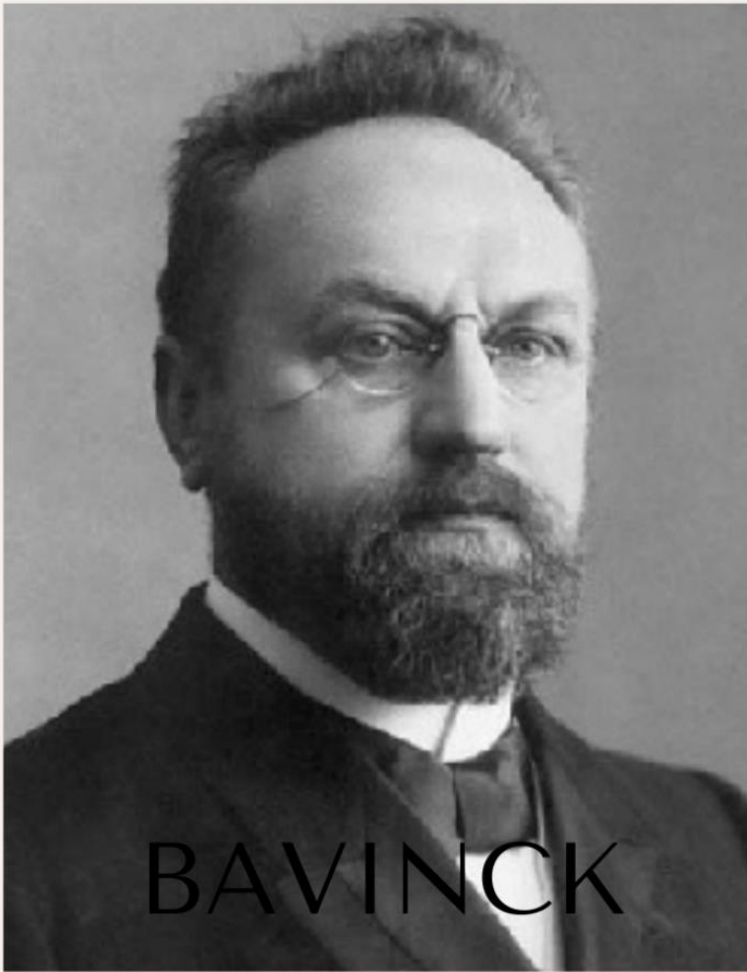
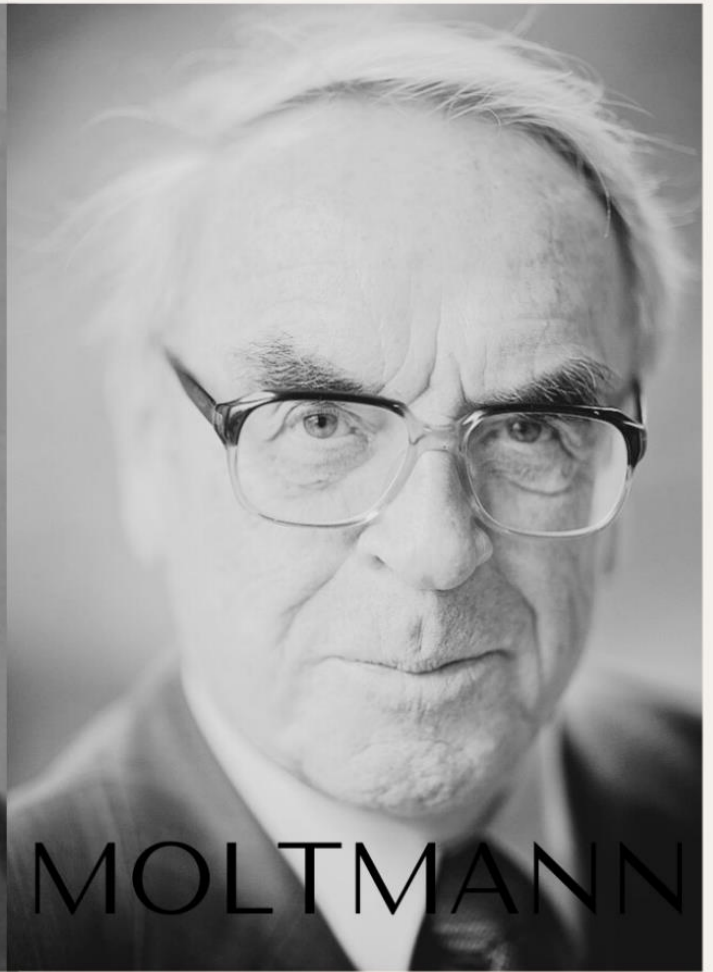


hell

AND THE IMAGE OF GOD



BAVINCK



MOLTMANN

An examination of Herman Bavinck's and Jürgen Moltmann's views on hell and the image of God and what these perceptions have to contribute when discussing hell in the 21st century

