic as a good gift from God, he detects in the Utrecht School an overconfidence in reason and an undue influence of rationality on the contents of faith. Van de Beek insists on Karl Barth’s adagium that *reality* precedes *possibility*: he refuses to reflect on possibilities prior to the given world.<sup>16</sup>

In turn, A. Vos gives a reply to Van de Beek under the heading “Consistency and theology.”<sup>17</sup> Vos sketches the catastrophic decay of faith and theology in the second half of the 20th century. Analytical and logical philosophy seemed to execute the death penalty on theology. Dutch theology, safely hidden in the Church, received a failing grade on the sharp consistency critique of the newest logical analysis. Vos points to the resultant confusion and disintegration in theology and at the different attempts to cope with this crisis. In Van de Beek, Vos finds an intriguing combination of a continuation of the *fides quaerens intellectum* tradition, a determinist line of thinking, and the rejection of the consistency criterion.<sup>18</sup> In reaction, Vos states that the theology of the Church never needed a *sacrificium intellectus*, and that the consistency gambit amounts to methodological suicide. Vos claims that consistency is not only an indispensable philosophical principle, but also a mature fruit of Christian thought: in contrast to ancient Greek thought, Christian thinkers apply the consistency criterion not only to necessary propositions, but also to (modally qualified) contingent propositions. Referring to the discussion on Hamann, Vos points out that experience and logic, faith and consistency should not be opponents, but belong together.<sup>19</sup> According to Vos, Dutch theology since the 19th century has on all sides lost the crucial connection between spiritual and scientific vitality. Therefore, Vos advocates the rediscovery of 16th and 17th century Reformed theology in which the two are found together. This theology should be understood in the right logical and ontological terms, as a combination of necessary and contingent truths. Historical understanding of the great tradition of the Church serves the systematical truth.<sup>20</sup> In the reconstruction of classical theology, Vos places the doctrine of God in the center:

Dogmatically, the primary perspective is God himself. He is absolutely good, unique, and one: no one is so good as he is. In the doctrine of God, the decisive richness of Old and New Testament revelation must be stored. The doctrine of God should not only contain the presuppositions of the doctrines of creation and reconciliation, but also the fact that in his

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<sup>15</sup> Van de Beek, “Prenten en verhalen,” 29-35.

<sup>16</sup> Van de Beek, “Prenten en verhalen,” 35-42.

<sup>17</sup> A. Vos, “Consistentie en theologie,” in *Openbaring en werkelijkheid*, 43-59.

<sup>18</sup> Vos, “Consistentie,” 43-48.

<sup>19</sup> Vos, “Consistentie,” 48-51.

<sup>20</sup> Vos, “Consistentie,” 51-58.

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becoming man the triune God is utterly near us. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an appendix to the doctrine of God, but doctrine of the Trinity is doctrine of God and vice versa.<sup>21</sup>

In 1995, J. Muis, afterwards appointed as professor of dogmatics in Utrecht, wrote an article on "Theology and logic."<sup>22</sup> He notices that the Utrecht scholars hold logical argumentation in high respect and consider logical inconsistency a mortal sin. Muis acknowledges the importance of logic in judging the validity of argumentation and the correctness of a conclusion.<sup>23</sup>

Turning to theology, Muis states that biblical revelation, being narrative and centered in God's Name, does not primarily aim at conceptual thinking; however, it occasions the formation of concepts such as "goodness" and "almightiness." Theology has to think through the questions arising from the biblical testimony. Muis warns, however, that the proper mode of theological thinking consists in generalizing and extrapolating the "God experiences," not in logical deduction from given concepts. Theological thinking is inductive, diachronic "thinking after," not deductive, synchronized "thinking about." While Muis does not exclude a legitimate usage of deductive and even speculative thinking, he pointedly criticizes Vos and Veldhuis who defend Duns Scotus's doctrine of God:

A theology that states, through logical deduction, necessary and eternal truths about God and his properties and takes these as the "hard kernel" of the doctrine of God besides the accidental properties characteristic of God's relation with men, is no longer recognizable as the revelation theology it attempts to be. To my mind, "being" and revelation of God are separated here in an unbiblical way, and the logical speculation about God's essential properties seems to become an independent source of knowing God.<sup>24</sup>

The next step made by Muis is to describe the laws of logic as human conventions. Fundamental to human thinking are concrete, temporally bound statements. Logic examines the formal relations between concepts and propositions and thus abstracts from the concrete content of a statement. The illusionary impression arises that the abstracted rules of logic are eternal, necessary rules, while in fact they are human inventions.<sup>25</sup> In the Utrecht School, Muis discerns the following governing statements:

1. Logical connections are also ontological structures foundational to all reality;
2. Logically unambiguous concepts and propositions are foundational to polyvalent and ambiguous metaphorical speech;
3. Logical truths are necessary, hold in all possible worlds, and thus belong to God's being.

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<sup>21</sup> Vos, "Consistentie," 59.

<sup>22</sup> J. Muis, "Theologie en logica," *Kerk en theologie* 46 (1995): 199-215.

<sup>23</sup> Muis, "Theologie en logica," 199-200.

<sup>24</sup> Muis, "Theologie en logica," 200-208 (quotations in my translation).

<sup>25</sup> Muis, "Theologie en logica," 208-209.

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While these statements are disputable already on philosophical grounds, Muis argues that they are theologically unjustified. He objects to the explanation of metaphorical language in terms of logically unambiguous concepts (here Brümmer's theory of metaphorical thinking is advanced against Vos's logical approach). Concerning the eternity and necessity of logical truths (a theory advocated by Van den Brink, though in a qualified way, see section 19.6 above), Muis demands that these are justified on biblical grounds; if this is impossible, the theory should be abandoned. The final sentences of Muis's article are worth quoting, since they indicate the profound differences that are at stake: for the Utrecht scholars,

God, reality, revelation and theology have a common logical basic structure. ... The circle between God, reality, revelation and theology is logically closed, but it is a theological short-circuit, since it neglects the differences and inequivalence between revelation, faith, "thinking after," "thinking about" and logic. Reviewing the theological application of the three statements just discussed, the rock solid rationalistic trust of these Utrecht theologians' reasoning about God, even where their statements are no longer inspired by Scripture and can no longer be tested on the experience of faith, strikes me. "Faith is no knowledge, but passion," Kierkegaard said in view of the paradox of a God in servant shape, the Eternal in time; and that goes too far. But when the knowledge of faith is so dominated by logic as is the case here, I do find this word a relief.<sup>26</sup>

Antonie Vos replied to Muis's critique in an article titled "Classic Reformed."<sup>27</sup> Vos's response is framed in an expression of gratitude for the "gift of the Church" as the place of faith and of the proclamation of the gospel. On the other hand, the third quarter of the 20th century has seen a serious decline of western Christianity under the force of atheist critique. Christian faith and theology have become a question of "to be or not to be." Vos states that this gives theology an urgent kerygmatic and missionary character: it should be *scientific proclamation*.<sup>28</sup>

The Dutch theological discussion, seen in international and supra-confessional dimensions, shows an exceptional focus on the question of logical consistency. Vos argues that in line with the classic tradition of theology this is no issue at all; the peculiarity of the Dutch discussion is caused by the strong influence of Karl Barth's rejection of the consistency principle in the name of God's sovereign power to decide over truth and falsehood. Vos notices that J. Muis initially accepts standard logic, but subsequently replaces it by an allegedly theological acceptance of contradictions. Vos makes the strong case that the consistency principle is not a matter of preference: if contradiction is accepted, any proposition can be deduced, and "anything goes." In addition, Vos claims that in the deepest sense the

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<sup>26</sup> Muis, "Theologie en logica," 210-215 (quotations in my translation).

<sup>27</sup> A. Vos, "Klassiek hervormd: De omweg is de kortste weg," *Kerk en theologie* 47 (1996): 54-61.

<sup>28</sup> Vos, "Klassiek hervormd," 54-56.

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discussion is not about (human) *logic*, but about the (divine) *Logos* who has become flesh.<sup>29</sup>

Muis had criticized Van den Brink and Veldhuis on the point of the “laws of logic.” Muis concluded that both Utrecht thinkers made logical truth equally eternal, immutable and as necessary as God himself, and opposed this conception to the biblical “method of the Name.” Vos shows that the opposite is true: God’s essence is primary, logical laws and other abstract objects are secondary, being founded in God’s essence. Moreover, Muis’s own position implies extreme nominalism, as he fails to understand that if the biblical doctrine of God’s essence can be refuted on correct logical grounds, it cannot possibly be true. There is something at stake! Positively, Vos argues that a Christian alternative ontology and logic provide a new logical room for a classic and innovative construction of the doctrine of God and further theology.<sup>30</sup>

Summarizing the discussion concerning rationality and consistency, I would like to make three statements.

1. The Utrecht School makes a strong case for the view that the Christian faith is rational (at least not irrational) and can be elucidated by rational inquiry. Most of its critics do *not* claim that theology should neglect or transcend standards of sound argumentation. In this broadest sense, the Utrecht project of philosophical theology can be seen as a legitimate and useful contribution to theology.
2. One critical focus of the discussion around the Utrecht School is the consistency principle. This logical “law” is explicitly stated and defended by Antonie Vos,<sup>31</sup> but presupposed and put into practice by Brümmer and the other scholars. In discussion with Van de Beek and Muis, Vos argued that rejecting this principle leads to disastrous consequences, as strictly speaking the distinction between truth and falsehood can no longer be maintained. For if one open contradiction is accepted, all possible propositions, affirmative and negative, can be deduced, and two entirely conflicting worlds are stated at once. But then I am entitled to believe and disbelieve at random, and knowledge and rationality lose any possible meaning. Behind the objections against the consistency principle, however, might reside some problems in its practical application:
  - a contradiction can be construed on insufficient grounds. For example, some theologians argue that God’s power and goodness are inconsistent with the occurrence of evil. Therefore, either God’s power or God’s goodness is compromised and should be qualified. It could be argued that this conclusion is a short-circuit, and that in a way God’s goodness and power

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<sup>29</sup> Vos, “Klassiek hervormd,” 56-57.

<sup>30</sup> Vos, “Klassiek hervormd,” 58-59.

<sup>31</sup> Even anchored in an ontology, as Vos stated that “reality is consistent in depth,” KN, 172, 181. I do not enter here into the debate on the viability of any (Christian) ontology as such. To my knowledge, few explicit criticism against the Utrecht School was issued on this point in the public debate. The joint effort of systematic, historical and apologetic thought in the Utrecht School can be understood as a rebuttal of the claim that “after Kant” (or whenever) metaphysics is no longer possible and is damaging to the Christian faith.

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can be stated together with the occurrence of evil. In that case, the problem is not with consistency or contradiction, but with overlooking some aspects of the problem;

- there can be questions in which our knowledge does not suffice to attain full consistency. With regard to God, it is highly probable that our intellectual capacities fall short to grasp the final truth. Still, this recognition does not *per se* count against the consistency principle. It could well be that there ultimately *is* consistency (for God). In addition, the acknowledgment of our limited understanding does not allow us to produce contradictory statements in the meantime.<sup>32</sup>
3. The criteria for philosophical theology as listed by Brümmer and others present one final source of problems. While the role of Scripture and tradition is often acknowledged, the emphasis is on the “purely rational” criteria of consistency and coherence. In connection with the foregoing remarks, this may raise the question of normativity: on which basis are insights viewed as crucial for judging other conceptions? Muis voices the suspicion that the biblical revelation of God’s “Name” is not sufficiently honored in the Utrecht School rational approach.<sup>33</sup>

### 21.3.2. Religious Language and Metaphors

As I have noticed before (see section 17.5 above), there are different approaches to religious language within the Utrecht School. Vincent Brümmer views religious language in Wittgensteinian terms as a “language game” with its own rules, in which everyday words and concepts are used in the context of life *coram Deo*. Antonie Vos, on the other hand, advocates a full-fledged Christian ontology.

Brümmer’s position on religious and theological language is discussed from different angles in the discussion volume *De liefde bevroagd*.

H.J. Adriaanse criticizes Brümmer’s usage of theological *models*. Whereas he acknowledges that a “model” is in itself a rather flexible, open interpretation of reality, he argues that Brümmer’s construction of a “key model” aims at a too rigid, unifying description. The whisper “it is not,” accompanying metaphors and models, is silenced in Brümmer’s key model of love. Adriaanse’s second objection takes the opposite side: Brümmer not only takes his model too “literally,” he is also insufficiently “realist.” Adriaanse states that Brümmer takes this “literal” aspect of language too easily: if theology systematizes the language of faith in “models,” it has to confront the “models” of other sciences.<sup>34</sup>

René van Woudenberg focuses on the “fundamentally metaphorical character of perception, thought and language.”<sup>35</sup> He examines Brümmer’s statement that

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<sup>32</sup> The plea for consistency does not require adherence to the “correspondence” theory of truth: the idea that (propositional) language completely reflects the inner structures of reality. It is only stated that, whatever the extent of our knowledge of reality itself, our statements concerning reality cannot be contradictory.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, a similar warning is issued *within* the Utrecht School by Marcel Sarot and Gijsbert van den Brink in their article “Liefde als sleutelmodel: Brümmer over de relatie van God en mens,” in *De liefde bevroagd* (23-35), 27-28.

<sup>34</sup> H.J. Adriaanse, “Attitude en relatie,” in *De liefde bevroagd* (44-57), 45-52.

<sup>35</sup> René van Woudenberg, “Zijn waarnemen, denken en spreken fundamenteel metaforisch

perception always involves classification, and thus, comparison (cf. the exposition in section 17.1 above). As Brümmer said, we always “perceive X as an *a*.” Van Woudenberg has two fundamental objections to this theory. First, it requires an infinite regress of comparisons before we can say we have perceived a single object. As Van Woudenberg argues, such infinite regress is impossible. Second, the comparative theory of perception conflicts with the “phenomenology of perception”: most perception is immediate, without involving any comparison or classification. Nor does Van Woudenberg accept the escape of implicit or unconscious comparison. As Van Woudenberg diagnoses it, the problem of perception and classification can be solved by distinguishing between perception proper and knowledge based on perception. *Perception* is a direct awareness on the basis of object-presentation. *Knowledge* is an interpretation of perception in which comparison may be included.<sup>36</sup>

Armed with these insights, Van Woudenberg discusses Brümmer’s position on the metaphorical character of language and thought. He rejects the claim that metaphors rest on comparison between a better known and a less known entity. Moreover, Van Woudenberg denies that all language and thought is metaphorical (a position he calls “pan-metaphorism”). Instead, he argues that univocal, literal, unambiguous language is possible, not only in everyday usage but also in faith and theology. Even metaphorical statements contain a cognitive claim which rests on truth conditions. For this part, metaphorical language can be translated into literal language. The decisive question for the nature of our God-talk is whether we can truly *know* God: if so, the possibility of literal, unambiguous speech about God exists.<sup>37</sup>

Brümmer’s “Socratic reply” makes it clear that the contributions by Adriaanse and Van Woudenberg touch on central parts of Brümmer’s thought. Concerning Van Woudenberg, Brümmer explains that thinking is in large part generalizing similarities and dissimilarities between things, and thus a comparative operation. The occurrence of metaphors as a figure of style is evocative of the fundamental transitivity of meaning. Metaphorical thinking is far from anti-realist: metaphors do indeed contain a truth claim. Brümmer rejects the strict distinction made by Van Woudenberg between perception and knowledge or interpretation.<sup>38</sup>

In response to Adriaanse, Brümmer expresses reservations about the theological claims of realism. As he states, theology is merely a systematic reflection on the stammering speech of spontaneous faith. Still, Brümmer takes the discussion some steps further. He sides with contemporary critics of “ontotheology,” in which the reality of God’s existence is understood in spatio-temporal terms. Instead of a definition in terms of perceivability, Brümmer chooses to describe the “real” as that which determines the limits of our possibilities of action. In this sense, the existence of God is most real for the Christian believer.<sup>39</sup>

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van karakter?” in *De liefde bevraagd*, 116-139.

<sup>36</sup> Van Woudenberg, “Waarnemen, denken en spreken,” 116-127.

<sup>37</sup> Van Woudenberg, “Waarnemen, denken en spreken,” 127-139.

<sup>38</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” in *De liefde bevraagd*, 141-145.

<sup>39</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” 145-151.

## Conclusions and Discussions

The “Vos line” in the Utrecht School makes, as we noticed before, stronger ontological claims than Brümmer does. Christian faith is understood not as a “life form” with its own “language game,” but as a fruit of and response to God’s own revelation, which is concerned with ultimate truth. As a result, it is implied that only obedient understanding God’s revelation can provide us with the true perspective on and knowledge of reality. This is most pointedly elaborated on in the issue of contingency and necessity (anchored in God’s being the free Creator of a free world). The consequences regarding contingency and the further implications for grace and salvation will be discussed in sections 21.3.3 and 21.3.4 below.

### 21.3.3. Synchronic Contingency

The publications of some Utrecht School members highlight the fact that the concept of synchronic contingency is a “revolutionary discovery” of John Duns Scotus, which was not consistently followed by all subsequent theologians (see section 17.2 above). It can be expected that not all theologians oriented on earlier or later traditions are convinced by the Utrecht plea for an ontology of contingency. To be sure, there is a long and broad discussion in world-wide theology of determinism vs. indeterminism and of compatibilism vs. incompatibilism in the question of God’s foreknowledge and human free acts.<sup>40</sup> The Utrecht approach takes a distinct position in these discussions, and it is not strange that this provokes critical reactions.

In fact, a frontal attack on the Utrecht employment of synchronic contingency as a key concept in interpreting the Reformed tradition was launched by Paul Helm.<sup>41</sup> Helm claims that the “paradigm change thesis” resulting in a Scotist, “synchronic contingency” reading of the Reformed tradition, embodies “serious exaggerations, if not confusions.” To start with, he states that the idea of synchronic (or, as Helm paraphrases, simultaneous) contingency appears to place God in time.

“For two events, or two possibilities, could only be synchronous or simultaneous if they occurred, or possibly occurred, at the same time. Whether this is compatible with what Scotus believes about God’s relation to time seems extremely debatable.”

For the sake of argument, Helm removes this difficulty by speaking about God’s eternally willing that an event takes place at time  $t_1$ . Synchronic contingency then means that

“God could ... have eternally willed what is incompatible with what in fact occurred. I have just had breakfast: God could have eternally willed that I not have breakfast.”

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<sup>40</sup> For a recent sample of the systematic options see *Divine Foreknowledge. Four Views*, ed. by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Paul Helm, “Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism. A Note of Caution,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003): 207-222; a reply by A.J. Beck & A. Vos, “Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003): 223-233; a final word by Paul Helm, “Synchronic Contingency Again,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003): 234-238.

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Helm claims that this is merely a possibility in the mind of God: in the actual world God cannot make the opposite of the actual event occur.<sup>42</sup>

The question examined further by Helm is how Scotus's view (as presented by Vos) differs from Thomas Aquinas'. He adduces some evidence that Aquinas also distinguished between indeterminate knowledge (knowledge of simple understanding) and determinate knowledge in cooperation with God's will, and that Aquinas knew of logical alternatives. In brief, Aquinas's theology provides room for contingency as well as Scotus'.<sup>43</sup>

Be that as it is, does the concept of synchronic contingency really bypass the determinism - indeterminism dilemma, as Vos claimed? Helm boldly states, "Of course it does nothing of the kind." He argues that "it is possible for the universe to be contingent in the sense that it might not have been, but nevertheless be as deterministic as a clock." God could, by a completely arbitrary and whimsical act, actualize a universe that is completely deterministic. The other way round, Helm argues that if God's free will is denied and the universe is considered as an emanation from divine nature, it could still be a random, contingent concatenation of entities and events. In brief, "there is no logical connection between synchronic contingency and indeterminism, and between emanationism and determinism."

Now Helm notices that in the preceding argument he understood determinism/indeterminism in respect to the universe as a whole. Does synchronic contingency make a difference in respect to separate events *within* creation? On this level, Helm admits the indeterminacy of events in themselves, and states that they are determined by God's decree only.<sup>44</sup>

Helm further points to the difference between God's *determining* the truth-value of possible events and God's *causing* these events. He notices that in the interpretation of Scotus by Vos c.s., God's willing an event to happen is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for its occurring, especially in the case of human willing. Helm takes the opposite stand, and claims that the Reformed scholastics agree with him. Reiterating the earlier example, he states

My having breakfast (or not) today is eternally "fixed" by the eternal divine willing. God might have been free to will that I not have breakfast today (..) but if he has willed that I have breakfast today I do not seem to be synchronously free not to have it.

Helm then refers to the famous and important distinction between necessity of the consequent and necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentis – consequentiae*; cf. sections 17.2.1, 17.2.2, and 19.5, and see also part I of this study, section 7.2). Does the fact that necessarily, if God knows that *p*, *p* happens, leave room for indeterministic freedom of the human will? Helm argues that all Reformed scholastics held the view that "God's decreeing some action imposes a necessity upon it." So, there can be no question of indeterminacy because human actions are efficaciously willed by God.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Helm, "Synchronic Contingency," 207-210.

<sup>43</sup> Helm, "Synchronic Contingency," 210-213.

<sup>44</sup> Helm, "Synchronic Contingency," 213-215.

<sup>45</sup> Helm, "Synchronic Contingency," 215-216.

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Helm presses the question further by stating that the synchronic or simultaneous element in “synchronic contingency” is redundant. According to Helm, the mere insight that God could do otherwise than he does is sufficient, and does not need the qualification of synchronicity; from the eternity point of view, it is even an obsolete addition. Helm makes a distinction between God’s will and God’s knowledge: God’s will is truly contingent; in respect to God’s knowledge, Helm states that God

cannot refrain from knowing what is true. ... Since God cannot refrain from knowing what is true, then if A occurs where not-A could have occurred, God’s omniscient foreknowledge must faithfully and infallibly “track” this change. ... Otherwise he is not omniscient, and (if omniscience is part of the essence of God), he is not God.

Helm claims to stick to the mainstream theology of the church in affirming “that God’s knowledge of the contingent must itself be contingent; not *that* he knows, for he necessarily knows maximally, by the exercise of his perfect power, but *what* he knows.” In the final analysis, Helm thinks that synchronic contingency is only ascribed to God’s will and knowledge because Vos and others want to maintain synchronic contingency and “libertarian freedom” for humans. In conclusion, Helm produces a rule of thumb:

If a theologian holds to synchronic contingency in respect of human acts, you can expect him to adhere to synchronic contingency in respect of divine knowledge, if he divorces God’s knowledge from his will.<sup>46</sup>

In the end, Helm explicitly denies that the Reformed scholastic theology endorsed a “synchronic contingent” ontology. In advance, he declares that a “single philosophical idea” cannot bear the weight of the whole system of Christian doctrine. Moreover, he argues that the Reformed scholastics adhered to varieties of determinist thinking rather than to synchronic contingency. In regard to Turretini, for example, Helm appeals to his rejection of “indifference” as characteristic of human freedom: if Turretini had accepted synchronic contingency, he would have to accept indifference as well. After all, the Reformed scholastics may have utilized Scotist elements (the idea of conceptually different “moments” in God’s mind; the view of *possibilia*), but their eclecticism does not allow us to impute synchronic contingency as a new “central dogma” to their theology.<sup>47</sup>

As can be expected, Beck & Vos were not amused by Helm’s frontal attack. While mostly liberal or fideist theologians reject the claims concerning synchronic contingency, here a “distinguished Christian philosopher” is unhappy with the findings of the Utrecht School. Beck & Vos point to Helm’s own “strongly deterministic standpoint” as a source of disagreement.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Helm, “Synchronic Contingency,” 216-219.

<sup>47</sup> Helm, “Synchronic Contingency,” 219-222.

<sup>48</sup> Beck & Vos, “Conceptual Patterns,” 223-224.

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Beck & Vos state that they do not view “synchronic contingency” as a new “central dogma,” but as “the presupposed logical framework of a truly non-necessitarian ontology.” Secondly, they explain that the element “synchronic” does not deny divine eternity, but signifies what in modern logic is also called “contingency proper,” as distinct from the earlier diachronic understanding of contingency. An important statement is

that a diachronically “contingent” state of affairs, i.e. a state of affairs that at some time  $t$ , but not always, obtains in world  $W$  will nevertheless be a synchronically necessary state of affairs, if synchronic contingency is not presupposed.

The crucial question is whether “transworld-alternativity” is accepted (Beck & Vos) or denied (Helm). Thirdly, Beck & Vos claim that there is a way between the hard determinism of Helm and its alleged opposite, namely autonomous independent freedom, and that Reformed scholasticism followed precisely this third way.<sup>49</sup>

Central in Beck & Vos’s reaction to Helm is their refutation of Helm’s inference that God’s eternal knowing and willing “fixes” the event. This would only be the case if God’s eternal knowledge and will were necessary itself. To the contrary, the Reformed scholastics already demonstrated the untenability of this assumption, using the distinction between absolute necessity (necessity of the consequent) and implicative or hypothetical necessity (necessity of the consequence). Vos & Beck also argue that Reformed theologians like Voetius did ascribe freedom of (formal) indifference to man: given all circumstances and requirements, man is (formally) free to do this or that, to act or not-act. This formal freedom presupposes synchronic contingency on the ontological level. It is, according to the Reformed, not incompatible with the hypothetical necessity deriving from the divine providence and decree. Beck & Vos show that Helm is historically in error concerning Reformed scholasticism; an error which might reveal a systematical problem, since Helm eliminates the distinction between absolute and implicative necessity and thus rules out all contingency proper.<sup>50</sup>

What about Paul Helm’s recourse to Thomas Aquinas as a sound *doctor ecclesiae*? Beck & Vos argue that Aquinas’s theory of divine knowledge and will does not assign to God’s will the central role of selecting the possibilities to be actualized. In his “knowledge of vision,” God necessarily “sees” what will come to be. In the 13th century context, Aquinas and other “Aristotelians” deviated from the ongoing line of Christian thought centered around the will (divine and human); it is significant that the famous Condemnations of 1277 also touch the views of Thomas Aquinas. In establishing the “Thomist” or “Scotist” identity of later Reformed scholastic thinking, we have to reckon with the “canonical” status of Thomas’s *Summa theologiae* as a textbook; the fact that his definitions and arguments are quoted does not mean that his views are shared. Instead, the deeper conceptual structures are often Scotus’.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, Beck & Vos show that Helm’s rejection of synchronic contingency results in a world where everything is necessary and “eternally fixed.” If this

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<sup>49</sup> Beck & Vos, “Conceptual Patterns,” 224-225.

<sup>50</sup> Beck & Vos, “Conceptual Patterns,” 225-229.

<sup>51</sup> Beck & Vos, “Conceptual Patterns,” 229-231.

“absolute necessity of the consequent” is affirmed, it follows that also the logical antecedent (God’s knowledge and will of all events) is necessary. On the other hand, Beck & Vos notice that according to Helm the theology of the church has always affirmed the contingency of God’s knowing and willing the contingent.

And who would deny that theology has taught the existence of a personal and thus truly willing God? However, if all divine acts are necessary, it is impossible that God, who truly wills, exists. So, there is something at stake.<sup>52</sup>

The final round in this debate is for Paul Helm. This rejoinder contains little new material. Helm maintains most of his earlier criticism. Interesting is Helm’s modified statement of the necessity implied by God’s will:

“(1a) Necessarily, if God eternally willed that *p*, then necessarily *p*”

Crucial in Helm’s explanation of this proposition is the statement that because of “God decreeing that *p*, *p* is fixed.” Reality can be different, but in all cases it corresponds to God’s decree. In terms of the distinction between necessity of the consequent-consequence, Helm opts for necessity of the consequent, but argues that this can be a “hard fact” or “accidental” necessity, which is less totalitarian than the necessitarianism feared by Beck & Vos. Helm argues that Beck & Vos, in their interpretation of Reformed scholasticism, tacitly import “material indifference” while advocating “freedom of formal indifference.” Again, Helm states that “synchronic” contingency is superfluous, as simple, logical contingency suffices.<sup>53</sup>

#### **21.3.4. Freedom and Grace**

While the previous sub-section discussed the fairly abstract philosophical idea of synchronic contingency, here we deal with some practical consequences in the doctrines of man, sin, and grace. The discussion of the Utrecht School insights on freedom and grace took place in three rounds.

The first round was between Vincent Brümmer and Cornelis Graafland (1928 – 2004, extraordinary professor at Utrecht on behalf of the *Gereformeerde Bond* in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*) in 1981, and centered on the irresistibility of grace. Brümmer offered an argument largely identical to the one that was later published in *Speaking of a personal God*. As I have summarized these insights in section 18.1 above, we limit the description here to the following: starting with the claim, confessionally elaborated in the Canons of Dordt, that it is “impossible to resist God’s grace,” Brümmer asks in what sense this is so. It is not *conceptually* or *logically* impossible, as the biblical concept of grace seems to be open to acceptance or rejection by man. Nor is it *factually* impossible to resist grace, as the Bible and church history show. Should the irresistibility of grace then be understood in *normative* terms, i.e. one is not *permitted* to resist it? Brümmer argues that in that case, the relationship between God and man would be conceived of in terms of a contract. Brümmer suspects the Dordt fathers of falling back into a “causal” model of thought. He argues that in such a model the right nature of the relation between God and man, characterized by love, freedom and responsibility, cannot be

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<sup>52</sup> Beck & Vos, “Conceptual Patterns,” 232-233.

<sup>53</sup> Helm, “Synchronic Contingency Again,” 234-238.

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maintained. Moreover, 17th century theology thought in categories of substance and was unable to acknowledge relational categories. This explains why Dordt spoke of conversion as a “state” brought about by God instead of as a dynamic relation or event between God and man. In brief, Brümmer states that the Canons of Dordt defend a right case but employ obsolete conceptual instruments to state their case. His own personal model is more appropriate. In this model, the impossibility of resisting grace is *rational*: given the offer of God’s infinite love, it is entirely unreasonable for any human being to decline it. This does not mean that accepting grace is simply within man’s power: he must be constantly inspired, illuminated and empowered to do so. In that sense, all glory is to God.<sup>54</sup>

Graafland’s reaction to Brümmer’s challenge focuses on the question, whether the Canons of Dordt contain an obsolete doctrine of grace. To start with, Graafland shows that Brümmer employs an insufficient conception of grace in concluding that grace is not *conceptually* irresistible. Brümmer merely thinks of the *offer* of grace, while Dordt speaks of the *gift* and *appropriation* or realization of grace within man. As a matter of fact, the former is often resisted, while it is the latter that works irresistibly, according to Dordt. Graafland’s next step is to qualify Brümmer’s claim concerning the personal nature of grace in the relation between God and man. While Brümmer stated that conversion always is a free and active deed of man, Graafland points to the passive dimension of grace and regeneration: it is typical of the biblical doctrine of grace that man cannot bring himself to conversion. Graafland does not share Brümmer’s fear that emphasis on this passive dimension results in a causal, manipulative relationship between God and man. Below this difference there is a different starting point: Brümmer starts with purely anthropological considerations and comes to a high view of human freedom and responsibility; Graafland, with Dordt, starts in the concrete situation of sinful mankind after the Fall, in which man does not have the power to return to God unless he is graciously saved by God. Graafland argues that the strong terms used by Dordt to describe God’s work in our conversion may sound manipulative in the context of bare anthropology, but are instead intended to function in a soteriological context. When grace is called powerful and irresistible, this points to the intensity of grace’s working, not at an impersonal causality. Graafland argues that, on the basis of Scripture, we are entitled to describe the irresistibility of grace as “more than rational”: while God does not eliminate our intellect and will in the conversion, a radical renewal or new creation is needed that surpasses the merely rational assent to the gospel. Brümmer’s “rational irresistibility” comes dangerously close to the Remonstrant opponents of Dordt!<sup>55</sup>

In a brief rejoinder, Brümmer first answers Graafland’s distinction between anthropological and soteriological categories. Brümmer insists on the need to clarify the anthropological pre-conditions of any doctrine of grace. Second, he repeats the claim that not Dordt’s doctrine, but its philosophical-conceptual articulation has become obsolete. He briefly indicates the shift from substantial to

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<sup>54</sup> V. Brümmer, “Genade en onwederstandelijkheid: I. Hoe onwederstandelijk is de genade?” *Theologia Reformata* 24 (1981): 24-34.

<sup>55</sup> C. Graafland, “Genade en onwederstandelijkheid: II. De genadeleer van Dordt,” *Theologia Reformata* 24 (1981): 35-44.

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relational terms of thought, and points to the more subtle analysis of modal terms (possible – impossible) in modern logic. According to Brümmer, his revision of Dordt can maintain the *Soli Deo Gloria*: as God created us in the first place, freely offers his love in the second place, and motivates us by the Spirit to accept his offer of love in the third place, we have nothing to be proud of.<sup>56</sup>

The second discussion took place in 1994 between Brümmer and A. de Reuver (Graafland's successor at the extraordinary chair on behalf of the *Gereformeerde Bond* in Utrecht). The central topic of this discussion is man's *liberum arbitrium*. The specific question is how John Calvin employed the scholastic distinctions concerning man's freedom made by Bernard of Clairvaux.

The first exposition of Bernard and Calvin is given by Brümmer.<sup>57</sup> From the outset, the problem is stated as a tension or inconsistency between Calvin's deterministic doctrine of predestination and his qualified but serious acceptance of *liberum arbitrium*. From Bernard of Clairvaux, via Peter Lombard and the schools, Calvin borrowed a distinction of threefold freedom: freedom from necessity, from sin, and from misery. The first sort of freedom is essential to man; it means that he is the actor of his own deeds. Though motivated by circumstances and rational arguments, it is the will that freely chooses between alternative possibilities. Brümmer refers to Bernard's formulation "What does free choice? you ask. My answer is brief: it is saved. Take away free choice, and nothing is saved; take away grace, and there is nothing to save," and concludes that free choice is a necessary though insufficient condition for man's being saved.<sup>58</sup>

According to Brümmer, the *liberum arbitrium*, in Bernard's terms, is restored by God's granting freedom from sin (*liberum consilium* – free wisdom or policy) and freedom from misery (*liberum complacitum* – free pleasure). Our will only functions properly in accordance with God's will. Therefore, we need a threefold gift of grace: first, the knowledge of God's will; second, the power to act in agreement with God's will; third, the endurance in enjoying God's will. Brümmer emphasizes the personal, non-coercive character of God's grace as sketched by Bernard in relation to our free will.<sup>59</sup>

How does John Calvin incorporate Bernard's insights in his *Institutes*? Brümmer argues that Calvin accepts the key elements of Bernard's concept. Where Calvin speaks of the necessity in which we as sinners find ourselves, Brümmer interprets this as the loss of free wisdom. Diverging from Bernard, Calvin identifies the essential, remaining freedom of choice not as freedom from necessity, but as freedom from coercion. Calvin moreover strongly limits the scope of free choice to earthly, civil, and political affairs. Concerning moral and celestial things, we are blinder than the moles. In order to be restored, our mind needs to be illumined and empowered by God's Word and Spirit. Compared to Bernard, Calvin is more

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<sup>56</sup> V. Brümmer, "Genade en onwederstandelijkheid: III. De genadeleer van Graafland," *Theologia Reformata* 24 (1981): 45-49.

<sup>57</sup> Vincent Brümmer, "'Deze onderscheiding aanvaard ik gaarne,'" *Theologia Reformata* 37 (1994): 242-264.

<sup>58</sup> Brümmer, "'Deze onderscheiding'," 242-248.

<sup>59</sup> Brümmer, "'Deze onderscheiding'," 248-252.

impressed by the radical insufficiency of free choice for salvation than by the remaining splendor of this created capacity.<sup>60</sup>

Noticing that thus far Calvin is largely in line with Bernard, Brümmer asks whether things change when Calvin speaks about our perseverance in faith. Indeed Calvin states that God bends our will effectively, so that it is not up to our choice whether we believe or not. Those predestined by God to faith lose the possibility of forsaking God again. In Brümmer's analysis, Calvin is inconsistent by accepting free choice as essential to mankind in the first place, and then rejecting free choice by stating that the elect cannot reject grace. Thus, he cannot avoid a deterministic view of the relation between God and man: in the decisive moment, God does everything and man nothing. Brümmer argues that this "overkill" in Calvin's theology can be repaired by distinguishing between the distribution of causal power and of moral responsibility. While we rightly attribute the responsibility for our salvation to God, we should wisely acknowledge a dual or partial causality in salvation's coming about. Without our free assent, as Bernard says, there remains nothing to be saved, and grace has no address. The impossibility to resist grace, as we have seen explained earlier, is a *rational* impossibility.<sup>61</sup>

De Reuver's response to Brümmer's article gives a further analysis of both Bernard's and Calvin's conceptions of free choice in relation to grace.<sup>62</sup> Concerning Bernard, De Reuver first points out that Brümmer's understanding of free choice's being saved is incorrect: Brümmer sees *liberum arbitrium* as *pars pro toto*, and deduces from it that man is willingly involved in his own salvation. De Reuver advocates a strict reading, in the sense that *liberum arbitrium* itself is in need of salvation: after the Fall it is curved (inward on oneself, as Martin Luther would add), and needs to be redirected towards God. Even Bernard, to which Brümmer attaches his own view, would subscribe to the need of a new creation as God's work of renewing the will, instead of Brümmer's weaker 'inspiration'.<sup>63</sup>

Concerning Calvin, De Reuver notices that *liberum arbitrium* is dealt with in the christological part of the *Institutes*, where Calvin starts with a very radical doctrine of sin. Granted that we live in slavery, the question is what particles of freedom remain. Calvin's frontier is the Roman Catholic theology of his days, which exalts human freedom while effectively diminishing God's grace. According to Calvin, man sins necessarily though non-coerced. If one likes to call this *liberum arbitrium*, Calvin agrees, but adds that it is a lofty term for a lowly thing. De Reuver denies that, both for Calvin and for Bernard, sinful man has a true alternative to choose between good and evil. The choice for good works becomes possible only through regeneration, in which the sinful will is replaced by a God-directed will (although the will remains the will). The difference between Calvin and Bernard, as De Reuver understands them, is a difference of gradual evaluation, not of substantial conception.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Brümmer, "'Deze onderscheiding'," 252-259.

<sup>61</sup> Brümmer, "'Deze onderscheiding'," 259-264.

<sup>62</sup> A. de Reuver, "'Zo'n trotse titel voor een zo geringe zaak,'" *Theologia Reformata* 37 (1994): 265-289.

<sup>63</sup> De Reuver, "'Zo'n trotse titel'," 265-268.

<sup>64</sup> De Reuver, "'Zo'n trotse titel'," 269-277.

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A true difference exists between Calvin and Brümmer. As De Reuver sees it, the *nature* of grace is at stake. Calvin understands grace as utterly efficacious: it is not a mere offer, to be accepted or declined, but a powerful, internal work of God's Spirit. In De Reuver's view, Brümmer's concern to maintain human personhood is outweighed by Calvin's concern to confess the need of the efficacious grace of regeneration. From this insight, De Reuver even attacks Brümmer's suggestion to understand "irresistible grace" as "rationally irresistible." He argues that "natural," i.e. sinful, man does nothing unreasonable when he rejects God's grace. Only through the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, it becomes "rational" for our mind to accept God's love. Against Brümmer's emphasis on our *agency* as free, responsible persons, De Reuver appeals to Calvin's paradoxically sounding expression *passive agere* as the mode of conversion. As A.A. van Ruler phrased it, not only receiving grace, but also accepting grace is a matter of grace. *Liberum arbitrium* is possible only as *liberatum arbitrium*.<sup>65</sup>

A third critical reaction to Brümmer's views around salvation came from W.H. Velema in the volume *De liefde bevroegd*.<sup>66</sup> Besides Velema's positive appraisal of Brümmer's analysis of love, he refers to the discussion on the Canons of Dordt between Brümmer and Graafland, which we have surveyed previously. Velema's own criticism focuses on the implications of Brümmer's personalist understanding of God and man for the doctrine of reconciliation. According to Brümmer, the classical notions of punishment and satisfaction belong to a "contractual" approach of the relation between God and man. In a personal model, repentance and forgiveness suffice to restore the broken relationship. Christ's suffering and death are not a payment for our sins, but God's revelation of his ultimate love and the strongest recommendation of God's love to us, which bring us to the required repentance. Related to this understanding of reconciliation is Brümmer's rejection of the traditional notion of God's impassibility, and his statement that God needs our love. Both opinions are briefly criticized by Velema. In Velema's view, Brümmer postulates a general principle of love, to which both God and man are subsumed. Velema's own position is that God freely chose to create man, who should fear and love God. Therefore, Velema does not hesitate to state that man is *obliged* to give his love to God, a position explicitly rejected by Brümmer. For Velema's ethics, this implies that the law as God's commandment has a central function.

Brümmer's "Socratic reply" at the end of *De liefde bevroegd* contains a few remarks in response to Velema. Contrary to Velema's analysis, he does not subsume God and man under one concept of love. The decisive difference is that we have to live in accordance with God's will in order to be happy ourselves. In the loving relationship, God has the primacy. In this context, Brümmer allows some "causal-manipulative" elements in the relation between God and man, but these have merely a negative, evil-preventing function, and not the positive

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<sup>65</sup> De Reuver, "'Zo'n trotse titel' ," 277-289. Brümmer gave a brief reply to De Reuver: "'Dat ze hem op generlei wijze kan ontroofd worden,'" *Theologia Reformata* 37 (1994): 290-293.

<sup>66</sup> W.H. Velema, "Liefde en genade: Dogmatische en ethische implicaties van Brümmer's liefdesbegrip," in *De liefde bevroegd*, 58-67.

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function of eliciting our love. The true center of our living *coram Deo* is a whole-hearted, joyous love for God. Brümmer acknowledges the Law in a limited function as a kind of “backstop.”<sup>67</sup> Concerning God’s impassibility, Brümmer suggests that the classical tradition of the Church expressed legitimate intentions in a defective conceptual framework.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, to Velema’s objection that Brümmer makes God dependent on man, Brümmer answers that God freely chose to give up a part of his sovereignty. This does not, as Velema stated, lead to a division within God between a sovereign and a non-sovereign part. If we state that God is self-sufficient, we must always indicate in what sense God is and in what sense God is not self-sufficient.<sup>69</sup>

Looking back on the discussions reviewed in this section, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. It is remarkable that Vincent Brümmer is the only constant participant in the discussions, while other members of the Utrecht School around Antonie Vos could have been involved in these discussions as well. Substantially, we can conclude that Brümmer defends exactly the same view of freedom and grace as we found with, among others, Eef Dekker. The same pattern of attack and defense would apply to the Utrecht School as a whole.
2. Graafland and De Reuver concur in questioning Brümmer’s interpretation of traditional views (Bernard, Calvin, Canons of Dordt) in both the central concepts and the deeper theological intentions.
3. A fundamental difference regards the point of departure. For Brümmer, the anthropological point of view is decisive, and this leads him to an emphatic maintenance of free choice. His opponents point to the actual situation of mankind after the Fall, in which total corruption and slavery, radical liberation and regeneration are at least as decisive.<sup>70</sup>
4. Granted the different starting points, there is a more significant disagreement on the role of free choice in the process of conversion. Brümmer is eager to ban every suggestion of a causal-manipulative operation on God’s part, and claims that *liberum arbitrium* is active in our conversion. Graafland and De Reuver, on the other hand, consider a passive component on man’s part indispensable from a biblical perspective, and emphasize that it is not in the power of free choice to accept God’s grace.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” 152-156.

<sup>68</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” 158-159.

<sup>69</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” 159-160.

<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the following might help to solve the dilemma: the Reformed scholastics used to distinguish between the four “states” of man: before the Fall, after the Fall, under grace, and in glory. The first state describes the *essential* “make-up” of human nature, the three subsequent states deal with the *accidental* (moral and religious) variations in human nature. These two levels each have their own weight in construing a proper anthropology and soteriology.

<sup>71</sup> To my knowledge, the Reformed tradition is unanimous in emphasizing the actual impotence of the human will to convert itself to God. This being said, the question remains open which conceptual means we employ to distinguish between freedom and necessity, possibility and impossibility in man towards God.

5. Velema's contribution points to a relation between Brümmer's strictly personal, non-causal model and his doctrine of reconciliation, which might lead to a weakening of biblical notions of punishment, damnation, satisfaction and the like.<sup>72</sup>

### 21.3.5. Doctrine of Trinity

From Karl Barth's doctrine of God, we have learned the importance of a trinitarian approach to the doctrine of God. Does the Utrecht School comply with this criterion? On this topic, we have to reckon with different approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity within the Utrecht School. To begin, Vincent Brümmer paid relatively little attention to this doctrine in his work until 2005, and on the rare places where he does so, he seems to advocate a modalist version of the doctrine. In a sermon published in *Alzo lief had God*, Brümmer first compares the Trinity to three persons cooperating in a commission, but then rejects this notion because God is One. His statement that God has made himself dependent on our cooperation may be considered as a root for his thought on the Trinity. For the sake of that cooperation, God has to reveal his will (Jesus), to enable us to go this way (Father/Creator), and to break through our unwillingness (Spirit). As already hinted at in the previous sentence, Brümmer sees the "persons" of the Trinity as three different "roles" played by the one God.<sup>73</sup>

The place of the Trinity in Brümmer's *The Model of Love* is the specific topic of Christoph Schwöbel's contribution to *De liefde bevroegd*.<sup>74</sup> Affirming Brümmer's claim that the notion of love is central to the Christian faith, Schwöbel shows from an analysis of 1 John 4 that the statement "God is love" must be understood in a trinitarian sense.<sup>75</sup> Schwöbel subscribes to the personal-relational analysis of God's love in Brümmer's *The Model of Love*. Surprisingly, however, the doctrine of the Trinity plays a limited role in Brümmer's argument. Brümmer uses the doctrine *critically* to refute a mystical idea of "merging into the godhead," and *constructively* to point out that the triune God enables and motivates us to live in personal relationship with him. What is lacking, however, is an explanation of the *constitutive* function of the doctrine that God is One in Three Persons. Brümmer's refusal to employ the classic orthodox formula of *treis hypostaseis* in the *mia ousia* results not only in the rejection of a "social theory of Trinity," but forms a departure from Christian orthodoxy as well. Schwöbel's hypothesis is that Brümmer's incomplete doctrine of the Trinity points to structural problems in his understanding of the love of God and man.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> In 2002, A.H. van Veluw defended his dissertation "*De straf die ons de vrede aanbrengt*": *Over God, kruis, straf en de slachtoffers van deze wereld in de christelijke verzoeningsleer* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002) under supervision of Brümmer's disciple Luco van den Brom. This theological "grandson" of Brümmer verifies Velema's prophecy on the implications of the model of love for the doctrine of reconciliation.

<sup>73</sup> Brümmer, *Alzo lief*, 67-71.

<sup>74</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, "God is liefde: Het model van de liefde en de Triniteit," in *De liefde bevroegd*, 77-99.

<sup>75</sup> Schwöbel, "God is liefde," 77-83.

<sup>76</sup> Schwöbel, "God is liefde," 83-90.

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The crucial problem is Brümmer's statement that God needs our love in order to be a person and to be the God of love. The fundamental biblical statement that "God is love" is made dependent here on our human return of love to God. It is no longer possible to state that God is eternally relational, eternally personal, and eternally the God of love. Schwöbel sketches two ways out: either created beings returning love to God must be co-eternal with God, or God is fundamentally mutable as he changes from not-loving to loving on the occasion of our response. The first solution is outrightly rejected by Brümmer, leaving only the latter. Given Brümmer's view that God's infinite love is fundamental to our identity as human persons, a changeable God of love severely endangers our basic identity. Schwöbel concludes that the incompleteness of Brümmer's doctrine of the Trinity results in a serious incoherence and inadequacy of his conception of love. Schwöbel's proposal, therefore, is to "complete" Brümmer's doctrine of the Trinity. In doing so, he follows the track of the Cappadocian Fathers, who made the internal, mutual relations between Father, Son, and Spirit constitutive for both the threeness and the oneness of God. In this way, the dilemma between individuality and plurality is overcome in regard to God, and our understanding of "person" in respect to God is disconnected from its individualistic connotation. Precisely the "immanent Trinity" as a community or network of love provides the ground for God's "economic" love for us. Only if God is in himself love, God's self-revelation in which God bestows his love on us is trustworthy.<sup>77</sup>

In brief, Schwöbel's diagnosis is that Brümmer's doctrine of the Trinity must be completed by elaborating its constitutive dimension. Referring to Brümmer's expression "establishing the conceptual price," Schwöbel rhetorically asks whether Brümmer is running behind in paying this conceptual price.<sup>78</sup>

In his "Socratic reply" at the end of *De liefde bevroagd*, Brümmer enters into discussion with Schwöbel's proposal, which he briefly understands as advocating "that God is not one Person, but three, and therefore is not dependent on persons outside himself for personal relations (of love)." Brümmer concedes that his book *The Model of Love* pays insufficient attention to the doctrine of the Trinity. He disputes, however, Schwöbel's analysis that in his conception God as a person is made dependent on our return of love: while God as a partner "needs" our love, our love is not constitutive for God's status as a person or independent, free and responsible actor.<sup>79</sup>

Brümmer realizes that this does not satisfy Schwöbel: the latter refuses to base our faith merely on a relative stable yet mutable "character" of God and requires an ultimate foundation in the "immanent Trinity." In response, Brümmer explores whether his own conceptual model of love can apply also to the intra-trinitarian relations in God. The application to the relation between God and man had already revealed significant differences in the way God and man are persons. In Brümmer's view, a further inquiry into the intra-trinitarian relations may almost lead to equivocity of terms as "person," "love" and "communion." The trinitarian

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<sup>77</sup> Schwöbel, "God is liefde," 93-99.

<sup>78</sup> Schwöbel, "God is liefde," 99.

<sup>79</sup> Brümmer, "Socratisch weerwoord," 160-162.

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concept *hypostasis* differs from the “normal” concept of “person as independent actor” used in Brümmer’s argument. If this difference is neglected, speaking about three Persons leads to tritheism. Similarly, the trinitarian understanding of love and communion cannot employ the concept of person defined as “independent actor.” How, then, is the concept of *hypostasis* or *persona* to be positively understood? Agreeing with a passage from another article by Schwöbel himself, Brümmer speaks about three modes of action (creation, revelation, inspiration) of one and the same Actor. Brümmer employs the terms “role,” “mask” and “*dramatis persona*” to illustrate his view, but adds some qualifications in order to avoid modalism. First, while in theatre a mask does not reveal but hide the true person behind it, God’s “roles” truly reveal him. Second, the roles in a play are not necessarily coherent and are temporary and transitory, while God’s “roles” as respectively Father, Son, and Spirit are fundamentally coherent and eternal. Brümmer hopes that this explanation suffices to pay the conceptual price of a trinitarian model of love. He emphatically refuses to stretch the personal model of God beyond comprehension by assuming three independent actors within God, and to interpret divine love in that sense.<sup>80</sup>

Along the lines drawn in his response to Christoph Schwöbel, Brümmer provides a more detailed discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in his newest book *Ultiem geluk*.<sup>81</sup> Fundamentally, Brümmer approaches the doctrine of the Trinity from the perspective of God’s reconciling acts. Reconciliation consists in the endowment of a threefold freedom (which Brümmer derives from Bernard of Clairvaux): freedom of choice, freedom of knowing God, and freedom of living with God in loving unity. He parallels these three aspects of freedom with the respective persons of Father (creative power), Son (revelation), and Spirit (illumination and inspiration).

While God’s acts of reconciliation constitute the “o-economic Trinity,” Brümmer further asks how this relates to the “essential Trinity” or the “inner life of the Godhead.” His initial answer deserves quoting in full:

With this question we reach a point where we should tread very warily indeed. We know God in the way he deals with us and this knowledge is adequate to enable us to enjoy a life of fellowship with him. It is not for us to venture into speculations about the ‘inner life of the Godhead’. Here we reach the point of mystery where God ‘dwells in unapproachable light’ (1 Timothy 6:16). Here it is behoves us to remain agnostic and apophatic.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Brümmer, “Socratisch weerwoord,” 162-166.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *Ultiem geluk: Een nieuwe kijk op JEZUS, verzoening en Drie-eenheid* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), 169-206. An (abbreviated) English version of the chapter on Trinity is also available: *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity. Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 93-112

<sup>82</sup> Brümmer, *Ultiem geluk*, 178 (English taken from: *Atonement*, 97-98; interpunction according to the original).

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Although this statement seems to rule out all further inquiry into the immanent Trinity, Brümmer acknowledges that God's threefold acting raises the question whether behind these actions we find *three actors* or *one actor* manifesting himself in three different ways.

The standard patristic answer in terms of "three *hypostaseis* or persons in one *ousia* or substance" suffers, according to Brümmer, from the dual meaning of "substance" in Aristotelian philosophy. For Aristotle, "primary substance" is a separate, individual entity that has properties and enters into relations with other entities. "Secondary substance" is the essential property or nature that makes a thing to be the thing it is, and which is common to all individual entities (primary substances) that share this property. Brümmer argues that the Latin Church Fathers understood the divine *ousia* as primary substance (and thus God is *one* individual entity) to which the three persons relate as secondary substances (properties of some kind). The leading Greek Fathers, the Great Cappadocians, took exactly the opposite direction: the divine persons are understood as primary substances (individuals), the *ousia* as secondary substance (common property or nature). While it seems that the Cappadocian conception results in tritheism, Brümmer explains that they, as Platonist thinkers, considered the common nature of God as more real than the individual differentiation in persons. With this qualification, the Greek version of trinitarianism is not altogether different from the Latin doctrine.

With the obsolescence of Platonic thought, however, the unity of three individual divine Persons should be clarified in an other way. Brümmer states that modern "social trinitarians," such as Cornelius Plantinga and Richard Swinburne, do not succeed in this respect. In view of his earlier propagation of the "model of love" for God and man, it is remarkable that Brümmer here suggests that "'love' has its limitations as a metaphor for inner-Trinitarian relations. The relation between the Persons of the Trinity is too different from human relations, and even from the divine-human bond of love to which believers aspire, to be described in such an unqualified sense."<sup>83</sup> Following again Bernard of Clairvaux, Brümmer distinguishes between *unity* as the internal divine form of love and *union* as the love between God and man. In God, love is an internal property of one subject; between God and man, love is the relation between two individual and autonomous subjects. Strictly speaking, says Brümmer, it is impossible that "persons" have "internal relations" to each other, because the definitions of "person" (free, autonomous actor) and "internal relations" exclude each other. After all, Brümmer states that "social monotheism" is an impossible conjunction of notions.

Is it, then, better to go with Latin trinitarianism that views God as one, single personal being? First of all, Brümmer explains that in the Latin tradition the term *persona* is a technical term, not equivalent to our modern "person." The dominant connotation of *persona* is a role or function performed in social intercourse. Brümmer goes one step beyond Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, who described the divine persons as, respectively, "modes of being" and "modes of existence": according to Brümmer, Father, Son, and Spirit are "modes of agency." Creation,

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<sup>83</sup> Brümmer, *Ulltiem geluk*, 185 (English: *Atonement*, 102).

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revelation, and inspiration are the three basic forms of divine acting, which we still can attribute to one divine actor.

Does this emphasis on “roles” and “acting” result in a new form of modalism? Brümmer argues that there are three decisive differences between his view and modalism:

- a. God does not hide his true Self behind his threefold acting as creating Father, revealing Son, and inspiring Spirit. God truly is as he manifests himself.
- b. The three functions performed by God are no temporary and passing roles, but permanent works of God we can rely on. God is immutable in the personal sense of being faithful to his own character.
- c. Creation, revelation, and inspiration are no incompatible roles, but essentially interconnected forms of divine acting. God is eternally the Creator, Revealer, and Inspirator.

Accounting for the love of God introduces a further problem in Latin trinitarianism. If God, though existing in three persons, is one, single subject, he “needs” other subjects in order to love. Brümmer argues that this “need” does not make God dependent on his creatures: without creation, God is already a complete person. It is true, however, that God can only enjoy a relation of love when there are free and autonomous subjects beyond himself.

Looking back from the critique issued by Christoph Schwöbel to Brümmer’s final proposal of a doctrine of the Trinity in *Ultiem geluk*, the most remarkable fact is that Brümmer in the end drops the notion of love as a qualification of the “internal life” of God. While Schwöbel argued from the “definition” in 1 John 4:9 “God is love” to the effect that the internal divine community of love is foundational for the love between God and us, Brümmer insists on the understanding of love as a relational category that presupposes separate autonomous subjects, while denying that the intra-trinitarian relations qualify as such subjects. After all, the “key model” of love turns out to be determined by the understanding of freedom as autonomy.

As I have mentioned above (section 17.3), the most thorough discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Utrecht School is found in Nico den Bok’s dissertation *Communicating the Most High*. By means of a systematic analysis of Richard of St. Victor’s doctrine of the Trinity, Den Bok especially contributes to the discussion of the idea of the “social Trinity.” One of the most significant insights is that in Richard’s doctrine (which represents a stage in the development of the Western orthodox doctrine of the Trinity) in fact two concepts of personality are at stake. On the one hand, Richard views God as *one* rational substance and subject of action, in brief, *one person*. On the other hand, Richard employs the term *persona* in a technical sense for each of the three “persons”: they have in a certain sense different individualities and different origins, and stand in willful relations to each other. Den Bok concludes that for Richard the Trinity is one person in three “persons.” Characteristic of a person is that she can be the subject of contingent willing. If, as social trinitarian thinking has it, God is three persons in communion, this means that within God there are three subjects of contingent willing. The intra-trinitarian relations, then, are freely chosen, contingent and not natural to God.

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Den Bok argues that this cannot be an orthodox position. One further finding of Den Bok's study is that a third aspect of personality, namely "having mental powers" (intellect and will), is closely related to the aspects of individuality and relation mentioned before. In Richard, this is already suggested, and later theologians spell out the consequences: the relations of origin between Father, Son, and Spirit run parallel to God's intellect and will: the Son is the ultimate object of God's self-knowledge, the Spirit is both known and willed perfectly by the Father and the Son.

In a similar vein, Antonie Vos described John Duns Scotus's doctrine of the Trinity (see also section 17.3). Duns had a strong awareness of the importance of a consistent concept of Trinity: if monotheism *per se* does not allow for "production" and "relation" within the Godhead, the Christian faith is in great trouble. The argumentative starting point of this doctrine is the insight that God has the mental powers of intellect and will as principles of action. In God's essential nature, "producer" and "product" are of the same sort: divine persons. Moreover, there are precisely *two* fundamental principles of action or production: nature/intellect and will. Thus, there is in God one person who only *produces* (the Father), one person who only *is produced* (the Spirit), and one person who *both is produced and produces* (the Son). Finally, Vos argues that since in Duns's understanding of the trinitarian relations the dimensions of intellect (necessity) and will (contingency) are constitutive, the same dimensions are constitutive for all reality. The concept of the Trinity is therefore foundational to all theology and ontology.<sup>84</sup>

Our judgment concerning the place of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Utrecht School approach to the doctrine of God requires a distinction. The modalist version held by Brümmer is unsatisfactory measured by confessional standards. His qualifications, added in response to Christoph Schwöbel, do not really meet the decisive objections against modalism.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the fact that Brümmer does not ascribe genuine personality to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and neglects the intra-trinitarian relations accounts for his emphasis on the personal relationship between God and man. Since God has no relations within himself, it becomes more plausible that he is factually dependent on the loving relationship with man.

The more tradition-oriented strand of the Utrecht School endorses the classic doctrine of the Trinity as codified in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed and developed in the Latin tradition following Augustine. Whereas this might be judged insufficient from the perspective of a theory of "social Trinity," in fact the latter is explicitly refuted by Nico den Bok. A further feature of the doctrine of the

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. also the quotation from Vos given near footnote 52.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the conclusions by Heyns, *Die grondstructuur*, mentioned in note 2 of chapter 15. In view of Karl Barth, Heyns' main questions concern the omission of the concept of "person" and the threat of a hidden deity behind the outward manifestations of the Triune God. Applied to Brümmer, the second objection is met (at least initially) by Brümmer's qualifications; the first objection remains standing, as Brümmer not only rejects the term "person," but even the whole notion of "hypostasis" and of inner-trinitarian relations between the "persons" or "hypostases." In brief, Brümmer denies the relatively independent personal subsistences that constitute God's Triune being according to the Western tradition of trinitarian theology.

Trinity held in the more “Scotist” part of the Utrecht School is the acceptance of more “speculative” arguments connecting the doctrine of the Trinity with the central issues of intellect and will, necessity and contingency that govern the doctrine of God as a whole. As a result of this approach, the doctrines of the Trinity and of God are substantially the same. To many theologians, such a strong connection between the two doctrines would be quite desirable, although it is uncertain whether they would desire it in this precise shape.

### **21.3.6. Revisions of Theism**

The Utrecht School does not merely accept the traditional doctrine of God, but argumentatively develops and modifies it. The revisions of theism found in Utrecht are centered around two insights.

First, the personal and relational understanding of God places several divine attributes in a different key. Most of these transpositions are found in Vincent Brümmer’s writings, while some are further elaborated by his disciples.

- the love of God is the central concept for Brümmer. He understands it as a relation of mutual identification. Thus, it is not an attitude of an independent God towards dependent creatures; rather, it induces a certain dependence and vulnerability on God’s part.
- from this understanding of God’s love follows the revision of attributes like aseity and impassibility. If God is fundamentally relational, it is no longer plausible to subscribe to these concepts. Abstractly speaking, God can still be said to be independent of us. In practice, however, he has chosen to be dependent on our returning love. If genuine, this mutual love involves emotional vulnerability to the response of the other. Especially Marcel Sarot has furthered the discussion of aseity and impassibility in the Utrecht School by connecting classical theism to elements of process theology.
- in this Brümmerian framework, the traditional interpretation of attributes like eternity and immutability loses its plausibility. God is involved in temporal relations, and this makes his own acting and being temporary.

The second fundamental revision concerning the doctrine of God is developed by Antonie Vos. He distinguishes between essential and accidental properties of God. In fact, this distinction is based on the fundamental ontological distinction between necessity and contingency, which Vos sees as utterly grounded in God’s own being. Whereas the traditional doctrine of God saw no room for “accidents” in God, and hence had difficulty in accounting for relational aspects of God (but cf. my interpretation given in part I, sections 5.4.1 and 8.2), Vos’s proposal opens a realm of relational properties. The most important consequences of this move are as follows:

- contrary to Brümmer, Vos does not make the whole concept of God relational. The distinction between essential and accidental is crucial and cannot be eliminated. This means that essential attributes like simplicity and immutability are strictly maintained as expressing the individual identity of God. The accidental, relational properties do not compromise these essentials, but are grouped around the essential kernel of God’s being.
- in turn, the essential properties do not endanger the accidental properties of God. Vos argues that God’s accidental properties are contingent and do not

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impose necessity on the things he is related to. The traditional doctrine of God breathed a permanent threat of determinism. This threat is removed in the revision of doctrine along the lines of essential – accidental properties.

## 22. Conclusions

In the preceding parts of this study, we made an extensive examination of the interaction of method and content in the doctrine of God. The material was taken from contexts that differ considerably in time, cultural climate and philosophical orientation: Reformed scholasticism, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School.

The objective of this concluding chapter is, first, to gather the results of the preceding research in view of the general question “How are method and content related in the doctrine of God?” and, second, to sketch some lines for further development of the Reformed doctrine of God, drawing on the insights generated by this research.

### *22.1. The Connection of Method and Content in the Doctrine of God*

The findings of my research in the doctrine of God as expounded by Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and Utrecht School can be summarized on different levels. The highest level of abstraction is the interaction of method and content itself. In line with my expectations (see chapter 1), I have indeed discovered a significant correlation and interaction between them. Furthermore, the interaction runs in both directions: from method to content, but also from content to method. I will expand further on these summary statements.

#### **22.1.1. The Impact of Method on Content**

It is clear from the examination of different presentations of the doctrine of God that the method employed in theology has impact on the precise shape and substantial contents of doctrine. For each of the persons and periods studied here, this can be demonstrated on the following points:

- **Questions.** It seems self-evident that the questions stated in a certain type of theology will co-determine the answers and insights developed in that theology. In science, questions function as guiding principles that help to make observations and inferences. Questions incite one to select from the abundance of material the precise data that are relevant to one’s cognitive or other purposes. Questions also suggest a direction for finding answers, and thus raise expectations as to the outcome of the research. These general reflections on the methodological function of questions can be elucidated with extracts from my consideration of the doctrine of God:
  - *Reformed orthodox* expositions of the doctrine of God in general, explicitly or implicitly, follow the standard scholastic pattern of questioning: (1) *An sit?* (Whether it is?) (2) *Quid sit?* (What it is?) (3) *Qualis sit?* (How it is, or Of what sort it is?) This way of structuring the material can have the effect of a “formalizing” approach: in application to God, it seems that the first steps are performed in view of a rather abstract concept of “deity” that is only afterwards substantialized and personalized with biblical material concerning the gracious acts of God and his triune existence. It is a matter of dispu-

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te, however, as to what degree this sequence of questions has a damaging or even fatal consequence for the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God, as several 20th century authors have claimed. Following Richard Muller, I have argued that (1) the confession of God as the triune God is evidently presupposed in Reformed scholastic accounts of the doctrine of God, to the effect that (2) the order of discussion is more a pragmatic division of material and labor than a principal order, since (3) the questions “what is God?” and “How / Who is God?” should be taken together in fully answering the question of the “identity” of God.<sup>1</sup> This being said, it should be conceded that the way in which the question is posed does affect the presentation of the doctrine of God in that it places certain concepts and arguments in the front that could, taken by themselves, easily mislead us as to the identity of God. This leads to a twofold conclusion: (1) the Reformed orthodox way of structuring the doctrine of God by these questions should be understood at a deeper level than the immediate surface, but (2) a presentation that avoids the confusion concerning the identity of God that could arise from the Reformed scholastic order of questions is, in principle, preferable.

- An important feature of the theology of *Karl Barth* is his insistence on asking the right questions. The revolutionary start of Barth’s dialectical theology consists of his rejection of the common synthesis of God and man, revelation and experience or history, and his replacement of this synthesis by a radical disjunction between God and world, Word of God and words of men. The importance of taking the right starting point continues in Barth’s more “mature” theology and is reflected, among other things, in Barth’s repeated emphasis on stating the theological question correctly. The question is not “Does God exist?” but “Who is the God who reveals himself?” We should not ask: “Can God be known?” but, given the reality of God’s making himself known: “How and in how much is God known?” This Barthian way of stating the question reflects the “thought form” consciously developed by Barth in his interaction with Anselm of Canterbury: the central insight is that God’s *reality* precedes all *possibility*. For that reason, our knowledge of God can never start on a neutral basis of general possibilities, but should always start by acknowledging the reality of God’s existence. A similar pattern of adjusting the question prior to expounding the answer occurs throughout Barth’s discussion of the doctrine of God. In addition to the “realistic” thought form expressed in Barth’s questions, I point to the *dialectical* aspect of his method. While Barth emphasizes the radical disjunction between God and world, he gradually develops the insight that God’s salvific acts of revelation and reconciliation overcome the gap. On the conceptual level, Barth views God as being beyond the difference of, for example, finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, mutable and immutable. The initially fierce contrast arising in Barth’s theological questions does in fact start from and result in a higher synthesis – admittedly not a preconceived rational synthesis, but a synthesis read off from God’s concrete revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. part I, section 5.1 above, and section 22.2.1 below.

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- The *Utrecht School*, as an “analytical” type of philosophy of religion or philosophical theology, is quite explicit on the sort of questions it wants to answer. The Utrecht scholars explicitly react to the preceding dominance of epistemological or hermeneutical questions in theology: “How do you know  $x$ ?” Instead, the leading question in their conceptual analysis is “What does it mean to say  $x$ ?”<sup>2</sup> Members of the Utrecht School are in search of the exact conceptual “load” of theological terms, the implications and presuppositions of concepts, and the relations between the different concepts. Depending on the further orientation within the common Utrecht School framework, emphasis can be put either on the practical function of religious concepts in their “language game” and “life form,” or on the logical and ontological truth of statements in a fundamental, Christian philosophy. In both cases, the general question “What does it mean?” leads to terminological clarification and exact definitions. The “conceptual price tag” of theological terms is indicated: what aspects of reality are highlighted at the cost of others? The further aim of this procedure is to enable a deliberate choice of the most adequate concepts in speaking about God. Requirements such as conceptual clarity, consistency, adequacy and relevance play a considerable role in establishing the meaning of religious terms. Theological terms are often linked with and elucidated or defined by reference to “ordinary language.” The attempt at clarification may in some instances lead to the elimination of ambiguities resident in traditional positions in the doctrine. These adjustments should be judged on their own merits; at this time I merely signal them as an effect of the method of questioning in the Utrecht School.

- **Concepts.** Concepts can be viewed as the building blocks of discourse. They pointedly express someone’s cognitive attitude towards the elementary entities of which one is speaking. Concepts have the function to focus and fixate the content of thought, and thus move beyond loose “ordinary” language. Many presuppositions about the nature, properties, and relations of these entities coalesce in the use and explanation of concepts. For this reason, it is clear that in the connection of method and content, concepts have a crucial role. I illustrate the impact of concepts from the material presented in parts I-III of this study.

- *Reformed scholastic* theology is quite emphatic in its use of well-defined concepts. Its methodology requires it to explain the “names” (words, terms) before examining the “things” under discussion. Terminological clarity is fundamental to correct understanding. Moreover, an adequate definition provides a common basis for the exchange of arguments (or, stated otherwise: disagreements can be fought out through debate on definitions).

In line with academic practice of its own day, Reformed scholasticism aims at providing a “real definition” (*definitio realis*): a concise description that indicates the core essence of a thing and enumerates its distinctive properties (for example: “An oak is a big foliage tree with hard wood and with fruit called acorns”). The basic procedure for defining concepts is taken

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<sup>2</sup> Besides the hermeneutical and the conceptual questions, Brümmer discerns factual questions (“what is  $x$ ?”) and questions of meaning (“what meaning or value has  $x$  for me?”).

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from Aristotle's *Categories*, often applied in the form of Porphyry's *Tree of Classification*.<sup>3</sup> Another prevalent set of terms in defining concepts is that of *genus* and *differentia specifica*: the former indicates the common class to which an entity belongs, the latter the specific properties that distinguish this entity from other members of the class (for example: "Man is a rational (*differentia specifica*) sentient being (*genus*)" (*animal rationale*)).

The attempt to provide "real definitions" reveals an important scholastic presupposition: reality has an orderly structure. A frequently quoted maxim states that "the order of knowledge follows the order of things" (*ordo cognitionis sequitur ordinem rei*). Concepts and their definitions are not arbitrary, but are bound to reality. Methodologically, there is a strong connection between logic and ontology: the logical analysis of concepts and their connections is directly concerned with an adequate representation of reality.

A complication in Reformed Orthodoxy's usage of concepts lies in their provenance. Scholasticism's practice of definition draws on Aristotle's *Categories*, transmitted through a chain of philosophers from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Not all of the cognitive content attached to the standard definition of basic concepts is undisputedly consistent with Christian beliefs. A few examples show some of the problems of definition that Reformed scholastic theology had to face in the doctrine of God:

A very fundamental problem is the question of the suitability of concepts such as "essence" and "substance" for God. On the one hand, the Reformed orthodox do not refrain from giving some summary description of God's "being." On the other hand, they are clearly aware of the impossibility of producing a proper "definition" of God. Especially the term "substance" is thought inappropriate in view of God. The term "essence" seems more acceptable to them, although they immediately explain that in God the normal distinction between "essence" and "existence" does not hold.<sup>4</sup> We should also notice that in describing such a notion as the "essence" of God, the Reformed scholastics include explicitly biblical, Christian terms such as "the God of Israel" and "the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

A more practical problem is presented by concepts such as "omnipotence" and "justice." Concerning the former, we notice that many Reformed scholastics are occasioned by the Latin term *omnipotentia* to ask (a) what is the extension of "all" (*omne*) that falls under God's "power," and (b) how should God's "potency" be understood in relation to Aristotle's *passive* potency (*potentia passiva* as opposed to *actus*). Here the formal treatment of concepts has substantial consequences in the formulation of doctrine.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Van Asselt, *Inleiding*, 31-46.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between "essence" and "existence" is a perennial problem for philosophy; its application to God is especially so. Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'essentia Dei', gives a laconically brief statement: "God is the only necessary, self-existent being or, in other words, the only being in whom *esse*, or existence, and *essentia*, or essence, are inseparable; it is of the essence or 'whatness' of God that God exists."

<sup>5</sup> As we have seen in part III, section 19.6, Gijsbert van den Brink argues that the conflation of biblical (Abrahamite) "almightiness" and philosophical (Anselmian) "omnipotence" leads to confusion and unnecessary complication in this part of doctrine.

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concept of “justice” is especially susceptible to the commixture of “secular” and “biblical” elements. Since Martin Luther’s discovery that God’s justice is redemptive instead of demanding, Protestant theology has been sensitive to this problem. In Reformed Orthodoxy, however, we see authors start by quoting Aristotle’s phrase *ius suum cuique tribuere* (“to give everyone his own right”), which leads to an emphasis on the “distributive” or “remunerative” aspect of justice.<sup>6</sup> In evaluating that tendency, one should at least consider the option that the (biblical) concept of “justice,” as distinct from other divine attributes, inevitably has the connotation of something like “distribution” or “acting according to right rules.” On the other hand, the same authors substantiate the concept of divine justice with many biblical references, and ultimately point out that God has manifested his justice in Jesus Christ. The latter move has the further implication that God’s justice and grace are tightly connected, and not opposed to each other.

In conclusion, I would state that Reformed Orthodoxy shows a conscious, explicit and nuanced use of concepts.

- *Karl Barth* appears as a virtual opposite of the Reformed Orthodox in his treatment of concepts. His emphasis is not on an exact semantic and logical demarcation of his key terms, but on their concrete biblical substantiation. Barth prefers to start his expositions with a biblical-theological discussion. This does not mean, however, that conscious definition of concepts is altogether lacking. As Bent Flemming Nielsen notes, Barth’s *Kirchliche Dogmatik* reads as “eine lange, lange Reihe von Begriffsbestimmungen.”<sup>7</sup> Typical of Barth’s procedure in clarifying his concepts is the use of contrasting terms that mutually qualify each other. In this sense, Barth’s thought remains profoundly dialectical: he rejects the idea that a plain and simple Yes or No suffices; rather the interplay of affirmation and negation yields the modification that does justice to the reality under discussion. Practically, this means that most of Barth’s definitions do not form the *starting point* but the *result* of a dialectical discussion.

A principal aspect of Barth’s treatment of concepts is that he insists on the order of “subject” and “predicate” in applying concepts to God. If we want to know what, for example, the love or the power of God means, we should not start with a preconceived notion of these concepts, but we should let God determine their significance.

It should further be noticed that the concepts employed by Barth often have their background in post-Enlightenment philosophy and theology. Viewed diachronically, Barth “needed” to go through Kierkegaardian and Neo-Kantian language in order to arrive at his final theological conceptuality. Even where he rejects the conceptions of Idealist philosophy, the Idealist understanding of terms continues to influence his own discussion.

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<sup>6</sup> William den Boer, *Duplex Amor Dei: Contextuele karakteristiek van de theologie van Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609)*, Publicaties van het Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek vol. 1 (Apeldoorn 2008), 37-39, takes the Aristotelian definition of *iustitia* as *ius cuique suum tribuere* as the basis of his analysis of Arminius’ theology.

<sup>7</sup> Nielsen, *Rationalität der Offenbarungstheologie*, 43.

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This is evident, for example, in his treatment of the concept “Spirit” in opposition to “nature” (see part II, section 11.3).

- An important feature of the *Utrecht School* is its view of concepts. In fact, it treats conceptual inquiry as the core task of systematic theology. As reported in part III of this study (section 17.1), Vincent Brümmer rejects the “name model” of concepts and instead develops a “tool model.” This means that the scholastic presupposition that a conceptual network can and should exactly mirror the factual structure of reality is abandoned. Brümmer describes concepts as our thought forms or *mental skills*. Mastering a concept means being able to use a word correctly. Concepts are used in speech acts; crucial to correct usage of concepts is to discern the illocutionary act they perform (constative, expressive, commissive, prescriptive). According to the different types of illocutions, Brümmer distinguishes evaluative (axiological), epistemological, and ontological concepts. Common to all these groups of concepts is that they are explained in practical or pragmatic terms: what attitude does this concept require? how are my possibilities of action determined?, and so on.

Following on the choice for the “tool model” of words and concepts is the rejection of traditional analogical predication in favor of univocity of terms applied to God and creatures: since the meaning of terms does not reside in the entities they refer to, but in our use of language, the application to different entities does not cause a difference of meaning. To be sure, Brümmer realizes that applying terms adequately to God implies knowing which aspects of meaning are and are not relevant (to quote Wittgenstein’s famous example, in speaking about God’s eyes, it makes no sense to ask about his eyebrows ...).

An aspect of the Utrecht usage of religious concepts that comes to the center of the doctrine of God is the distinction between “God” as *title term* and “YHWH” as *proper name*. Brümmer introduced this distinction in discussing the ontological question of God’s (necessary) existence. He then states that in order to meet the definition of the term “God,” the being indicated by that term must necessarily exist. This does not entail, however, that YHWH as the bearer of a proper name exists necessarily. Luco van den Brom, Marcel Sarot, and Arjan Markus have followed Brümmer in employing this distinction; interestingly, Van den Brom differentiates between “God” and “gods” on the ground that “God” is by definition unique. The distinction between title term and proper name implies that a rational description of a being that deserves the title “God” can be produced without direct reference to the biblical self-revelation of YHWH. At this point, I note that (a) the distinction between title term and proper name reinforces the impression of philosophical theology as an enterprise that is in principle indifferent to specific religious or confessional truth, and (b) that on this issue the Utrecht School takes a position directly opposed to Karl Barth’s (see part II, section 10.2.3 about Barth’s interpretation of Anselm’s

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ontological argument as expression of revealed truth).<sup>8</sup>

Brümmer's view of concepts is shared by the other members of the Utrecht School. Although the "Vos group" within the School entertains a direct connection to medieval and Reformed scholasticism, these scholars agree with the "pragmatist" approach of concepts. A specific emphasis here is the idea that "knowing how to use a concept properly" comprises the application of strict logical rules. Moreover, both strands of the Utrecht School share the conviction that concepts differ from words: a concept is the mental skill, of which a word is the linguistic expression. One concept can be expressed in different words; the other way around, one word can be used to express different concepts. This insight is of considerable heuristic significance: in investigating a certain concept, we cannot merely search for only one word.

While concepts are thus placed in a wider context, the Utrecht School remains focused on detailed and precise "conceptual inquiry." Beyond giving exact definitions of the terms employed in theology, the Utrecht scholars investigate the presuppositions and implications of these concepts and the relations between different concepts. The objective of these investigations is mainly threefold: to make the religious concepts intelligible; to put them to the test by raising objections; and to make innovative proposals by modifying traditional concepts. Throughout, the Utrecht School strives for logical consistency and cultural relevance in their use of concepts.

The differences in orientation within the Utrecht School are reflected in partly different conceptual fields covered in the expositions of the respective members. The "Vos line" integrates much of the conceptual apparatus of medieval scholasticism, combined with parallel elements of contemporary philosophy. With Brümmer and his disciples, the terminology is in large part taken from recent analytical philosophy. In some instances, an explicit difference is stated between philosophical and religious concepts, particularly by Gijsbert van den Brink in contrasting "omnipotence" and "almightiness."

- **Sources.** An element of theological method that receives serious weight in many theological discussions is the question from what sources theological insights are derived. Roughly speaking, four sources can be distinguished: Holy Scripture, the tradition of the Church (laid down in creeds and symbols) and theology, philosophical thought, and experience (contemporary or historical, personal or supra-personal). Many Christians would argue that God's revelation in Scripture is the highest norm of theological truth, and should also be the primary source of insights and arguments. From this perspective, the concrete expositions of doctrine throughout the history of the Church elicit the question whether theology has always been faithful to this principle. It seems that, in practice, material from other sources has been dominant. For example, most scholastic theology, both medieval and post-Reformation, is said to lean too heavily on an Aristotelian philosophical apparatus. Roman-Catholic theology is

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<sup>8</sup> In section 22.2.1 below, I make some evaluative remarks on this distinction.

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known for officially (in the decrees of the Council of Trent) assigning to the tradition a place as source of doctrine equal to Scripture. And much modern, liberal theology openly employs experience as a criterion of viable theology. In this respect, the three subjects investigated in this study show a varied picture:

- *Reformed Orthodoxy* clearly states that God's revelation in Scripture is the prime and ultimate source and norm of doctrine. In principle, theology is understood as explanation of Scripture. This foundational statement is substantiated in the doctrine of God by a massive amount of Scriptural evidence.<sup>9</sup> In a somewhat marginal position, Reformed scholasticism acknowledges a "general revelation" of God through his works in creation and history, especially in man as a rational being. This dimension of revelation principally enables the exchange of knowledge between Scripture-based theology and insights available through other disciplines: if (parts of) created reality reveals something of God, the knowledge resulting from this general revelation can be incorporated into the whole of theology. During the main period of Reformed Orthodoxy, "general revelation" remains a marginal aspect of Reformed doctrine, mentioned for the sake of completeness, but readily passed over in order to move to the exposition of material doctrine on the basis of "special revelation" (Scripture). Revelation is the fundamental principle of this Reformed scholastic theology; to reason it assigns the instrumental role of providing clarification and argumentation for revealed truth. Indeed, Reformed theology assumes a basic harmony between theological and philosophical truth, since the world is God's creation and God himself is the Truth in person. But the search for truth in theology always stands under the direction of God's own Word. In the final decades of the 17th century and the first decades of the 18th century, we see a shift of emphasis with respect to "general revelation" and the "natural theology" derived from it: under the influence of newer, rationalist philosophies, several theologians accept a more prominent role for reason in explaining and justifying the Christian faith. Through this development, rational judgment in the form of philosophy indeed becomes an independent source and norm of truth. However, I would argue that for that period we can no longer properly speak of Reformed orthodox or scholastic theology.

Aside from Scripture and reason / philosophy, we can distinguish a considerable amount of traditional material in Reformed Orthodoxy's exposition of the doctrine of God. With some modification, most concepts, definitions, divisions and arguments presented in Reformed Orthodoxy can be traced back to the theological tradition from Augustine via Anselm to the great medieval scholastics of the 13th and 14th centuries. This line of continuity has at least a twofold background. First, the theology of the Reformation consciously maintained the connection to the "sound" tradition of the Church. The breach with the Roman-Catholic Church of those days was

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<sup>9</sup> As Richard Muller, *PRRD*, 2:509-520, points out, the Scriptural evidence in Reformed scholastic theology does not function as mere "proof texting," but reflects a vivid exegetical tradition.

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never intended as a complete severance of all bonds of piety and thought of the Church of all centuries. While it is for polemical reasons quite understandable that the continuity with the theological tradition is somewhat downplayed, it is very vital beneath the surface. Second, the decisive reason for maintaining the connection with the tradition is that this tradition can and should be understood as a history of biblical interpretation, as an ongoing process of reading and explaining Holy Scripture. Precisely on the basis of the *sola Scriptura*, Reformation and post-Reformation theology could recognize and value the efforts of understanding Scripture transmitted in the theological tradition. In this respect, it is quite natural that Reformed theology both accepted and adjusted traditional doctrinal patterns, measured on their adequacy to express the biblical doctrine. In applying the Scriptural criterion, Reformed Orthodoxy shows a principial eclecticism in its use of traditional material.

The final possible “source” of theological insight, experience, is hardly of any interest in Reformed scholastic theology. Of course, the concrete shape in which doctrine is presented and defended sometimes reflects the individual or collective experience of that time (for example, references to the voyages of discovery to unknown parts of America). But there is no “principle of experience” that co-determines the doctrinal substance. What we do find in several Reformed orthodox authors is a practical application of doctrine in relation to different aspects of life: exhortation to faithfulness, comfort in the needs of life, etcetera. This indicates that, whereas “experience” is no independent source, Reformed theology is in fact directed toward a practical life of trust in and obedience to God.<sup>10</sup>

- In *Karl Barth's* theology, we encounter a different arrangement of the possible sources of theology. His theology was born from the struggle with “liberal” theology based on (historical and psychological) experience. From this battle results a suspicious and even hostile attitude towards experience in Barth's theology.

Most important in this respect is the pronounced exclusivity of the Word of God as the only possible source of our knowledge of God. Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, however, has some aspects that distinguish it from the classic Reformed doctrines of revelation and Scripture. First, the Word of God is understood not primarily as the revelation “written down” in Scripture, but as a living event, the actual revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. At the transition from *Christliche Dogmatik* to *Church Dogmatics*, Barth restates “the Word” as cognitive principle in terms of “Jesus Christ” as both the ontic and the noetic foundation of our knowledge of God. Second, and related to my first remark, Barth construes his doctrine of revelation in terms of the “inextollable subjectivity” of God. This accounts for the strict connection between the doctrines of revelation and of Trinity: revelation as rooted in God's own trinitarian existence warrants that, on the one hand, God is essentially relational and communicative while, on the other hand,

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<sup>10</sup> Exemplary for the interwovenness of doctrine and practice is the theology of Petrus van Mastricht; see Neele, *The Art of Living*.

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He always remains "sovereign" and is the Subject, not object, of our knowledge of him. Third, as a result of the first two aspects, the Word of God is a dynamic, dialectical category, since it reflects or equals the divine self-movement in reconciling man with himself in Jesus Christ. Knowing God is being incorporated, by the Holy Spirit, in the unity with God to which God predestined us in Jesus Christ. This act stands under God's gracious sovereignty, to the effect that the "Word" is never an objective, static entity at our disposal, but always a matter of divine freedom and of human hope and expectation.

While these three remarks summarize the systematic main lines of Barth's doctrine of revelation, more should be said about his specific doctrine of Scripture and his practical use of Scripture. Scripture is, for Barth, one of the three "shapes" of the Word of God. As such, it has its importance and relative independence. More specifically, Scripture functions as an "objective" and critical instance in view of the teaching and proclamation of the Church. Biblical exegesis is, as the frequent and lengthy excursuses in the *Church Dogmatics* show, an important source and norm of doctrinal substance. In his concrete exegetical practice, Barth consistently applies his hermeneutical principle that all Scripture should be understood from Christ as its center. Barth's exegetical procedure is commonly labeled as "theological exegesis," a name consciously accepted by Barth in contrast with historical-critical exegesis.

The insistence on the exclusive status of the Word of God as the source of theology did not prevent Barth from frequently employing the tradition in a positive way. While his earliest theology seemed to start with "nothing but the Bible," he soon realized that the tradition of Church and theology contained treasures of reflection on and clarification and formulation of the biblical message. Doctrines such as Trinity and Christology, with much of their patristic and scholastic details, were considered indispensable by Barth in service of the adequate proclamation of the Gospel. In Barth's appreciation of the tradition, Church Fathers and Reformers occupied the front ranks, but gradually he included the scholastics, starting with Anselm of Canterbury, in his "cloud of witnesses." Even his most severe antagonist, Friedrich Schleiermacher as the "godfather" of 19th century liberal theology, remained a constant partner of theological dialogue for Barth. Barth's way of dealing with the tradition can be typified as eclectic: he made use of important lines of agreement (often taking sides with classic, orthodox theology against "Neo-Protestantism"), while rejecting elements of the tradition that in his eyes constituted a deviation from the proper Gospel.

The danger which, according to Barth, is especially endemic in the history of Church and theology is the acceptance of "natural reason" and philosophy as a secondary and auxiliary source of truth. The hostile attitude of Barth towards philosophy's "usurpation" of theology is in large part to be explained from his negative experiences with, as he saw it, the synthesis between human thought and divine Word in a wide range of modern types of Christianity including Neo-Protestantism, Roman-Catholicism and "Deutsche Christen." In my analysis of Barth, I concluded that these negative

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experiences led Barth to overstate the alleged errors of traditional theology on the issue of “natural theology” by failing to discern its genuine intentions. More significant in this survey of the connection between method and content is my observation that Barth also advocates and exercises a more positive function of philosophical argumentation in theology. While rejecting a principal affiliation of theology to one specific philosophical system, Barth acknowledges the indispensability of rational reflection on the Church’s doctrine. Just as in his appeal to the tradition, Barth is eclectic in his use of philosophical argumentation. His express requirement for such usage is that it is recognizably serviceable to the exposition of God’s own Word. This means that no *a priori* philosophical truth is acceptable: philosophical statements can only become true by their being taken captive by God in his Word. This attitude is elaborated in Barth’s doctrines of the *vestigia trinitatis* and of *analogy* (cf. part II, sections 10.3.1 and 10.3.3).

Together with “natural reason,” experience is rejected by Barth as an authoritative source of theological truth. The theology he was raised in (Herrmann) treated experience as precisely *the* point of contact with Jesus Christ. Early in his theological development, Barth learned to distrust psychological and historical accounts of religious experience. In effect, “religion” as an experiential phenomenon became suspect altogether. Consequently, we find no positive appeal to “experience” in Barth’s exposition of doctrine. It is true that Barth can allow a legitimate place for experience and even for the anthropological functions present in it (will, emotion, conscience). However, he still denies that experience has an independent existence: it is elicited by God’s Word and consists of recognition of and response to the Word.<sup>11</sup>

- In the *Utrecht School*, the issue of “sources” of theological knowledge and argumentation is complicated, and differs from more “classical” types of theology. Important in this complication is the fact that the Utrecht School positions itself as “philosophical theology.” In doing so, it distinguishes itself from traditional dogmatic theology and takes a position (somewhere) between philosophy of religion and systematic theology.

A further complication lies in the internal differentiation within the Utrecht School on this point. In the line of Vincent Brümmer, conceptual inquiry takes its starting point in religious language. Religion is viewed as a “life form” that generates its own “language game.” The natural birth ground of theological language is religious experience. Philosophical theology examines the concepts used in the religious language in view of (internal and external) intelligibility, consistency, coherence, adequacy, and practical relevance. It seems that, in principle, the choice for Christian God-talk as the object of inquiry is arbitrary and depends on the philosopher’s own Christian conviction. Admittedly, religious language is not taken by these Utrecht scholars in an idiosyncratic way: one of the tests it is put to is the connection to “everyday language” and its “reality depicting” character.

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<sup>11</sup> KD I/1, 206-239.

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Consistently interpreting religious statements as “speech acts,” Brümmer c.s. argue that the propositions implied in the Christian faith do indeed affect our “possibilities of action” and therefore have “reality depicting” value.

Brümmer would certainly protest against the identification of “reason” or “rationality” as a *source* of his philosophical theology. That is correct inasmuch as rational argumentation does not function as an independent source of insight, but is presented and employed merely as an instrument that explicates and investigates what is inherent in religious language. On the other hand, the emphasis on rational argumentation with its specified criteria of intelligibility, consistency and coherence has considerable impact on the way in which concepts and statements of faith can and cannot be understood.

In the “Brümmerian” type of philosophical theology, we encounter varying amounts of Scriptural and traditional material. Argued from the perspective of methodological principles, these instances are non-fundamental: religious language is the direct source of analysis, and conceptual analysis as a philosophical enterprise entails its own strict criteria of logical consistency and rational coherence. Brümmer and his disciples do posit additional criteria, including “consonance with the tradition” (which for Brümmer comprises Scripture). Several monographs produced by Utrecht School members show considerable interaction with traditional positions and extensive discussion of biblical material. As these examples show, the balance between “philosophical” and “dogmatic” theology varies, and a combination of “conceptual inquiry” with argumentation starting from Bible and theological tradition is perfectly possible. In my opinion, however, it remains true that the dimension of rational clarification and justification is dominant even in the treatment of biblical and traditional material. Biblical and traditional insights are employed as the starting point of conceptual inquiry, and are modified according to the results of this inquiry.

The other strand to be discerned in the Utrecht School, headed by Antonie Vos, advocates a philosophical theology in conscious continuity with a tradition of Christian thought culminating in the philosophy and theology of John Duns Scotus. This has the effect that “conceptual inquiry” is widened to and supported by “modal logic and ontology”: an analysis of (statements concerning) reality in terms of necessary / contingent / possible / impossible. While functioning as a professionally philosophical framework, this type of ontology and logic is understood by its proponents as truly Christian thought, drawing on and elaborating insights that are given to us in God’s own revelation.

The assumed systematic equivalence between the philosophical system of Scotist modal ontology and God’s revelation makes it understandable that publications from this line of the Utrecht School often work more constructively with material from the (patristic and scholastic) tradition, and sometimes also start from biblical data. To be sure, the Scriptural or traditional dimension often is not dominant, since the emphasis remains on positive systematic exposition of thought, and since the stated equivalence between philosophy and revelation allows for an implicit and indirect rather

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than explicit and direct connection to Scripture.

- **Ways of argumentation.** This is a rather loose term to indicate further characteristics of the modes of argumentation detected in my research on Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School. We may expect that the majority of the factors discussed above will coalesce and reappear under this heading.
  - As to *Reformed Orthodoxy*, the question of its mode of argumentation can be answered on different levels. To begin, there is the level of explicit methodological discussion in which Reformed scholastic authors participated. As we have seen (part I, chapter 4), these discussions were largely performed in the frame of a continuation and renewal of Aristotelian teaching on method. The crucial question concerns the difference between inductive and deductive method: should theology start with general principles (axioms) and deduce the concrete, detailed substance of doctrine from these principles, or should one start with concrete (biblical) data and work out the more abstract implications and presupposition? Coupled to this question is the discussion of the theoretical or practical character of theology: in the theory of science of those days, a deductive (compositive) procedure of arguing was considered appropriate for theoretical or contemplative sciences, while an inductive (resolutive) procedure was thought suitable for practical or operative sciences. The net result of the Reformed orthodox contribution to this methodological debate is that the distinctions as such are relativized: the character of theology is mostly defined as a mix of theoretical and practical science, and the use of both inductive and deductive forms of argumentation is recommended.

Most significant is the application of the distinction between inductive and deductive reasoning with respect to “biblical” and “systematic” theology (the terms are, admittedly, somewhat anachronistic). In reaction to what they saw as an over-development of rational reflection in late medieval theology, the first generation of Reformers advocated and practiced a strongly biblical theology, avoiding much of the subtleties and “speculations” of late scholastic theology. As soon as the need of educational transmission and intellectual defense of the Reformed faith was felt, however, Reformation leaders of the second and third generations turned to a controlled re-introduction of traditional methods of theological argumentation. In that connection, the distinction between inductive and deductive method appeared as a quite natural two-way movement and labor division: on the one hand, one should clearly start from the concrete data of Scripture and build sound doctrine upon them; on the other hand, once the biblical doctrine could be formulated, one was entitled and necessitated to examine the systematic presuppositions, implications and connections in view of actual (polemical) questions. The development of the *loci communes* is exemplary of this duality: initiated as a way of gathering doctrinal viewpoints from the biblical text, they soon developed into the systematic exposition and elaboration of doctrine. The documents studied in part I still show the two-way relation between inductive and deductive method: we

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encounter expositions that start from general doctrinal principles and incorporate biblical material in the elaboration of such axioms, accompanied by discussions that start with one or more places of Scripture, develop a doctrinal statement out of these texts, and then elucidate in an argumentative way the systematic aspects of that doctrine. At the end of part I, I concluded that the choice for one direction (from Scripture to doctrine or vice versa) does not necessarily affect the substance of doctrine.

Within the “deductive” method mostly used in dogmatic theology, Reformed Orthodoxy implicitly or explicitly handles the *quaestio* structure typical of medieval scholasticism. This means that the discussion of a part of doctrine focuses on a (fictively or actually) debated question that brings out the most significant systematic aspects of the matter. Typical of the *quaestio* structure is the emphasis on precise definition of the *status quaestionis* and of key terms, rehearsal of arguments *pro* and *contra*, and a resolution of the question by (a series of) distinctions that specify in what sense something is or is not the case. An important conclusion from my research is that the *quaestio* as the core of scholastic practice does not from the outset press one into a certain direction; quite the contrary, it is an open procedure that invites to find the truth on the basis of the strongest arguments and that often results in a nuanced position by providing exact distinctions.

Following the generally “Aristotelian” orientation of Reformed orthodox method, the formal type of reasoning employed is often the “syllogism.” The formalization itself is a consequence of Reformed scholasticism’s strife for precise formulation of doctrine. A syllogistic form of an argument does not *per se* decide about the truth of any statement; instead, it is a helpful instrument to make visible the structure of a proposition and to check the validity or invalidity of inferences. Syllogisms are often applied by the Reformed scholastics in polemical contexts: by analyzing the opponent’s position in a syllogistic form, they attempt to show the logical errors or ambiguities contained in it. In the practice of syllogistic analysis, we see the Reformed orthodox take two directions when refuting an opposite view: either they point at a logical mistake that leads to invalid conclusions, or they point out that a syllogistic argument, though formally valid, rests on false premises. Especially the latter observation indicates that not the formal structure of arguments decides their truth, but rather the substantial convictions taken as premises.

- In *Karl Barth’s* theology, a dominant feature of argumentation is its dialectical character. Barth’s earliest theology was therefore labeled “dialectical theology.” His later theology is less extreme in employing paradoxes, but still is profoundly dialectical at several levels. The fundamental, ontological dialectic between God and man is maintained, resulting in an epistemological dialectic of revelation and hiddenness. Typical of Barth’s mature theology is that the dialectic is not static but dynamic, and is resolved in a movement from God to man (and, subsequently, *vice versa*) in Jesus Christ.

Besides the fundamental dialectic, a dialectical pattern of reasoning is

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found in the main structure of the doctrine of divine attributes (or, in Barth's terms, perfections): the attributes are arranged according to the basic duality of divine love and divine freedom. Barth does not mean by that duality that love and freedom are opposites, but he does state that both qualify each other in a dialectical way. Consequently, the same holds for the pairs of attributes: one attribute of divine love is balanced and complemented by another attribute of divine freedom. Barth takes pains to point out how the different divine attributes modify and corroborate each other.

Within the discussion of the individual attributes, Barth maintains the dialectical form of thought by insisting that the divine perfections do not stand over against created reality (for example: eternity against time), but include in themselves the difference and unity with created reality. This pattern of differentiation – unification is ultimately rooted in Barth's version of the doctrine of the Trinity.

While the dialectic of Barth's theology is fundamentally christological, the christological focus also determines his detailed expositions in the doctrine of God. Lengthy discussions that nuance and fill the doctrinal concepts often culminate in references to the story of Jesus Christ. It is a given with Barth's argumentative procedure that only at the end the full implications of his argument can be understood.

Further, I have noted (part II, section 15.3.3) that Barth's dialectical qualification of concepts sometimes comes close to obliterating any intelligible conceptual content, for example in the simultaneous affirmation of finitude and infinity in view of God's omnipresence. There is no easy way out of this interpretational and systematic problem of Barth's way of thinking, as the dialectic of differentiation and unification – or stated otherwise: upholding and reconciling opposites – is fundamental to Barth's thought.

Finally, any analysis and evaluation of Barth has to reckon with the differences in styles and genres within the *Church Dogmatics*. While the main level of exposition often shows a considerable degree of rhetorical suggestiveness, the small print provides more precise argumentative, historical and biblical substantiation. My contention has been that an adequate systematic appraisal of Barth's doctrinal achievements should give decisive weight to the small print argument.

- From the *Utrecht School* as a strongly philosophical theological discipline, we may expect rather sophisticated patterns of argumentation. What governs most contributions to the doctrine of God are the criteria laid out by Vincent Brümmer:
  - freedom from contradiction;
  - unity (coherence);
  - relevance;
  - universality;
  - impressiveness.

Emphasis is on the first two criteria: logical consistency and coherence.

An aspect of the explicitness of argumentation in the Utrecht School is the fact that most of its members enter into methodological deliberations

## *Conclusions*

prior to their substantial investigations. These methodological expositions do not only serve as a justification of the subsequent research, but also as an expression of the fundamental approach toward the nature of theology. Examples of incisive methodological choices are Brümmer's emphasis on the metaphorical nature of theological language, and Marcel Sarot's distinction between first-order and second-order attributes of God (indicating God's moral character and his underlying "metaphysical" properties respectively).

The Utrecht School shows some characteristic practical procedures employed to meet the stated criteria. A method that is, at first sight, not typical of Utrecht, is the investigation of positions developed by other theologians. For the Utrecht scholars, however, the analysis of these positions serves the systematic development of their own argument, not historical understanding as such. As a consequence, historical positions are often reduced to standard systematic options. Examples of such standardized arguments include the "free will defense," the notion of "dual agency," and the distinction between different types of relationships.

A second device commonly used, and reminiscent of medieval and early modern scholastic practice, is to state objections in order to test a given position, or, in slightly variant form, to present problems to be solved. The result of discussing such objections and problems is the discovery of conditions which a concept or argument must satisfy.

Especially in the "Vos strand" of the Utrecht School, we encounter a tendency to formalize the arguments in the shape of syllogistic reasoning with help from symbolic logic. While this may have an alienating effect on the inexperienced reader, it is intended to make optimally visible the argumentative operations that are performed. Exact, formal reasoning helps to spell out the implications of concepts and propositions. Apart from the degree of formalism, the focus on implications is common to all Utrecht scholars. Once a concept is explained, they will always ask "what else follows?"

A final concrete argumentative procedure to be mentioned here is the "thought experiment." If there are no decisive arguments for or against a given proposition, Utrecht scholars try to imagine a hypothetical situation that provides the required clarification. For example, when asking whether sensations like joy and pain require the possession of a body, Marcel Sarot discusses the "phantom limb pain" phenomenon (see part III, section 19.3). And in exploring the notion of "counterfactuals," Eef Dekker presents the hypothetical statement: If Curley were to be offered \$ 20,000, he would accept this bribe (see part III, section 19.5).

On a larger scale, the "thought experiment" is instantiated in the idea of "possible worlds." Together with other philosophers, the Utrecht scholars do not take the actually existing universe for granted, but insist that entirely different worlds are possible. The elaborate possible worlds semantics allow one to give precise definition to important modal terms such as necessity, contingency, (im)possibility, essential and accidental properties, common and individual natures, and so on.

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- **Structures.** The structure of doctrine reflects the interaction of method and content at a rather high level of generalization. As a matter of fact, no exposition of doctrine can do without some way of ordering the material. It can be asked, however, to what extent the way of structuring affects the substance of doctrine.
  - *Reformed orthodox* discussions of the doctrine of God normally follow the following pattern:
    - Names of God;
    - Being of God;
    - Attributes of God;
    - Works of God;
    - Persons in God.

This order seems to move from epistemological preliminaries, through an ontological discussion in general terms, to the concrete salvational and trinitarian contents of biblical revelation. Understood in this way, the Orthodox structure of the doctrine of God was heavily criticized in recent theology.

As I have pointed out in part I of this study, however, this understanding can be seriously questioned. First of all, Reformed Orthodoxy refuses to treat the whole of doctrine from one, unifying systematic point of view. Opting for the *locus* method, it acknowledges that the content of God's revelation exceeds the grasp of human knowledge and reasoning. The different *loci* are connected in a loose (roughly historical) order, but are in principle interchangeable. Furthermore, in several authors the discussion of Trinity precedes the doctrine of God proper. It can well be argued that only the "doctrine of God" and the "doctrine of the Trinity" taken together cover the complete description of God's identity (as the Reformed scholastics would add: within the limits of our understanding). The movement from "general" to "special" appeals to a common sense plausibility that was inverted forcefully only in the 20th century by Karl Barth and his followers. As to the discussion of the divine names, it arises on the one hand from the sense that terminological clarification prior to further discussion is desirable, and on the other hand from the intention to give due weight to God's self-revelation through his names in Scripture.<sup>12</sup> Far from reflecting a speculative, aprioristic type of reasoning, it proceeds from characteristic Reformational convictions.

A further structure is found in the exposition of the divine attributes. These are commonly divided into two groups: incommunicable and communicable. Despite all qualifications surrounding this division, Reformed Orthodoxy holds that it does make sense to distinguish a dimension of God as He exists in himself, independent of his relations to and dealings with created reality, and a dimension of God viewed as operative and related to other beings. The former functions, so to speak, as the presupposition and prerequisite of the latter. It is worth observing that the discussion of the second group of attributes for the most part exceeds the first group in terms of length. This nuances the impression that the first group is also the most important.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:246.

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- *Karl Barth's* theology differs in structure from Reformed Orthodoxy. I do not deal here with the overall structure of the complete *Church Dogmatics*, but restrict myself to the parts directly relevant to the doctrine of God. As a first observation, we note that Barth places the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly at the very front. This decision has two important implications. First, it reflects Barth's insight that in describing God's identity, one should start not with a general concept of deity, but with the God who has revealed himself as triune. The further elaboration of concepts in the doctrine of the Trinity establishes important marks for the subsequent discussion of God's being and perfections. The idea of the triad of divine Persons as *repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate* recurs in the context of God's perfections as, similarly, repetitions of the single divine essence. The insight that God has life within himself prior to his outward relations (God's primary objectivity) functions as a regulative principle throughout the discussion of God's perfections. Second, the doctrine of the Trinity is closely connected to the doctrine of revelation. This entails an emphasis on the epistemological component of theology that remains present throughout the doctrine of God, and becomes immediately visible in the fact that the discussion of our knowledge of God comprises the first 250 pages of *KD II/1*. More substantially, the basic description of God's being that governs the subsequent exposition of God's perfections summarizes the motifs of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity:

God is who He is in the act of his revelation. God seeks and creates fellowship between himself and us, and therefore He loves us. But He is this loving God without us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the freedom of the Lord, who has his life from himself.

In turn, this description contains the fundamental pair of "love" and "freedom" that is further elaborated in the discussion of God's perfections.

Significant in the doctrine of God proper is the dialectical structure in which the divine perfections are presented. Drawing on the fundamental dialectic of love and freedom, Barth discusses God's perfections in mixed pairs: a perfection of love is accompanied by a perfection of freedom, and *vice versa*. In this way of ordering, Barth attempts to overcome the difficulties resident in the traditional incommunicable-communicable division. He pointedly gives the primary place to God's love and its attendant perfections. By pairing the perfections, however, Barth strongly connects the dimensions of love and freedom.

A final, remarkable element of the structure of Barth's doctrine of God is the fact that he incorporates the doctrine of election in it. While the inclusion of the doctrine of predestination into the doctrine of God is criticized by Barth (and others), his own understanding of election becomes, by this placement, determinative of God's being: God is in his own inner being determined to be graceful to men, to bestow his love on them and to lay his wrath on Jesus Christ exclusively.

In conclusion, the parts of Barth's theology relevant to the theme of this study have a well thought out structure that is consistently carried out

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through the first two volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the structure determines the contents of Barth's theology, because the structure itself is determined by substantial convictions concerning the identity of God. In this case, the structure reflects and serves the doctrinal interests.

- In the *Utrecht School*, it is difficult to discern an overall structure, because it consists of contributions by different authors on specific parts of the doctrine of God. In the leading figures of the School, however, some important structures can be found.

The method of conceptual inquiry developed by Brümmer is in itself applicable in all different contexts, and does not prescribe a systematical ordering of doctrine. In Brümmer's later work, however, the "key model" of a personally related God with love as his central property has a strongly structuring power. It still enables the discussion of diverse topics and the interaction with different conceptual frameworks, but it gives the discussion a recognizable twist. In the final analysis, we were even able to remark that in view of the doctrine of the Trinity, Vincent Brümmer admits that his model of love is in fact determined by his understanding of relations (part III, section 21.3.5). In several dissertations by Brümmer's pupils, the relational model of thought structures and determines the eventual argument.

The same holds for other elements of Brümmer's approach. As I have noted above under the heading of Concepts, the conceptual inquiry by the Utrecht School pays much attention to the pragmatic or attitudinal aspects adherent in the use of concepts. Ultimately, concepts are placed within a practical life form. The dissertation of Arjan Markus on God's transcendence most explicitly relates the understanding of transcendence to the "meaning of life." In other contributions, the practical emphasis occurs in the translation of theological concepts into evaluative and prescriptive terms (e.g., the term "God" means "worthy of worship").

To move to the other sub-group in the Utrecht School, we have seen that Antonie Vos gave a sketch of a complete doctrine of God in his dissertation, shaped as a "theory of divine attributes." This sketch was not afterwards elaborated into a full-scale exposition. Much of the insights in the structure of the doctrine of God can be found in Vos' publications on John Duns Scotus. Distinctive of Vos' Scotian doctrine of God is the fundamental distinction between *necessary* and *contingent* theology: necessary theology consists of the propositions that are strictly implied in God's being God, and thus cannot be negated; contingent theology deals with God's acts (including the mental acts of knowledge and will) towards created reality that can be otherwise than they in fact are. Since there is as yet no full systematic exposition from the "Vos part" of the School, we can state only tentatively that in it the distinction between necessary and contingent theology would be structurally determining.

On the basis of the above, I state that on the different levels of theological method – questions, concepts, sources, arguments, structures – the impact of

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methodological choices on the substance of doctrine can be detected. At the same time, however, this impact should not be overestimated. The way of presenting doctrine does not irreparably lead to one-sidedness in substantial understanding; methods turn out to be sufficiently flexible to allow for different insights. Furthermore, on several levels of method do we find substantial convictions lying behind the formal procedures. This brings me to the next element for discussion.

### 22.1.2. Insights Governing Method

While in the preceding observations the emphasis was on the impact of methodological choices on the substance of doctrine, we can also notice the reverse. The method employed in the exposition of the doctrine of God is governed by substantial, theological insights. For each type of theology examined in this study, I will point out some important doctrinal notions that determine method.

In Reformed Orthodoxy, three notions in particular have a strong influence on the method employed in the doctrine of God: simplicity, sovereignty, and perfection.

The notion of divine *simplicity* is often considered the key to the traditional doctrine of God. The concept can be stated in positive terms: all that is *in* God is God, or in negative terms by the denial of metaphysical, logical and physical composition in God. It can easily be understood that such a concept exerts a strongly regulative function in the exposition of the doctrine of God. It prescribes the equation of each of the divine attributes with the essence of God himself, and excludes any substantial differentiation among the diverse attributes. Three important motives behind the doctrine of simplicity should be mentioned here:

- the insight that the way in which God possesses his “qualities” cannot be derived from or made dependent on any entity outside God → divine independence and aseity;
- the insight that in God’s attributes and manifestations we have to do with God himself, not with something at any conceivable distance from God → divine integrity;
- the insight that any compositeness in God would entail the possibility of dissolution of God’s essence, which runs against the biblical teaching of God’s eternity and immutability → divine indestructibility.

The function of the doctrine of simplicity is that whatever statement is made about God should be consistent with these insights.

The regulative function of this concept of simplicity (especially in the version of “denial of distinctions”) is not meant, however, to exclude any distinctions at all and to propose a unitarian, undifferentiated concept of God. The Reformed orthodox normally defend some sort of distinction between the diverse attributes of God; a distinction that is at least grounded in the need of our limited cognitive capacities to use different concepts, but that ultimately has a “foundation” in God’s own being (*fundamentum in re*) and can therefore be called a “distinction of essential definition” (*distinctio formalis*).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The three formulations given for the nature of distinctions in God’s essence and properties stand on a scale from “negative” to “positive” theology, and can be recognized as stemming

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In Reformed scholastic theology, one can observe some difficulty with the implications of the doctrine of simplicity in the handling of the *dictum* "there are no accidents in God." All authors verbally express their acceptance of this principle, and the substantial insight thus expressed equals the interpretation of simplicity presented above. On closer analysis, however, it appears that at least some authors sensed the need to make some distinction between an essential and an accidental dimension in God's essence and in his operations (cf. part I, section 5.4.1). I will return to this issue later in this chapter (section 22.2.4). For the moment, it is important to notice that the "second group" of divine attributes precisely deals with God's outward relations and operations that need the balance of essential and accidental dimensions. As such, the elaboration of the second group of attributes is evidence against the contention that the notion of simplicity excludes any true relation of God with the world outside of him.

The second important notion to be discussed is divine *sovereignty*. It follows immediately from God's simplicity, especially in the sense of divine independence and aseity. Consequently, the first aspect of God's sovereignty is his *ontological priority* over all other entities. God's existence and essence cannot be derived or deduced from anything else; on the contrary, God is the ultimate presupposition and ground of possibility of the existence of all other things. It is in these terms that Reformed Orthodoxy (following the patristic and scholastic tradition) couches the Christian confession of God as Creator of heaven and earth. The fact that, since the scholastics (from Anselm to Thomas, Scotus, and Ockham), this ontological priority of God has been formulated in terms of causality (God as *prima causa*) should not prevent us from acknowledging the deeply religious roots of this notion.

The second aspect of God's sovereignty, following on the first, is his *conceptual priority*. If God can in his existence and essence not be reduced to anything else, the same must hold for concepts we use to describe God. As the scholastics prefer to say in a language reminiscent of Plato, all perfections are primarily and *per se* in God and secondarily and *by participation* in us. That means that we cannot determine "from below" the meaning of concepts in application to God, but that we should let God determine (in his revelation in Scripture) what terms mean in view of him. Though the concepts used for God are first known by us from their earthly usage, we have to "rethink" them starting from God. It can be questioned, however, whether the Reformed scholastics always manage to stay true to this principle: in some cases (for example, when dealing with divine justice) they start their discussion with a definition taken from common philosophical language (mainly Aristotelian). Even then, they are aware that the concept applies to God in a unique way, free of all imperfections that adhere to creatures.

The third aspect of God's sovereignty is his *moral freedom*. God's ontological priority and independence implies that God can in his actions be coerced and limited by nothing. Whatever God does, arises from the free decision of his will. The central and determining role of the divine will is one of the characteristics of the doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy. This moral freedom of God affects the

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from nominalist, Thomist, and Scotist schools respectively. I treat the latter two approaches as systematically convergent.

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relation between God and the (moral) good. The prevalence of the divine will excludes God's being subjected to a pre-established notion of goodness. God's own will is the ultimate source and norm of goodness. This contention is safeguarded from the danger of extreme voluntarism by the insight that God is essentially good. While nothing outside of God can prescribe anything to him, God's own holy will is the warrant that whatever God is and wills and does is truly good. As we have seen in part I of this study, this combination of insights urged the Reformed scholastics (drawing on earlier medieval thought, especially Duns Scotus) to develop a conceptual apparatus that enabled them to establish a precise and adequate balance of necessity and contingency and of divine and human freedom.

As a final crucial notion in the Reformed orthodox exposition of the doctrine of God I mention divine *perfection*. In this respect, Reformed scholasticism continues in the line of "perfect being theology" of which Anselm of Canterbury is the most well-known representative. It could be said, however, that most Reformed scholastics do not argue for God's perfection in precisely the philosophically penetrating way we encounter in Anselm and other medievals. Especially the "ontological argument" for the existence of God is less prominent in Reformed theology than it was in medieval thought. Nevertheless, the substantial conviction that God is perfect in all respects is, according to the Reformed orthodox, clearly taught by Scripture and should therefore be regulative in theology. The most important consequences of this notion of perfection in the further doctrine of God are (a) the attempt to remove all "imperfections" from the interpretation of whatever divine attribute, and (b) the repeated statement that there is no "need" in God that should be relieved by, for example, God's relationship with man.

With Karl Barth's theology, we arrive in an entirely different climate. While some of the governing Reformed orthodox insights are present in his theology as well, the theological constellation is different. Most prominent in Barth's theology are the three following principles: christological concentration, trinitarian framework, and divine freedom. In addition to these central notions, I will make some remarks on Barth's position in respect to the question of divine simplicity/multiplicity.

That *christological concentration* is the hallmark of Barth's mature theology, is well known.<sup>14</sup> Barth pretends that it alone constitutes a truly theological method, as distinct from any method that starts from general principles of thought outside the revelation in Christ. As I have noted in part II of this study (section 10.3.2), God's act of revelation in Jesus Christ is, for Barth, both the ontic and the noetic foundation of all theology. In Barth's exposition of the doctrine of God, this has significant methodological consequences. Throughout his discussion of the diverse "perfections," Barth makes it clear that their *focus* lies in Jesus Christ. If we want to know God's wisdom, righteousness, omnipresence, almightiness and so on, we have to look at Christ. Especially Barth's exegetical expositions always culminate in Jesus Christ. At bottom, the focus of all attributes in Christ has to do with the overcoming of the fundamental difference between God and man. Barth consistently argues that God's attributes should not be understood in contrast with crea-

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 43-50.

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ted reality, but should be seen as the reconciliation of unity and difference. This dialectical thought form is based by Barth on the revelation – reconciliation act of God in Christ. In this respect, Barth's strictly christological doctrine of *election* spells out the implications of his overall principle of christological concentration. Election does not only determine our human destination, it also determines God's own essence. In Jesus Christ, God takes upon himself our sin and damnation and bestows on us his righteousness and glory. By the election of Christ, God commits himself to being *our* God. The impact of this doctrinal position is enormous: throughout the doctrine of God, Barth excludes the possibility that we would ever be without God. The *diastasis* of Barth's early theology is overcome by the statement that God includes us in his communion of love.

The *doctrine of the Trinity* as Barth expounds it is in the first instance a wider framework of exactly the same divine reality that is expressed in the christological concentration. As we saw in part II, Barth's theology shows a marvelous unity thanks to the cluster of equivalent doctrines: Trinity – Christology – election – revelation – reconciliation. The function of the doctrine of the Trinity, however, extends beyond these fundamental connections. I point to three further consequences:

1. The doctrine of the Trinity obliges theology to describe God's identity in personal and particular categories. The God in whom the Christian Church believes is not a "highest Being" identified by the most abstract concepts of rational thought, but is the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ, identified by his gracious acts. From this fundamental insight arises Barth's consistent rejection of all "natural theology" and of any tendency to derive statements concerning God from "general" truth. It also accounts for the fundamental place of his biblical-theological expositions in developing the doctrine of God.
2. The doctrine of the Trinity as inner-divine relatedness functions as a "prototype" of God's relations to the created world. Barth elaborates this insight in two directions: (a) the essential relations between the Persons within God safeguard God's ontological independence: since He has the fullness of life within himself, God does not need the relation to world or man in order to be completely God; (b) on the other hand, God's being related in himself is the immanent ground and source of God's bestowing his love on us: God is essentially communicative and relational, and thus can communicate and relate to us.
3. In Barth's doctrine of the Trinity, a specific principle of unity and differentiation is at work: the divine Persons differentiate themselves from the others, but then "return" to full community of divine life. A similar pattern is visible in Barth's doctrine of the divine perfections. At the highest level, he presents the divine perfections as "repetitions" of God's essence, just as the Persons are understood as eternal repetitions of God's essence. The metaphor (if it is one) of repetition allows Barth to assume some movement and difference in God's being. This possibility returns in the exposition of distinct attributes such as God's immutability and eternity. Because God "repeats himself" as Father, Son, and Spirit, there is no need for a merely *a-temporal* understanding of God. Although, in my analysis, Barth does not unambiguously advocate a *temporal* understand-

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ding of God, the fundamental structure deriving from his doctrine of the Trinity would certainly permit such an elaboration.

A third principle of Barth's theology that strongly influences his method is his notion of *divine freedom*. It originates from Barth's attack on liberal theology which, in Barth's eyes, made God an object at man's disposal instead of the free subject of his own acts. The motif of freedom continues in the dialectic of the revelation and hiddenness of God: when God graciously reveals himself, He remains free and is never fully grasped by man. Barth's notion of divine freedom seems rather extreme when we hear him state that God's freedom even exempts him from the laws of logic (i.e., the law of non-contradiction). In other parts of his doctrine of God, however, we encounter a balance between God's freedom, love, wisdom and goodness that comes close to the Reformed scholastic position. Then it becomes clear that Barth's intention is to prevent the subordination of God to human thought, not to plea for an arbitrary, capricious concept of God.

Finally, something needs to be said of Barth's use of the concept of simplicity in relation to his introduction of "multiplicity" in the exposition of God's perfections. As I have concluded in part II of this study, Barth accepts and employs the following implications of the traditional notion of simplicity:

- the perfections are identical with God's own essence;
- the perfections do not substantially differ from each other;
- the perfections should be understood from God's being, not from any general categories of thought.

Besides this positive function of the doctrine of simplicity, we find a critical attitude towards the traditional emphasis on the denial of any differentiation in God. As I have pointed out before, Barth assumes a dialectical unity-in-differentiation in God. In his basic definition of God's being, he consciously employs "actualist" language that evokes the idea of a dynamic, differentiated reality. For that reason, Barth does not share scholasticism's abhorrence of "real" differences in God's being. In effect, however, Barth's discussion of the subsequent perfections does not lead to the establishment of real differences or contradictions: he consistently emphasizes the essential unity of all God's perfections, stating that they mutually qualify each other and should be understood together.

Finally, the Utrecht School also exhibits the impact of some substantial notions on its method.

Vincent Brümmer's project of philosophical theology, which seems at first sight to employ a formal and neutral method, is in fact driven by firm theological convictions. In a gradual but very consistent way, Brümmer developed a personal model of God in which "love" is the central concept. Brümmer's understanding of God's love as a personal, relational category has important consequences for several parts of the doctrine of God.

In general, the relational understanding of God excludes the interpretation of God's mode of acting in terms of "causal manipulation" and of God's own being in merely "essentialist" terms. A first example is the doctrine of irresistible grace, closely connected to the doctrine of predestination. The personal relationship with God is a relationship of love. In a loving relationship it is *rationaly impossible* to reject the bestowed love, just as it is rationally impossible to act against one's

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conscience. Where the love of God is experienced as an undeserved favor, it is impossible to reject this favor. From this interpretation, Brümmer comes to reject the “causal-manipulative” framework, which he detects in the Canons of Dordt on this issue.

Another theme addressed by Brümmer is the question as to how God relates to evil. In this respect, he modifies the traditional idea that it is *essentially* impossible for God to do anything evil: The best way to account for God’s inability to do evil is to speak of his divine *disposition* never to act out of his character; in this disposition, God’s will is accompanied by his omniscience and his freedom from all constraints. In both examples, we see that the notions of personhood and relation, which presuppose freedom, determine Brümmer’s further argument.

The notion of freedom is also prominent in the other part of the Utrecht School. Here, it has a somewhat different context, namely the theory of necessity and contingency. The analysis of reality in terms of modalities is claimed to be based on the biblical revelation of God as the free Creator of a contingent world, and intends to safeguard the freedom of the will of both God and man. The focus of the Utrecht School on divine and human freedom heavily bears on its methodological procedures: much energy is invested in examining the conditions and presuppositions under which true freedom is warranted in theological conceptuality. Especially in the “Vos part” of the Utrecht School, the technicalities of modal ontology and possible world theory are frequently employed in order to clarify these matters. Here the lines of medieval and Reformed scholasticism are continued in interaction with recent, contemporary philosophical discussion. An effect of the focus on necessity and contingency is the fact that in the most penetrating analyses (e.g., by Antonie Vos and Nico den Bok) the dimensions of necessity – contingency and essential – accidental become the most fundamental dimensions of all theological and philosophical thought. Next to the doctrine of God proper, the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology and reconciliation in particular are analyzed in these terms.

In both strands of the Utrecht School, we find a continuation of the “perfect being” theology initiated by Augustine and Anselm. The statement that all and only the best conceivable properties should be attributed to God (provisionally treated as a “title-term”) functions as a standard rule in this type of philosophical theology. The application of this principle by different members of the School, however, varies considerably. The question whether it is better to have or not have a certain property can be answered in different ways that reflect different preferences and basic values. For example, Antonie Vos provides a stringent argumentation in order to prove that God must be necessarily unique, infinite, omniscient and immutable. Others, such as Luco van den Brom, approach God’s “great-making properties” from the requirements of religious practice. Marcel Sarot consistently argues from the “perfect being” principle, but couples that approach to insights from process philosophy, to the effect that God is understood as temporal rather than a-temporal and that God’s omniscience entails his being subject to passion and emotion.

### 22.1.3. Method as a Hermeneutical Category

In the preceding sections, I elaborated the two-way interaction of method and content in the doctrine of God. In order to understand more fully the function of method in theology, I further point to the importance of method as a “hermeneutical category.” By “hermeneutical category” I mean that method (understood as the whole of argumentative strategies) serves in theology as a vehicle to transmit the message of Scripture in response to historical and cultural circumstances. The research that was presented in parts I – III of this study provides abundant material in favor of the claim that the concrete shape taken by theology in different times is influenced (to say the least) by the historical, cultural, social, philosophical and theological<sup>15</sup> situation of that time. Generally speaking, theology throughout the ages has (rightly) attempted to be contextually adequate and relevant. That does not in itself mean that the non-negotiable truth of the gospel is bargained away; quite the contrary, the intention is to speak this truth to the ears and hearts of people of a certain era. In order to do so, it is theology’s task to explicate the contents of the Christian faith (listening to God’s own revelation in Scripture) in interaction with actual cultural and philosophical themes and questions. The shifts in these themes and questions result in significant changes in the way theology presents and defends the Church’s doctrine.

Let me illustrate these considerations by concrete material from each preceding part of this study.

In Reformed Orthodoxy, a polemical dimension of debate with opposing positions is evident. As a consciously argumentative theology in search of truth, it felt obliged to analyze and refute contrary accounts of religious truth. Interestingly, we see a shift of polemical frontiers over the course of Reformed orthodox theology, leading to changes in doctrinal focus and in argumentation and refinement of thought. Reformed scholasticism developed as a recognizable phenomenon in the 1550’s and 60’s. In the four or five decades that followed, the main opponents in scholastic debate were the Lutherans and the Roman-Catholic Church. The confrontation with the Lutherans concerned mainly the doctrines of predestination, Christology, and the Lord’s Supper. From a methodological point of view, it is important to notice that these discussions touch upon the question of the relation between revelation and reason: the Lutherans claimed that the particular conjunction of the divine and human natures of Christ (*communicatio idiomatum*) entails consequences that exceed “normal” physical and metaphysical possibilities. In effect, the Lutherans accepted a “double truth”: what is true in philosophy need not be true in theology. In the Reformed response, the emphasis is on internal theological considerations that lead to a different Christology. In the course of argumentation, however, the Reformed rejected the “double truth” view and accepted the principle that what is true in philosophy is also true in theology. This does not mean that the Reformed made rational thought the judge and standard of theological truth, but it does mean that they advocated a consistently rational explanation of the relation of both natures of Christ. As to the doctrine of

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<sup>15</sup> This is not intended as an exhaustive enumeration of situational factors that have impact on theology.

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Eucharist, the Reformed held that a spiritual, significative understanding of Christ's presence in the elements of bread and wine is preferable to the Lutheran theory of consubstantiality. The Reformed tended to reject hypotheses that are *unnecessary* from a religious, biblical perspective and that are *implausible* from the perspective of logical consistency. Concerning the doctrine of predestination, the Reformed had to face the Lutheran charge that it leads to determinism and fatalism. This confrontation led to efforts to establish a precise balance of necessity and contingency, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, a balance that subsequently received an important structural place in the Reformed doctrine of God. The Reformed eagerly pointed out that the Lutheran alternative of election of the basis of foreseen faith (*e praevisa fide*) is biblically insufficient. Again, a dimension in this discussion is the legitimacy of rational thought: according to the Lutherans, the Reformed got entangled in the logical consequences of a determinist system, and would have been better off had they stopped their reasoning at an earlier point. The Reformed, in response, showed how the apparently conflicting principles and interests could be reconciled in a biblically adequate and rationally consistent way.

The second frontier of Early Reformed Orthodoxy was the Roman-Catholic Church. The debate with this opponent has a few divergent consequences. First, the principal issue between Rome and Reformation is the authority of Scripture and tradition. While the Reformed cannot be accused of neglect or contempt of the tradition, they clearly stated that the ultimate source and norm of doctrine is God's own Word in Holy Scripture. The exact elaboration of the doctrine of Scripture is one of the great theological consequences of the Reformation. After the Council of Trent, Catholic polemicists (or, as they call themselves, controversialists) defended the position of the Church on Scripture and tradition by, among other things, pointing at the obscurity of Scripture that requires the tradition and the teaching office of the Church. These attacks led several Reformed theologians to refutation by means of further doctrinal exposition and minute scrutiny of alleged obscurities and contradictions in Scripture.<sup>16</sup> The Roman-Catholic emphasis on tradition as a decisive instance in theology had the further effect that most Reformed theologians were quite reserved in expressing their continuity with earlier, patristic and scholastic, theology. Both in biblical exegesis and in doctrinal exposition, the continuity is considerable. Understandably, this fact was somewhat concealed for tactical reasons. On the other hand, some early orthodox writers strengthened their polemical case by pointing out that respected theologians of the Church agree with the Reformed rather than with the Catholics. A final effect of the debate with Roman-Catholicism in the early phase of Reformed Orthodoxy is situated more directly in the doctrine of God: discussions of divine attributes such as grace, justice and foreknowledge underscore the Reformed conviction that salvation rests ultimately on God's good pleasure, not on man's merits. This area of debate would extend into the next phase of Reformed scholastic theology.

From the turn of the 17th century until the 1650's en 60's, the issues mentioned above continued to be treated in Reformed orthodox theology. Gradually, we see a

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<sup>16</sup> Whitaker (see Broeyer, *William Whitaker*), Amesius (see Dekker, "Ecumenical Debate"), Polanus, Lubbertus (see Van der Woude, *Sibrandus Lubbertus*).

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certain standardization of the positions due to the disappearance of immediate, live debates. The debate with the Lutherans on Christology and the Lord's Supper, together with its dimension of revelation – reason, reappeared in connection with the fundamental discussion of the relation between philosophy and theology. Reformed scholastics developed the theory of mixed articles / syllogisms: certain doctrinal points require the combination of propositions taken from Scripture and from philosophy. The Reformed argued that conclusions from such mixed syllogisms are truly theological and have doctrinal authority;<sup>17</sup> the instrumental function of logical reasoning in bringing about the implications of biblical truth was clearly stated.

During the first half of the 17th century, the debate on the implications of the gospel of free grace intensified from several sides. First, the controversy with Roman-Catholicism received new impulses from the intra-Catholic struggle on "grace and its auxiliaries" (*de gratia et de auxiliis*), which was kindled by Jesuit theologians such as Luis Molina and Francesco Fonseca. Within the Catholic Church, the careful Thomist synthesis built on the basis of Augustine's teachings became disrupted by the influx of a typically early modern plea for human freedom and autonomy. Since the advocates of the Jesuit position embedded their views in a renewed and sophisticated version of (roughly Aristotelian) metaphysics, the scientific challenge arising from their doctrines extended beyond the walls of the Catholic Church and reached also Reformed theologians. Among the first Protestant theologians who digested the new Jesuit theories we find Jacob Arminius. Passing over the whole theological and ecclesiastical debate that led to the condemnation of Arminius and his followers and to the drawing up of the Canons of Dordt, I note that through his theology a similar attitude of early modern humanism obtained a foothold in Reformed thought. No wonder that Reformed orthodox writers often treated the Arminians as allies of the "papists," especially of the Jesuits among the Catholics.

The polemical situation sketched above makes it understandable that the development of an adequate position on the issues of predestination, grace and freedom was an urgent task for Reformed scholastic theology. In part I of this study, we have seen that the performance of this task resulted in a doctrine of God in which the divine will has the decisive role and which strikes a precise conceptual balance between necessity and contingency. Over against the Jesuit device of "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*), the Reformed orthodox argued that the certainty and infallibility of divine foreknowledge does not endanger or destroy human freedom of choice and moreover, that no human act of will can occur without a logically prior decision of God's will. The Reformed elaborated the usual framework of primary and secondary causality with a variegated exposition of different sorts of necessity and freedom in the relation between these two levels of causality. In this respect, my research yields an important conclusion: contrary to popular opinion, the framework of causal language in Reformed scholasticism is

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the famous phrase from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.6 (Schaff, *Creeds*, 603): "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by *good and necessary consequence* [italics added] may be deduced from Scripture."

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not the immediate consequence of the application of Aristotelian philosophy, and thus alien to biblical and religious interests. On the contrary, it reflects the conscious effort to express fundamental biblical insights and profound religious interests in a conceptuality that enables the exact exchange of theological arguments.

A different frontier of Reformed theology in the era of High Orthodoxy (ca. 1620-1680) is formed by the Socinians. Although first appearing to represent but a marginal movement, the Socinians turned out to be one of the most profound challenges to Reformed theology. As early rationalists and fore-runners of the Enlightenment, they advocated a rational religion purified from allegedly irrational doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. In a sense, the Socinians were moved by the same mindset as the aforementioned Catholics and Arminians, though in a more radical way. The opposition by the Socinians forced the Reformed scholastics to point out that the traditional doctrines, including God's justice, grace and omnipotence, do not lead to absurdity but are rationally consistent. The Socinian opposition to orthodoxy has an ironic side. While actually assigning to reason the decisive role in religious matters, they attested a strong adherence to revelation and rejected the traditional procedure of providing arguments for the existence of God. Behind this allegedly "revelationist" surface, the Reformed orthodox sensed the immediate threat of rationalism and the further consequence of outright atheism: given the dominance of rational judgment for the Socinians, the privileges conceded to faith and revelation would not hold out for long. In response, the Reformed insisted on the inner harmony between revealed truth and rational thought and maintained the (modest) legitimacy of natural theology and theistic proofs. After all, the Reformed scholastic appeal to rational truth and natural theology was intended as a defense of biblical truth against the Socinians. From a hermeneutical point of view, we can learn from this case that theological positions (i.e., the issue of natural theology and the arguments for the existence of God) should be judged in connection with contemporary polemical alternatives.

In the second half of the 17th century, the polemical scene shifted again. Early Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Spinoza presented new ways of philosophizing that did not only contradict Reformed scholasticism on specific theological or philosophical issues, but in the long run undermined the intellectual plausibility of the entire thought system derived from Aristotle's philosophy.

The appearance of the *philosophia nova* led to diverse reactions: some Reformed philosophers and theologians adopted the philosophical approach of Descartes, while the majority rejected the Cartesian method and much of the specific theories attached to it. What especially bothered the Reformed opponents of Cartesianism is, first, the fundamental duality of thought and matter (*cogitatio – extensio*) and, second, the subjective turn. The duality of thought and matter affected the understanding of God's spirituality. While in traditional terms, the *spiritualitas Dei* comprised the intrinsic vitality, the non-materiality, and the invisibility of God, under Cartesian dominance this concept received a strong emphasis on the rational(ist) dimension of "thought" (*cogitatio*). As we have seen (part I, section 6.1), Bernard Pictet adopted the interpretation of *spiritualitas* as *cogitatio*; but most Reformed theologians carefully distanced themselves from Cartesianism on this point. The other difficulty for Reformed scholastics was Descartes' argument for

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the existence of God on the basis of the innate "idea of God" (*idea Dei*) in the human mind. While this argument has some resemblance with medieval theistic proofs (especially with the "ontological" argument of Anselm), Descartes gave it a subjective turn by taking the rational human mind as his starting point. The *idea Dei* is based on the *cogito ergo sum*. In earlier apologetics, the foundation of arguments was always some aspect of the reality of God himself and his works, not human thought that "requires" the idea of God as its presupposition. The rejection of the Cartesian "idea of God" increased the tendency in Reformed theology to treat the "ontological" argument with some reservation and to focus on the revelation of God (in creation and in Scripture) as the basis of our knowledge of God.

The role of the philosophy of Spinoza in Reformed theology is much more limited than that of Descartes. Standing in the same fundamental duality of thought and matter, Spinoza opted for matter (extension) as the basic category and advocated the identification of God and nature in one all-encompassing substance (*Deus sive natura*). This system of thought was so obviously removed from basic Reformed notions that it had little, if any, attractiveness. The most discernible effect of the confrontation with Spinoza's philosophy is a reinforcement of the traditional Reformed position on the (in)corporeality of God. From the Early Church onward, the heresy of the Anthropomorphites who ascribed a real body to God was rejected; this rejection received an actualization in view of Spinoza and sectarian groups that adopted some of Spinoza's ideas. The interaction with Spinozist thought is most clearly present in Bernhardinus de Moor's *Commentarius perpetuus*, the last full statement of Reformed orthodox theology from the third quarter of the 18th century.

This brings us to the final phase of Reformed orthodoxy during the 18th century. Internally, most insights and arguments remained to be expounded and employed. It became gradually clear, however, that the Reformed scholastic type of theology was no longer ecclesiastically and culturally dominant. It lost its intellectual plausibility in the eyes of many, even in academic theology itself. I have pointed to the remarkable transition that took place from father Francesco Turretini to his son Jean-Alphonse (part I, section 3.3). The former presented, in the third quarter of the 17th century, a firm and thorough defense of Reformed scholastic theology in self-conscious interaction with theological and philosophical opponents. The latter moved, at the turn from the 17th to the 18th century, to a theology that strongly depends on the approval of secular philosophical reason and for that sake reduces the contents of Christian theology to a minimum of "natural religion." For the doctrine of God, this means that the confession of God as triune was marginalized and that traditionally important attributes such as simplicity, aseity and immutability were either passed over or modified. Generally speaking, the leading theology of the 18th century is no longer a Reformed orthodox and scholastic theology, notwithstanding exceptions such as Bernhardinus de Moor. Philosophical systems presented by men such as John Locke, G.W. Leibniz and Christian Wolff drastically changed the intellectual stage and evoked a new theology in accordance with Enlightenment principles. My intention here is not to evaluate this development, but to point to the strong impact of contextual factors on the history of Reformed scholastic theology.

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In a different constellation, Karl Barth's theology as well shows the impact of contextual factors and the hermeneutical importance of method as a way to deal with these factors. It should be noted that Barth handled these matters in a very conscious way. The departure from the established liberal German theology seemed to require the choice for a "dialectical" theology with strong "existentialist" overtones. Fairly early on in his theological development, however, Barth reconnected himself to the orthodox theological tradition of the Church and in an increasingly clear way viewed the Church as the proper context and basis for theology. The principal focus on the Church and its teaching led Barth to a specific attitude towards the great political and social challenge posed by the rise of Hitler's Nazi Germany. From a hermeneutical point of view, one might expect a direct reaction to this threatening context in Barth's theology. However, we hardly find such direct repercussions. Barth exhorted church and theology to stay true to their proper duty: proclaiming the Word of God. The battle to be fought out in the 1930's was, in Barth's view, not a political fight with the Nazi regime as such, but a war within the Church over obedience to the one and only Lord Jesus Christ. Behind the particular phenomenon of the Nazi movement, Barth detected the general and endemic error of modern Protestantism to allow instances next to the Word of God to gain authority. His diagnosis of the situation is thus put in theological terms, and the profoundly theological disease is cured by theological medicine.<sup>18</sup>

That being said, Barth's theology does in an unambiguous yet sophisticated way reflect the legacy of 19th century European (German) philosophy and theology. Barth's concentration on the epistemological problem cannot be understood without the profound influence of Immanuel Kant.<sup>19</sup> Important decisions in Barth's doctrine of God draw on the dilemmas created by Idealist theology: the duality of "spirit and nature" and of "personality and absoluteness"; the introduction of actualist, dynamic categories in the description of God's "being." To be sure, Barth sought to develop genuinely theological positions on these issues, obedient to Scripture and thus not tributary to philosophy. The way in which the questions are posed and answered, however, clearly shows traces of the original philosophical and theological context.

A further hermeneutical feature of Barth's theology relates to his view on and use of Scripture. Early in his career, Barth developed an insight he would never abandon: the co-temporality or simultaneity of God's revelation in Scripture with our lives in a different age. Barth viewed Scripture not as a document from past ages, but as the living Word of God that addresses us immediately. With this hermeneutical approach, Barth differs from both the historical-critical theology he

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<sup>18</sup> See part II, section 11.3, where I refer to the *Barmen Theological Declaration*. With the emphasis on the theological dimension of Barth's reaction to contextual factors, I implicitly reject interpretations of Barth as consistently socialist (F.-W. Marquardt) or implicitly fascist (Rendtorff, Graf, et al.). My interpretation as substantiated in part II of this study supports the claim that Barth should first and above all be understood and valued as what he claimed to be: a theologian of the Church.

<sup>19</sup> Van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel*, 11-14, 225-227, 236-255, 262-266 (English: *As in a Mirror*, 3-6, 246-248, 258-281, 289-293).

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grew up with and the traditional orthodox understanding of Scripture. The cleft between Barth and historical criticism is exemplarily manifest in the polemic between Barth and Adolf von Harnack (see part II, section 10.1.1). The difference with older protestant orthodoxy is, first, that Barth does not principally deny the legitimacy of historical criticism although he states its inadequacy, and, second, that he advocates a dynamic and actualist doctrine of revelation in three distinct shapes: Christ, Scripture, proclamation (see part II, section 10.3.1). Barth's place between "liberal" and "orthodox" views of Scripture should not obscure the fact that his expressed deeper affinity is with the older, orthodox doctrine.

Besides the conscious relation of Barth's theology to different parts of its context, we can notice some unconscious effects. Important parts of his theology seem to reflect an authoritarian climate or way of thinking. This holds for his emphasis on the authority of God's own Word, and for the centrality of the notion of Lordship in his doctrine of God. This observation is extremely difficult to value properly. To be frank, the emphases on the authority of God's Word and on God's being the Lord are common to Calvinist theology rather than typical of Barth. On the other hand, the "authoritarian" traits of Barth's theology seem to be tightly connected to Barth's personality, in that he almost claims the authority of divine revelation for his own expositions. I would not go as far as to deconstruct Barth's theology down to fascism dressed up as doctrine. I would suggest, however, that unconscious influences of the authoritarian age in which Barth grew up and lived cannot be excluded.<sup>20</sup>

A similar connection may be sensed in the focus on the "community" instead of the "individual" in Barth's doctrine of election. Although it is undoubtedly intended as a faithful expression of biblical doctrine, it fits well with the widespread attention to communal aspects of human life in the 1930's and 40's, followed in the 1950's by the idea of the Church's service to the world. Perhaps we can best say that Barth integrated these broader concerns creatively into his theology and thus reinforced the tendencies that were already present.

In the philosophical theology of the Utrecht School, three contextual factors play a role.

First, I mention the crisis of religion in 20th century Western Europe and North America. Important philosophers, especially from the school of logical positivism, denied that religious language makes any sense, let alone can be true, and advocated an overt atheism. In the intellectual milieu of the 1940's till 1960's, the devastating criticism of religion and theology seemed to leave no room at all for the rational defense of the Christian faith. In different ways, the founders of the Utrecht School sought a way out of this hopeless situation. Vincent Brümmer took, in a sense, the positivist approach for granted by connecting to the movement of linguistic analysis following the later Ludwig Wittgenstein. The combination of speech act theory and language game theory seemed to provide a new possibility to account for the significance of religious language. Starting from the low level

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<sup>20</sup> Pannenberg, *Problemggeschichte*, 202-204 points out that "decisionism" and "authoritarianism" were widespread features of the cultural and scientific climate of the 1920's and 1930's.

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assumption that believers perform meaningful speech acts by uttering religious statements, Brümmer attempts to work out the realist and evaluative implications of such statements and to relate these to what he calls "real world language." The undeniable result of conceptual analysis as performed by the Utrecht School is that Christian religious concepts and propositions are demonstrated to be no mere nonsense, but instead can be elaborated in a perfectly consistent and coherent way. Antonie Vos faced the same radical criticism by atheist philosophers and chose a somewhat different strategy to counter it: he analyzed the fundamental ideas behind non-Christian philosophy and discovered that these ideas (the strict connection of certainty on the level of knowledge and of necessity on the level of being) are self-contradictory. In response, Vos developed a distinctly Christian ontology, following the lead of John Duns Scotus. The analysis of reality in terms of necessity and contingency is closely connected to the doctrines of God and of the Trinity. In fact, the correct distinction of these two dimensions rests on the fundamental insights of the Christian doctrine of God. The outcome of Vos' approach is the statement that the Christian faith provides a (or: the only) consistent explanation of the whole of reality. Christian faith is not inferior but superior in terms of philosophy.

While the atheist critique to which the Utrecht School responds came from without, there was also a situation within the realm of church and theology that (antithetically) contributed to the development of the Utrecht School. As both Brümmer and Vos have at times narrated, the Dutch theological scene in the 1950's and '60 was dominated by Barthianism. One effect of this Barthianist domination was an extreme emphasis on the revelation of the mysteries of faith and on the paradoxical character of revelation. One could hardly explain what the "articles of faith" meant in rational terms or argue for their plausibility. In this respect, it seems to me that the Barthianism mentioned here took one side of Barth's own theology and developed it in an irrationalist direction. Indicative of that tendency is the sacred loftiness in which these theologians used to speak of the "Name" of the Lord: a Name that is all mystery, and of which nothing further can be said.<sup>21</sup> The early Utrecht scholars found themselves troubled by this irrational, mysterious climate. Far from denying that faith is mysterious and rests on divine revelation, they insisted on the importance and legitimacy of the question "What does it mean?" This general difference in theological orientation is reflected in the different positions on the more technical question as to how our concepts can or cannot apply to God. As we have seen in part II of this study, Karl Barth moved from the emphasis on the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man to the cautious acceptance of the *analogia fidei*. Brümmer and Vos do, in the first place, reject the idea of infinite qualitative difference as the suitable starting point of theological language and, in the second place, replace the idea of analogy by the stronger claim of univocity of concepts: if we apply terms to God, they have exactly the same meaning that they have in application to other beings. In this respect, the Utrecht School goes one step further than traditional Reformed theology that held to the view of "analogical predication" (see part I, section 5.2).

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<sup>21</sup> In the line of K.H. Miskotte, Th.J.M. Naastepad, F.H. Breukelman and the *Amsterdam School* of biblical theology.

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An additional influence that can be detected in some members of the Utrecht School comes from process philosophy and theology. Interestingly, Antonie Vos' dissertation on *Knowledge and Necessity* occasioned the philosopher H.G. Hubbeling to confront Vos with the question whether he would not prefer to join process theology. Vos forcefully rejected this suggestion: process thought leaves intact the basic modal structures of antique thought, since contingency still is understood merely as temporal change. Another problem with process theology is that it pretends to solve the problem of "foreknowledge vs. freedom" by making God's knowledge temporal and probable rather than eternal and certain. Vos makes it clear that this argument rests on the false assumption that certain, infallible divine foreknowledge destroys contingency and freedom. Finally, Vos rejects the pivotal notion of divine self-realization through the world process. He argues that entities (including God) are determined by their essential properties, not by accidental properties. Despite its refutation by Vos, process theology remained attractive to some members of the Utrecht School. This is most clearly the case with Marcel Sarot, who builds his concept of the "corporeality of God" on assumptions taken from process thought. Typical "process elements" here are the organic unity of God and the world (analogous to the unity of soul and body), the claim that knowledge must be experiential, and the emphasis on the responsiveness of God. To a lesser degree, some of these ideas are taken over by Arjan Markus (who had Sarot as one of his dissertation supervisors): Markus advocates a (partly) temporal and mutable understanding of God, and argues that God's knowledge must be "intimate and experiential," and will therefore often be no more than "probable." The positions taken by Sarot and Markus did not go unchallenged within the circles of the Utrecht School. Luco van den Brom, Eef Dekker and Nico den Bok attacked different aspects of process thought imported by Sarot. We must conclude that "process theology" is a contextual factor influencing the Utrecht School, but that it is an influence that is internally debated.

As a final level of interaction between the cultural climate and the theology of the Utrecht School, I mention the emphasis on personal relations and human freedom. As we have seen in part III of this study, these two themes are closely interconnected. It is hard to see this emphasis in the Utrecht School apart from the focus on autonomy and freedom extant in Western European culture ever since the Renaissance and from the rise of relational thinking in the 20th century. In Vincent Brümmer and those immediately following him, the influence of the cultural climate on these issues seems strongest. In the more tradition-oriented part of the Utrecht School, it is balanced by a high view of divine sovereignty. Moreover, it is interesting from a hermeneutical point of view that in investigating the scholastic tradition, these Utrecht scholars discover the most satisfactory accounts of divine and human freedom precisely in the orthodox Reformed direction. The least we can say is that contemporary themes and preferences have occasioned and stimulated the historical and systematic research of the Utrecht School.

#### 22.1.4. The Limited Significance of Method

In the first sub-section above, I have listed important effects of the method employed in the doctrine of God on the doctrinal content. In the present sub-section, I will balance these statements by pointing to the *limited significance* of method.

One of the great surprises of my research is the large amount of doctrinal continuity throughout the changes of context and method. Of course, the differences in the exposition of the doctrine of God should not be neglected. Critical interaction with parts of the theological tradition and their respective methods yields important insights that deserve further elaboration. Despite the significant changes of theological and philosophical orientation, we can state that central notions of Christian faith remain intact over centuries of theology stretching from early Reformed orthodox theology in the mid-16th century through Karl Barth's theology of the 1920's to the 1950's and into the philosophical theology of the Utrecht School at the close of the 20th century. Primarily three key doctrines stand out as permanent milestones of the doctrine of God:

1. The ontological differentiation between God and world / man. Reformed Orthodoxy as well as Karl Barth and the Utrecht School take the fundamental difference based on the Creator – creature distinction as the starting point of their thinking. Honoring this distinction prevents the subsuming of God under preconceived general concepts of “being.”
2. The doctrine of simplicity. Admittedly this doctrine has received considerable modification and re-evaluation with Karl Barth and the Utrecht School (especially F.G. Immink). In this critical development of doctrine, some aspects of the traditional presentation and argumentation of the doctrine have been abandoned, especially the elements drawing on contemporary philosophical reasoning such as the Aristotelian form – matter scheme. Still, the theological kernel of this doctrine is subscribed to by all theologians studied here.
3. Reflection on the relation between God and created reality. The insights mentioned above (ontological differentiation, divine simplicity) do not result in a concept of God that lacks any “historical” and “relational” dimension. The reality of God's active involvement with the world and with mankind in particular is constantly implied in the statements of the doctrine of God, both in Reformed Orthodoxy and in Karl Barth and in the Utrecht School. Again, I admit that the concrete shape in which this involvement and its implications are presented differs in the three types of theology examined here. The preceding exposition and analysis warrants the conclusion, however, that the positions taken in each of these three show strong structural similarities. Crucial in all is the right awareness and distinction of the *essential* and *accidental*, *necessary* and *contingent*, *ad intra* and *ad extra* dimensions of (the doctrine of) God. In the heuristic order of this study, this insight draws on the Utrecht School, especially on Antonie Vos' presentation of the doctrine of God. Vos' restatement of a doctrine of divine attributes, continuing on medieval Scotist logic and ontology and connected with the contemporary renewal of these philosophical disciplines, provides *both* a consistent exposition of the concept of God that balances both dimensions *and* a model of interpretation of the classic Reformed positions

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in the doctrine of God. In a combination of these two functions, it may enable us to overcome some of the difficulties of traditional doctrine (especially the denial of “accidents” in God). In my own analysis of Reformed orthodox doctrine, I have found positive evidence favoring the “Scotist” model of interpretation: in particular the Reformed exposition of God’s knowledge and will in relation to contingent creaturely events shows the application of a careful distinction between necessity and contingency in God’s relation to the world. Far from representing the domination of a “rigid” and “deterministic” Aristotelian system of causality, this part of Reformed theology is a conscious effort to express biblical and religious truth in clear and consistent conceptuality, over against positions (Jesuit, Arminian, Socinian) that correspond to opposite religious attitudes. Karl Barth’s emphasis on God’s freedom appears to lead to the abandonment of “logical necessity” in the doctrine of God and to a straightforward choice for radical contingency. Indeed, Barth consistently refused to accept the determination of God’s possibilities by human reasoning. This does not mean, however, that in Barth’s concept of God “anything goes.” Via God’s love, goodness, and faithfulness, Barth in fact arrives at a position that is structurally identical to Reformed scholastic theology. The emphasis on God’s freedom is intended to prevent man from capturing God in the bounds of human possibility, not to deny that God has an essentially good nature. Especially Barth’s account of God’s foreknowledge and will is, despite some verbal criticisms, remarkably close to the Reformed scholastic account of the same matter. I conclude that the attempt to state a correct balance between the dimensions of essentiality and accidentality, necessity and contingency, is common to Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School.

The three insights just stated will, among others, be further elaborated in the next section of this chapter. To the brief statement given above, I add two important conclusions in view of the method of theology:

4. There is considerable truth in the classic maxim “method is arbitrary” (*methodus est arbitraria*). It is interesting to remember that precisely Karl Barth, with his pointed critique of the methodology of scholastic theology, repeatedly expressed his approval of this dictum, both when dealing with the relation between (dogmatic) theology and philosophy and when defending his own method in the exposition of the divine perfections. Barth acknowledged that different approaches, concepts and procedures could yield substantially identical results; on the other hand, he tried to offer powerful arguments in favor of his own methodological choices. The fundamental continuity detected in the fore-mentioned three important insights confirms Barth’s intuition that it is possible to arrive at the same truth along different ways. In that respect, theology would do well to relativize the importance of methodological discussions. Typical of modern thought is a very high view of proper method as the only way to truth. Postmodernist skepticism of rational methods of the past does not fundamentally differ from that modern sense of method.
5. The insight that method is arbitrary does not imply that method is unimportant. It remains possible to weigh the merits and demerits of different approaches in the doctrine of God. Moreover, it is a descriptive fact that methods employed in different stages of history reflect the different horizons, interests and questions

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of a particular era. Awareness of this contextual dimension of theological method contributes to a fuller understanding of what is at stake in the concrete presentation of doctrine.

### 22.1.5. A Picture of the Doctrine of God

Anticipating on the elaboration of the doctrine of God in the next section, I present here a number of immediate conclusions from my research into the different types of the doctrine of God.

The *first* conclusion is of a descriptive nature. Contrary to popular opinion, the doctrine of God does not appear to have been abstract, static and monolithic. This conclusion is especially relevant to the Reformed orthodox version of this doctrine, since it in particular has been under suspicion. A closer analysis of the allegedly "Aristotelian" conceptuality employed in that phase of theology revealed the conscious effort to adjust the categories of thought to the requirements of divine revelation and Christian faith. Moreover, the doctrine of God always reflected the actual debates and challenges of its time. The fact that the main body of doctrine remained constant does not count against the genuine interaction with philosophical, cultural and religious problems.

A *second* conclusion is that, judged from its persistence in different types of theology, the notion of "simplicity" is indispensable in the doctrine of God. Despite the qualifications made by Karl Barth and later theologians, important aspects of this doctrine continue to regulate the doctrine of God as a whole. To start, the notion of simplicity serves as a *unifying principle* that prevents the dissolution of the doctrine of God into separate treatises on God's relations and actions. This is made possible by the insistence, inherent in the concept of simplicity, on the full, personal and essential, *identity* of God in all of his perfections, relations and actions. Besides excluding the possibility of dissolution of the doctrine of God, the unifying function of the concept of simplicity does also consist of ruling out all contradiction among God's properties. The practical consequence of this principle is that alleged and apparent contradictions between divine attributes (e.g., between justice and mercy) are eliminated by careful qualification of each property.<sup>22</sup> A further important function of the doctrine of divine simplicity is to express the *independence* of God, both in the ontological and in the conceptual sense. In the *ontological sense*, the doctrine safeguards the insight that God's essence is not built up from "components" that originate elsewhere, nor can it be dissolved and cease to exist. In scholastic theology, this function of the notion of simplicity is often formulated in "causal" language derived from the Aristotelian framework of thought. The relativity and conceivable disadvantages of this language should not prevent us from seeing the importance of the ontological independence of God stated in this form. On the basis of the preceding research we can in this respect also notice, rather marginal in Reformed Orthodoxy, and then fully exposed by Karl Barth, the connection between the doctrine of simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity. Reformed scholastic theology explains that simplicity and Trinity do not contradict

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that (even) in Reformed Orthodoxy the conceptual reconciliation of the attributes of justice and mercy is determined by the historical event of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

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each other: God's subsistence in the three divine Persons does not consist of "composition" out of different parts, but should be understood as personal specification of the one divine essence (*Personae non componunt, sed distinguunt, non ut res et res, sed ut modi subsistendi*). Trinity thus does not bring in God a multiplicity prohibited by the concept of simplicity, and simplicity does not exclude the sort of distinction and modification required by the doctrine of the Trinity. The *pointe* of argumentation in Reformed orthodox theology is *negative*, aimed at removing the apparent contradiction between the two doctrines. Karl Barth's theology, in turn, provides a *positive* exposition of God's triune existence as the form in which God has his full and independent life. The emphasis on God's independent trinitarian existence agrees well with the corresponding aspect of the notion of simplicity. Looking back, we can even find in Reformed Orthodoxy the awareness that God's "simple" essence is identical with the rich and complete life of the triune God. The ontological independence implied in the doctrine of simplicity is also an important insight in the Utrecht School, especially in the "Vos part" of the school. Here, it is elaborated both from the perspective of the Creator-creature distinction and from the insight that God's trinitarian nature is his personal, individual, essential nature: God does not share his individual nature with its essential characteristics with other entities, they are properly *his* properties. From the ontological independence follows the conceptual independence of God's being and attributes. Reformed scholasticism and Karl Barth agree in asserting that concepts properly applying to God should be primarily attributed to God, and only secondarily to creatures. The argumentative devices employed to make this point, however, do differ. In Reformed Orthodoxy, we occasionally find language reflecting Platonic thought on divine existence *per se* versus created existence by participation (*per participationem*). Moreover, the Reformed orthodox commonly opt for "analogy" as the mode of predicating attributes of both God and creatures. The concept of analogy, particularly when combined with the "participation" language, suggest a commonality of being between God and creatures. On closer analysis, however, this appearance is deceiving: Reformed Orthodoxy does not normally elaborate "analogy" as *analogia entis*, but treats analogy as a mode of predication, and insists on the fundamental ontological difference between God and creation. "Analogy" is considered as a way to maintain *both* the possibility to speak meaningfully about God *and* the conceptual priority and independence of God. Practically, the Reformed orthodox can take the starting point of the discussion of a divine attribute in a general, philosophical definition, but then hasten to emphasize that in respect to God such a definition should be determined by God's own revelation in Scripture. Karl Barth's approach in this matter is directed against the danger of encapsulating God within the categories of human thought through the principle of *analogia entis*. More strongly than Reformed Orthodoxy, Barth rejects the subsuming of God under preconceived definitions. His concept of "analogy" means that God, in his revelation, seizes our human concepts and takes them into service of his self-communication. The concepts thus employed by God remain always under God's control and can never stand by themselves. While the conceptual independence of God and his perfections is in theory stated more strongly by Barth than by the Reformed scholastics, the practical outcome is not altogether different: just as the scholastics did, Barth relates God's perfections to concepts from the created world

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and then qualifies and modifies them in order to be fitting for God. The Utrecht School has a somewhat different position in this respect. Both directions within the school subscribe to the *univocity* of concepts applied to both God and world. Thus they deny that in the concepts themselves lies a difference of meaning (in addition to some similarity) when applied to either God or created beings (the traditional theory of analogy). Given the insight that concepts are “thought operations” on the part of the knowing subject, concepts are by definition human, and it does not make sense, according to Brümmer c.s., to assume a separate meaning of concepts in relation to God. What remains of the idea of conceptual independence is (a) theology’s obligation to specify in what (unique) way God has his properties, and (b) a strict understanding of properties such as unity, infinity, eternity, immutability etc. as essential to and identical with the divine nature. The latter aspect implies that most essential properties of God apply uniquely and exclusively to him: God is eternal, infinite, immutable etc., while creatures are temporal, finite and mutable. Here, the independence of God lies not in a special status of the concepts as such, but in the specification of concepts that belong to God in contrast with creatures.

While the concept of simplicity emphasizes the inner unity and coherence of God, the history of the doctrine of God shows, in the *third* place, a permanent endeavor to account for God’s relatedness and involvement with created reality as well. In this respect, the gradual differences between Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth and the Utrecht School should not obscure the fundamental agreement between these types of theology. After what has been said on this issue above (sections 22.1.2 and 22.1.4) and anticipating on what will be said below (section 22.2.4), I restrict myself here to the observation that the relation of God’s internal being and external relations and operations, the distinction of essential and accidental, necessary and contingent dimensions is a constant theme in the doctrine of God. That underlines once more the insight stated above that the doctrine of God is not abstract and static, but is concerned with the reality of God and world as revealed in Scripture and as experienced in life *coram Deo*.

From God’s relatedness to the world immediately follows, as a *fourth* conclusion, the connection of faith and revelation with thought and reason. While it is true that the relation between theology and philosophy, revelation and ontology, is framed differently, we can notice that all forms of the doctrine of God feel obliged to discuss this relation, both in general and foundational terms and in concrete application. A strong interest behind this connection is the insight that God and (created) reality, knowledge of God and knowledge of (created) reality cannot be separated. Both in the ontological and in the epistemological respect, God and his revelation are fundamental to everything else. If God and reality were separated, the double conclusion lies at hand that reality exists of itself and that God does not exist. From the perspective of the Christian faith (and, as Antonie Vos has contended, from the perspective of sound, consistent thought) both conclusions are totally unacceptable. Therefore, the connection between God and reality, revelation and ontology is of vital importance for Christian faith and theology.

A *fifth* and final conclusion of this sub-section: If we arrive, with the doctrine of God, on the field of rational thought, it becomes clear that the limits of human thinking are reached and broken. In terms of the question of “method and

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content," this is an extremely important conclusion. The apparently strong and rigid conceptuality of Reformed scholasticism is in fact determined by the insight that God does not fall under normal human categories, and that new concepts and schemes of thought therefore need to be invented. Fortunately, the Reformed found such consciously Christian conceptuality already in medieval scholasticism, especially in the Scotist branch of medieval Christian philosophy. In a different and apparently more vigorous mode, Karl Barth insisted on the absolute superiority of God over our capacity of thinking. There is some irony in the fact that in Barth's opposition to modern attempts to capture God in human categories he himself remained tributary to a certain type of (dialectical) thinking. This does not, however, count against the legitimacy of his insistence on God's superiority. What it does demonstrate is the difficulty of living in accordance with one's own principles and, thus, the limitedness of our capacities of thinking. In the Utrecht School, the emphasis on logical consistency and the rather down-to-earth practice of conceptual analysis seems to run against the idea of the "incomprehensibility" of God. Indeed the Utrecht scholars oppose the "Barthian" emphasis on the hiddenness of God and the paradoxicality of language about God. Instead, they advocate the univocity of concepts in application to both God and creatures. This is strongly expressed by Brümmer in identifying religious language as "ordinary, everyday language." On the other hand, the connection to the "perfect being" theology and the penetrating analysis of God's "great-making properties" make it clear that for the Utrecht School God is far from an "ordinary being." Nevertheless, on the specific issue of divine incomprehensibility or, as Arjan Markus puts it, conceptual transcendence, the Utrecht School still does take a position somewhat different from the mainstream of orthodox theology.

### *22.2. Elaborating a Reformed Doctrine of God*

The preceding research in parts I – III of this study included the intensive interaction with highly developed accounts of the doctrine of God. We looked at these versions of doctrine with an eye for the methodological aspect: How is the doctrine of God constructed? What questions, concepts, sources, arguments and structures are employed? What interaction between theology and different types of philosophy can be detected? What is the impact of method on the substance of doctrine and vice versa?

Along with these specific questions, we gathered substantial insights into the doctrine of God as such. This was an intended effect of this study: I did not merely want to examine the "technical" construction of the doctrine of God, but also to proceed in the understanding of this doctrine itself. For the further development of Reformed theology, both the hermeneutical awareness of the interaction of method and content and the rethinking of the doctrine of God itself are profitable.

In this final section, I present some of the most important insights into the doctrine of God while drawing on the preceding analysis. On each of these topics, I will give some points for further theological consideration. The aim of this discussion is not to provide a full-scale doctrine of God or a complete solution to hotly debated issues, but merely to elaborate the results of this study into a promising direction.

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A preliminary remark should be made about the abstract character of the following discussion. The reader will have noticed that the preceding research did already take place at a rather general and abstract level. Although many specific details were touched upon and several references to Scriptural “evidence” were given, the focus was on the main structures of the doctrine of God and its more technical conceptuality. In this concluding chapter, the level of abstraction is even higher: I will not give a full, positive exposition of all divine attributes, but concentrate on general questions and dimensions that determine the whole of the doctrine of God.

Central in the following discussion is the “identity of God.” As I have explained in chapter 1, the doctrine of God is fundamentally concerned with the identity of God, with the answer to the question “Who is God?” The following aspects of the identity of God will be dealt with:

1. God as the triune God
2. God in Christ
3. The fullness of the divine life
4. Necessity and contingency in relation to God
5. God’s relational and historical character
6. God and ontology

### **22.2.1. The Triune God**

I deliberately start with addressing the question of the relation between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. In the preceding analyses, this was a recurrent theme. Karl Barth powerfully insisted on the doctrine of the Trinity as the basis and presupposition of all doctrine. Following his lead, many recent theologians have criticized earlier theology for a lack of trinitarian awareness and have presented fully trinitarian systems of theology. According to these theologians, a doctrine of God that is not from the start conceived as trinitarian inevitably falls short.

At first sight, it is obvious that the Christian Church confesses God as the triune, Father, Son and Spirit, on the basis of the clear testimony of Scripture. This confession distinguishes Christianity from all other religions (polytheistic or monotheistic) and within Christianity separates orthodox faith from all kinds of heresies, ancient and modern. As such, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to all further teaching and worship.

The issue to be discussed here, however, is of a more specific and technical nature. The question is whether there is a legitimate place for a doctrine of God (his essence, attributes, decrees and operations) as distinct from the doctrine of the Trinity. Another way to put the question is, in what ways the exposition of the doctrine of God can and should be determined by insights concerning God being triune: what are the necessary implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for the doctrine of God?

In answering this question, I will take three steps. The first step is to weigh the accusation made against traditional theology that it has insufficiently considered the vital connection between doctrine of God and doctrine of the Trinity. The second step is to examine a few representative accounts of a strictly trinitarian theology (including the doctrine of God). As a conclusion to these two steps, I will

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in the third place formulate my own ideas on the possibility and necessity of connecting the doctrine of God with the doctrine of the Trinity.

Especially in part I of this study, we noticed the critique leveled against the Reformed scholastic doctrine of God that it insufficiently connects this doctrine with the doctrine of the Trinity. The central objection is that the traditional doctrine of God deals with "God in general," an abstract and impersonal deity that is described in general categories of thought. According to the critics, Reformed orthodox theologians failed to make it clear that the God whom they presented in their doctrines of God is the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This failure affects both the sources from which concepts and ideas concerning God are taken (philosophy vs. Scripture) and the character of the Godhead itself: without the crucial notions of Trinity, God is a static, abstract and impersonal entity that can hardly be conceived as our loving Father and our gracious Savior. The divine attributes, disconnected from God's trinitarian existence, are discussed as philosophical categories that lack the warmth and color of biblical narrative. Instead of such an a-trinitarian doctrine of God, the critics of Reformed scholasticism advocate a thoroughly trinitarian rethinking of the doctrine of God.

In several places in part I of this study, I already provided some counter-argumentation to this criticism (see sections 5.1 and 8.2). I will repeat the most important points.

In the first place, if we take the whole of Reformed orthodox theology into consideration, it is obvious that these theologians subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity as strongly as any recent defendant. The Reformed scholastics fully incorporated the classic dogma of the Trinity into their confessions and theology. Moreover, the Reformed orthodox had to face severe attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity in the 16th and 17th centuries. Early rationalists of diverse plumage rejected this doctrine and advocated a view of God as exclusively one, with Christ and the Spirit being merely external and subordinate manifestations of the unitarian Godhead. In this context, the Reformed orthodox forcefully upheld and defended the confession of God as triune. For this reason alone, it seems unfair to charge the Reformed orthodox with insufficient trinitarian awareness.

Second, in many places of their expositions of the doctrine of God, the Reformed orthodox do make the connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. A few examples:

- Many expositions start with a discussion of the divine names. In that context, the implicit or explicit trinitarian dimensions of God's names (especially *Elohim* and *YHWH*) are indicated;
- The Reformed orthodox are very cautious in providing a "definition" or description of the divine essence. These descriptions often are stated in terms of "a most simple, infinite Spirit," which indeed sounds fairly abstract. Immediately connected to such terms, however, we frequently find explanations in terms of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" or "the God of Israel." This indicates that even where the Reformed scholastics employed abstract terms to describe God, they kept the concrete trinitarian existence of God in mind.

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- In the discussion of several of the divine attributes, the relation to the doctrine of the Trinity is explicitly laid, for example, concerning God's simplicity, independence, and perfection. To give another example, Girolamo Zanchi's discussion of God's omnipotence finishes with a narrative account of God's power as shown in the acts of salvation mentioned in the Apostles' Creed.

These examples suffice to refute the claim that the traditional doctrine of God lacks any connection to the doctrine of the Trinity.

My third remark regards the structure of and divisions in systematic theology. Reformed theology from the 16th century onward opted for the *locus* method: the doctrinal topics are discussed in separate chapters that are loosely connected in a certain systematic order. The systematic behind the order of discussion can, for the first part, be stated in terms of "how can God be known?" (revelation, Scripture) and "Who is God?" (doctrines of God and of Trinity); after these foundational discussions, the works of God in creation, reconciliation and restoration are presented in a salvation-historical order in immediate connection with the three Persons Father (creation), Son (reconciliation) and Spirit (sanctification). Despite this well thought out order, Reformed scholastic dogmatics is not conceived as the logically consistent unfolding of one single systematic point of view. Each *locus*, though connected with the others, has its own Scriptural, traditional and conceptual material. With respect to the doctrines of God and of Trinity, it is clear that they belong together in examining the essence of God. At the same time, both have their specific focus and complex of problems. In the doctrine of the Trinity, the classic formulas of "one essence in three Persons," *opera ad extra sunt indivisa*, "appropriation of works to one of the divine Persons," *perichoresis*, and so on form the body of doctrinal discussion. The doctrine of God, on the other hand, speaks of God's essence in connection (not with the Persons but) with its immanent characteristics and external relations and operations. These fields of interest each require a large amount of attention and of conceptual clarification. For that reason, I consider a "division of labor" between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity as a fully plausible and legitimate choice for Reformed scholastic theology. That being said, the fact remains that both parts of doctrine deal with the "essence" of God and that only in combination do these doctrines give a (initially) complete account of God's being.

These observations diminish the charge against the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. That does not mean, however, that there is no perspective for connecting more strongly the doctrines of God and the Trinity. In order to have a sense of what benefits such a connection might yield, I briefly examine recent proposals for a decidedly trinitarian understanding of the doctrine of God. First, from the exposition of Karl Barth's doctrine of God in part II of this study we can take some indications of such a trinitarian profile.

To begin, Barth's doctrine of the Trinity makes a strong connection between God and his revelation. The connection works in two directions. On the one hand, the doctrine of the Trinity is an explanation ("interpretation," in Barth's terms) of the event of revelation in terms of Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness, and thus connects this event back to the Person of God himself. On the other hand, the

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doctrine of the Trinity thus understood prescribes that all statements about God are strictly taken from this revelation event.

Next, Barth's version of the doctrine of the Trinity employs the concepts of "identity" and "difference" to indicate that God's being has a dialectical and dynamic structure. A key term in this respect is "repetition" (*Wiederholung*), which Barth can paraphrase as "God is thrice differently the same" (*dreimal anders Derselbe*). This dialectical dynamic of identity and difference is employed by Barth on several occasions in his discussion of the divine attributes (perfections). The "perfections" themselves are indicated by Barth with the same term "repetition" that he had used for the Persons of the Trinity, which suggests that the relation of the perfections to God's being is structurally similar to that of the Persons to God's being. This usage of the same term for both the Persons and the perfections does not, however, establish a direct connection between them: the similarity resides in the way they are related to God's essence.

A further implication of Barth's account of the doctrine of the Trinity for his doctrine of God is that it enables the incorporation of "historical" or "temporal" movement and progress in God. As we have seen in section 14.1, it is not fully clear whether Barth can really be taken as an advocate of a "temporal" understanding of God; at least his emphatic doctrine of God's eternity as pre-, supra- and post-temporality nuances that conclusion.<sup>23</sup> The identification of God by his acts of revelation and salvation, however, as ultimately based in his trinitarian existence opens the door to such an understanding. Barth is not obligated to a concept of God's being that excludes movement and change.

A different consequence of the trinitarian framework of Barth's doctrine of God is the insight that the perfections of God towards creatures have their basis and prototype in God's own trinitarian life. Time and again, Barth emphasizes that prior to his love, grace, justice etc. towards us, God has love, grace, and justice in himself. This argument has two important ramifications: first, it gives additional warrant to the independence of God from his creatures; second, it guarantees that God's love, grace etc. that He bestows on us are trustworthy because they have their root in his own essence.

A final effect of the doctrine of the Trinity on Barth's doctrine of God is found in the salvational focus it provides to his discussion of several attributes. In this respect, the trinitarian focus is nearly equivalent to the christological concentration: it ensures that God's perfections are not conceived of as general, abstract categories (e.g., power or justice) but are understood in the specific sense revealed in God's trinitarian acts of salvation.

After Barth, the emphasis on Trinity as the fundamental and all-determining doctrine became more common in systematic theology. As an example of post-Barthian trinitarian theology, I choose Robert Jenson.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Barth makes one of his references to the doctrine of the Trinity precisely in this context: he describes the coherence of the three aspects of eternity as similar to the *perichoresis* of the three divine Persons.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Jenson, *God after God: The God of the Past and the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 175, points to the proximity of his theology to that of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann: "Even the footnotes will have shown how

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In his book *God after God*, Robert Jenson confronts the crisis of religion in the post-World War II western world. He views the doctrine of God (taken in a large sense) as the battlefield of religious struggle. In his view, the Church of the first few centuries fought such a battle already. In facing Hellenistic religion, the Early Church entered into the common antique "passion (...) for bridge-entities between eternity and time." Together with this passion for reconciliation of eternity and time, an "agonized apprehension of the otherness of eternity from time" sneaked into the Christian mind. The Church struggled for two centuries with the challenge of Greek religion and metaphysics.

*The result of its labors was the doctrine of Trinity.* The doctrine of Trinity was born of the meeting between Greek metaphysics and the Gospel, just as its critics have so long insisted. But far from representing a victory of metaphysics over "the simple Gospel," it represents the redefining of what Greek metaphysical religion had meant by "God," in the light of faith's apprehension of its object. The doctrine of Trinity was the creation, if one will, of a *new ontology of "God"* on the basis of the gospel. The doctrine of Trinity is the ancient church's victory over the timeless Presence of Greek religion: it was an anti-metaphysical, anti-religious doctrine of God.<sup>25</sup>

Now the doctrine of the Trinity is, in Jenson's analysis, not a *complete* victory over Greek metaphysics. There remains a tacit synthesis of gospel and religion that started to cause troubles in later eras. In fact, the 20th century crisis of Christian faith is quite similar to the crisis of the Early Church in its confrontation with Greek religion.

Jenson's own proposal for a renewal of the doctrine of the Trinity centers on temporal categories. Following the lead of Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans*, Jenson rejects the preoccupation of traditional doctrine with the *past*, resulting in a fixed and static conception of the godhead. Instead, he advocates a doctrine of God that is directed toward the *future*. God should not be conceived in terms of "being," but should be seen as "an event, a happening." God as a "subject" is identical with the particular "event" of his love revealed in Jesus Christ. In that event, God has "time for us" and gives us time to live with him; in brief, He gives us the future.<sup>26</sup>

Up to this point, Jenson has remained in Barth's footsteps. He notes, however, that there is a fundamental ambiguity about Barth's statements on the doctrine of God, caused by Barth's use of *analogy*. Jenson briefly states the problem as follows:

Sometimes Barth's theology reads as the first true theology of God-with-us: God occurs as what historically happens with Jesus Christ to give our secular lives concrete temporal structu-

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closely related sections I-VII of this chapter are to the movement in theology led by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann. Exactly how directly indebted my reflections are to these men, I am not sure. The indebtedness is doubtless considerable." For the sake of brevity, I take Jenson as the representative of a broader theological movement.

<sup>25</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 125-133.

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re. But then one turns one's head slightly – and the whole grandiose story of God and man seems to float away into the heavens, leaving us gazing up as spectators of our own drama. What is the true reading of Barth's thought? Both and neither – which is, of course, a very Barthian thing to have to say.

The meaning of Barth's theology could be that the eternal God of traditional theology came down to occur among us as Jesus' temporal relatedness. But it could also mean that both Jesus and our involvement with him occur in the abstract dwelling of the eternal God.<sup>27</sup>

Barth's talk about the time of Jesus as God's time for us continues to carry the suggestion of a-temporal eternity: "all our times are equally its immediate neighbor, because separations in time mean nothing to it." Barth calls Jesus' time "the 'prototype' of our time; our time is determined by it as the image by its model." Here, Jenson spots Barth's fatal adherence to analogical thought: "This sort of language is rather too close for comfort to Plato's talk of time as the moving image of timeless eternity."<sup>28</sup>

The distinction between God-in-himself and God-for-us, conceived as a prototype – image relation, does more than just warrant God's freedom. It imports in God's inner being (God-in-himself) a mode of being that is different from God's being in the event of Jesus Christ. Thus "Barth has not discovered any new way of conceptualizing God's freedom over against his being for us." His theology contains the promising beginnings of a new understanding of analogy: the *analogia relationis*, which is an analogy between active relations that occur through temporal events. Barth does not, however, succeed in destroying the whole traditional scheme of analogical thinking.<sup>29</sup>

How does Jenson himself conceive of God's transcendence?

If we drop the notion of analogy, we must try to understand God's transcendence within the terms of time itself. We will have to understand the radicalness of God's temporality as a certain pattern of that temporality itself. (...) We will understand God's freedom over against what he is for and with us by his futurity to what he already is with and for us.<sup>30</sup>

If the continuity of God's being is no longer provided by timeless eternity, it should be found somewhere else. Jenson proposes the categories of "communication, utterance, language" as suitable for that function. "We will learn to understand God as an *hermeneutic event*, as a Word."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 152.

<sup>29</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 153-155.

<sup>30</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 155-156. In a further elaboration of the hermeneutical understanding of God (pages 183-192), Jenson comes to describe God as "Speaker and Hearer, Address and Response," "a *Conversation*," and "in himself Self-understanding, Language and Utterance."

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Jenson's plea for futurity as the central category and his understanding of God as an hermeneutic event coalesce in the terms "promise" and "hope." The "temporal event of God" *par excellence* is the resurrection, which Jenson does not understand as *pure fulfillment*, but as *pure promise*: "promise is the ontological category for the reality of the risen Lord." The resurrection opens God's and our future.<sup>32</sup>

The hope of the Christian future is the hope for *love*. And love "is the pattern of existence enacted in Jesus' being-unto-crucifixion." For Jenson, the crucifixion of Christ is the fundamental event; the subsequent resurrection is "the promise of an accomplished struggle toward each other." The peculiarity of love is that its fulfillment does not close the future: love can be extended and deepened and continued.<sup>33</sup>

Jenson's next important step is to identify God's being and God's transcendence in terms of the event of Christ's resurrection: "for faith, 'God' equals, by definition, 'Whoever raised Jesus'." The event of resurrection "is the occurrence of God." Consequently, the transcendence of God "is the fact of time, the 'beyondness' of the future which gives us past and present and makes our lives temporal." God's identity should be described as his future, which is the future of love. Jenson employs the narrative term "plot" to indicate the type of identity of Christ and God: "Love is the dramatic coherence of Jesus' plot of death and future action." In Christ's resurrection, the contradiction of death and hope is overcome by God. As such, it exceeds the possibilities of our world.

Hope does not project the future from the possibilities given in the present by the past; it projects the past (...) from the new future possibilities given by God. God, therefore, is "the power of the future, of the future conceived from its futurity, from its coming ...."<sup>34</sup>

Now Jenson does not describe God as exclusive futurity, without any dimension of the past. As the Creator, God is the Lord of the past. God's act of creation, however, has the structure of *promise* that calls into being a *history*. As history, the past is always open to the future. God's transcendence, as revealed in the resurrection of Christ, simply is his futurity. God's futurity cannot even be stopped by death: "In the crucifixion and resurrection, God occurs as death *and* promise, as the overcoming of death, as the triumph of the future."<sup>35</sup>

Given Jenson's definition of God as futurity, his further revision of the traditional "doctrine of God" follows from it. First, Jenson redefines God's eternity:

God's eternity is not that for him everything is really already past, but that in love everything is still open, including the past. His eternity is that he can never be surpassed, never caught up with. (...) God is not a presence possessing his past and future

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<sup>32</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 157-160.

<sup>33</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 160-162.

<sup>34</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 162-166 (final quotation from p. 166).

<sup>35</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 168-171.

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in himself; he is a future possessing his past in himself and therefore always present.<sup>36</sup>

God's nature, secondly, is "not the set of attributes he may be permanently relied on to exemplify; it is the plot of his history," "the coherence of his acts." The third and final notion revised by Jenson is the fundamental metaphysical concept of "being":

In religious metaphysics, "being" is resistance to change, immunity to time. If God's transcendence is futurity, then "being" is historical temporality, it is exactly the call to change. (...) In a truly theological ontology, "being" is the possibility of becoming other than I am, and is therefore necessarily not a characteristic of myself.<sup>37</sup>

For Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity, the emphasis on futurity and freedom has an important consequence: contrary to the tradition, the Spirit rather than the Father should be primary.

The Spirit is the hypostasis of God's futurity and so of God's relatedness. The Spirit is therefore the determination of the nature of the triune – that is, future and related – God. We therefore replaced the formula that in the Trinity there is an Origin and two Originateds with the formula that in God there is a Goal and two Anticipations, an anticipated Anticipation and a pure Anticipation. God goes before, God follows and God is preceded – and these are the relations subsisting as modes of being in God.<sup>38</sup>

If the intra-trinitarian relations are defined in this way, "then God is his openness to himself as a true future not fixed by any past."<sup>39</sup>

Jenson's *Systematic Theology* (1997) continues the lines established in the 1960's.<sup>40</sup> In this work, the confession of God as the triune has a structuring function: the doctrine of God as Jenson understands it comprises the doctrines of all three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 171-172.

<sup>38</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 174. Jenson's plea for the primacy of the Spirit in the doctrine of Trinity resembles Colin Gunton's diagnosis, mentioned in section 14.1 above, that Karl Barth's theology precisely lacks proper attention to the Spirit. In that connection, Gunton understands a Spirit-oriented doctrine of Trinity as at once an account of "social Trinity." Moreover, he connects the primacy of the Spirit with the priority of the future over the past, just as Jenson does. Chronologically, Gunton may be dependent on Jenson for this analysis.

<sup>39</sup> Jenson, *God after God*, 174. On pages 175-179, Jenson discusses Wolfhart Pannenberg's views on God as "the power of the future." He argues that Pannenberg's emphasis on wholeness (complete universal history) causes him to remain bound to metaphysical unity instead of being open to true freedom.

<sup>40</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:X, 60-64.

## Conclusions

The primary task of systematic theology is to identify God. Jenson states that God is identified by temporal acts, such as the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.<sup>42</sup> An important addition is the statement that God is not only identified *by* these events, but that He identifies himself *with* these events, and thus is temporally identifiable. In Jenson's words,

Were God identified *by* Israel's Exodus or Jesus' Resurrection, without being identified *with* them, the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself.<sup>43</sup>

As "narrative" is the fundamental genre of Scriptural revelation, God's identity consists in the "dramatic coherence" of his acts. Jenson views the doctrine of the Trinity as the expression of this dramatic, narrative coherence of God: in the grand narrative of God,

we must reckon with and seek to identify a plurality of what can only be called *dramatis dei personae*, "characters of the drama of God."<sup>44</sup>

The historical, dramatic relations between Father, Son, and Spirit are constitutive for the triune identity of God. In the Son and the Spirit, God is communicating himself to mankind in order to incorporate humanity in his own life. In view of the concrete roles of Father, Son, and Spirit, Jenson speaks of "eventful differentiation in God," and denies the classic maxim *opera ad extra sunt indivisa*: there *is* in fact differentiation and mutuality in God's external works.<sup>45</sup>

These conceptual moves produce a very specific approach of God's eternity. Jenson rejects the Greek fixation on a-temporal existence as an ontological perfection. The crucifixion of Christ is precisely the radical crisis of time-immune deity: "The God of crucifixion and resurrection is one with himself in a moment of supreme dramatic self-transcendence or not at all." God's eternity should not be understood as the persistent instantiation of "a beginning in which he already is all he will ever will be; he is eternally himself in that he unrestrictedly anticipates an end in which he will be all he ever could be."<sup>46</sup>

In another context, Jenson describes God's eternity as "temporal infinity" and (referring to Karl Barth) as "pure duration." The term "temporal infinity" is qualified as "the inexhaustibility of one event. That event is the appropriation of all other events by the love actual as Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>47</sup>

This understanding of eternity is framed by the doctrine of the Trinity:

We may begin by noting the connection between the poles of time and the mutual roles of Father, Son, and Spirit. (...) The Father is the "whence" of God's life; the Spirit is the "whither"

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<sup>42</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:42-46.

<sup>43</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:59.

<sup>44</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:64, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:77-114.

<sup>46</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:64-71 (cf. also 89, 94-100).

<sup>47</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:217-218, 221. For the term "pure duration," Jenson could also refer to Reformed scholastic theologians such as Maccovius, Turretini, Van Maastricht and De Moor (cf. part I, section 6.4). The category of "temporal infinity" is clarified by Jenson's statement that "God is not *subjected* to created time's contingencies" (144).

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of God's life; and we may even say that the Son is that life's specious present.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to this interaction of trinitarian and temporal terms, Jenson speaks of the Trinity as a "communal life" which is open to participation by others. Quite pointedly, Jenson states that God is "roomy."<sup>49</sup>

In Jenson's trinitarian rethinking of the doctrine of God, there is little room for the traditional exposition of God's attributes. Jenson touches in passing on the issue of the attributes, and then mentions "jealousy" as the "first among the Lord's attributes." God's jealousy is implied by his being temporally identifiable by his acts: "temporal entities must be jealous of their identities or cease."<sup>50</sup> In his chapter "The Being of the One God," Jenson comes closest to the traditional issues concerning God's essence and attributes. He describes God as subsequently:

- an event;
- a person;<sup>51</sup>
- a decision;
- a conversation.<sup>52</sup>

Next, he relativizes the need for a separate doctrine of divine attributes: "Fundamentally, the predicates we rightly attribute to God are simply all those that speaking the gospel may from time to time require."<sup>53</sup>

In a final discussion, however, Jenson does interact with the traditional "transcendentals" that are "convertible" with being: unity, truth, goodness and beauty. God's *unity* was elaborated by Jenson in the argument recorded above: it is a dramatic and inclusive unity. God's *truth* is understood as God's knowability, which is not, according to Jenson, "a dispositional property (...). God is knowable because and only because he is in fact known." God is knowable, first to himself within the Trinity, and then, second, to us by our "participation in the converse of the Father and the Son in the Spirit." In this regard, Jenson rejects the "unexamined presupposition of God's nonobjectivity or nonembodiment" that runs through the theological tradition. Be it true that our knowledge of God is always God's gift, God makes himself our object in Christ through the Spirit in Christ's body: the Church.<sup>54</sup>

God's *goodness* is described by Jenson in communal terms: our inclusion in the divine conversation is

an initiation into the triune harmony, into God's righteousness.  
(...) To know God is to know his moral will. (...) God's grant of participation in the triune discourse is not random but purposeful: he lives with us in order that we may live with him.  
(...) That God thus honors and benefits us is his goodness to us

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<sup>48</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:218.

<sup>49</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:226.

<sup>50</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:47.

<sup>51</sup> Contra Pannenberg, Jenson takes the common life of the Trinity as personal itself; Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:116 footnote 4.

<sup>52</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:221-223.

<sup>53</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:223.

<sup>54</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:227-229.

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– and of a goodness in God that was not his goodness to us we yet again may not speculate.<sup>55</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, Jenson discusses God's *hiddenness* in direct connection with his goodness, and therefore as a moral issue rather than as an epistemological problem. God's hiddenness is not that God "holds back some part of the self-knowing he shares with us," but means that "that self-knowing is alive and moving and we cannot keep up with its moral intentions." Because of his futurity, God is always ahead of us.<sup>56</sup>

The final "property" of God discussed by Jenson is God's *beauty* or enjoyability. It is understood as

the perfect harmony of the triune communal life. (...) God's beauty is the actual living exchange between Father, Son, and Spirit, as this exchange is perfect simply as exchange, as it *sings*. The harmony of Father, Son, and Spirit, the triune perichoresis, transcends its character as goodness because it has no purpose beyond itself, being itself God.

Again, we humans are "taken into the triune singing." The Church's singing doubles the trinitarian song, which is in fact "a great *fugue*."<sup>57</sup>

The above exposition of Robert Jenson's theology serves the purpose of understanding more fully the possible implications of a trinitarian rethinking of the doctrine of God. In Jenson's version of the doctrine, we can notice the following aspects:

First, Jenson meets his own requirement that the doctrine of the Trinity should be functional within the whole of doctrine. That is in itself an important lesson to be learnt for Reformed theology: all doctrine, in particular the doctrine of the Trinity, should not merely be stated and affirmed as "dead capital," but should have recognizable impact on our beliefs and practices.

Second, in Jenson's making the doctrine of the Trinity foundationally functional, we can detect additional and perhaps underlying motifs:

- a preference for a temporal instead of an a-temporal conception of God;
- an emphasis on the categories of future and hope;
- a hermeneutical understanding of God as Word-event and Conversation;
- a redefinition of "being" in terms of "event" and "decision," to the effect that "being" is the "possibility to become other";
- an anti-religious approach: God is fundamentally different from other "gods";
- a directedness toward our "incorporation" or "participation" in the triune communal life, which is enabled by God's identification with humanity in Jesus Christ;

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<sup>55</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:230-231.

<sup>56</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:233.

<sup>57</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:234-236. The term *perichoresis* recurs throughout Jenson's discussion of God's "transcendental" properties.

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- a strict ontological and epistemological identification of God and his revelation;
- a rejection of “analogical” thought (even in Karl Barth’s version), accompanied by the assumption of God’s “embodiment” in the Church with its proclamation, liturgy and sacraments and with the understanding of God’s transcendence in temporal, actualist terms (in popular terms: “You can never catch Me”);
- an understanding of Scriptural revelation in terms of “narrative” and “drama.”

These motifs reflect the philosophical and theological climate of the second half of the 20th century. This observation confirms my earlier statement (section 22.1.3) that systematic theology always interacts with its context. Jenson does so in a conscious and successful way. At the same time, this occurrence of additional motifs raises the question of whether the doctrine of the Trinity is really fundamental in Jenson’s theology. It could also be the case that the motifs connected with Jenson’s version of this doctrine are in fact decisive of his position. At least the factors just mentioned need to be evaluated on their own merit. The limits of this study do not admit such an evaluation.

Third, Jenson’s treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity shows both a penetrating and insightful interaction with the intentions and concepts of classic doctrine and a creative and innovative restatement. In his analysis of the traditional material of the doctrine of the Trinity, Jenson attempts to bring together Western and Eastern theological concerns. Just as many other recent theologians, he criticizes Augustine for insufficiently distinguishing the three Persons of the Trinity and for downplaying the personality of the Holy Spirit. In Jenson’s renewal of this doctrine, two aspects stand out:

- a. the *temporal* character of the triune life by the description of Father, Son, and Spirit in terms of beginning, middle, and end, or as goal and anticipations;
- b. the *social* character of the Trinity, which means that it is intent upon the participation of humanity in its community.

The first of these two aspects continues on the lines drawn by Karl Barth. We have noticed, however, that Barth is not unambiguous in making the Trinity temporal (see part II, section 14.1). By contrast, Jenson is quite radical and consequent in this regard. The second aspect marks a difference between Barth and Jenson. While Barth employs the doctrine of the Trinity as a “prototype” and “root” for God’s self-communication and relatedness towards us, he maintains the fundamental difference between God and creature, and does not directly speak of our incorporation into the divine life.

Fourth, Jenson’s rethinking of the doctrine of God from the trinitarian viewpoint results in a major transformation: little remains intact from the traditional body of the doctrine of God. All God-talk is drawn by Jenson into a hermeneutical and narrative framework. Most obvious is his revision of the concept of “eternity,” which becomes in his theology the touchstone of the sanity of the doctrine of God.

Fifth, it seems that Jenson proposes an actualism that is even more radical than Karl Barth’s. While for Barth the event of revelation in Jesus Christ is the decisive act of God (which, of course, Jenson does not deny), Jenson seems to stretch this act

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to the general principle of hope: God gives us the future. In Jenson's conception, God becomes himself an event, more precisely: a speech event. An implication of this view is that God has no individual subjectivity, but coincides with his (speech) acts.

The discussion of Barth's and Jenson's efforts in connecting the doctrine of the Trinity with the doctrine of God, gives occasion for us to state the following conclusions:

Recent Protestant theology shows a wide consensus on the necessity of connecting the doctrine of God to the doctrine of the Trinity. Reformed theology does not need to refrain from this consensus, as far as the *personal identity* of God is emphasized by reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. If the cultural, philosophical and (inter-)religious situation of our times requires the explicit expression of what was self-evident to earlier generations of Reformed theologians, we should meet this requirement.

Some suspicion is in place concerning the motifs and intentions associated with the plea for a trinitarian rethinking of the doctrine of God. As especially the theology of Robert Jenson makes clear, the propagation of a trinitarian doctrine of God may well lead to a conception dominated by "God-for-us," even to the elimination of the notion of "God-in-himself." From this observation, the double lesson can be drawn that (a) doctrinal innovations reflect practical, religious and cultural interests, and (b) apparently identical proposals for doctrinal structures and concepts in systematic theology may stand in service of entirely different purposes. For that reason, the innovative proposals should be judged not only on their direct conceptual content and argumentative plausibility, but also on their immanent tendencies and the programmatic framework they stand in. We should be aware of the difference between orthodox and heterodox versions of the doctrine of the Trinity; heterodox versions can by definition not contribute positively to the understanding of the doctrine of God. Within the scope of this study, I consider Vincent Brümmer's account of the doctrine of the Trinity deficient in the modalist direction, as he cannot do justice to the distinct existence of the three divine Persons (cf. part III, section 21.3.5). Robert Jenson's theology is, in my opinion, exemplary of a type of social trinitarianism that loses sight of the propriety of God as an independent subject.

More substantially, I would maintain with Karl Barth the distinction between God as He has his own triune life as Father, Son, and Spirit and as He reveals himself in his external gracious relations and actions. Starting from this basic conviction, Barth's further contention that God's internal communicative and relational character is the root and prototype of his communication and relatedness towards his creatures, should be accepted as well (for a further elaboration, see section 22.2.5 below). More strongly than Barth, I would employ the *will* of God as crucial factor safeguarding both the independence of God and the integrity of his relatedness toward us. Especially the distinction between the *natural* and the *free will* of God should be maintained here. The *natural* will of God is the immanent inclination by which each of the Persons of the Trinity wills to accept, love and enjoy the others. This natural will is essential: God cannot but will himself; Father, Son, and Spirit cannot but love each other. To go one step further, this natural will

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is constitutive for God's being, or viewed otherwise, it is God's being itself in the eternal, permanent act of love and community. The *free* will of God, on the other hand, has entities outside himself as its object; it is not immanent, but transient. Anticipating on the distinction between necessity and contingency (section 22.2.4 below), I would suggest that this free will is not essential, but accidental to God. To be sure, it is essential for God to have this benevolent will, but its specific application to his creatures is accidental, i.e. God is God even without the specific acts of his free will. Consequently, God's free will is not constitutive for God's being, although it is firmly rooted in God's essence and genuinely expresses the essential goodness of God.

Only the doctrines of God and of the Trinity taken together can answer the question concerning the identity of God, albeit still limited to what God has revealed of himself. Our limited cognitive capacities prevent the complete integration of the notions (with their full implications) of divine Persons and divine properties into one systematic account. Persons and properties cannot be reduced to each other, nor can specific properties be exclusively bound to one of the divine Persons. In my opinion, it is most advisable to assign to both parts of systematic theology their own task, without separating their respective contributions in formulating our knowledge of who God is.

For systematic theologians, it is appealing to construe coherent, symmetrical and parallel sets of ideas. In respect of the Trinity, one could be induced to treat it as a structural principle that can be made functional in other parts of doctrine. I would, however, be cautious in doing so. The doctrine of the Trinity is the Church's answer to the specific problematic of how Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit relate to the God of Israel. If the concepts and structures developed for the sake of that answer are taken for themselves, one could easily miss their right focus and end up with illegitimate usage of the trinitarian notions. I would, for example, reject the parallel suggested by Barth between the divine persons and the divine properties in view of their relationship (consisting in "repetition") to the divine essence. When the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are said to be three times God in different ways, this is different from the statement that God is subsequently eternal, wise, just, holy, etcetera. While in our speech about God we need in both cases some sort of "repetition" in order to express the truth, the reality of persons and properties in God is decisively different. A similar reserve applies where the doctrine of the Trinity is treated as the solution to the problem of unity and differentiation, or singularity and plurality, in general. While it is a meaningful insight of faith that God can at once be three and one, the doctrine of the Trinity does not provide a metaphysical principle of the "one and the many" or a dialectical principle of "differentiation and reconciliation." It might seem as if a truly Christian, trinitarian worldview can be attained along such lines, but in fact alien patterns of thought might as a Trojan horse invade Christian doctrine. Reformed theology should insist on the specific application of the trinitarian conceptuality to the one God existing in three Persons.

In a more limited sense, insights gathered from the doctrine of the Trinity can modify or color the exposition of God's essence and attributes. Most fundamentally, we should take to heart Karl Barth's admonition never to speak of God's essence apart from God's existence as the triune (cf. statement 1. above). In fact,

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this insight prevailed already in Reformed scholastic theology, though in a different form. In this respect, the distinction found in the Utrecht School between “God” as a title term and YHWH as a proper name, raises some doubt. In an abstract sense, one can try to formulate some general criteria to which an entity must comply in order to be God; in practice, however, these criteria should be discovered in the self-revelation of the triune God. There are, for example, fundamental differences between the essential properties of Allah and the Father of Jesus Christ. If the latter is God, the former cannot be. At a more detailed level of exposition, one could try to describe the divine attributes in terms that reflect the concrete operations of the triune God. It does make sense, for example, to start the exposition of God’s *knowledge* and *wisdom* with the fact that the Son of God is God’s wisdom in person; although it is not easy to point out the full implications of this equation. As Reformed Orthodoxy does already show, the connection between the attributes of *grace* and *justice* should not be abstractly construed, but should be found in the concrete divine work of salvation in Jesus Christ. The confession of God as triune prohibits the interpretation of God’s *immutability* as static and monolithic unity. The account of divine *omnipotence*, as a final example, should do justice to God’s care for his creation, the suffering of Christ as the way in which God overcomes evil, and the soft irresistibility of the Spirit.

A functional relation between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity can also be established in the opposite direction. The attributes expounded in the doctrine of God can be viewed as prerequisites or presuppositions for the being and acting of the triune God. In order to be God (in the three Persons Father, Son, and Spirit), God “must” be one, simple, eternal, infinite, immutable, holy, etcetera. In order to be our Creator, Revealer and Redeemer, God “must” be eternal, omnipresent, almighty, wise, good, loving, gracious and just. The “must” in these statements does not, of course, indicate an external necessity imposed on God, but a logical, implicative necessity (for a further explanation, see section 22.2.4 below): it can, in itself, not be otherwise. This “cannot be otherwise,” in turn, is no limitation of God’s sovereignty, but merely the expression of the inherent greatness and perfection of God.

### 22.2.2. God in Christ

As the preceding sub-section made clear, there is an important tendency in recent systematic theology to emphasize the particular, personal character of God. This can be done in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, but also in terms of Christology. In fact, the two approaches are intimately connected. In this study, we encountered the christological focus, connected with the trinitarian emphasis, especially in Karl Barth’s theology.

The insight that the doctrine of God has to deal with “God in Christ” has the following consequences for Barth:

- Knowledge of God is only possible through God’s revelation in Christ. Barth rejects any possibility of knowing God from other sources, apart from Christ. The christological exclusivity of true knowledge of God rests not only on the “objective” side (the Word of God), but includes our “subjective” participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

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- Christ determines the contents of our knowledge of God. The reason for this is that God has tied himself to unity with man in the person of Christ. Barth's christological doctrine of election implies that this unity with man determines God's own being. No true statements about God can be made apart from Christ.
- In the doctrine of God, the determining role of Christology is seen in an actualist and salvation-historical understanding of God's essence and attributes. The actualist motive means that God is defined in terms of his gracious acts, not in terms of abstract, a-temporal substance. Barth's actualism in the doctrine of God is christologically founded, since the "Christ event" is the great act and movement in which God constitutes and manifests himself. As a further specification, God's fundamental act has the character of salvation. Barth rejects any understanding of God's properties and acts that is "morally neutral": God's complete being aims at the bestowal of his grace and at our salvation.
- As a structural principle behind Barth's application of Christology to the doctrine of God, we can discern the dialectic of difference and unity. In this respect, Barth's Christology is equivalent to his doctrine of the Trinity, although Christology takes one further step: while Trinity implies the inner coherence of differentiation and identity in God himself, Christology means that the radical antithesis between God and man is reconciled in Christ and is incorporated in God's own trinitarian existence. In the elaboration of this principle, Barth makes it clear that God's essence and perfections should not be described in mere opposition to created reality. God is not only different from creation and mankind, but succeeds in overcoming the difference and to include created being into his own reality.

Just as with his trinitarian emphasis, Barth received much approval and imitation with his christological concentration in the doctrine of God. From a decidedly Lutheran perspective, Oswald Bayer presents a strongly christological interpretation of God's attributes in his article "Eigenschaften Gottes V. Christentum" in *RGG*<sup>3</sup> (vol. 2, col. 1139-1142).

Bayer's starting point is that by God's self-revelation in Christ, all his properties are communicated to us. He therefore rejects the distinction between communicable and incommunicable attributes. Bound to the historical events of Christ, God's attributes express a "communicative identity" (*kommunikative Identität*) of God and man, time and eternity, infinite and finite, omnipotence and impotence. God's eternal being and his temporal coming go together without confusion, without change, without division, without separation (one recognizes here the key terms of Chalcedonian Christology).

The metaphysical "transcendentals" of unity, truth, goodness and beauty should be understood in the framework of the *communicatio idiomatum* of the two natures of Christ. In the final analysis, the "communicative identity" of God and man is identical with the biblical definition of God: "God is love." This "definition," however, should not be understood in an abstract, theoretical sense (Bayer sees such an abstraction in Karl Barth's exposition of God's perfections in pairs of love and freedom), but in the concrete reality of life in a world that is created anew

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by God. We encounter God's love also in the forms of wrath, patience, and hiddenness.

Because of the irreducible plurality of properties in which we encounter God, Bayer states that an univocal concept of omnipotence is impossible. Instead, omnipotence (*Allmacht*) is a polyvalent meta-predicate that receives its proper meaning in the different relations it is applied in. The polyvalence goes so far as to create a difference between the *nomen appellativum* "God" (in general) and the *nomen proprium* "God" (the triune). In this life, we cannot attain a unified perspective on the love of God; in the situation of affliction, we can only hope for it.

The popularity of a strong christological focus in the doctrine of God combined with the fact that Barthian and Lutheran convictions can easily merge in this respect, poses the question how a distinctly Reformed theology should proceed in this matter. Both Barth's and Bayer's proposals imply a strong view of the unity of God and man in Christ, though the unity is explained in different frameworks: in Barth, the unity rests on God's free election of Christ and retains a dialectical character; Bayer explicitly endorses the Lutheran concept of the *communicatio idiomatum* and extends its application to the doctrine of divine attributes.

As is widely known, Reformed theology differs from Lutheranism precisely on Christology and on the legitimacy of the concept of *communicatio idiomatum*. Lutheran Christology places a strong emphasis on the unity of the divine and human natures of Christ: by its assumption into the divine Person, Christ's human nature shares in the properties of the divine nature and is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent together with the divine nature. In contrast, Reformed Christology insists on the remaining distinction between the human and divine natures, appealing to the classic *dictum* concerning Christ's divinity: "It remained what it was, and assumed what it was not" (*mansit quod erat, assumpsit quod non erat*).

Later theology shows several attempts to diminish the difference and to reconcile the 16th century controversy. One such attempt was made by Karl Barth in his discussion of God's omnipresence (see part II, section 12.3.1). Barth's argument rests on the recognition of different but connected forms of divine *presence*: God is essentially present to himself in the Trinity, He is present by way of union in Jesus Christ, and He is present by his grace and Spirit to men who believe in Christ. According to Barth, the discussion of the ubiquity of Christ's body is frustrated by the one-sidedness of both positions: the Reformed did not take seriously enough the connections between the forms of divine presence, while the Lutherans did not sufficiently differentiate between these forms of presence. In response to Barth's argument, I would state that he effectively draws the discussion into a different framework: he no longer thinks in terms of substantial natures, but in terms of a concrete event of inclusion of mankind into the divine life. Still, his identification of the (omni)presence of "man united with God in Jesus Christ" as a "relative but real presence" seems to maintain the Reformed reserve against the full ascription of ubiquity to Christ's human nature and leaves open the exact way(s) in which "man united with God in Jesus Christ" is present.

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Another contribution to the Lutheran – Reformed controversy is given by Barend Kamphuis.<sup>58</sup> To be sure, his study is not directly concerned with the Lutheran-Reformed debate, but with the 20th century problematic of a Christology “from above” or “from below” in connection with the doctrine of revelation. Still, Kamphuis’ findings may provide a different and promising framework for assessing the traditional christological differences.

The first and fundamental step is methodical: Christology should start, not in an abstract “above” or in an equally abstract “below,” but in God’s concrete revelation in Scripture. Despite the differences of emphasis between the gospels (synoptic and Johannine), the New Testament witnesses concur in identifying Jesus Christ as “God manifested in the flesh.” This confession is not an abstract thought construct, but echoes the concrete event or movement of incarnation.<sup>59</sup>

Kamphuis insists on the methodical *and* substantial importance of the concrete event of God becoming man. This results in a priority of the substantial “from above” in the Person of Christ. The priority of the “above” does not mean, however, that there is no room for the genuine humanity of Christ. In two steps, Kamphuis eliminates the suggestion that divinity and humanity can only be maintained at the expense of each other.<sup>60</sup>

The first step is to overcome the duality of natures by focusing on the unity of Person. Kamphuis points out that the famous Chalcedonian formula does not only speak of the two natures of Christ as “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,” but throughout to Christ as “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten.” In and beyond the human and the divine nature, the Church encounters Jesus Christ, not as the model of unification of (divine) transcendence and (human) immanence, but as the wonder of this unity in Person.<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, Kamphuis makes this move even more pointedly by stating that Christology should not start with nature or person, but with the office of Christ. The fact that in Christ God became man has a specific reason, namely God’s eternal purpose of saving mankind by the propitiatory death of his Son. Christ as a Person, both God and man, should be strictly viewed as our Mediator. Kamphuis focuses his position explicitly on the question of the suffering of Christ in relation to divine (im)passibility. Scripture unreservedly tells us about Christ’s suffering up to his being deserted by God. This should not, however, occasion us to abstract reasoning about how “God can be deserted by God” or about the (not-)sharing of the divine nature in suffering and death – a reasoning that cannot but fail – , but should first and foremost lead us to thankful recognition and praise of God’s infinite love manifest in the substitutional suffering and death of Christ for our salvation.<sup>62</sup>

As an ultimate expression of this view on the unity of Christ’s Person and work, Kamphuis refers to the theologoumenon of the *pactum salutis*: the idea that God’s

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<sup>58</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 470-511.

<sup>59</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 470-481.

<sup>60</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 483-499.

<sup>61</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 508; cf. for a further elaboration Barend Kamphuis, “Chalcedon in Kampen,” *Theologia Reformata* 48 (2005), 26-40.

<sup>62</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 499-503.

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plan of salvation has the character of a trinitarian covenant. The classic doctrine of *pactum salutis* starts “above,” with Christ’s divinity and pre-existence. The pre-existence of Christ is, in this context, not ideal but real: the pre-existent Christ is viewed as personally acting towards his future work of *assumptio carnis* and *sponsio*. Anchored in the “deliberation” and “decision” of the triune God, the unity of the Person of Christ and his work is established as strongly as it can be.<sup>63</sup>

From this brief review of Kamphuis’ contribution to the christological debates, I draw the conclusion that the relation between Christ’s divine and human nature and, consequently, between Christology and the doctrine of God<sup>64</sup> should not be conceived in an abstract and isolated way. In the remainder of this section, it will become clear that I endorse the emphasis on the unity of Person (instead of separate natures) and on the concrete, salvific function and purpose of the event of God becoming man in Christ. In critical response to Kamphuis, however, I would argue that his shifting the discussion from nature to person and from person to function (office) is not entirely satisfying. After all, any theology that confesses Christ as Son of God cannot avoid the question as to what the incarnation, suffering and death of Christ imply for the doctrine of God. The statement that we face an event, not a structure, a mystery, not a plain truth, does not dispense us of the obligation to speak meaningfully about this mystery and to explain as best as we can how our statements about Christ are and can be true.

As an attempt to such explanation, I claim, first of all, that the strong unity of Person need not eliminate all distinction between the human and the divine nature in Christ, and, second, that this unity of Person does not *per se* provide the exclusive model of the relation between God and man. From the biblical testimony, one should acknowledge that the strong personal unity of God and man in the Person of Jesus Christ is a singular event with a particular function and purpose, namely the salvation of mankind through reconciliation, motivated by the free love of God toward fallen creatures. The Son of God’s assuming the human nature does indeed mean the personal identification of God with this man, Jesus Christ. That does not, however, necessarily imply the complete reverse identification of God by the unity with man, nor the unqualified extension of the unity of God and man in Christ to all mankind.

My insistence on the proper distinction of the two natures in Christ has the following consequences for the christological qualifications of the doctrine of God as proposed by Barth and Bayer:

- a. Concerning the *epistemological* question, I do in principle agree with the statement that God has fully and ultimately revealed himself in Christ and that therefore God can only be known in Christ. To this claim, however, I make a qualification. Christ is the ultimate and final manifestation of God, especially in his essential goodness and his purpose of salvation. Whatever is true of God, is

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<sup>63</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 504-505.

<sup>64</sup> Kamphuis, *Boven en beneden*, 505-510, explicitly connects his discussion of Christology to the doctrine of God, especially in terms of “transcendence” and “immanence.” While this pair of concepts is dominant in 20th century doctrine of God as reviewed by Kamphuis, it did not turn out to be equally important in my study.

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true of Christ. Whatever can be known of God, should be known as specified in Christ. On the other hand, however, in the long history of revelation God has revealed infinitely many aspects of himself. All of this revelation should be taken into account in order to know God. In my view, it would be somewhat artificial to deduce all true knowledge of God exclusively from the concrete story of Jesus Christ. While agreeing with a Christocentric approach to the doctrine of God, I reject “Christomonism” in this respect.

- b. Barth’s train of thought concerning our knowledge of God moves beyond the “formal source” of this knowledge: Barth states that the election of Jesus Christ determines God’s *essence* as including the unity with man. There is no room in this study to evaluate Barth’s doctrine of election as a whole. At this point, I limit myself to the remark that God’s plan of bringing salvation in Jesus Christ indicates a genuine and deep-rooted purpose of God (cf. also section 22.2.5 below). In this respect, Barth’s supralapsarian doctrine of election deserves further consideration, in connection with the classic doctrine of the *pactum salutis* and with the proposal of a “supralapsarian Christology” from the Scotist part of the Utrecht School (cf. part III, sections 17.2.2 and 17.3 above). A further difficulty in elaborating this line of thought lies both in Barth’s christological determination of God’s essence and in the traditional Reformed *dictum* “the decrees of God are the decreeing God himself” (*decreta Dei sunt Deus decernens*). As we have seen in part I of this study, Reformed Orthodoxy commonly defends a strong version of the doctrine of simplicity, implying that there are no “accidents” in God. When this statement is extended to God’s decrees, it seems that all God’s decrees with their concrete, personal contents are essential to God. As the analysis by members of the Utrecht School shows, this view threatens both God’s freedom and human freedom. Within Reformed Orthodoxy, we found a few indications of the awareness that, of course, the outward relations and operations of God have their foundation in essential properties such as goodness, justice and wisdom,<sup>65</sup> but that nevertheless the application of these properties to concrete creaturely entities and events is contingent and brings an accidental dimension along with it. This awareness should be maintained in considering the impact of Christology and election on the essence of God. Karl Barth himself does sometimes distinguish between the necessary, essential will of God by which the three Persons of the Trinity are united, and the contingent, accidental will by which God has chosen to love man in Christ. In the main thrust of his theology, however, the strict distinction between necessity and contingency is often overruled by a dialectical and actualist way of thinking. If this distinction is honored, the deep and genuine purpose of God to reconcile fallen mankind with him can be fully maintained, without the implication that hereby the own essence of God is determined.

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<sup>65</sup> In this sense the maxim *decreta Dei sunt Deus decernens* should be maintained as an indication of the fact that in all of his decisions, God is actively present with all his virtues, and that the decree is not co-determined or influenced from without. As such, it equals Barth’s (and the scholastics’) understanding of God’s simplicity: “in all that He is and does, He is wholly and undividedly himself.”

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- c. In addition to the qualification on Barth's supralapsarian, christological doctrine of election, the idea of *christological unity* of God and man itself should be carefully interpreted. The contention that Jesus Christ defines the identity of God presupposes a strong identification of God and Christ. From an orthodox Reformed perspective, two qualifications should be made. First, it is not God as such that is identical with Christ, but the Son as second Person of the Trinity. Although the Father and the Spirit are crucially involved in the incarnation, it is properly the Son that is united with man in Jesus Christ. Second, the incarnation is a specific event or act of God with a well-defined purpose: to bring back fallen humanity into communion with God, by reconciling the guilt of their sins. The union of God and man in Christ stands in service of Christ's task as Mediator between God and man. Therefore this union should not be extended into a general model of God's dealing with humanity. Incarnation and reconciliation should be maintained as salvation-historical facts, not as ontological models.
- d. For Barth, the christological focus of the doctrine of God results in the statement that God's "character" is not "morally neutral," but unambiguously intent upon our *salvation*. I subscribe to the denial of "moral neutrality" in God, but reject the suggestion that this denial can only be christologically grounded. The traditional, scholastic doctrine of God explains God's moral character in great detail by means of attributes such as holiness, justice, love, grace, and mercy as extrapolations of God's will. These perfections are uniquely manifest in God's work of salvation through Christ, but they are present in God prior to Christ's coming on earth. In this respect, the intentions behind the christological focus in the doctrine of God can be accepted, but they need not be exclusively grounded in the "Christ event" because they are warranted in God's perfections from the outset.
- e. Especially in Bayer's approach, the christological determination of the doctrine of God results in a strong unity of *God and man*. Although it is not immediately clear what a "communicative identity" of God and man does mean (an identity brought about by the event of divine self-communication?), Bayer unmistakably rejects any distinction between communicable and incommunicable divine properties. In the experience of faith, we have mixed and polyvalent encounters with God, through which we may hope to discover the love of God in Christ. In Bayer's conception, an other duality occurs, namely between the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus*. The christological determination of God's attributes yields at once identity and (paradoxical) duality. I, on the contrary, maintain the distinctively Reformed concern to maintain the ontological distinction between God and man. True revelation and a genuine relation between God and man presupposes the existence of distinct subjects, not their merging into a "communicative identity." Salvation by Jesus Christ does not consist of our *divinization*, but in our "*humanization*": our becoming truly man in the face of God.
- f. An extreme consequence of a christological understanding of the doctrine of God is the statement that God himself is involved in the *suffering and death* of Christ; briefly put: God died when Christ died. As Marcel Sarot's contribution to the Utrecht School (see part III, section 19.3) makes clear, theopaschitism and

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the passibility of God have become dominant views in 20th century theology.<sup>66</sup> In my view, the conclusion from Christ's death to the death of God is an invalid and illegitimate one. Even if the unity of the Person of Christ is emphasized, the distinction between his human and his divine nature should be preserved. Christ as a person died, but that does not entail that God in Christ died, even apart from the question as to what it would mean for God to die.

The position developed in this section may seem somewhat reactionary in view of what counts as innovative achievements of the 20th century doctrine of God. I cannot hide the fact that I am critical toward the alleged improvements of a christological reworking of the doctrine of God and negative toward some of the concrete proposals in this area. Behind my critique, however, lies the positive conviction that classic Reformed theology, both in the doctrine of God and in Christology, provides sufficient room for the genuine and legitimate concerns advocated in terms of a christological focus. In elaborating these concerns, Reformed theology would, to my mind, do well to maintain the fundamental distinction of classic Christology.

### 22.2.3. The Fullness of the Divine Life

Under the heading of this sub-section, several insights gathered throughout this study coalesce. To start, I emphasize that the doctrine of God can never result in an abstract, empty, lifeless conception of God. Contrary to popular opinion, the traditional Reformed doctrine of God does not represent such a lifeless conception. The wide range of divine attributes examined there is intended to express the infinite richness of God's being. In this respect, the doctrine of divine simplicity should not be understood as an elimination of all distinction in God but rather as the recognition of the fact that in all his properties, relations and actions, God is completely present in the fullness of his life. In all three parts of this study, we found the insight that the fullness of God's life with all its properties cannot be expressed in one single concept or model.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the fullness of the divine life is evidently understood in both Reformed Orthodoxy and Karl Barth's theology as the fullness of trinitarian life. It is precisely in the independent yet fully relational and active exchange of the divine essence in the three Persons that all further vivacity and activity of God originates.

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<sup>66</sup> I point to my observations concerning Barth's doctrine of God on this point: (a) Barth accepts the kenosis motif as expressing that "being God" is not God's only possibility, but God can also choose to empty himself in unity with humble humanity (section 12.3.2); (b) God has chosen to subject himself to evil and rejection, even to taste damnation, death and hell (section 13.2); (c) by these statements, Barth does distance himself from traditional impassibilism, but does not unambiguously endorse the idea of the "death of God" (this is also Eberhard Jüngel's conclusion, see section 14.1).

<sup>67</sup> The final clause might sound somewhat dubious in view of Vincent Brümmer's proposal to frame the doctrine of God in the "model of love." While it is true that Brümmer comes closest to describing God's nature and character with help from one "key model," he does still employ most of the other traditional concepts to fill in the "key model."

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Traditionally, the category of God's life (*vita Dei*) is particularly employed in discussing the second group of divine attributes, in which God is externally active. Here, the life of God is explicated in terms of the basic faculties of the human soul: intellect, will, and power. This does not mean that God is depicted after the image of man; the Christian tradition firmly holds that man is created after God's image, and that implies that God is the "original person" possessing the capacities of knowing, willing, and executing, which man receives in a derivative way.

An important concept to be considered in relation to the fullness of the divine life is the term *actus purissimus* (*et simplicissimus*). This term has come under suspicion for at least two reasons (aside from the simple observation that it is not directly derived from Scripture):

- a. it employs language that is obviously taken from Aristotelian (meta)physics, namely from the opposition of act and potency (*actus – potentia*);
- b. by exclusively ascribing to God "act" and denying "potency," this concept seems to exclude any real relationship between God and creatures and to interpret God as the Aristotelian "unmoved Mover."

In my view, we can and should understand the term *actus purissimus* in a more positive way, for several reasons. First, the term *actus* should not merely be heard in opposition to *potentia*, but deserves to be understood on its own conceptual merits in the Christian-Aristotelian system of thought. *Actus* means that a certain aspect of being is fully realized. Applied to God, the term *actus purissimus* indicates that God is all that He is in the most perfect and complete manner, without any defect or lack. God is "fully realized being" in *optima forma*.<sup>68</sup> This should not be understood in a "dynamic" way, as if God developed from potentiality to perfect actuality. As God's essential "make-up" consists of his fully actualized perfections, He has these perfections eternally in and by himself. A further implication of God's being *actus purissimus* is that He is in complete control of his own being. In Aristotelian metaphysics, all potencies can be "acted upon" by other causes. This "being acted upon" is excluded for God. His way of being is not dependent on or derived from anything else. If we connect these two aspects of God's being *actus purissimus* to the question of relationship and responsiveness, the following may result: it is not excluded that God truly relates himself to other entities or that He genuinely responds to acts and requests of his creatures. What is excluded is (a) that his outward relations and acts add to or detract from his fully and perfectly being God, and (b) that in relation and response God is "acted upon" by created actors that exert some control over God.

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<sup>68</sup> One might associate the term *actus purissimus* with the "principle of plenitude": the Aristotelian idea that all true possibilities (potencies) are sooner or later realized (actualized). Cf. A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936). In fact, however, the classic Christian doctrine of God precisely breaks with the principle of plenitude. By acknowledging contingency as a fundamental category, based on the belief in God as the Creator, Christian thought has room for possibilities that will never be realized. The necessitarian tendency of antique Greek philosophy is fundamentally counteracted. When God is described as *actus purissimus*, this does not incorporate God into the "great chain of being," but instead it singles out God as the being who alone is fully and perfectly whatever He could and should be.

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In this connection, the classic Christian notion of the *vita Dei*, as expressed with the help of the *actus purissimus*, should be sharply distinguished from modern versions of the doctrine of God such as process theology and similar conceptions.<sup>69</sup> In process theology, God does become dependent on the world for being fully realized: in himself, He contains potentiality as well as actuality. Moreover, the responsiveness of God in process thought is conceived of in terms of “prehension”: God perceives or “prehends” whatever experiences and emotions occur in the great world organism. It is hard to see how God retains individuality and independence in this type of responsiveness. By contrast, the traditional view can make room for true responsiveness of God while maintaining his independent existence as the Subject of his own “emotion-like” properties.

### 22.2.4. Necessity and Contingency

Throughout this chapter, I have in numerous places pointed to the importance of correctly distinguishing between the dimensions of necessity and contingency in the doctrine of God. Indeed, this is one of the great discoveries of my investigations in the doctrine of God. The frequent references to this issue show that this distinction greatly affects several other aspects: on a structural systematic level, it is a fundamental and determining distinction.

In the course of my research, I learned to employ the distinction between necessity and contingency from the Utrecht School. As the historical research of this group made clear, the philosophical discipline of “modal ontology” that centers around this distinction, arose from decidedly Christian thought in medieval scholasticism, and culminated in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus. At the background of Aristotelian philosophy, in which reality was interpreted in causal language with strong necessitarian tendencies, the statement of the fundamental contingency of created reality appears as a direct consequence of the Christian confession that God created the world because He willed to do so. This confession urged medieval thinkers to analyze the concept of “will,” and in doing so, they discovered that a true will presupposes structural freedom of choice. If reality depends on the divine will, then there are several possible states of affairs and courses of events, of which God selects some and rejects others. The ancient Greek axiom that every true possibility is necessarily realized was rejected, and the picture of an open world of possibilities arose.

The full systematic implications of the concept of (“synchronic”) contingency and the modal ontology (“possible world semantics”) are expounded in the works of Antonie Vos and others (see part III of this study, esp. sections 17.2.2 and 21.3.3). With this analysis in mind, I found basically the same way of thinking in the relevant parts of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God. The Reformed doctrine of God’s knowledge and will clearly works with a “Scotist” concept of contingency, and maintains the strong emphasis on God’s will as the decisive cause of all reality.

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. John B. Cobb jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited / Westminster Press, 1976). See also part III, sections 19.3, 19.6, 21.3.6., and chapter 20.

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In the systematic elaboration of my own position, some aspects of the necessity-contingency distinction deserve further explanation.

First, a few words about the “causal framework” in which these categories function. In the reception of Reformed scholastic theology (and of confessional texts produced in the same era), the causal language has produced confusion and suspicion. It seems that the use of causal terms implies an impersonal approach to the reality of God and creatures by reducing them to “causes” and “effects.” Moreover, when God is identified as “first Cause” (*prima causa*) and creatures as “secondary causes” (*causae secundae*), this gives the impression that God can overrule and manipulate the acts of creatures, to the effect that creatures lose all freedom in respect to God.<sup>70</sup> A careful examination of the Reformed orthodox handling of causal language and conceptuality reveals that the aforementioned impressions rest on hermeneutical misunderstandings. Since the time the natural sciences gained dominance in European culture beginning in the 18th century, we have become accustomed to thinking of causes as impersonal, natural forces that operate in a necessary way. This interpretation, however, does not match the classic, scholastic understanding of causality. Scholastic philosophy, building on ancient Greek thought, is interested in the constitution of reality. In analyzing the conditions of becoming and being, scholasticism employs the concept of *causa* to indicate a relation of production: a *causa* is anything that is involved in the realization of some other thing. Furthermore, many types and degrees of causality are distinguished: effective and final causes, formal and material causes, partial and complete causes, necessary and contingent causes, natural and free causes. Especially the latter two pairs of terms are most important for understanding the causal framework of Christian scholasticism. In explicit contrast to ancient thought, Christian thinkers introduced a fundamental distinction between causes that work necessarily (without alternatives) and causes that work freely (with alternatives). The class of free causes includes God, man and angels as rational entities. The freedom of operation of these causes presupposes the possession of a will that chooses out of the alternative courses of action. The possession of a will, in turn, is the prerequisite and prerogative of being a person. Much of the (Reformed) scholastic usage of *causa* can without difficulty be translated in terms of “personal agent.” In itself, the term *causa* means no more than that something (as yet undefined as personal or impersonal) is involved in bringing about another thing (equally undefined as personal or impersonal, object, event or act). So far concerning the first misunderstanding: *causa* can be understood as both personal and impersonal, dependent on its referent. The second hermeneutical difficulty in understanding the Reformed orthodox causal language lies in the nature of “production,” especially in relation to the “first-second cause” distinction. A mechanical understanding of causality, that was already implied in the first misunderstanding of causality, brings with it the idea that the operation of a cause will always have its effect regardless of the response or co-operation of the object. Causation is understood here in terms of necessary operation, which in case of a causal relation between persons means that one person manipulates the other in

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<sup>70</sup> As we have seen in part III, sections 18.1 and 21.3.4, Vincent Brümmer shares this interpretation of the Reformed tradition as pointedly expressed in the Canons of Dordt.

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order to produce the intended effect. With the Reformed orthodox, however, causation is by no means understood as always necessary, mechanical and manipulative. Given the category of free, personal causation, it is possible to discern different factors that contribute to an act of the will. The foundational, all-encompassing and decisive factor behind all created reality is the will of God. It is a non-negotiable insight of the Christian faith that nothing can exist without God's continuing care and governance. Medieval Christian thinkers invested much effort in analyzing the relation between God as the First Cause and created secondary causes. They concluded that it is possible to maintain at one and the same time the absolute sovereignty of God in his foreknowledge and decrees and the human freedom to act along alternative routes. Reformed Orthodoxy picks up these lines of thought, and presents a balanced model of divine and human causality.

Next, the emphasis on (synchronic) contingency might suggest that all that is said about God and the world should be understood as contingent. On that account, the radical voluntarism of the 14th and 15th centuries concurs with the postmodern idea that "anything goes."<sup>71</sup> One of the goals of this study, however, is to deny that conclusion. The classic Christian position (medieval and Reformed) is characterized by a precise balance between the dimensions of necessity and contingency. On the basis of that balance, Antonie Vos has presented a complete "theory of properties" that is elaborated into a "theory of divine attributes." A refined set of conceptual distinctions enable the identification of properties as necessary, essential, contingent, accidental, possible, impossible, individual, common. In Vos' doctrine of God, there are many properties of God that are essential to him and, granted that God exists necessarily, are necessary themselves. If God is truly God, then He must be necessarily one, infinite, eternal, good, omniscient and omnipotent. This necessity is not enforced upon God from the outside, but is an inherent, logical necessity. An important lesson concerning theological method and rationality in this respect is that we should unlearn the idea that any statement of logical necessity in God is an attempt to exercise control over God: it is merely the recognition of what God is in himself.

This brings me to a third remark: it is of utmost importance to distinguish carefully between different sorts of necessity. To modern ears, "necessity" has the connotation of physical coercion: there is absolutely no alternative. Medieval and early modern Christian thought, however, employed a fundamental distinction between *absolute* and *hypothetical necessity*, or *necessity of the consequent-necessity of the consequence*. Absolute necessity resides in the things themselves: a fire cannot but burn, God cannot but be good. Hypothetical or implicative necessity concerns the relation between different things which can in themselves be non-necessary.

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<sup>71</sup> The slogan "anything goes" became famous through Paul Feyerabend's postmodern philosophy of science; see Feyerabend, *Against Method*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1988); *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987). On the difference between the Scotist view of contingency defended here and the radical postmodern views of contingency, see Nico den Bok, "Is dan alles mogelijk? De dubbelzinnige expansie van het contingentiebeseef na Duns Scotus," in *Geloof geeft te denken: Opstellen over de theologie van Johannes Duns Scotus*, ed. by Henri Veldhuis and Andreas J. Beck, *Scripta franciscana*, vol. 8 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 283-312.

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The *necessity of the consequent-consequence* distinction is based on the analysis of an implication. An example of an implication is:

(1) If I marry Sophie, Sophie is my wife.

This conditional assertion can logically be symbolized as:

(2)  $p \rightarrow q$

In (2) the conditional assertion of (1) is symbolized by substituting its two parts by a letter (if  $p$ , then  $q$ ) and substituting their implicative connection by the logical symbol for an implication ( $p \rightarrow q$ ). In this symbolized proposition, we call  $p$  the *antecedent* and  $q$  the *consequent* of the implication  $p \rightarrow q$ . Now if we add a necessity operator (N) to the implication, we can construct different formulas.

First, the implication itself can be necessary: if  $p$ , then  $q$  is always implied. Hence, the necessity operator is put in front of or above the whole implication:

(3) 
$$\begin{array}{c} \text{N} \\ \text{N}(p \rightarrow q) \text{ or } p \rightarrow q \end{array}$$

This kind of necessity was called the necessity of the *consequence* by the Reformed. It is important to note that this necessity applies to the *implication* between two states of affairs: in (3) the necessity operator N determines the whole of the consequence  $p \rightarrow q$ . Thus, the relation of implication itself is necessary. Yet, neither  $p$  nor  $q$  have to be necessary, because  $p$  and  $q$  may be perfectly contingent. Referring to the example: it is contingent that I marry Sophie (I do not have to do so...), and it is contingent that Sophie is my wife (she does not have to be mine...); but the implication between both is necessary: it cannot be the case that I marry Sophie but that she is not my wife.

Now the crucial point is that the necessity of the *consequence* is not equivalent to the necessity of the *consequent*. In formula (4), the necessity of the *consequent* obtains:

(4)  $p \rightarrow Nq$

In (4) the necessity operator N is placed before the consequent of the implication and determines the consequent  $q$ . This proposition claims that the result of the conditional proposition is necessary. In terms of our example: it is necessary that Sophie is my wife (if I marry her). When the Reformed scholastics and their Utrecht heirs utilize the distinction between the necessity of the consequent and the necessity of the consequence, they point out that formula (3) does not imply formula (4): if the implicative connection between two propositions or events is necessary, this does not mean that either of both is necessary in itself.

The relevance of these distinctions in the theory of necessity and contingency becomes especially clear in discussing God's foreknowledge and will. The debate on foreknowledge is dominated by two axes of opposition: determinism vs. indeterminism, and compatibilism vs. incompatibilism. The first axis has to do with the

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question whether our reality (especially free, creaturely actions) are or are not determined by God's decree. The second axis concerns the further question whether divine determination (which is assumed by most theologians, even if only for the sake of the argument) is or is not compatible with true human freedom. Many conservative theologians insist on God's determination of everything, and commonly seek for ways to make human freedom compatible with this determination (or entirely abandon human freedom). By contrast, many liberal theologians assume the incompatibility of divine determination and human freedom, and for the sake of freedom conclude that God does not determine the entire course of created reality.

The approach of necessity and contingency expounded above can solve the dilemmas in a different way. To begin, contingency is acknowledged as a fundamental category of created reality. But contingency is not limited to creation: it originates from God's free will. From the start, God has a contingent dimension in the external operation of his will. God's relation with and decrees concerning created reality do not violate but do respect the fundamental contingency. The contingent alternatives in reality are also contingent alternatives in God's foreknowledge in the *first structural moment*. This knowledge of possibilities is indeterminate. From these alternatives, some are realized while others remain mere possibilities. According to the Christian faith, the actualization of possibilities rests on God's will. In the *second structural moment*, God knows the possibilities as being realized. In this second structural moment, God's foreknowledge is determinate. The ground of determination is the decision of God's will. In the actualization of contingent acts, however, a free human will is constitutively involved. If I do not choose to have marmalade on my slice of bread, then there will be no marmalade on it. The contingency of acts that are determined by God to be actualized is not removed by their becoming actual. Contingency is a modal status that does not change by actualization.<sup>72</sup>

There is, however, also a dimension of necessity in regard to contingent acts. This is a hypothetical necessity that can be expressed as follows:

(5)  $N(\text{GK}p \rightarrow p)$ : Necessarily, if God knows that  $p$  (will happen), then  $p$  (will happen)

or:

(5')  $N(p \rightarrow \text{GK}p)$ : Necessarily, if  $p$  (will happen), then God knows that  $p$  (will happen)

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<sup>72</sup> For a fuller explanation of the first and second structural moment in God's foreknowledge, see Andreas J. Beck, "Gisbertus Voetius," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 213-215. Beck discerns three structural moments: 1. the indeterminate knowledge of mere possibilities; 2. the conditional knowledge of modes and causal relations between hypothetically future states of affairs; 3. the determinate knowledge of the future on the basis of God's own decree.

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This hypothetical or implicative necessity warrants that nothing happens beyond or contrary to the knowledge of God. Still, this type of necessity does not make the known fact nor God's knowledge of it necessary in itself. The exercise of human freedom is safeguarded as well.

Similar formulas can be drawn up for God's will. A complication in this regard arises from the fact that many contingent events involve the act of a (human) will. God's act of will to make something happen thus includes a human act of will. In formula:

(6) GWaWp: God wills [subject] *a* to will [act] *p*

This formula reflects the theory of dual causality: God and man are both in their own way involved in the actualization of a certain state of affairs. For the Reformed orthodox elaboration of the dual causality model in view of God's foreknowledge and will, the following statements are characteristic:

The decision of God's will is a prerequisite for the actualization (or, as the Reformed scholastics often put it, futurition) of a human act of will. This does not only include the realization of the general conditions under which an act can be performed, but pertains to the specific act itself.

At the same time, the acting human will is determined by nothing but itself. It is exactly the will itself that, given all relevant circumstances, performs the act of selecting one of the alternative options.

The relation between God's act of determination and the self-determination of the human will is expressed by the concept of "concurrency" (*concursum*). This term means that, each starting on its own level and performing its own task, both the divine and the human will terminate (end up) in the same act.

In this concept of concurrency, there is no conflict between the divine and the human will: the freedom of the human will is not violated by God's decree but is instead safeguarded by it and included in its execution; conversely, human freedom does not damage God's sovereignty because it is always dependent on and in accordance with the divine decree.

In my view, such a balanced theory of God's foreknowledge and will in relation to contingent creaturely acts has the potential to solve many tensions and dilemmas that are experienced in contemporary faith and theology. It enables the maintenance of a distinctly Reformed approach: distinguished from both a "hard" determinism that is frequently but incorrectly taken as "true Calvinism," and an overt indeterminism that downplays God's sovereignty and effectiveness in favor of human free choice. Both determinism and indeterminism suffer from the misunderstanding that the certainty of God's foreknowledge and the determination of God's will imply the necessity of the things known and willed by God.

As stated above, the concept of "concurrency" is crucial for an adequate doctrine of divine foreknowledge and decree. In the history of Reformed theology, however, the concept has become suspect to many. One important reason for this suspicion is the fact that an influential strand of Roman-Catholic theology prominently employed the concept of *concursum*. Especially the Jesuits, headed by Luis Molina, developed a theory of God's foreknowledge in which the term

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*concursum* served to create fundamental independence for the human will. I have discussed their theory, labeled “middle knowledge” (*scientia media*), in several parts of this study (part I, section 7.2, excursus 3; part II, section 12.3.2; part III, section 19.5). In the Jesuit view, *concursum* should be understood as “general concurrence”: God provides the general circumstances and conditions in which the human will can choose with absolute freedom. God’s actualization of things does not, according to the Jesuit, include the specific act of man’s will but merely the prerequisites for that act. For Reformed theology, it is of vital importance to reject the Jesuit limitation of *concursum* to “general concurrence” and to elaborate the concept as “specific concurrence”: God’s involvement with the actualization of human acts pertains to the act itself.

A further concept that is indispensable in a sound and adequate Reformed doctrine of divine foreknowledge and decree is “permission.” It is indispensable because the events and acts that fall under the determination of God’s will consist in large part of evil. Since God is essentially good and holy, the ascription of evil to the decree of God creates a fundamental problem. On the one hand, if evil is directly caused by God’s decree, the conclusion that God is “the author of sin,” and thus guilty of evil, is inevitable. On the other hand, if evil things happen without any involvement of God’s will, God’s omnipotence and his government of the world are severely curtailed. If evil does not in some way fall under God’s will and decree, the consequence is that God cannot adequately anticipate on and act upon the occurrence of evil and, in the final analysis, is powerless in the face of evil. For that reason, Christian theology, at least starting with Augustine, has developed a concept of permission (*permissio*) to indicate the involvement of God in the occurrence of evil.

Interestingly, Reformed theology since the 16th century has a somewhat uncomfortable relation to the concept of permission. As is well known, John Calvin rejected the concept. Calvin’s concern is that the notion of permission implies that God merely acquiesces in an act performed by creatures, without being decisively involved, “as if God sat in a watchtower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will.” Instead, Calvin argues that even the evil acts of Satan and of the wicked stand under the direct command of God’s will. While appealing to a host of biblical examples, Calvin states that through the acts of men and devils, God exercises his own judgments and performs his own work.<sup>73</sup> Later, Calvin returns to this issue in the framework of predestination and reprobation. Some people (e.g., Erasmus) prefer to say that “the wicked perish because God permits it, not because he so wills.” Calvin responds: “But why shall we say ‘permission’ unless it is because God so wills?” Quoting Augustine, Calvin holds that the will of God is the necessity of things, to the effect that the wickedness and the damnation of sinners is in a secret way brought forward by the just will of God.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Calvin [ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles], *Institutes*, I.18.1. Calvin gave a fuller exposition of his view, in response to Sebastian Castellio, in his treatise *Calumniae nebulonis cuiusdam de occulta providentia Dei* (1558).

<sup>74</sup> Calvin [ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles], *Institutes*, III.23.8.

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Later Reformed scholastic theology reprised the term *permissio*, with tacit and sometimes open response to Calvin's criticism. Calvin's objection that "permission" gives a too weak and passive character to God's involvement with evil is countered by the statement that it is not *passive* but *active* permission (*permissio activa*). God is not, as it were, overwhelmed by evil and then has no choice but to let it go. Quite contrary, God's permission of evil is a conscious and active determination to let an evil act or event occur. In addition, the Reformed scholastics explain that God's permission of evil is an *indirect* act of will. God does not without qualification will that evil happens. The qualification can be twofold: (a) God chooses *not to prevent* something evil; (b) God permits something evil that is directly caused by *the act of a created will*. These qualifications are important in order to guarantee God's moral goodness and to respect the freedom and responsibility of creaturely agents. At the same time, the fact that God has an (albeit indirect) act of will concerning evil safeguards the control of God over all that happens in the world and God's ability to act upon evil that occurs.

Special attention in this respect should be paid to a recent direction in theology: the so-called open-view theory or open theism. In North-America, this position has aroused much debate among evangelical theologians.<sup>75</sup> In Dutch theology, it has attracted little attention thus far.

The open theist argument runs summarily as follows:<sup>76</sup>

- (1) Love is God's most important quality.
- (2) Love is not only care and commitment, but also being sensitive and responsive.
- (3) Creatures exert an influence on God.
- (4) God's will is not the ultimate explanation of everything. History is the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do.
- (5) God does not know everything timelessly, but learns from events as they take place.
- (6) So God is dependent on the world in some ways.
- (7) Human beings are free in the libertarian sense.

While open theists share several of the convictions expressed above with adherents of different theological approaches (especially with process theology),

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<sup>75</sup> Extensive bibliographies are given in works that critically discuss open theism, for example John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 213-219; John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 385-400. Representative statements of the open theist position can be found in: Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> Statement provided by Frame, *No Other God*, 23, based on Richard Rice, "Biblical Support," in: Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 15-16. Thesis 7 in the list above is not directly quoted from Rice, but is added by Frame on the basis of other writings by advocates of open theism. According to Frame, "libertarian freedom" is possibly the root from which the whole open theist system grows.

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thesis 5 is most distinctive of the “open view” of God. It can be unfolded in the following sub-statements:

- a. Free decisions by personal agents are by definition unpredictable, and therefore unknowable for God.
- b. The future depends partially on free decisions by personal agents, and thus God cannot have exhaustive knowledge of the future.
- c. God’s knowledge is limited and partially conjectural; God can be ignorant or mistaken on the course of future events.

To thesis 7, Frame adds a definition of libertarian freedom by the open-theist philosopher William Hasker:

An agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent’s power to perform the action and also in the agent’s power to refrain from the action.<sup>77</sup>

Judged from the positions in the doctrine of God developed above, open theism is deficient in a number of aspects. First, it shares the presupposition that certain foreknowledge and a determinate decree on God’s part eliminate room for human freedom. As I have argued before, this presupposition is false: the Reformed theories of contingency and dual causality provide a way to maintain human freedom as dependent on God’s sovereign determination and actualization of reality. Thus, the presupposition on which the open theist “solution” is based, consists of a false dilemma.

Furthermore, in the open theist alternative, the sovereignty of God is inevitably sacrificed for human free choice. If God has only “probable” or “conjectural” knowledge of free human acts, He cannot effectively pursue his own plans. It is precisely the category of contingent acts and facts that is crucial for the realization of God’s salvific purposes. The certainty and infallibility of God’s foreknowledge is not only relevant in the doctrine of God, but also in the context of soteriology. On this point, open theism cannot stand a serious biblical test.

A third problematic element in the open theist theory of divine foreknowledge is the assumption that God’s knowledge of temporal things should itself be temporal. On the level of the theory of divine attributes in general, this amounts to the abolition of God’s eternity. In the next section, I will elaborate on the relation between eternity and time. For the moment, I deny the open theist assumption that God’s knowledge of temporal things needs to be temporal itself. This assumption exhibits a strange sort of “essentialist” thinking. “Essentialism” is commonly

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<sup>77</sup> Quotation from: William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in Pinnock, *Openness*, 136-137. John Frame’s rebuttal of open theism is mainly targeted against the assumption of “libertarian freedom.” In my view, Hasker’s definition wrongly centers on the *power* of man to perform an act instead of the fundamental, ontological *possibility* of alternative, opposite acts. Frame, following Hasker’s definition, misses the opportunity to employ the idea of synchronic contingency as a way to combine divine sovereignty and human freedom. The confusion between the “capacity” element and the “possibility” element in freedom was already signaled by Girolami Zanchi; see my contribution “Always Free, but not Always Good: Two Texts of Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590) on Free Will,” in Van Asselt et al., *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, especially section 2.4.

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understood as a type of thought that is dominated by unchanging substances and their essential properties. In open theism (and, to be sure, various recent theological proposals) the essentialism is inverted: whatever is legitimately identified as God's (historical and relational) involvement in created reality is "projected back" into God's own being and is translated in essential terms. Instead of "eternalizing" God's concrete actions, here God's own essence is "temporalized" with appeal to his concrete actions. In both cases, the proper distinction of a necessary (essential) and a contingent (accidental) dimension in God is missed. Such a distinction enables us to maintain the eternal character of God's knowledge, while at the same time preserving the truly temporal character of its objects. It is a common insight of Reformed scholastic theology that God knows things precisely as they are: He knows contingent things as contingent, temporal things as temporal. The temporal order and the difference between temporal moments are contained and maintained in God's foreknowledge. The fact that God in his eternity is "co-existent" with all different parts of time, does not entail that the different moments of time themselves are co-existent with each other.

My conclusion is that open theism creates a problem that need not exist, and presents a solution that does not meet biblical and doctrinal requirements. Reformed theology would therefore do better to employ the richness of its own conceptual tradition in discussing the problem of God's foreknowledge in relation to free creaturely acts.

### **22.2.5. God's Relational and Historical Character**

Much of recent theology's revisions of the doctrine of God is aimed at affirming God's relational and historical character. For the sake of this affirmation, severe criticism is directed against traditional theology that allegedly endorses an a-relational and a-historical conception of God. The preceding sections do already contain the material needed to deal with this problematic.

Before I enter into the substantial discussion of God's "relationality" and "historicity," I point to an important hermeneutical insight that arises at this point. In 20th century theology, it has become a commonplace to accuse traditional (scholastic) theology of a fatal allegiance to Greek, Aristotelian patterns of thought that violate the message of the Gospel. Behind this accusation lies a hermeneutical diagnosis: in the interpretation of God's revelation by Church and theology, we find an interaction between Scripture and tradition and contemporary culture and thought. According to modern critics, this interaction had damaging consequences for the formulation of doctrine: the categories of (secular, Greek) thought proved dominant over the fundamental truths of the Gospel. Now the irony of the matter is that a similar interaction between Scriptural insights and contemporary thought occurs with the proponents of a more relational and historical conception of God. Historicity and relationality (in that order) are precisely the central categories of much Western philosophy since the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Apart from the question of the biblical legitimacy of recent theology's attention to these categories, the fact that modern philosophy moves in the same direction adds to the plausibility and popularity of the proposed revisions of the doctrine of God. Even in strictly orthodox, "conservative" theological circles, the philosophical orientation on the categories of relation and historicity has resulted in a friendly

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sentiment towards these insights. Especially via biblical theology, these dimensions of the biblical doctrine of God are discovered and propagated. In these more strictly Reformed circles, an increasing tension is felt between the traditional concepts and thoughts in the systematic doctrine of God and the newer findings of biblical theology. This tension is a sign of the inevitability of the hermeneutical problematic: because of factors in our present cultural and philosophical context, we are forced to look anew into traditional doctrines on the basis of fresh biblical exegesis and theology. At the same time, our approach in exegesis and biblical theology is likely to be influenced by the preferred ideas and feelings of our own time.

The hermeneutical diagnosis does not impose a shame on either traditional or recent theology. It is restricted to the sober observation that interaction between biblical revelation, theological tradition and present cultural and philosophical context does continually occur, though in different constellations. What really matters is not the fact of such interaction itself, but the attitude in which the interaction is consciously performed. In several places of this study, we have seen that the Scriptural insights that form the doctrinal content have the power to break through and to remodel the employed concepts and categories of thought. Any theology, be it medieval or (post)modern, should be open to the transforming power of God's revelation in relativizing and reshaping our frames of thought. This holds for Aristotelian thinking in terms of substances and essences as well as for modern thinking in terms of relations and temporal change. In addition, we should realize that modern "functionalist" thought is as much a metaphysical proposal as is the despised essentialism of older philosophy.<sup>78</sup>

This being said, the categories of relationality and historicity should be put to a concrete test. For that test, I will employ the insights developed in the four preceding sub-sections.

From the doctrine of the Trinity, I derive two important insights in this respect:

1. *God is relational in his inner being.* I subscribe to the classic Western tradition that considers the relations between Father, Son and Spirit to be constitutive for God's essence. God's one essence consists in the three divine Persons. These Persons, in turn, are defined by their mutual relations, as is evidenced by the fact that the "personal properties" of each Person reside precisely in, respectively, *paternitas*, *filiatio* and *spiratio*. This understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity means that the Christian doctrine of God cannot be foreign or hostile to the notion of relationality. We must acknowledge a relational exchange of life and love in God's own inner being.

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Jansen, *Relationality and the Concept of God* (PhD thesis, VU Amsterdam, 1995), 145 comes to the same conclusion, especially in view of Jürgen Moltmann: "In place of the causal scheme of classical theism, Moltmann introduces a personal, psychological metaphysics." At the background of these new metaphysics, Jansen detects the philosophy of Hegel. The upshot of Jansen's study is the attempt to balance the legitimate interests of a relational understanding of God with the maintenance of God's independence by means of the classic "metaphysical" notions. Jansen tries to combine these two emphases in a framework of "narrative wholeness."

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2. *God remains an independent subject in his external relations.* In contrast to the idea of “social Trinity,” I further hold that the internal relationality of the triune God remains fundamentally distinct from his entering into external relations. Trinity is not “open” in the sense that human beings are incorporated on equal terms in the trinitarian “social life.” The constitutive relations within the Trinity are unique. In this respect, I follow Karl Barth, who emphasized the relational character of God’s own essence while maintaining the fundamental distinction between these internal relations and the external relations of God. According to Barth, it should be maintained that God’s inner relationality (in Barth’s words: primary objectivity) is the source and basis of his external relations to creation (“secondary objectivity”), but it does not become identical with these outward relations.

In section 22.2.2, I developed a position on the christological qualification of the doctrine of God. In that connection, I rejected Karl Barth’s claim that the “Christ event” exclusively defines the identity of God, as well as Oswald Bayer’s assumption that the divine nature and the human nature of Christ merge in one common identity. There is, however, reason for a serious qualification of the doctrine of God on the basis of Christology. For the question of relationality and historicity, this has the following consequences:

3. *There is in God a deep, eternal purpose and intention to save mankind and to bring man into intimate communion with God.* Salvation through the work of Christ is not ultimately motivated by external factors (e.g., by sin), nor does it merely rest on the satisfaction of the demands of God’s justice. The ultimate motive behind salvation is God’s love, his free and gracious will to bring people into his communion. The personal union of God and man in Christ expresses this deep intention and serves as a model of the way in which God wills to unite us with himself. At the same time, the personal unity of God and man in Christ remains unique. The faithful share in this unity by faith and through the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ. Our relation or communion with God (and vice versa) should not be framed in terms of God’s essence, but God’s will. Yet this does not make it less serious!
4. *The incarnation of God in Christ, and the subsequent history of Christ’s life, suffering, death, and resurrection is abundant proof of God’s active involvement in our world and on our behalf.* In Holy Scripture, this involvement comprises the whole history of the world from creation till consummation. Orthodox Christianity has never questioned this active involvement, because it lives from it. The question is, however, how to conceptualize it in connection with the doctrine of God. Do the facts of creation and incarnation rule out the traditional understanding of divine attributes such as simplicity, aseity, and immutability? I do not think so. First of all, some distinctions should be kept in mind. Creation as the first great work of God precisely presupposes the otherness of Creator and creature. God remains himself while bringing into existence a world differing from him. The world is not less real when it does not add to the deity of God! As to the second great work of God, incarnation and redemption, the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity and between the divine and human nature of Christ provide the warrant for both the sincerity of God’s involvement in it and the

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unchanged integrity of the divine essence. In incarnation and redemption, God reveals Who He eternally is; He does not become what He was not before. These distinctions being established, the way is open to confess as strongly as any modern theologian that God acts in history and seeks sincere community with us in Christ. The contention that the traditional theistic attributes prevent this is a fallacy.

As I have shown in section 22.2.3, the classic account of the life of God contains all properties that are “required” for God to act and relate externally: knowledge, will, and power. A notorious problem, however, is how God can act in *time* if He himself is *eternal*. Is it necessary to claim that God is *temporal*, or that his eternity *includes* our time? The problem with temporal existence is that it entails starting and ceasing to exist, which is biblically excluded for God. The statement that God’s eternity includes our temporality does not really seem to solve the problem. While connecting two modes of existence (eternal and temporal), it fails to make clear how these two modes are related. Does the inclusion of time in eternity extinguish the difference between time and eternity? If so, does that mean that God is made temporal after all, or that humans share in the eternity that originally belongs to God? If not, what is the “point of contact” between them?

Perhaps some further qualification of the concept of eternity might help. I have already referred to time and eternity as different modes of existence. Time is proper to created being, eternity to the uncreated Creator. Classic Christian thought accepted and maintained the irreducible distinction between the two modes of existence. Should we not continue to do so? The rational difficulties with the concept of eternity might implicitly contain an element of refusal to accept the difference between God and man, and the tacit attempt to place God and man on one level.

Modern critics of the idea of eternity give the false impression that traditional doctrine views eternity as the opposite of time, in brief, as timelessness. Reformed scholastic theologians take pains to present eternity as God’s unique mode of “duration,” as the continuous present in which God lives, or in Boethius’ terms, as the “complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of unending life.” God’s eternity embraces, sustains and completes our time. Because of the fundamental difference between the two modes of existence, we cannot, from our temporal perspective, give an adequate description of God’s eternal mode of being. At the very least we should and can speak about eternity in a manner that does not by definition exclude the possibility that God is in genuine contact with the temporal world.

In section 19.4, Luco van den Brom’s model of God’s omnipresence as a multi-dimensional form of spatiality was presented. If God exists in a higher dimensionality than our three-dimensional reality, then it is explicable how God can be present to every place at once. Perhaps this schematic model can be extended with at least one more dimension, by which God is superior not only to space, but also to time (modern physics often reckons with a four-dimensional spatio-temporal continuum). In his own dimension, God is always behind us, with us, and ahead of us. Our temporal adventures never surprise him or escape from

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his control. Seen from the other side, God can always anticipate on, intervene in, and keep memory of what happens in time.

We are now equipped to formulate the bearings of the doctrine of eternity on the question of God's historical and relational character:

5. *Eternity is a mode of existence fundamentally distinct from temporal existence.* There is no biblical warrant nor conceptual urgency for exchanging God's eternity for temporality. Eternal existence does not by definition exclude real contact and personal involvement with the affairs of the created, temporal world. Eternity can be circumscribed in ways that allow for positive connections with time, without extinguishing its proper character.

Following on the preceding remarks, the consequences from my extensive discussion of necessity and contingency (section 22.2.4 above) for the present question can be easily drawn:

6. *Due to the accidental dimension of his outward operations, God can truly and flexibly engage in relations with and acts towards his creatures.* The essential "core" of his being prevents him from being substantially changed by or gradually "developing" through these operations. The involvement of God who exists necessarily himself, poses no threat to the freedom of creatures, since God in his knowing and willing respects the contingency of free creaturely acts.<sup>79</sup>

In summary, my contention is that the classic doctrine of God is no impediment to the ascription of true action in time and relation to creatures on God's part. On the other hand, I reject the suggestion that this historicity and relationality of God necessarily affects God's own inner being.

### 22.2.6. Revelation and Ontology

In the previous sections, I discussed some material aspects of the doctrine of God. Some final reflection should now be given to the question as to the extent to which theology can produce such material propositions about God. Barthian and post-Barthian theology shows a strong aversion against rational truth claims concerning God. In that respect, it was a daring enterprise to bring together in this study Reformed scholasticism from the 16th to 18th centuries, and the 20th century philosophical theology of Utrecht School with the intentionally anti-scholastic theology of Karl Barth.

The doctrine of God is the part of systematic theology that most strongly raises the question as to how revelation and ontology relate to each other. The concepts employed for the being and attributes of God evoke the impression that here philosophical ontology dominates over biblical content. Karl Barth dubbed such philosophy-dominated theology "natural theology," and denied it any legitimacy within the Church. This did not prevent Barth from devising his own "ontology of grace" (Wilfried Härle's phrase) or from openly utilizing philosophical concepts that suited his theological needs (cf. part II, section 15.2).

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<sup>79</sup> To say the least! In fact, our contingency and freedom are based on the free decisions of the divine will.

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The analysis of especially Reformed scholastic doctrine has revealed that the use of concepts originating in (Aristotelian) philosophy does not automatically imply the import of philosophical thought. The various forms of Aristotelianism transmitted to early modern Protestant theology had gone through a penetrating reworking by the medieval doctors who adjusted them to the prescripts of Christian faith, and even developed new conceptual patterns in order to express the biblical truth. Time and again, we can notice that the material convictions about God, read from Holy Scripture, break through the limits of philosophical concepts and modify them. "Revelation and ontology," then, is not a positional war between two fixed entities, but a vivid exchange of form and content and a serious struggle to come to a coherent and intelligible expression of Christian beliefs about God.

The link between revelational theology and some sort of ontology is important because of the fact that God and his revelation do not stand in a void beyond reality. As Vincent Brümmer puts it, religious language has a "reality-depicting character," and God is ontologically relevant in that He "determines our possibilities of action." While it is true that God cannot be incorporated in our spatio-temporal reality, it is indispensable to keep the confession that God is more real than anything, and that God's revelation as reported and transmitted in Holy Scripture takes place in reality.

Given the fact that God is the Truth in person, and that the world is God's creation, there can be no principal contradiction between revelation and sound ontological thinking. Reformed scholasticism advocated such a harmony between revelation and reason, and could do this in a scientific climate that initially accepted the primacy of revelation. When the order of revelation and reason was reverted under Enlightenment influence, theology found itself in a difficult situation. My claim, however, is that this reversal, with its loss of plausibility for scholastic doctrine, is not irreversible.<sup>80</sup> The enterprise of the Utrecht School has shown that the classic Christian approach of ontology can be revived and made fertile for scientific research and debate.

Especially the discussion of the Utrecht School (part III) yields two important questions in this respect. The first is the "consistency criterion." Can we speak consistently about God, or should we accept paradoxes and contradictions? In the preceding paragraph, it was implicitly stated that there is no contradiction – or positively speaking: there is full consistency – in God himself.<sup>81</sup> This does not automatically mean that theological statements *about God* can be made fully consistent as well. It does mean, however, that a lack of consistency originates from our limited understanding, not from the "dialectical" or "paradoxical" nature of God and his works. In many cases, it can be demonstrated that alleged contra-

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<sup>80</sup> It seems somewhat strange to see theologians combat the idea of Fate in theology, while at the same time accepting the Fate of the history of philosophy. For the possibility of revelational theology "after Kant," cf. Van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel*, 368-399 (English: *As in a Mirror*, 417-453), and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?," *Modern Theology* 14 (1994): 1-18.

<sup>81</sup> Reformed scholastics typically refer to 2 *Corinthians* 1:19 "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.'" See my article "Geloof op zoek naar inzicht".

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dictions rest on false presuppositions and can be solved by correct definitions and distinctions. Moreover, at the level of human understanding and communication, consistency is indispensable, since the conscious acceptance of one contradiction results in the extinction of the true-false distinction as such. The proper response, therefore, to any inability to attain full consistency in theological matters is not to endorse inconsistencies but to acknowledge and demarcate the boundaries of what can and cannot be known and said.

The second question regards “univocal predication” of terms for God and man. The mainstream of classic Christian theology has held to “analogical predication”: in applying concepts to God and man respectively, we can count on some similarity that makes speech about God meaningful, while we should reckon with an even greater dissimilarity because of the profound otherness, infinity and perfection of God. A marginal line of negative theology states that our words, when used for God, are “equivocal”: they sound similar, but we cannot identify their meaning, and the best we can do is to keep silent about God. The Utrecht plea for univocity (equality of significance in terms used for God and creatures) is to be understood at the background of the “tool model” of conceptual languages: concepts are no ontologically independent vehicles of meaning, or direct correspondences to reality, but they are thought forms or mental skills by which we interpret and classify our surrounding reality. Since concepts are unequivocally on our side, it makes no sense to differentiate in their application to different objects. It is interesting to see Vincent Brümmer at the end retreat somewhat from univocity when discussing the concept of love in view of Trinity. If precisely at the point that is, according to a large Christian tradition, the root of love, the model of love does not apply, either the model is deficient or its application should reckon with the otherness of God, and thus move in the direction of analogy. For the future, I see two viable options: a. keeping to analogical predication, with the disadvantage that it remains vague as to the precise border between similarity and dissimilarity, or b. accepting at least a univocal kernel in applying ordinary concepts to God, with some qualification so as to account for the uniqueness in which God has his properties.

Can we speak of “general revelation” and “natural theology” after Barth, as the Reformed tradition did before him? To my mind, this is an issue of relative importance. Given the philosophical and cultural changes that separate us from the 17th century, there is reason to be more cautious with these terms. The nearby disappearance of a Christian worldview as a plausible frame of reference means that we can no longer take it for granted that rational thought will support the truth of Christian faith. On the other hand, “natural theology” can be maintained in a modest form as the expression of the insight that the world, as God’s creation, testifies of its Creator (although this testimony is universally ignored and suppressed, cf. *Romans* 1:18-20).

Given the obligation and possibility to speak meaningfully about God on the basis of his own revelation, we should in the end join the virtually unanimous tradition of Christian theology that teaches that the reality of God always exceeds our concepts and arguments. Time and again, we have seen in the analysis of pieces from the doctrine of God that this reality breaks through our given

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framework of thought and opens new possibilities of thinking. At the close of this extensive investigation, I exclaim with the apostle Paul (*Romans* 11:33-36):

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

# Samenvatting

Dit boek onderzoekt de “samenhang van methode en inhoud in de Godsleer”. De Godsleer lijkt in het bijzonder een onderdeel van de systematische theologie waar de combinatie van “bijbelse” en “filosofische” elementen tot spanning leidt (1.1). Dit onderzoek gaat uit van de hermeneutische veronderstelling dat theologie altijd in verbinding staat met het omringende denkklimaat. Een concrete analyse van de wisselwerking van methode en inhoud moet zichtbaar maken hoe in wisselende contexten het spreken over God gestalte heeft gekregen in de dogmatische Godsleer (1.2).

Drie grote stukken uit de geschiedenis van het gereformeerd protestantisme worden naast elkaar gezet: de Gereformeerde Orthodoxie (ca. 1560-1750), de theologie van Karl Barth (1886-1968), en de zogenoemde Utrechtse School (ca. 1975-2005). De analyse van de Godsleer in elk van deze segmenten leidt, naar verwachting, tot voldoende inzicht in de problemen en de mogelijkheden van de toepassing van theologische methodes in de Godsleer (1.3). Met dit onderzoek streef ik niet alleen naar een beantwoording van de analytische vraagstelling, maar ook naar inzichten die kunnen dienen voor een eigentijdse uitwerking van de Godsleer binnen een gereformeerd-confessioneel perspectief (1.4).

## *Deel I: De Godsleer in de Gereformeerde Orthodoxie*

Veel hedendaagse theologie bouwt nog altijd voort op de leerontwikkeling die in de scholastieke fase van de theologie (middeleeuws of na-reformatorisch) gestalte kreeg. Tegelijk staat deze theologie (die afwisselend als “orthodox” en “scholastiek” wordt aangeduid) onder de verdenking dat zij het bijbels getuigenis over God vervormd heeft door zich over te leveren aan rationalistisch, Aristotelisch denken. Door een concrete analyse van de methodologische bezinning binnen de gereformeerde scholastiek en van de uitwerking in de Godsleer poog ik deze verdenking te toetsen.

De geschiedenis van het onderzoek naar gereformeerde scholastiek (hoofdstuk 2) laat sterk uiteenlopende benaderingen zien. Een eerste onderzoeksgolf in de negentiende eeuw droeg bij aan de ontsluiting van het bronnenmateriaal, en concentreerde zich in analyse en evaluatie op het “kenmerkende” van de gereformeerde-scholastieke theologie ten opzichte van andere confessionele stromingen (2.2.1). Een tweede fase van onderzoek (eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw) toont zich kritisch op het rationele gehalte van de gereformeerde scholastiek; deze argwaan kreeg een sterke impuls door de opkomst van de barthiaanse theologie (2.2.2). In de laatste decennia maakt zich een positieve herwaardering van de (gereformeerde) scholastiek sterk, onder andere in Noord-Amerika (Richard A. Muller, Carl R. Trueman) en rond de Universiteit Utrecht (Antoon Vos, Willem J. van Asselt, Andreas J. Beck). Deze “new school” legt nadruk op scholastiek als methode van denken (in plaats van als systeem) en op de universitaire context waarin de gereformeerde scholastiek zich ontwikkelde als adequate vorm van wetenschappelijke theologie. Bij deze laatste benadering sluit ik mij aan (2.2.3).

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Hoofdstuk 3 biedt een verkenning van de *historische context* van de gereformeerde orthodoxie. Gereformeerd-scholastieke theologie bestrijkt globaal de periode van ca. 1550 – 1750. Zij sluit aan bij de scholastieke theologiebeoefening van de Middeleeuwen (3.1). Uiteraard staat zij ook in contact met de zich ontwikkelende Renaissance (3.2). In haar latere fase krijgt zij te maken met de Verlichting die het wetenschappelijke, culturele en religieuze klimaat ingrijpend veranderde (3.3). De verkenning van de verbinding tussen de gereformeerde scholastiek en de voortschrijdende ontwikkeling van het meer algemene intellectuele klimaat leidt tot twee belangrijke conclusies (3.4):

1. De middeleeuwse scholastiek waarbij de gereformeerde scholastiek zich aansluit is niet zonder meer als Aristotelisch denken op te vatten, maar als een krachtige poging om het wetenschappelijk denken te ontwikkelen uitgaande van en gericht op de christelijke geloofsovertuiging.

2. De gereformeerd-orthodoxe theologie bevindt zich *niet* op de weg naar het rationalisme van de Verlichting, maar houdt tegenover dit rationalisme juist vast aan het primaat van Gods openbaring.

Na deze toelijdende wegen volgt in hoofdstuk 4 een bespreking van de *methodologische debatten* die in en rond de gereformeerde orthodoxie gevoerd werden, met name in haar beginfase. In de theologiegeschiedenis vraagt de methodologische revolutie van Petrus Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée) de aandacht (4.1), met name sinds Jürgen Moltmann het Ramisme bepleitte als alternatief voor het (in zijn ogen) logisch-speculatieve Aristotelisme van mensen als Beza. Als humanist zette Ramus zich af tegen de heersende, aristotelische schoolfilosofie, en ontwierp hij een meer op empirie en praktijk gerichte methode en logica. Ramus richtte zich bewust op de (protestantse) theologie en pleitte voor een eenvoudige, bijbels-praktische uiteenzetting van de leer met weglating van scholastieke ingewikkeldheden. Met zijn praktische gerichtheid verwierf Ramus sympathie onder gereformeerden (voornamelijk in de Engelstalige wereld), en zijn methodiek van “definiëren en verdelen” werd door velen gevolgd als hulpmiddel om een handzaam overzicht van de stof te produceren. Het Ramisme is echter geen volwaardig alternatief voor de aristotelische filosofie van die tijd gebleken, en de doorwerking binnen de theologie is minder diepgaand en breed dan Moltmann beweerde.

De tegenpool van Ramus in de methodologische discussie van de 16e eeuw was Jacopo Zabarella (4.2). Zabarella houdt zich strikt aan de logische en methodologische geschriften van Aristoteles. Op grond daarvan presenteert hij een exclusieve tweedeling van wetenschappelijke methodes: de “compositieve” of “deductieve” methode past bij de “beschouwende”, theoretische wetenschappen; de “resolutieve” of “inductieve” methode hoort thuis bij de praktische, handelingsgerichte disciplines. De invloed van Zabarella is nog moeilijker te traceren dan die van Ramus; de belangrijkste gereformeerde theoloog die zich diepgaand met de academische betogen van Zabarella heeft beziggehouden, is Bartholomaeus Keckermann uit Danzig. In termen van de twee genoemde methodes pleit Keckermann voor de opvatting van theologie als “praktische” wetenschap. In de praktijk gebruikt hij elementen van zowel Zabarella’s als Ramus’ methodenleer.

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De eclecticische houding van Keckermann in de methodenstrijd tussen Ramus en Zabarella is representatief voor de gereformeerde scholastiek als geheel. Diverse auteurs tonen zich thuis in de wetenschapstheoretische discussies van hun tijd. De focus ligt bij de inhoudelijk bepaalde ontwikkeling van een eigen theologische methode (4.3). Franciscus Junius leverde daaraan een belangrijke bijdrage met zijn verhandeling *De vera theologia*. Elementen uit Junius' betoog, zoals de onderscheiding van archetypische en ectypische theologie en de toepassing van het aristotelische schema van de viervoudige oorzaak (*causa materialis – formalis – efficiens – finalis*) op de theologie, werden spoedig gemeengoed in leerboeken voor gereformeerde dogmatiek. In zulke prolegomena verstaat de gereformeerde theologie zich nadrukkelijk als *openbaringstheologie*: alleen doordat God zichzelf laat kennen in de Schrift (en secundair in schepping en geschiedenis), kunnen wij Hem kennen.

Gereformeerd-orthodoxe theologen hebben zich uitvoerig bezonnen op de verhouding van theologie en filosofie (4.4, excurs 1). Het extreme standpunt dat filosofische waarheid en theologische waarheid niets met elkaar van doen hebben (dubbele waarheid) wordt evenzeer afgewezen als het andere uiterste van overheersing door ratio en filosofie. Een reeks onderscheidingen brengt – zoals in de scholastiek gebruikelijk – verheldering over de bruikbaarheid en grenzen van filosofisch denken in de theologie.

Het onderzoek naar de bezinning op methode in de gereformeerde scholastiek levert een aantal conclusies op (4.5):

1. Het belang van uitgesproken posities in het algemene methodologische debat (Ramus, Zabarella) voor de gereformeerde theologie moet niet worden overschat. Gereformeerde theologen passen methodologische inzichten eclecticisch en genuanceerd toe.

2. Gereformeerd-scholastieke theologie neemt het uitgangspunt nadrukkelijk in Gods openbaring in de Heilige Schrift. Zij streeft in haar verwoording van de leer naar zo groot mogelijke overeenkomst met de geopenbaarde waarheid, maar pretendeert niet een volmaakte weergave vanuit Gods gezichtspunt te kunnen geven.

3. Er bestaat een methodische wisselwerking tussen bijbeluitleg en leerstellige uiteenzetting. De ontwikkeling van *loci communes* naast de exegese doet recht aan zowel de bijbelse verworteling van de leer als de noodzaak van conceptuele en argumentatieve doordenking.

4. Binnen de aanvaarding van een principiële overeenstemming van goddelijke waarheid (geopenbaard in de Schrift) en menselijke rede (verlicht door de Heilige Geest), ziet de gereformeerde scholastiek op verschillende niveaus ruimte voor een instrumenteel gebruik van filosofisch denken.

De proef op de som wordt genomen in de hoofdstukken 5 t/m 7, die een beschrijving geven van de Godsleer in de gereformeerde scholastiek. De weergave is gebaseerd op het werk van enkele tientallen theologen uit verschillende landen en periodes. Zodoende ontstaat een breed, representatief beeld van een gezamenlijke hoofdlijn, waarop de variaties en ontwikkelingen kunnen worden ingetekend.

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De eerste vraag die vanuit methodisch oogpunt opkomt is die naar de *structuur* van de gereformeerd-orthodoxe Godsleer (5.1). De formele structuur wordt doorgaans bepaald door standaardvragen uit de scholastieke wetenschapspraktijk:

- wat betekent het onderzochte begrip?
- bestaat het object van onderzoek eigenlijk wel?
- wat is het dan?
- welke verdere eigenschappen heeft het?

Vanuit modern perspectief roept de volgorde van behandeling die in de Godsleer uit deze vragen resulteert, een bedenking op: gaat het zo niet over een algemeen godsbegrip waarin we niet God de Drieënige, de Vader van Jezus Christus, herkennen? De vraag naar de verhouding van Godsleer en triniteitsleer komt in de eindevaluatie terug.

Vanaf Girolamo Zanchi beginnen veel gereformeerde scholastici hun Godsleer met een bespreking van Gods *namen* (5.2, excurs 2). Behalve als standaardelement van de scholastieke vraag-methode kan dit worden gewaardeerd als een doorwerking van het uitgangspunt dat theologische kennis alleen uit Gods eigen openbaring kan worden geput. De bespreking van de bijbelse namen voor God groeit al bij Zanchi uit tot een beknopte theologische kentheorie. Vrijwel unaniem beschouwen de gereformeerd-orthodoxe schrijvers de naam *Jahwe* als de belangrijkste aanduiding van Gods wezen. In de andere oudtestamentische naam *Elohim* zien meerderen een aanwijzing van Gods bestaan als de Drieënige.

Voor de meeste gereformeerd-scholastieke auteurs is het geen echte vraag of God *bestaat* (5.3). Wel worden apologetisch een aantal Godsbewijzen naar voren gebracht. Vergeleken met de middeleeuwse traditie van Godsbewijzen is opvallend dat een "ontologisch" bewijs (Anselmus) en een "modaal" bewijs (Duns Scotus) op de achtergrond komen terwijl de meer "empirische" bewijzen van Thomas van Aquino en "retorische" bewijzen vanuit de geschiedenis en menselijke vermogens breder worden gepresenteerd. Naast het bestaan van God (*existentia*) wordt ook zijn wezen (*essentia*) besproken. De gereformeerde scholastici zijn zeer terughoudend in het geven van een "definitie" van wie God is. Veelgebruikte termen als *substantia* en *natura* zijn tezeer filosofisch besmet om ze zomaar op God toe te passen. Met nadruk stellen meerdere auteurs dat over Gods wezen niet buiten de Drieëenheid om gesproken kan worden.

De breedste uitwerking krijgt de Godsleer in de behandeling van Gods eigenschappen (*attributa, perfectiones, proprietates essentielles*; 5.4). De term "eigenschappen" wordt nadrukkelijk afgeschermd tegen het misverstand dat het om additionele kwaliteiten gaat: Gods eigenschappen zijn identiek met zijn wezen, er zijn bij God geen "accidentele eigenschappen". Binnen deze stellingname kan hier en daar een poging worden waargenomen om toch accidentele aspecten in Gods verhouding tot de geschapen wereld op begrip te brengen: de wil en kennis zijn essentieel in God, maar het feit dat Gods kennis en wil een aangrijpingspunt hebben in geschapen objecten (die contingent kunnen zijn), maakt dat Gods (voor-)kennis en wil(sbesluit) in dat opzicht niet essentieel en noodzakelijk zijn. Om eenheid en onderscheid tussen de eigenschappen en Gods wezen te benoemen, gebruiken de diverse auteurs zowel Thomistische als Scotistische terminologie. Mijn stelling is dat langs Scotistische lijn de grootste conceptuele helderheid

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ontstaat, en dat auteurs die aan de oppervlakte Thomistische termen gebruiken, daaraan een Scotistische invulling kunnen geven. Ten aanzien van de indeling van Gods eigenschappen doen zich varianten voor, waarover soms stevig gediscussieerd wordt. Als hoofdlijn tekent zich een onderscheid af tussen eigenschappen die beschrijven hoe God is in zichzelf (*attributa incommunicabilia / negativa / absoluta*), in onderscheid van schepselen, en eigenschappen die de relatie van God tot de geschapen wereld betreffen (*attributa communicabilia / positiva / relativa*).

In de *eerste groep van eigenschappen* (hoofdstuk 6) speelt de “eenvoudigheid Gods” (*simplicitas Dei*) een belangrijke rol (6.1). Met een keur van argumenten weerspreken de gereformeerde scholastici de gedachte dat God een “samengesteld” wezen zou zijn. Positief drukken ze daarmee het unieke goddelijke bestaan van God uit. Voortvloeiend uit Gods eenvoudigheid wordt gesproken over de geestelijkheid en onlichamelijkheid van God. Op het eerste gezicht lijkt hiermee God te worden ingedeeld in een classificatieschema waarbij “geest” en “stof” tegenover elkaar staan als hoger en lager. Diverse auteurs benadrukken echter dat God op volstrekt andere wijze “geest” is dan bijvoorbeeld de engelen. De beleden onlichamelijkheid van God weerhoudt sommige schrijvers er niet van, positief te spreken over het “zien van God” (*visio Dei*). Is het spreken over Gods “eenvoud” wel te verenigen met de leer van de Drieëenheid? Het gereformeerd-orthodoxe antwoord is dat het bestaan van God in drie Personen geen “samenstelling” (*compositio*) is, maar een drievoudige “wijze van bestaan” (*modificatio, modi subsistendi*). Evenmin als een correcte leer van de Drieëenheid in conflict is met de leer van de *simplicitas*, levert een correcte christologie problemen op wanneer de Zoon van God menselijke natuur aanneemt.

De onafhankelijkheid van God (*independentia* of *aseitas*) brengt tot uitdrukking dat God in zijn bestaan en wezen én in zijn werken van niets of niemand afhankelijk is (6.2). Op het niveau van Gods bestaan is de onafhankelijkheid gelijkwaardig aan noodzakelijkheid: omdat er niets is dat het bestaan van God kan bevorderen of verhinderen, kán het niet anders dan dat God bestaat. Deze “noodzakelijkheid van bestaan” vloeit echter niet over in de effecten van Gods handelen naar buiten toe, en resulteert dus niet in een deterministisch systeem.

Onder de goddelijke eigenschappen neemt de oneindigheid (*infinitas*) een belangrijke plaats in (6.3). Deze wordt door de gereformeerde scholastici opgevat als kwalitatieve en absolute oneindigheid van Gods wezen, niet als kwantitatieve of materiële oneindigheid waarbij God ook het geschapen zijn zou insluiten (zoals Spinoza leerde).

Gods oneindigheid wordt door veel theologen onderverdeeld in eeuwigheid (*aeternitas*; 6.4) als oneindigheid met betrekking tot tijdsduur (*duratio*) en alomtegenwoordigheid (*immensitas* of *omnipraesentia*; 6.5) als oneindigheid met betrekking tot ruimte (*spatium*). De beroemde omschrijving door Boëthius van Gods eeuwigheid als “geheel gelijktijdig en volmaakt bezit van onbegrensbaar leven” wordt vrijwel unaniem als uitgangspunt genomen. Verder wordt benadrukt dat God als de Eeuwige geen begin of eind kent én geen voortgang in de tijd. Dat laatste sluit niet uit dat Gods eeuwigheid in positieve zin “co-existeert” met de

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geschapen tijd. Evenals voor de andere eigenschappen worden voor de eeuwigheid van God zowel Schriftplaatsen als rationale argumenten aangevoerd.

Tegenover de Socinianen, die beweren dat God slechts door zijn macht en werkzaamheid alomtegenwoordig is, houden de gereformeerde scholastici staande dat Gods *wezen* overal tegenwoordig is. Ook deze eigenschap moet niet in kwantitatieve of materiële zin worden verstaan. Binnen de essentiële alomtegenwoordigheid van God maken de gereformeerde-orthodoxe theologen ruimte voor verschillende gradaties van aanwezigheid: God is in zichzelf als zijn eigen "plaats", Hij woont op unieke wijze in Jezus Christus, op daarvan afgeleide, genadige wijze in de gelovigen, en is als Schepper manifest in heel zijn schepping. In dit verband kan een confrontatie met de lutherse leer van de ubiciteit van de menselijke natuur van Christus niet uitblijven. Een auteur als Polanus weerlegt niet alleen het lutherse Schriftbewijs, maar betoogt ook dat het toekennen van goddelijke eigenschappen aan de menselijke natuur inconsistent, en dus onmogelijk, is.

Verbonden aan Gods onafhankelijkheid en eeuwigheid wordt de onveranderlijkheid van God (*immutabilitas*) behandeld (6.6). De kern van deze leer heeft betrekking op Gods eigen wezen: God kan niet ophouden God te zijn, of "meer of minder" God worden. Behalve met filosofische argumenten die uit een aristotelisch of platoons kader stammen, onderbouwen de gereformeerde scholastici deze leer van onveranderlijkheid met bijbelse gegevens, waaronder de Godsnaam Jahwe een voorname plaats inneemt. De belangrijke leerstukken van schepping en incarnatie worden zodanig geïnterpreteerd dat zij met deze essentiële onveranderlijkheid van God te verenigen zijn. Met betrekking tot Gods kennis en wil van de geschapen dingen wordt benadrukt dat de essentiële onveranderlijkheid van God niet de objecten van zijn kennis en wil onveranderlijk maakt.

Een (vaak beknopte) bespreking van Gods volmaaktheid (*perfectio*) rondt de behandeling van de eerste groep eigenschappen af (6.7). God heeft geen schepselen nodig om volmaakt en gelukkig te zijn. Petrus van Maastricht, om een voorbeeld te noemen, fundeert de volmaaktheid van Gods wezen in zijn Drieëinig bestaan.

De *tweede groep eigenschappen* omvat goddelijke deugden die een zekere gelijkenis met geschapen, menselijke eigenschappen vertonen. De fundamentele begrippen in deze groep zijn Gods verstand, wil en macht (*scientia – voluntas – potentia*), die naar analogie van de menselijke vermogens van "kennen", "willen" en "kunnen" worden beschreven, en samengevat worden als het "leven van God" (*vita Dei*). God heeft het leven in zichzelf, en is de bron van alle leven en activiteit in de geschapen wereld (7.1).

De kennis of het verstand van God (*scientia* of *intellectus Dei*; 7.2) wordt in brede zin omschreven naar analogie van menselijke cognitieve activiteiten, waarbij ook de componenten van praktische gerichtheid en goedheid aanwezig zijn. Gods kennis is volmaakte kennis (al het kenbare omvattend) die niet uit opeenvolgende ken-acten bestaat, maar uit één oneindige ken-act die gelijkwaardig is aan Gods eigen wezen. In deze éne kennis van God wordt een fundamenteel logisch onderscheid aangebracht tussen "kennis die louter inzicht is" en "kennis die het feitelijk bestaan van de dingen betreft". Van alle kenobjecten (bestaande en niet-bestaande)

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doorziet God hun waarheid; daarnaast weet God welke mogelijke kenobjecten gerealiseerd zijn of worden. Onder die laatste categorie vallen ook de toekomstige vrije, contingente handelingen (*futura contingentia*) van mensen. God kent deze op grond van zijn eigen besluit om ze tot stand te laten komen. Over Gods “voorkennis” van de *futura contingentia* woedde in de 16e/17e eeuw een hevig debat waarin de gereformeerden tegenover de Remonstranten en de Rooms-katholieken (m.n. de Jezuïeten) stonden. De gereformeerden houden eraan vast dat God ware en zekere kennis van de vrije handelingen van mensen kan hebben, maar dat deze handelingen daardoor niet absoluut noodzakelijk worden (dat zou leiden tot determinisme en tot de consequentie dat God de “auteur van het kwaad” is). Zij verwerpen de door Jezuïeten ontworpen theorie van de “middenkennis” (*scientia media*; excurs 3) die stelt dat God wel de *omstandigheden* kent waarin de mens uit meerdere mogelijkheden kan kiezen, maar niet weet welke menselijke keus (bv. om het evangelie al dan niet aan te nemen) gerealiseerd wordt.

In de toespitsing van de leer over Gods voorkennis op de *futura contingentia* speelt in feite de goddelijke wil (*voluntas*) al de beslissende rol (7.3). Wezenlijk voor de wil is het *kiezen* (goedkeuren of afkeuren) van de door het verstand gekende mogelijkheden. Daarbij is de wil vrij, niet gedwongen tot een van beide (of meer) alternatieven. Als volmaakte wil is Gods wil altijd gericht op het goede: primair op Hemzelf als het hoogste goed, secundair op het geschapen goede. Maar dan nog is God vrij om het ene of het andere goed te willen. Gods wil is op alle dingen betrokken, ook op het kwaad, hetzij door toelating (*permissio*) hetzij voorzover het kwaad een creatuurlijk substraat heeft. Een reeks onderscheidingen binnen de goddelijke wil poogt te verdisconteren dat God sommige dingen niet bij wijze van *bevel* of voorschrift wil, maar wel *besluit* dat zij moeten gebeuren (om één of andere, voor ons verborgen reden). De gereformeerde scholastici weren elke poging af om Gods wilsbesluit afhankelijk te maken van autonome menselijke wilsbeslissingen die door God alleen conditioneel gewild worden.

Uit Gods wil vloeien een aantal “morele” eigenschappen, ook wel deugden of affecten (*virtutes / affectus*) voort: goedheid, liefde, genade, ontferming, geduld, gerechtigheid, heiligheid en toorn (7.3.1 t/m 7.3.7). Bij de behandeling van deze eigenschappen leggen de gereformeerde-orthodoxe schrijvers er nadruk op dat het gaat om innerlijke, essentiële kwaliteiten van God die niet door externe oorzaken beïnvloed worden of aan externe maatstaven onderworpen zijn (excursen 6 en 7).

Gods macht (7.4) wordt door de gereformeerde scholastiek unaniem als *almacht* (*omnipotentia*) omschreven; in de omschrijving van *wat* God kan als Hij *alles* kan, doen zich variaties voor. Sommigen relateren Gods macht aan Gods wil: God kan doen, wat Hij kan willen. Anderen leggen accent op de logische (on)mogelijkheid als grens van wat God kan: wat innerlijk tegenstrijdig is (een vierkante cirkel), kan God niet maken, omdat het niets is. Een derde accent wordt gelegd op Gods eigen *natuur* als bron en maatstaf van wat mogelijk is. De gereformeerde scholastiek pakt de middeleeuwse onderscheiding tussen de absolute en de actuele macht van God (*potentia absoluta – ordinata/actualis*) weer op, ondanks de felle verwerping van dat onderscheid door Calvijn. Met behulp van die distinctie wordt overeind gehouden dat God meer kan doen dan Hij feitelijk doet.

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Met een bespreking van de heerschappij (*dominium/potestas*; 7.4.1) en de heerlijkheid en gelukzaligheid (*gloria/beatitudo*; 7.4.2) wordt de Godsleer afgerond.

Nadat zo een aantal conceptuele en structurele hoofdlijnen van de gereformeerd-orthodoxe Godsleer zijn geanalyseerd, trek ik in hoofdstuk 8 de volgende *conclusies* met betrekking tot de onderzoeksvraag naar de verhouding van methode en inhoud:

In de gereformeerd-scholastieke Godsleer wordt uitgebreid en gedetailleerd gebruik gemaakt van conceptuele en argumentatieve instrumenten die in de middeleeuwse scholastiek ontwikkeld waren op basis van (voornamelijk) Aristoteles' geschriften. Het gebruik van die filosofische instrumenten wordt echter door inhoudelijke theologische overtuigingen gestuurd. Opvallend is dat belangrijke categorieën en onderscheidingen uit het aristotelisch denkkader juist op God niet van toepassing worden verklaard.

De gereformeerd-scholastieke theologie ontleent veel van haar begrippen-materiaal en argumentaties aan de patristische en middeleeuws-scholastieke traditie van theologie als *fides quaerens intellectum* die gevoed wordt door het voortdurend lezen en analyseren van de Heilige Schrift. Deze continuïteit wordt gedragen door de overeenstemming met de leer van de Schrift en door de overtuiging dat de waarheid, uit welke bron ook geput, één is.

Door de bespreking van Gods namen als uitgangspunt te nemen voor de Godsleer blijft de gereformeerde scholastiek trouw aan het *sola Scriptura*. In de theologische kentheorie die zo ontstaat, kiest de gereformeerde orthodoxie in hoofdlijn voor "analogie" als wijze waarop begrippen zowel aan God als aan schepselen worden toegeschreven. Anders dan in de latere beeldvorming wordt aangenomen, gaat het daarbij niet om een ontologische overeenkomst (*analogia entis* – het grote schrikbeeld van Karl Barth), maar slechts om "analoge predicatie" van termen.

De gereformeerd-scholastieke leer van Gods eigenschappen wordt op het eerste gezicht beheerst door een strikte opvatting van Gods eenvoud (*simplicitas*). Bij nader toezien functioneren wel degelijk onderscheidingen tussen een interne en een externe, en tussen een essentiële en een (voorzichtig uitgesproken) accidentele dimensie van Gods wezen. Eigenschappen die God onderscheiden van de geschapen werkelijkheid, hebben als diepste intentie om van alle kanten tot uitdrukking te brengen dat God in alle opzichten volmaakt is. Het feit dat God fundamenteel anders is dan zijn schepping, verhindert niet dat God in een actieve en positieve relatie tot de geschapen wereld staat, zoals blijkt uit de tweede groep eigenschappen (verstand, wil, macht).

Binnen Gods "relationele" eigenschappen neemt de goddelijke wil een centrale plaats in. Vanuit het inzicht dat de wil van God structureel vrijheid en contingentie veronderstelt, kan de gereformeerde scholastiek staande houden dat Gods kennen en willen geen absolute noodzakelijkheid aan de geschapen dingen opleggen, maar juist ruimte laten voor creatuurlijke vrijheid. Van de andere kant worden pogingen afgeweerd om de menselijke keuzevrijheid autonoom te maken ten opzichte van God, zodat God omgekeerd afhankelijk zou worden van menselijke keuzes. Beide intenties vloeien samen in het model van tweevoudige oorzakelijkheid: God als

“eerste oorzaak” bepaalt in (zijn) vrijheid de loop van alle dingen, inclusief vrije menselijke keuzes; schepselen als “tweede oorzaak” behouden in de uitvoering van Gods besluit de hun toekomstige vrijheid om zelf te kiezen.

### ***Deel II: De Godsleer in de theologie van Karl Barth***

Karl Barth geldt als de belangrijkste protestantse theoloog van de 20e eeuw, en blijkt ook aan het begin van de 21e eeuw van belang als inspiratiebron. Binnen deze studie functioneert Barth als contrastmodel voor de gereformeerd-scholastieke traditie. Hij staat een geheel eigen theologische methode voor, en verbindt de Godsleer nadrukkelijk met andere leerstukken zoals de triniteitsleer en de christologie (9.1).

In de interpretatie van Barths theologie zijn verschillende benaderingen ontwikkeld (9.2). In deze studie wordt Barth in principe als een gereformeerd theoloog gezien, en wordt nadruk gelegd op de begripsmatige kant van Barths *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.

Om Barths Godsleer te plaatsen in het geheel van zijn *theologische programma*, wordt een schets gegeven van de ontwikkeling van zijn theologische methode (hoofdstuk 10). In aansluiting bij Bruce McCormack wordt de beslissende wending gezien in Barths afscheid van zijn “liberale” leermeesters; de daarop volgende ontwikkeling van een sterk dialectische naar een meer “analogische” theologie hangt samen met Barths bestudering van de grote leerstukken van de klassieke christelijke theologie. Barths vroege theologie (10.1) wordt beschreven in de confrontatie met zijn leermeesters Herrmann en Harnack, in zijn beïnvloeding door het Marburgse Neo-Kantianisme van Hermann Cohen en Paul Natorp, dat hij mede door zijn broer Heinrich Barth leerde kennen, en in zijn positiekeus ten opzichte van het historisch positivisme van Ernst Troeltsch en de bestrijding daarvan door Franz Overbeck. Deze eerste fase loopt uit op de beide eerste drukken van de *Römerbrief*. Elementen die van blijvende betekenis zijn voor Barths theologie zijn de nadruk op het fundamentele verschil tussen God en de wereld, en de hermeneutische benadering van de bijbelwoorden: tegenover de gedistantieerde historisch-kritische methode is Barth uit op een directe confrontatie tussen het bijbelwoord en de hedendaagse existentie. De verdere hulplijnen en concepten die Barth in de eerste, respectievelijk tweede uitgave van de *Römerbrief* gebruikt, verschillen sterk van elkaar. *Römerbrief*<sup>2</sup> vestigt Barths reputatie als dialectisch theoloog.

In de daarop volgende jaren '20 ontwikkelt Barth zich in een meer “dogmatische” richting: door zich in de grote christelijke dogma's te verdiepen, leert hij de motieven en concepten van deze traditie te waarderen en incorporeert hij ze in zijn eigen dialectische theologie (10.2). Barths eerste dogmatische ontwerp, de *Christliche Dogmatik* is consequent een theologie van de openbaring. Een beslissende stap voorwaarts is Barths analyse van de theologische methode van de “vader van de scholastiek”, Anselmus van Canterbury. In een bespreking van het “ontologisch Godsbewijs” van Anselmus ontwikkelt Barth zijn eigen, ontologische denkvorm, gekenmerkt door de aanvaarding van Gods objectieve bestaan (*Gegenständlichkeit Gottes*) en de prioriteit van de *werkelijkheid* van Gods bestaan boven alle

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logische *mogelijkheid* en *noodzakelijkheid*. De prolegomena van Barths *Kirchliche Dogmatik* trekken deze lijnen door in de vorm van een uitvoerige triniteitsleer. De principiële inzet bij de werkelijkheid van Gods openbaring leidt tot een voortdurende afwijzing van theologische argumentatie buiten het geopenbaarde Woord van God om (natuurlijke theologie). Barth verwerpt niet alleen de Rooms-Katholieke idee van de *analogia entis* tussen God en schepselen, maar ook elke vorm van *directe identiteit* tussen Gods spreken en handelen en elementen uit de geschapen werkelijkheid.

In Barths uiteindelijke theologische methode (10.3), zoals uitgewerkt in de *Kirchliche Dogmatik* verdienen twee motieven nadere aandacht: de christologische concentratie, en het gebruik van de analogie. In de christologische concentratie vindt Barth de manier om zijn aanvankelijke probleem, de onoverbrugbare tegenstelling tussen God en mens, te overbruggen. Christus is in zijn "zijn" en in zijn "handelen" de Verzoener. Typerend voor de problematiek waarbinnen Barths theologie tot ontwikkeling komt, is de toespitsing van de christologische concentratie op de *epistemologie*. De christologie weerspiegelt de dialectiek tussen openbaring en verborgenheid. In Christus wordt de mens opgenomen in het proces van Gods openbaring. Christus is de sleutel om Gods openbaring in de Schrift te vinden en te verstaan. Zowel de vraag als het antwoord in het begrijpen van de werkelijkheid moet in Christus gezocht worden. Behalve epistemologisch is Christus ook *ontologisch* het middelpunt van de theologie. In de triniteitsleer is de wederzijdse betrokkenheid van Vader, Zoon en Geest constitutief voor het goddelijk wezen. De christologie betreft de menselijke natuur van Christus in dat dynamische goddelijke leven, waarmee tegelijk de tegenstelling tussen God en mens in de dialectiek van Gods wezen wordt opgenomen. Barths verkiezingsleer brengt tot uitdrukking dat Gods keuze voor Christus en de zijnen fundamenteel is voor Gods eigen wezen; zo wordt Christus de focus van al Gods handelen.

De ontwikkeling van het analogie-begrip doorloopt een aantal stadia in de *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. In de prolegomena (deel I/1) spreekt Barth van een *analogia fidei*: in het geloof creëert God de Heilige Geest een aanknopingspunt voor het ontvangen en aannemen van Gods gesproken Woord. In de Godsleer (deel II/1) volgt op de verwerping van de *analogia entis* de positieve aanname van een *analogia revelationis*: menselijke woorden kunnen in dienst genomen worden om waarheid over God te spreken, niet op grond van intrinsieke waarde, maar op grond van Gods vrije beslissing. De laatste en meest vergaande vorm van analogie is de *analogia relationis* die Barth in zijn leer over de schepping van de mens als beeld Gods presenteert. Barth plaatst Christus in het centrum van alle relaties, tussen God en mens en tussen mensen onderling, waarmee het analogiebegrip raakt aan het eerder beschreven motief van de christologische concentratie.

In een terugblik op Barths theologische ontwikkeling (10.4) kunnen we vaststellen dat deze geen eenduidige lijn ("van de paradox naar de analogie") vertoont, maar dat in een aantal fases nieuwe componenten zich verbinden met oudere motieven. Een dialectische denkwijze blijft kenmerkend voor Barths theologie, maar de schrille "theologie van de crisis" wordt geleidelijk meer positief ingevuld vanuit de in Christus geschonken openbaring en verzoening. Hierdoor ontvangen geloof en theologie hun eigen redelijkheid. Barth levert zich echter niet

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uit aan realisme zonder meer: de werkelijkheid van de openbaring blijft staan onder Gods vrije beschikking.

Barths Godsleer (hoofdstuk 11) neemt fundamenteel haar uitgangspunt in de triniteitsleer. Zoals de triniteitsleer het antwoord was op de vraag naar de *mogelijkheid* van de openbaring, zo begint Barth zijn Godsleer met de vraag naar de *werkelijkheid* van onze kennis van God (11.2). Die kennis is gebaseerd op Gods "secundaire objectiviteit" in zijn openbaring aan ons, die op haar beurt teruggaat op de "primaire objectiviteit" van Gods Drieëinig bestaan. Zo is de *noëtische* kwestie onlosmakelijk aan de *ontische* inhoud van de Godsleer verbonden. Bovendien staat kennis van God ons niet zomaar ter beschikking, maar alleen doordat God ons deel geeft aan zichzelf. Met nadruk bestrijdt Barth elke gedachte dat de mogelijkheid van het kennen van God een inherente kwaliteit van de mens is; hij verwerpt elke "natuurlijke theologie". In Gods mededeling van kennis van zichzelf neemt Hij menselijke taal in dienst als "analogie".

Barth poneert dat de Godsleer bestaat in de uitleg van het zinnetje "God is" (11.3). Hij vult het zijnsbegrip in door te zeggen dat "God is Die Hij is in de act van zijn openbaring". God bestaat altijd als Persoon. Wezenlijk voor Barths begrip van God is de dialectiek van liefde en vrijheid, waarbij de vrijheid van God niet tegenover zijn immanentie en betrokkenheid staat, maar er juist de grond van is.

Barths leer van Gods "eigenschappen" of "volkomenheden" (hoofdstuk 12) begint met een bespreking van de verhouding tussen deze eigenschappen en Gods wezen (12.1). Tegenover het (open of verborgen) nominalisme van de traditionele leer van de *simplicitas Dei* poneert Barth een *reëel onderscheid* tussen Gods wezen en eigenschappen en tussen de eigenschappen onderling. Voor de indeling van de eigenschappenleer is de tweeslag van liefde en vrijheid fundamenteel: in een eerste groep van "volkomenheden" wordt steeds een eigenschap van Gods liefde gekoppeld aan een eigenschap van Gods vrijheid (genade-heiligheid; barmhartigheid-rechtvaardigheid; geduld-wijsheid); in de tweede groep van "volkomenheden" gebeurt dit in omgekeerde volgorde (eenheid-alomtegenwoordigheid; bestendigheid-almacht; eeuwigheid-glorie). Onder Gods almacht bespreekt Barth ook de leer van Gods kennis en wil (*scientia-voluntas*), waarbij hij uitgebreid ingaat op de bijbehorende scholastieke onderscheidingen.

Enkele aspecten die in Barths behandeling van Gods eigenschappen (12.2.1 t/m 12.3.3) telkens terugkeren:

- het vasthouden aan de volgorde subject-predicaat: God bepaalt de invulling van een begrip (liefde, macht), niet omgekeerd;
- de verankering van Gods volkomenheden in zijn Drieëinig leven;
- de waarschuwing tegen pogingen Gods volkomenheid in de begripsmatige greep te krijgen;
- de toespitsing van Gods eigenschappen op zijn openbaring in Christus, met name in zijn lijden en dood;
- consequent verzet tegen alles wat in God een dualiteit aanbrengt tussen de *deus revelatus* en de *deus absconditus*

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De weergave van Barths Godsleer is niet compleet zonder in te gaan op zijn leer van verkiezing en gebod (hoofdstuk 13). Door zijn verkiezing van/in Jezus Christus legt God zichzelf van eeuwigheid vast als de genadige God. Christus is zowel de *Erkenntnisgrund* als de *Realgrund* van Gods zelfbepaling (13.1). Volgens Barth is Christus tegelijk het subject van de verkiezing (de verkiezende God) en het object (de verkoren mens). In strikt christologische zin handhaaft Barth de “dubbele predestinatie” door te stellen dat God aan de mens de *verkiezing* toerekent, aan zichzelf de *verwerping* (13.2). De verbinding tussen de verkiezing van Jezus Christus en de verkiezing van de individuele gelovige ziet Barth lopen via de verkiezing van de gemeenschap (Israël; de kerk); in de verkoren gemeenschap heeft God heel de wereld op het oog (13.3). Wie Christus niet kent, heeft geen weet van de genadige boodschap dat God vóór hem/haar gekozen heeft (13.4).

Als tegenhanger van de verkiezing geeft Barth een bespreking van Gods gebod, als aanzet voor een christelijke ethiek (13.5). Ook het gebod behoort tot de Godsleer, omdat God daarmee een claim legt op ons leven. Evenals de verkiezing kan ook het gebod alleen in Christus verstaan worden. De heiligheid in het volgen van Gods gebod kan slechts van de Geest van God ontvangen worden.

Voor de verdere analyse van Barths Godsleer (hoofdstuk 14) komen vijf thema's aan de orde.

In de eerste plaats (14.1) zijn *trinitarische opvatting van Gods wezen*. Met behulp van de interpretaties door Eberhard Jüngel en Colin Gunton wordt vastgesteld dat al onze kennis van God, volgens Barth, bepaald wordt door de eraan vooraf gaande werkelijkheid van God als de Drieënige, en dat de relationele en dynamische structuur van Gods eigen wezen wordt uitgewerkt in een concrete, actualistische visie op Gods handelingen en eigenschappen. Enige reserve blijft bestaan bij de vraag of Barth Gods wezen in *temporele* termen opvat: zijn trinitarische inzet geeft daar ruimte voor, zonder dat Barth deze consequenties zelf voluit trekt. De fundamentele betrokkenheid (liefde) van de Drieënige God op de mens ligt vast in de *uitverkiezing* in Jezus Christus. Bij Barths verkiezingsleer worden twee kritische opmerkingen geplaatst: (a) verrassend genoeg is juist Gods beslissing vóór de mens “volledig ondialectisch”, waardoor Gods vrijheid op dit beslissende punt slechts in één richting kan werken; (b) de relatie tussen God en mens wordt zo zeer gedomineerd door de verzoening van beide in Christus dat ook hier sprake is van vrijheid met slechts één richting; hierdoor is van het serieus nemen van de menselijke reactie (waaronder afwijzing van Gods liefde) te weinig sprake.

Het tweede thema (14.2) is Barths visie op het *kennen van God*. Barth houdt zo sterk vast aan het “subject” zijn van God, dat ook ons kennen van Hem in feite een daad van God zelf is. Ook op dit punt doet Barth geen recht aan de relatieve zelfstandigheid en responsiviteit van de mens ten opzichte van God. Verder is in Barths theologische kenleer de notie van “analogie” van belang. In Barths hantering van deze notie, in kritische discussie met de scholastiek, ligt opnieuw het accent op Gods volledige vrijheid in het zich te kennen geven.

Als derde thema (14.3) wordt besproken de invulling van Gods “zijn” door de “daad” van zijn vrije liefde. Barths actualisme is verankerd in zijn triniteitsleer. De concrete dynamiek van liefde en vrijheid is inderdaad constitutief voor zijn

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uitwerking van de “eigenschappenleer”. Op een meer technisch, conceptueel niveau gaat het bij dit thema om Gods “subjectiviteit” en “objectiviteit”. Barths nadruk op het “onophebaar subject zijn” van God verhindert de herleiding van de Godskennis tot menselijke mogelijkheden, en impliceert tegelijk dat God als werkelijk Persoon naar ons toe komt. Ook hier is de triniteitsleer van fundamenteel belang, waarbij ik pleit voor een realistisch-persoonlijke interpretatie van Barths visie in plaats van een louter functionele. Daarbij is Barth mijns inziens gevrijwaard van het verwijt van modalisme. Bij Barths spreken over Gods “objectiviteit” gaat het om Gods “primaire” objectiviteit waardoor Hij in zichzelf, onafhankelijk van mensen, bestaat en zichzelf kent, en om “secundaire” objectiviteit waardoor God zich op vrije en indirecte wijze aan ons bekend maakt. In verband met Barths zijnsbegrip wordt ook ingegaan op zijn visie op noodzakelijkheid en contingentie. Op het eerste gezicht leidt Barths absolute accent op Gods vrijheid tot radicale contingentie, waarbij hij zelfs de elementaire wetten van de logica relativeert; bij nader toezien blijkt dat Gods vrije keuze door Barth gezien wordt als ingebed in zijn goede en wijze wezen, waarmee een balans tussen noodzakelijkheid en contingentie ontstaat die (bij verschil in gebruikte terminologie) structureel lijkt op de gereformeerd-scholastieke positie.

Een saillant detail, in de vierde plaats (14.4), van Barths eigenschappenleer is zijn pleidooi voor het aannemen van *reëel onderscheid*, en dus *meervoudigheid*, in Gods eigenschappen, tegenover de klassieke notie van *simplicitas Dei*. Een belangrijk motief is het afweren van een (nominalistische) scheiding tussen God zoals wij Hem kennen en God zoals Hij in zichzelf is. In tweede instantie kwalificeert Barth de aanname van werkelijk meervoud in God zozeer – parallel aan zijn uitwerking van onderscheid en eenheid van de goddelijke Personen in de Drieëenheid – dat het verschil met de scholastieke denkwijze in feite gering is.

Als laatste deelthema (14.5) wordt ingegaan op de dialectiek in Barths eigenschappenleer. Dat betreft niet alleen de dialectiek van liefde en vrijheid die in de opbouw van de eigenschappenleer is uitgewerkt, maar ook de herhaaldelijk terugkomende stelling dat God niet alleen *tegenover* de wereld, maar ook *in* de wereld is, en de tegenstelling tussen ongeschapen en geschapen bestaan in zichzelf overstijgt. Ook hierin is Barth consistent, aangezien zijn triniteitsleer en christologie al betogen dat God in Jezus Christus de radicale tegenstelling tussen God en mens verzoent.

Een concluderend hoofdstuk (15) vat de in het voorafgaande beschreven bevindingen nog eens samen (15.1). Daarbij kan vastgesteld worden dat de theologische methode die Barth in de Godsleer gebruikt, consistent is met zijn fundamentele theologische overtuigingen met betrekking tot de openbaring van de Drieënige God in Christus (15.2). In het bijzonder de Godsleer maakt de ontwikkeling van een radicaal-dialectische naar een meer ontologische denkvorm (gemarkeerd door Barths boek over Anselmus) zichtbaar. Daardoor staat dit stuk van zijn theologie in sterke continuïteit met de klassieke theologie.

Onder het kopje “Overblijvende vragen” (15.3) wordt allereerst Barths visie op en hantering van de Heilige Schrift besproken; vervolgens wordt Barth gelokaliseerd in de theologische traditie van enerzijds kerkvaders en scholastieke theolo-

gie, anderzijds de theologie na Kant (Schleiermacher en Hegel tot en met Barths eigen leermeesters Herrmann en Harnack); tenslotte komen de argumentatieve karakteristieken van Barths Godsleer (zijn hantering van begrippen, de dialectische wijze van argumenteren, en de verhouding tussen de "hoofdtekst" en de "excursen" in de *Kirchliche Dogmatik*) aan de orde.

### ***Deel III: de Godsleer in de Utrechtse School***

De "Utrechtse School" is een groep theologen/filosofen die vooral in de jaren '80 en '90 van de twintigste eeuw een belangrijke plek op het theologisch toneel in Nederland innamen. De Utrechtse School is interessant vanwege haar expliciete verantwoording van de gekozen methode, die een aansluiting tot stand brengt tussen de scholastieke methode uit vroeger eeuwen en hedendaagse analytische filosofie, en vanwege de nadrukkelijke toepassing van deze methode op onderwerpen uit de Godsleer.

In eerste instantie lijken er binnen de Utrechtse School twee groepen te bestaan: een groep rond Vincent Brümmer die vooral aansluiting zoekt bij hedendaagse analytische filosofie, en een groep rond Antoon Vos die zich sterker op de traditie van de middeleeuwse en nareformatorische scholastiek oriënteert. Bij nader toezien zijn vier elementen van belang om de systematisch-theologische benadering van de Utrechtse te typeren (hoofdstuk 17):

1. *Conceptuele analyse* oftewel begripsanalyse (17.1). Brümmer schreef het grondleggende boek *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse*, waarin hij laat zien hoe de betekenis, de samenhang en de implicaties van theologische taal (als toespitsing van "alledaagse" taal op het religieuze terrein) kan worden verhelderd. Brümmer verwerpt het traditionele "namenmodel" waarin begrippen als afspiegeling van de werkelijkheid worden gezien, en bepleit in plaats daarvan het "werktuigmodel" waarin begrippen als denkvormen of mentale vaardigheden worden beschouwd. In aansluiting bij Ludwig Wittgenstein ziet Brümmer geloofstaal en theologische taal als een "taalspel" met een eigen "levensvorm". Wijsgerige theologie onderzoekt, aan de hand van een aantal rationele criteria, de vooronderstellingen en implicaties van geloofsbegrippen en hun onderlinge relaties. Het spreken over God heeft de pretentie om werkelijkheid te beschrijven: God bestaat, in de zin dat Hij onze handelingsmogelijkheden beperkt. Brümmer laat zijn *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse* uitlopen op een aanzet voor de behandeling van Gods bestaan en enkele fundamentele eigenschappen.
2. *Modale ontologie en logica* (17.2). Deze tweede fundamentele lijn in de Utrechtse School, als aanvulling op de conceptuele analyse van Brümmer, is voornamelijk door Antoon Vos ontwikkeld. In zijn dissertatie *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid* confronteert hij zich met het "absoluut evidentialisme": een filosofische positie die stelt dat absoluut zekere kennis mogelijk is, waarbij meteen de gekende stand van zaken als noodzakelijk wordt geponeerd (het kan niet anders zijn dan het is). Met behulp van aanzetten in de christelijke traditie, vooral van Johannes Duns Scotus, poogt Vos te ontkomen aan de dodelijke omarming van dit kennisideaal dat enerzijds leidt tot metafysisch determinisme, anderzijds het geloof in God buiten het domein van zekere kennis plaatst. Op basis van de fundamentele modale begrippen mogelijk-contingent-noodzakelijk-onmogelijk

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ontwikkelt Vos een ontologische theorie van eigenschappen waarmee een gedifferentieerde beschrijving van de werkelijkheid mogelijk is. In latere publicaties van Vos en anderen wordt de aansluiting bij Duns Scotus verder in kaart gebracht. Duns ontwikkelde als eerste een notie van “contingentie” die niet in diachrone zin (voordat iets gebeurt, kan het ook anders) wordt opgevat, maar als “synchrone contingentie” (de werkelijkheid bevat structureel alternatieve standen van zaken, wanneer één mogelijkheid geactualiseerd wordt, blijft de mogelijkheid van het tegendeel nog altijd bestaan). In de dissertatie van Guus Labooy, *Vrijheid en disposities*, wordt het Scotiaanse begrip van contingentie en vrijheid toegepast op de psychiatrie. In andere Utrechtse studies wordt de potentiële toepassing van het onderscheid tussen “noodzakelijk” en “contingent” op traditionele leerstukken (verzoening, predestinatie) verkend.

3. *Historische oriëntatie*. Met name in de groep Utrechters onder aanvoering van Antoon Vos wordt veel werk gemaakt van de aansluiting bij de traditie van middeleeuwse scholastiek en gereformeerde theologie uit de 16e tot 18e eeuw. Typerend is de stelling dat scholastieke theologie is ingebed in de universitaire praktijk van wetenschapsbeoefening, en tegelijk beslissend gevoed wordt door christelijke spiritualiteit en geloofsovertuiging. Nico den Bok, bijvoorbeeld, presenteert de originele doordenking die Richard van St. Victor gaf van het persoons- en relatiebegrip in de triniteitsleer. De 12e eeuwse theologie van Richard blijkt kritisch in verbinding gebracht te kunnen worden met hedendaagse trends in de triniteitsleer (“social Trinity”). Ten aanzien van de gereformeerd-scholastieke theologie die in de periode na Calvijn tot ontwikkeling kwam, kenmerkt de Utrechtse benadering zich door twee componenten: de vervanging van de discontinuïteits- of vervalthese (scholastiek is “verraad” aan de Reformatie) door de these van dubbele continuïteit (met zowel de middeleeuwse, scholastieke theologie als de theologie van de Reformatoren); en de hypothese dat de inhoudelijke conceptualiteit van de gereformeerde traditie niet zozeer Thomistisch als wel Scotistisch is.
4. *Apologetische houding*. De conceptuele analyse en verheldering van de christelijke geloofstaal leidt als vanzelf tot een verdediging van de geloofs-begrippen tegenover (atheïstische) kritiek. De Utrechtse School plaatst zich nadrukkelijk in de augustijns-anselmiaanse traditie van *fides quaerens intellectum*. Meer specifiek richt de dissertatie van Henri Veldhuis, *Een verzegeld boek*, zich tegen de mythe die door vertegenwoordigers van de Verlichting is gecreëerd, dat het klassieke christelijke Godsgeloof niet langer rationeel verdedigbaar is. Als concreet voorbeeld van apologetiek wordt een boekje van Antoon Vos besproken (*Het is de Heer!*), dat een ontologisch model presenteert waarin de lichamelijke opstanding van Christus voorstelbaar en verdedigbaar is.

Samenvattend zijn de volgende aspecten van de Utrechtse methode van belang (17.5):

- de positionering als filosofische theologie, met een positieve visie op rationaliteit, een focus op concepten en proposities, hantering van criteria voor rationele plausibiliteit, en nadrukkelijke deelname aan het filosofisch debat;

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- binnen Brümmers methode van conceptuele analyse een combinatie van aansluiting bij de taal filosofie van Ludwig Wittgenstein met de aanname dat religieuze taal wel degelijk de werkelijkheid van God en zijn handelen aanduidt;
- in de groep rond Vos een nadrukkelijk pleidooi voor een christelijke ontologie van contingentie en vrijheid tegenover denkvormen die het menselijk kennen absoluut stellen en in metafysisch opzicht contingentie en vrijheid uitbannen;
- in de apologetische houding een aansluiting bij Augustinus' aanname dat de mens een "natuurlijk Godsverlangen" heeft dat door Gods openbaring geactiveerd en vervuld wordt.

Kijken we vervolgens naar de inhoudelijke Godsleer die binnen de Utrechtse School ontwikkeld is (hoofdstuk 18), dan zijn allereerst twee boeken van Vincent Brümmer grondlegend.

In *Over een persoonlijk God gesproken* (18.1) sluit Brümmer aan bij zijn eerdere uiteenzetting van begripsanalyse als methode van theologiseren. Hij bepleit het goed recht van conceptuele modellen in het spreken over God, en stelt dat alleen een persoonlijk, relationeel model recht doet aan wie God is. De verhouding tussen God en mens mag nooit in termen van "causale manipulatie" worden opgevat, omdat daarmee zowel Gods vrijheid als de menselijke vrijheid wordt geëlimineerd, en er geen sprake kan zijn van echte liefde tussen God en mensen. Vanuit zijn relationele model ziet Brümmer nieuwe mogelijkheden om traditionele problemen als "onweerstaanbare genade", "zondeloosheid", "verhouding van Gods handelen en menselijk handelen" en de "theodicee" te verhelderen.

Brümmers volgende boek, *Liefde van God en mensen* (18.2) werkt het persoonlijk-relationele model uit in een analyse van het begrip "liefde". Uitgaande van een theorie over metaforen als geëigende religieuze en theologische taalvorm, stelt Brümmer dat "liefde" het meest geschikte "sleutelmodel" is voor het spreken over God. Liefde is meer dan gevoel: het is een houding (attitude) die uit gevoel en positieve waardering voortkomt. Een relatie van liefde is niet manipulatief, en bestaat ook niet uit een "contract van rechten en plichten", maar wordt gekenmerkt door het zich over en weer identificeren met de belangen van de ander. Vanuit zijn model van "liefde" geeft Brümmer een eigen visie op de verzoening tussen God en mensen, en op de vraag of God kwetsbaar kan zijn en kan lijden.

Naast Brümmers grondleggende bijdragen verdient de "theorie van goddelijke eigenschappen", door Antoon Vos ontwikkeld in zijn dissertatie *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid, aandacht* (18.3). Cruciaal is de juiste hantering van het onderscheid tussen essentiële en accidentele eigenschappen ten aanzien van God. Vos bestrijdt de veronderstelling dat Gods wezen (*essentia*) het meest algemene zijnsbegrip is: God is een unieke, persoonlijke natuur. Gods alwetendheid leidt niet tot noodzakelijkheid van de gekende werkelijkheid (determinisme) wanneer wordt ingezien dat Gods kennis van geschapen standen van zaken accidenteel is. Vos' theorie van goddelijke eigenschappen loopt uit op een "epistemisch" bewijs van Gods bestaan: als het mogelijk is dat een alwetende God bestaat, dan bestaat God ook werkelijk.

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De lijnen als uitgezet door Brümmer en Vos worden, in wisselende combinaties, uitgewerkt op onderdelen van de Godsleer door een rij van dissertaties en overige publicaties uit de Utrechtse School (hoofdstuk 19).

Gerrit Immink onderzoekt het concept van Gods *eenvoudigheid* (*divine simplicity*; 19.1). Hij confronteert de traditionele vormgeving van dit leerstuk door scholastieke theologen als Anselmus, Thomas van Aquino en Hieronymus Zanchius met kritiek vanuit de “kerugmatische” theologie (Barth, Miskotte). Verder analyseert hij de filosofische (logische) vooronderstellingen in het hedendaagse alternatief voor de “eenvoud Gods” ontwikkeld door Alvin Plantinga. In zijn slotbeschouwing accepteert Immink drie theologische motieven in de notie van de *simplicitas Dei*: Gods anders-zijn ten opzichte van de schepping; zijn *aseitas* of onafhankelijkheid; en Gods eenheid of “coherentie”. Over de logische component van het leerstuk is Immink kritisch: de traditionele theologie hanteert een Platoons denkschema waarin het “algemene” meer realiteitswaarde heeft dan het “individuele”. Immink bepleit het onderscheiden van essentiële en accidentele eigenschappen van God, om recht te doen aan de relationele eigenschappen die God heeft. Ook stelt Immink dat een logisch onderscheid tussen God als subject en zijn eigenschappen onvermijdelijk is.

In de klassieke Godsleer speelt Gods *onveranderlijkheid* een grote rol. In de publicaties uit de Utrechtse School komt dit concept minder prominent aan de orde (19.2). In zijn dissertatie *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid* interpreteert Vos de (on)veranderlijkheid in de modaal-logische termen van “mogelijke werelden”: in hoeverre variëren Gods eigenschappen tussen de mogelijke werelden? In een latere bijdrage aan de bundel *Hoe is uw Naam?* behandelt Vos het probleem van Gods “berouw”, en betreft hij de vraag van veranderlijk/onveranderlijk op de verhouding tussen Gods kennis en wil en de contingente zaken in onze wereld.

Marcel Sarots dissertatie is gewijd aan de vraag of God kan *lijden* en of Hij een *lichaam* heeft (19.3). Tegen de hoofdstroom van de eerdere theologische traditie in, ontwikkelt Sarot een theorie van goddelijke kwetsbaarheid. In een confrontatie met argumenten *tegen* een “lijdende” God blijkt zijn theorie houdbaar te zijn wanneer ze zich concentreert op gevoelens of emoties van lijden. Vervolgens bespreekt Sarot kritisch de belangrijkste argumenten *voor* het “passibilisme”. Het sterkste argument blijkt te zijn Gods liefde, die kwetsbaarheid impliceert. Een verbreding van de problematiek ontstaat door de vraag of het ervaren van emoties (liefde, pijn) het hebben van een lichaam veronderstelt. In zekere zin moet dit volgens Sarot inderdaad het geval zijn. In verbinding met denkers uit de procestheologie stelt Sarot dat de wereld als lichaam van God beschouwd kan worden. Daarbij moet Gods persoonlijke, mentale transcendentie gewaarborgd worden.

Als een van Brümmer's eerste leerlingen promoveerde Luco van den Brom op een studie over de *alomtegenwoordigheid* van God (19.4). Van den Brom neemt de religieuze noties “heiligheid” en “heerlijkheid” van God als uitgangspunt, en toont aan dat God in de zin van die noties verering waard is alleen wanneer Hij niet aan één plaats gebonden is. Vervolgens bespreekt Van den Brom uiteenlopende theorieën over ruimtelijkheid, en verschillende toepassingen daarvan op het denken over God. Hij concludeert dat zowel de idee van “ruimtelijkheid” als die

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van "ruimteloosheid" geen recht doen aan wie God is. Voor zijn eigen theorie sluit Van den Brom aan bij de "relationele" opvatting van ruimte. De basis is het begrip "dimensie", opgevat als "een manier om objecten te ordenen". Als God bestaat in een eigen, hogere dimensionaliteit is gewaarborgd dat Hij actief en positief op ons ruimtelijke bestaan betrokken is en tegelijk daarboven verheven blijft. Van den Brom wil de identificatie van God en (tijd-ruimtelijke) wereld als voltrokken in de procestheologie vermijden. Hij stelt dat zijn notie van Gods bestaan in een hogere dimensionaliteit verenigbaar is met de leer van Gods Drieëenheid. Een interessant toepassing van Van den Broms concept betreft de hemelvaart van Jezus: in plaats van een "ruimtereis" is dat de opneming van Jezus in Gods hogere dimensionaliteit.

De leer over Gods (*voor*)kennis is binnen de Utrechtse School vooral ontwikkeld door Eef Dekker (19.5). Dekkers dissertatie behandelt de theologie van Jacobus Arminius. Dekker hanteert voor de analyse van Arminius' leer van genade en predestinatie een systematisch raamwerk, waarin de modale termen "noodzakelijkheid" en "contingentie" en de twee "graden" van vrijheid (zowel God als de mens is vrij om te kiezen) centraal staan. De belangrijkste conclusie is dat Arminius er goed in slaagt om de twee graden van vrijheid te waarborgen (wat elke christelijke theologie volgens Dekker moet doen), maar niet coherent is in zijn hantering van noodzakelijkheid en contingentie. Dekker doet het voorstel om Arminius' theologie te "transponeren" naar een "mogelijke werelden"-model waarin de contingentie van menselijke keuzes beter recht gedaan kan worden. In Arminius' denken is invloed waarneembaar van de Spaanse Jezuïet Molina, die de leer van de middenkennis (*scientia media*) ontwikkelde. Een latere studie van Dekker is gewijd aan een filosofische analyse van deze middenkennis. Middenkennis is een houdbaar concept, volgens Dekker, wanneer het gepaard gaat met een "mogelijke werelden"-ontologie en met de aanvaarding van synchrone contingentie. Middenkennis is een klein, maar belangrijk onderdeel van Gods kennis, met betrekking tot handelingen van vrije schepselen die ook anders kunnen zijn dan ze in feite zijn.

Gijsbert van den Brink wijdde zijn dissertatie aan Gods *almacht* (19.6). Een eerste deel is gewijd aan de historische ontwikkeling van dit begrip in de Oude Kerk (verbreding van Gods feitelijke heerschappij over alles naar zijn vermogen om alles tot stand te brengen), in de Middeleeuwen (onderscheid tussen Gods absolute en geordende almacht) en bij René Descartes (Gods almacht met betrekking tot "eeuwige", "noodzakelijke" waarheden). In het tweede deel biedt Van den Brink een conceptuele doordenking van de historisch gesignaleerde thema's. Gaandeweg komt hij uit bij een onderliggend verschil tussen het filosofische, Anselmiaanse concept "almacht" (omnipotence) en het bijbelse, Abrahamitische spreken over "almacht" (almightiness). Alleen dat laatste biedt steun voor het geloof. Als laatste ronde spitst Van den Brink zijn bevindingen toe op twee systematisch-theologische problemen: de verhouding tussen Gods almacht en menselijke verantwoordelijkheid, en het probleem van het kwaad. In beide gaat het om de verbinding van logisch coherente begripsvorming en de aanvaarding van een religieus en moreel universum.

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De laatste Utrechtse bijdrage aan de Godsleer is de dissertatie van Arjan Markus over Gods *transcendentie* (19.7). Hij behandelt dit thema in het kader van wat Brümmer geponeerd heeft over de christelijke “levensvorm” waarin God de primaire bepaler van zingeving is. Op een werkdefinitie van “transcendentie” volgt een historische verkenning van het spreken over transcendentie bij Griekse filosofen, het Oude en Nieuwe Testament, en enkele stromingen in de christelijke traditie. Markus onderscheidt vier categorieën van transcendentie: ontologische en morele transcendentie, transcendentie in termen van de vermogens van kennis en macht, en conceptuele transcendentie. Bij de bespreking van deze categorieën confronteert hij zich met drie denkopties: het klassiek theïsme, de processtheologie, en de negatieve theologie. In zijn eigen invulling van transcendentie kiest hij doorgaans een genuanceerde positie waarin elementen van vooral het klassiek theïsme en de processtheologie zijn opgenomen. Markus spitst zijn onderzoek toe op de zin die Gods transcendentie verleent aan ons leven. Daarbij gaat hij in op atheïstische kritiek op het christelijke spreken over God. Zijn conclusie is dat de transcendente God een verder reikende zin en perspectief aan het leven verleent.

In een afzonderlijk hoofdstuk (20) worden de Utrechtse bijdragen aan de Godsleer nog eens op een rij gezet. Daarbij wordt ook aandacht gegeven aan de aanzetten voor methodologische bezinning die in meerdere Utrechtse dissertaties worden gegeven.

Belangrijk in de bijdrage van Luco van den Brom is de stelling (ook al geponeerd door Brümmer) dat de term “God” tegelijk als persoonsnaam en als functieaanduiding (titel) gebruikt wordt; de naam Jahwe identificeert dan de persoon die de titel draagt. Verder onderscheidt Van den Brom tussen eerste-orde en tweede-orde eigenschappen van God (resp. glorie en heiligheid). Ook draagt Van den Brom bij aan de analyse van wat het betekent om God als handelende persoon te beschouwen. In onderscheid van Brümmer beperkt Van den Brom Gods handelen niet tot “algemene medewerking” aan het handelen van geschapen oorzaken, maar rekent hij ook met rechtstreeks ingrijpen door God.

Volgens Marcel Sarot staan in de “filosofische theologie” (onderscheiden van “confessionele theologie”) de logische relaties tussen de concepten binnen het christelijk geloof en de relaties tussen de geloofsconcepten en concepten uit andere domeinen centraal. Verder zoekt Sarot naar de “basale logica” van de Godsleer, en vindt deze in Anselmus’ notie van “een wezen groter dan wat niets gedacht kan worden” (*id quo maius cogitari nequit*). Als dit hoogste, volmaakte wezen is God alle aanbedding waardig, en is Hij de ultieme zingever.

Gijsbert van den Brink confronteert zich in zijn inleidende hoofdstuk met de “cultureel-linguïstische” school van George Lindbeck, en sluit aan bij diens omschrijving van de geloofsleer als “verzameling gebruiksregels voor godsdienstig spreken binnen een specifieke geloofstraditie”. Deze positie verklaart mede de (in vergelijking met Brümmer en andere van zijn leerlingen) sterkere verbondenheid van Van den Brink met de confessioneel-gereformeerde overtuiging.

Uit het overzicht van de Utrechtse School blijkt een fundamenteel verschil in benadering, zowel van methodologische als van inhoudelijke aard, tussen de “taalspel”-benadering van Brümmer en het meer pretentieuze streven van Vos

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naar een zelfstandige christelijke ontologie. Dit verschil in oriëntatie leidt op het methodische vlak tot verschillende types van argumentatie, en inhoudelijk tot uiteenlopende visies op Gods eigenschappen. In de Vos-groep wordt nadruk gelegd op de “essentiële” eigenschappen van God, in vergaande overeenstemming met de klassieke Godsleer. In de Brümmer-groep bestaat meer variatie en meer kritiek op de klassieke invulling van eigenschappen als eeuwigheid, onveranderlijkheid en alwetendheid. Beide benaderingen komen samen in een krachtig pleidooi voor goddelijke en menselijke vrijheid: bij Brümmer gebeurt dit vanuit het “sleutelmodel” van relatie en liefde, bij Vos vanuit de notie van synchrone contingentie.

Een concreet verschilpunt binnen de Utrechtse School betreft de waardering voor procesfilosofie en –theologie. Vos wijst die denkrichting fundamenteel af; Sarot en, in mindere mate, Markus tonen affiniteit met het procesdenken, terwijl in Vincent Brümmer denken sommige elementen in de richting van procestheologie lijken te wijzen zonder dat hij dit met zoveel woorden bevestigt.

Het afsluitende hoofdstuk van dit deel (21) beantwoordt allereerst de vraagstelling naar de samenhang van methode en inhoud in de Godsleer van de Utrechtse School (21.1). De gekozen methode van begripsanalyse wordt consequent gevolgd in de uitwerking van de Godsleer. Daarbinnen zijn verschillende types argumentatie mogelijk. Een inhoudelijk uitgangspunt met grote methodologische consequenties is de aansluiting bij de Anselmianse theologie waarin God als “volmaakt wezen” omschreven wordt. Het persoonlijke en relationele model voor spreken over God leidt tot aanpassingen in de traditionele concepten uit de Godsleer. Als geheel heeft de Godsleer van de Utrechtse School een apologetische strekking, doordat wordt aangetoond dat het christelijke spreken over God rationeel consistent en plausibel is.

Vervolgens wordt de Utrechtse School geplaatst in haar verhouding tot de Gereformeerde Orthodoxie en Karl Barth (21.2). Ten opzichte van de gereformeerde scholastiek is er vooral binnen de “Vos-groep” een fundamentele overeenstemming in methode en inhoud, terwijl bij Brümmer en zijn leerlingen de afstand groter is. De relatie tot Karl Barth is ambivalent: de Utrechtse School ontstond mede als reactie op de dominante barthiaanse theologie in Nederland. Antoon Vos heeft tegelijk oog voor een belangrijk element van continuïteit tussen Barth zelf en de klassieke, scholastieke theologie. Op onderdelen wordt Barth bekritiseerd (Immink, Van den Brink) of verwelkomd als inspiratiebron (Van den Brom).

De methodische en inhoudelijke posities van de Utrechtse School hebben in Nederland en daarbuiten kritische reactie opgeroepen (21.3). Rond vijf thema’s worden de discussies weergegeven:

De Utrechters staan voor een *rationele theologie* waarin *logische consistentie* een fundamenteel criterium is. Een eerste reactie door de Leidse dogmaticus Hendrikus Berkhof is op dit punt positief over Brümmer inzet. Een fellere confrontatie vindt plaats in een bundel *Openbaring en werkelijkheid*, tussen A. van de Beek als opponent en Henri Veldhuis en Antoon Vos als verdedigers van de Utrechtse

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methode. Vervolgens valt J. Muis, later hoogleraar dogmatiek in Utrecht, het principe van logische consistentie aan. Zowel Van de Beek als Muis stellen dat christelijk geloof paradoxen bevat en niet logisch sluitend te krijgen is. Mijn conclusie is dat de aanval op het consistentie-criterium misplaatst is: problemen met theologische argumentaties ontstaan niet door het streven naar logische consistentie, maar door kortsluiting tussen premisses en onvoldoende onderscheiding tussen noodzakelijke en niet-noodzakelijke consequenties.

Kenmerkend voor de Brümmeriaanse richting is de insteek bij *religieuze taalgebruik* en de rol van *metaforen* daarin. Vooral door de filosofen H.J. Adriaanse en René van Woudenberg is het modelmatige en metaforische element van Brümmer's denken bekritiseerd. In reactie legt Brümmer nadruk op het realistische gehalte van metaforen en de uitwerking daarvan in modellen.

Van andere aard is de kritiek op de door Vos c.s. naar voren gebrachte notie van *synchrone contingentie*. Het gaat hier om een fundamentele component van een christelijke ontologie die van cruciaal belang is voor de verhouding van God (met name Gods kennen en willen) tot de geschapen werkelijkheid. De godsdienstfilosoof Paul Helm valt de Scotistische interpretatie van de gereformeerde traditie aan, en betoogt met beroep op Thomas van Aquino dat synchrone contingentie een overbodige notie is. Bovendien aanvaardt Helm de door de Utrechtse School afgewezen veronderstelling dat Gods voorkennis de loop der dingen determineert.

Door twee theologen uit de Gereformeerde Bond in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, C. Graafland en A. de Reuver, en door de christelijk-gereformeerde W.H. Velema is kritisch gereageerd op Brümmer's stellingen over *Gods genade in verband met menselijke vrijheid*. Centrale notie in hun kritiek is de aard van Gods genade als *effectieve genade*. Verder is er verschil in uitgangspunt: Brümmer denkt vanuit abstracte, neutrale antropologische categorieën, Graafland, De Reuver en Velema vanuit de concrete situatie van een in zonde gevallen mensheid die niet in staat is het goede te willen.

Over de leer van Gods *Drieëenheid* wordt binnen de Utrechtse School verschillend gedacht. De groep rond Vos aanvaardt de klassieke triniteitsleer als fundamenteel geloofsartikel, en staat positief tegenover rationele argumenten om Gods drieëinig bestaan te onderstrepen. Brümmer laat zich weinig over dit leerstuk uit, en wat hij er wel over zegt, lijkt in een modalistische richting te gaan. Fundamentele kritiek op dit punt is geleverd door Christoph Schwöbel.

Vergeleken met de traditionele Godsleer worden in de Utrechtse School twee fundamentele *aanpassingen* doorgevoerd: in de eerste plaats leidt Brümmer's persoonlijke, relationele denkmodel tot wijzigingen in de opvatting van goddelijke eigenschappen als (on)lijdelijkheid en (on)afhankelijkheid, gevolgd door eeuwigheid en onveranderlijkheid; in de tweede plaats bepleit Vos de aanvaarding van een accidentele dimensie in de Godsleer, in onderscheid van de klassieke stelling dat er in God geen "accidenten" zijn.

## Slotbeschouwing

Na de drie beschrijvend-analyserende hoofddelen volgt in hoofdstuk 22 een slotbeschouwing over het onderzoek als geheel. Dit hoofdstuk heeft twee doelen: a.

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de vraagstelling over de verhouding van methode en inhoud in de Godsleer beantwoorden (22.1); b. uit het voorafgaande onderzoek enkele lijnen doortrekken voor een eigentijdse gereformeerde Godsleer (22.2).

Dat de gevolgde methode impact heeft op de inhoudelijke resultaten van het denken, laat zich bij elk van de drie beschreven stukken Godsleer (gereformeerde scholastiek, Karl Barth, Utrechtse School) aanwijzen op een aantal niveaus (22.1.1):

- de wijze waarop *vragen* gesteld worden bepaalt mede de reikwijdte en aard van de gevonden antwoorden;
- de gebruikte *begrippen* vormen een belangrijk knooppunt van methodologische en inhoudelijke overtuigingen; in de toepassing op de Godsleer blijken begrippen al gauw aan hun grens te komen;
- systematische theologie put uit verschillende *bronnen*: de Heilige Schrift, de kerkelijke en theologische traditie, filosofie uit verleden en heden, en (collectieve danwel persoonlijke) ervaring; in de beschreven stukken theologie functioneren deze bronnen in uiteenlopende verhoudingen;
- tot de theologische methode behoren concrete *argumentatiestrategieën* die vaak de invloed van contemporaine filosofie vertonen; uit mijn onderzoek blijkt dat de gebruikte argumentatievorm niet persé de inhoudelijke uitkomsten vastlegt;
- op een relatief hoog generalisatieniveau weerspiegelt de *structuur* van behandeling van de Godsleer de voornaamste methodologische en inhoudelijke keuzes; ook hier moet weer gerekend worden met een tweezijdige wisselwerking van methode en inhoud.

Aansluitend bij de geconstateerde wisselwerking onderzoekt een afzonderlijke subparagraaf (22.1.2) welke fundamentele inzichten de gevolgde methode bepalen. Bij de gereformeerde-orthodoxe theologie gaat het om de *simplicitas Dei*, de *soevereiniteit* van God, en de *volmaaktheid* van God. Beslissende inzichten voor Karl Barths Godsleer zijn: de *christologische concentratie*, het *trinitarische kader* voor de Godsleer, en de *vrijheid van God*. In de Utrechtse School heeft het *persoonlijk-relatieve* denken van Brümmer grote invloed, die leidt tot een sterke nadruk op *menselijke vrijheid*; van de andere kant komend, namelijk vanuit een *ontologie* die draait op het onderscheid essentieel-accidenteel / noodzakelijk-contingent, pleiten Vos c.s. eveneens voor het honoreren van *goddelijke en menselijke vrijheid*. Verder is een verbindende factor in de Utrechtse School de aansluiting bij de “volmaakte wezen”-theologie van Augustinus en Anselmus.

Vervolgens (22.1.3) wordt gesteld dat de methode een *hermeneutische categorie* is: via een specifieke methode wordt in een concrete context de boodschap van het evangelie verwoord. Bij elk van de onderzochte theologische posities is de interactie met een telkens wisselende historische, kerkelijke en filosofische context aan te wijzen.

Alles overwegend kom ik tot de stelling dat de methode *beperkte betekenis* heeft voor de inhoud van de Godsleer (22.1.4). In alle wisselende constellaties blijken enkele fundamentele inzichten steeds aanwezig te zijn: de ontologische differentiatie tussen God en de geschapen wereld (inclusief de mens); de leer van de

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eenvoud Gods (ondanks nuancering door Barth); een positieve invulling van de verhouding tussen God en de wereld. "*Methodus est arbitraria*" – die slogan wordt door het uitgevoerde onderzoek bevestigd. Dat wil geenszins zeggen dat bezinning op de methode van de theologie onbelangrijk is: bewustzijn van de contextuele bepaaldheid van elke theologie kan scherper zicht geven op de fundamentele inzichten en belangen die in uiteenlopende presentaties van de geloofsleer naar voren komen.

In het tweede gedeelte van het slothoofdstuk worden op een vrij hoog abstractieniveau enkele lijnen getrokken voor verdere ontwikkeling van de gereformeerde Godsleer.

Als eerste punt komt daarbij aan de orde het inzicht dat *God de Drieënige* is (22.2.1). Het verwijt aan de gereformerd-orthodoxe Godsleer dat zij te weinig trinitarisch doordacht is, wordt genuanceerd en weerlegd. Vervolgens wordt nagegaan welke mogelijkheden er zijn om, meer in de gereformeerde orthodoxie gebeurde, expliciet te maken dat God over wie wij spreken de Drieënige is. Naast Karl Barth levert Robert Jensons triniteitsleer daarvoor mogelijk materiaal. In Jensons theologie is de triniteitsleer daadwerkelijk functioneel. Tegelijk is aan te wijzen dat andere motieven en belangen meekomen in zijn pleidooi voor een trinitarische insteek, wat de vraag oproept wélke inzichten nu precies beslissend zijn. Anders dan Barth kiest Jenson voor een sterk historische en "sociale" invulling van de triniteit. Vanuit deze gereviseerde triniteitsleer blijft ook in de (summiere) Godsleer van Jenson weinig van de traditionele inzichten overeen.

De winst van expliciete aandacht voor de triniteitsleer als kader voor de Godsleer is dat God nooit anders dan als *persoon* gezien wordt. Gods eigen Drieëinig bestaan kan als grond en voorbeeld van zijn relationeel, communicatief optreden naar buiten beschouwd worden, mits dit optreden niet rechtstreeks in Gods *natuur* maar in zijn vrije *wilsbeslissing* gefundeerd wordt. Enige reserve is op zijn plaats tegen een volledige integratie van het begrippenmateriaal uit respectievelijk de triniteitsleer en de Godsleer. Beide leerstukken beantwoorden elk hun eigen vragen, en het is voor ons beperkte verstand niet mogelijk om dit alles in één samenhangend perspectief te plaatsen. Het gebruik van trinitarische categorieën om algemene denkproblemen als "eenheid en verscheidenheid" of "differentiatie en verzoening" op te lossen, loopt gevaar om Trojaanse paarden binnen te halen. Op bescheiden wijze kan, over en weer, gepoogd worden om elementen uit de Godsleer en de triniteitsleer met elkaar in verband te brengen. Alleen tezamen genomen beantwoorden deze leerstukken de vraag naar de "identiteit" van God.

Het tweede thema is een vervolg op het eerste: de Drieënige *God kennen wij alleen in Christus* (22.2.2). Ook hier heeft Karl Barth een belangrijke trend in de Godsleer gezet. Vanuit een luthers perspectief bindt Oswald Bayer de "communicatieve identiteit" van God nog sterker aan de christologie. De fundamentele verschillen tussen de lutherse en de gereformeerde christologie zijn ook nu nog relevant, en verhinderen de opname van Bayers gedachten in een gereformeerd ontwerp voor de Godsleer. Van Barend Kamphuis' bijdrage aan de christologie wordt het sterke accent op de persoonlijke eenheid van God en mens in Christus overgenomen. Rekening houdend met een juiste onderscheiding van de twee

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naturen in Christus, noem ik een zestal aspecten waarin de verhouding van christologie en Godsleer bepaald kan worden:

1. Ten aanzien van het kennen van God onderschrijf ik de gedachte dat alle kennis van God bepaald wordt door zijn openbaring in Christus. Tegelijk moet er ruimte blijven voor het geheel van Gods openbaring in de lange openbaringsgeschiedenis die aan de incarnatie vooraf gaat.
2. Bij Karl Barth is de eenheid van God en mens in Christus en de verzoening tussen God en mens, via de verkiezingsleer, constitutief voor Gods eigen wezen. Naar mijn overtuiging wordt daarmee geen recht gedaan aan het onderscheid tussen de essentiële en de accidentele dimensie van God, in het bijzonder het onderscheid tussen de “natuurlijke” en de “vrije” wil van God. Eenheid en verzoening met de mens is een diep en serieus verlangen en besluit van God, maar vloeit niet (noodzakelijk) uit zijn wezen voort.
3. De unieke vereniging van God en mens in de persoon Jezus Christus moet niet als algemeen model voor de relatie tussen God en mens genomen worden: ten eerste is het de *tweede Persoon* van de Drieëenheid die mens wordt; ten tweede heeft de incarnatie het specifieke *doel* om een verloren mensheid te verlossen.
4. Gods handelen in Christus maakt duidelijk dat God niet “moreel neutraal” is, maar vol liefde, heiligheid, rechtvaardigheid en genade.
5. De eenheid van God en mens in Christus verhindert niet de handhaving van de fundamentele ontologische onderscheiding tussen God en mens als Schepper en schepsel. In de verlossing door Christus worden wij niet “God”, maar werkelijk mens.
6. Er is onvoldoende reden voor de gevolgtrekking dat de dood van Christus de dood van God impliceert.

Als derde aandachtsveld (22.2.3) bespreek ik de *volheid van Gods leven*, die in de gereformeerd-scholastieke behandeling van een groot aantal eigenschappen (verstand, wil, macht, met toespitsingen daarvan als liefde, heiligheid, geduld etc.) tot uitdrukking wordt gebracht. Van Karl Barth kunnen we leren dat deze volheid van Gods leven trinitarisch van aard is. De levende God staat in relatie met de door Hem geschapen wereld, en reageert op wat daar gebeurt. Het aristotelische begrip *actus purissimus*, ontdaan van onjuiste connotaties, waarborgt het inzicht dat deze relaties en reacties niet toe- of afdoen aan Gods eigen bestaan en dat God niet “gemanipuleerd” kan worden. Met deze hantering van dat begrip onderscheidt de gereformeerde theologie zich van vormen van procestheologie.

Een cruciaal inzicht in mijn onderzoek, waarnaar al meerdere keren verwezen is, is de onderscheiding van een *essentiële en een accidentele dimensie* in God, die in Gods verhouding tot de wereld gelijkwaardig is aan het begrippenpaar *noodzakelijkheid-contingentie* (22.2.4). Tegenover gangbare voorstellingen levert nauwkeurige analyse het gegeven op dat het orthodoxe spreken over God als “eerste oorzaak” die het handelen van de geschapen “tweede oorzaken” onfeilbaar kent en bepaalt, niet leidt tot determinisme. De fundamentele notie van synchrone contingentie betekent, aan de andere kant, niet dat alles in de werkelijkheid contingent en willekeurig wordt. De klassiek-gereformeerde positie bestaat juist in een zorgvuldige balans van noodzakelijkheid en contingentie, en in een nauwkeurige omschrijving

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van verschillende soorten noodzakelijkheid (absolute en hypothetische noodzakelijkheid). Toegepast op de verhouding van Gods besluit en menselijke wilsacten kan worden gezegd dat, gegeven Gods besluit om gebeurtenis *a* te laten gebeuren door de menselijke wilsact *p*, noodzakelijkerwijs *a* zal gebeuren; terwijl tegelijk de menselijke wilsact *p* vrij is, en de mogelijkheid van de tegengestelde wilsact blijft bestaan. Bij deze uitwerking van Gods voorkennis en wil met betrekking tot menselijke wilsacten is het alternatieve Jezuïetische concept van “middenkennis” (*scientia media*) inadequaat en overbodig. Hetzelfde geldt voor de vooral in Noord-Amerika populaire visie van het “open theïsme”, waarin God van vrije menselijke handelingen geen zekere, maar hooguit waarschijnlijke kennis kan hebben. In het geschetste denkkader is bovendien het concept van goddelijke “toelating” (*permissio*) met betrekking tot het kwaad onmisbaar.

In de hedendaagse theologie bestaat een sterke gevoeligheid voor *het historische en relationele aspect van de Godsleer* (22.2.5). Ironisch genoeg gaat daarbij verzet tegen het vermeende “essentialisme” van de traditionele leer gepaard met een “essentialisering” van dynamische, relationele en historische categorieën. Op grond van de hiervoor besproken inzichten kan worden gesteld dat de klassieke Godsleer voldoende ruimte biedt om recht te doen aan het relationele en historische handelen van God, zoals uitgewerkt in de volgende gedachten:

- vanuit de *triniteitsleer* is duidelijk dat God relationeel is in zijn eigen innerlijke wezen, terwijl Hij in zijn relaties naar buiten toe een onafhankelijk subject blijft;
- de verbinding van *christologie* en Godsleer levert het inzicht op dat God een diepe en eeuwige intentie heeft om mensen te redden en in innige verbondenheid met Hem terug te brengen, en dat God om dat doel te realiseren diep in het menselijke bestaan en de menselijke geschiedenis ingaat;
- in Gods *volheid van leven* zijn alle noodzakelijke voorwaarden aanwezig voor concreet, relationeel en historisch handelen; daarbij is het voor de realiteit van Gods handelen in onze geschiedenis niet noodzakelijk om het onderscheid tussen Gods eeuwig bestaan en ons tijdelijk bestaan op te heffen;
- de juiste onderscheiding van de essentiële en de accidentele dimensie in God maakt het mogelijk om volop ruimte aan Gods werkelijke betrokkenheid op de wereld te geven en tegelijk te handhaven dat God door die betrokkenheid niet verandert maar volstrekt zichzelf blijft.

In het laatste deelthema komen de inhoudelijke en de methodische component samen: *openbaring en ontologie* (22.2.6). Met name sinds Barths verwerping van “natuurlijke theologie” staat het gebruik van filosofische, ontologische concepten in de theologie onder verdenking. Uit mijn onderzoek blijkt dat juist in de gereformeerd-scholastieke theologie het besef leeft dat onze concepten tekortschieten als het over God gaat. Begripsmatige taal in de Godsleer is geen keurslijf, maar een worsteling om tot uitdrukking te brengen wie God is zoals Hij uit de Schriften gekend wordt. Een belangrijk uitgangspunt is dat God de waarheid in eigen persoon is, en de Schepper van onze wereld en ons denkvermogen. Een principiële tegenstelling tussen goddelijke waarheid en menselijk denken is daarmee uitgesloten. Dit betekent dat het principe van logische consistentie moet worden aan-

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vaard, zij het dat in de toepassing van dit beginsel grenzen opdoemen. Om die grens te respecteren is het beter om niet te spreken van “univoke” toekenning van begrippen aan God en mens, maar vast te houden aan “analogische” predicatie. God laat zich werkelijk door ons kennen, maar zijn werkelijkheid overstijgt altijd onze concepten en argumenten. Dit hoeft geen ontmoediging te zijn, maar opent telkens weer nieuwe perspectieven van verwondering en aanbidding.

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# Curriculum Vitae

Roelf Theodoor te Velde werd geboren te Hardenberg op 12 mei 1974. Van 1986 tot 1992 doorliep hij aan de Gereformeerde Scholengemeenschap "Prof. dr. S. Greijdanus" te Zwolle het VWO (gymnasium). Vanaf 1992 studeerde hij theologie aan de Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Kampen, waar hij op 11 september 1998 slaagde voor het doctoraal examen (cum laude). Aansluitend was hij tot augustus 2004 aan dezelfde instelling verbonden als AIO in de vakgroep Systematische Theologie. Tevens was hij van februari 2002 tot maart 2007 werkzaam als onderwijskundig medewerker / onderwijscoördinator aan de Theologische Universiteit Kampen. Sinds 11 maart 2007 is hij als predikant verbonden aan de Gereformeerde Kerk (vrijgemaakt) van Pijnacker-Nootdorp.

Op 29 mei 1996 trouwde hij met Dineke Meijer. Inmiddels kregen zij samen vijf zonen: Riekert, Jesse, Jelmer, Tobias en Florian.