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Since an early time in recorded history, many people have shown longing for an afterlife. This is visible from the grave gifts that were given to the dead, in the belief that the deceased could put these gifts to use in the afterlife¹. In the canonical Scriptures, the afterlife is an important theme and almost all religions speak about an afterlife. Christian theologians have also been exploring the concepts of heaven and hell since the early church. The Apostles Creed speaks of Christ descending into hell and ascending into heaven. The afterlife is also a reality in the Reformed Confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of comfort in life and death. It speaks of an assurance by the Holy Spirit of eternal life. These are already some examples where hell and heaven have been given a prominent place in Christian traditional sources.

The importance of heaven and hell in culture, theology and art is expressed through three dimensions by the Tilburg theologian of culture Frank G. Bosman as follows: First, a metaphysical dimension, that heaven and hell are outside our empirical reality and are therefore sources for theological supposition. Second, is a psychological and existential dimension in which heaven and hell give meaning to our existence. Third an ethical dimension where heaven and hell in Western thought presuppose an ultimate justice².

This shows that the afterlife triggers thoughts for people throughout the centuries. In this study, I want to explore this in more detail. For Christians, the beliefs around the afterlife include the belief in heaven and hell. I want to focus on hell in this research because there is renewed attention to hell and there has been renewed debate about it since the last decades.

1. Introduction

This introduction will discuss the problem statement and describe the research objective resulting in the research question. This will include the position of the researcher and the sources of information.

1.1. Problem statement

The idea of hell has fascinated people for decades and remains a relevant and recurring theme. Recently we have seen a lot of attention for hell again in theology in the West. In 2016, the book *Four views of hell* has been republished. The book describes four different views of hell³: hell as eternal

¹ Guido Derksen and Martin van Mousch, *Hemel En Hel in Kaart: Een Cultuurhistorische Verkenning* (Leuven: Davidsfonds/Clauwaert V.Z.W, 2022), 15.

² Frank G. Bosman, ed., *Hemel En Hel: Beelden van Het Hiernamaals in Het Westers Christendom* (Heeswijk: Uitgeverij Abdij van Berne, 2012), 12–13.

³ Preston M. Sprinkle, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, Second Edition, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016).

conscious torment, hell as annihilation, the universalist version and finally hell as eternal conscious torment supplemented by a purgatory where believers are for a time of sanctification. In the introduction, the theologian and co-author Sprinkle, says there is a need to republish this book because developments are going on within Christianity. First, the vision of hell as annihilation is growing in popularity among evangelicals. Second, universalism is on the rise where people believe that everyone will be saved in the end. Third, because of an ecumenical spirit, there is a dialogue with the Catholic Church regarding purgatory.

Also among ordinary believers, the topic is relevant and people have different opinions on the meaning of hell. *De Nieuwe Koers* (DNK) and *weetwatjegeloof.nl* surveyed the vision of hell among Dutch pastors and believers in 2020. Respondents come from the PKN, GKV, Baptists, Evangelical, CGK, NG, HHK, and other smaller churches/faith communities. It shows that 36% of the respondents choose hell as perpetual, conscious physical and mental torment. 34% choose a perpetual separation from God. 9% of respondents believe in a universal reconciliation of humanity. 22 % of the evangelical pastors surveyed, choose a universalist view. In 2004, they conducted the same survey among pastors and there was no universalist answer at the time. 45% of the respondents were in favour of hell as perpetual conscious torment and 43% saw hell as eternal separation from God⁴. This survey shows that there is a noticeable shift in 21st century thinking about hell⁵.

In response to these results, the Reformed theologian Ad van der Dussen argued that the views of God are shifting among people and that their thinking no longer fits with beliefs about hell⁶. This involves deeper thematic issues such as God's sovereignty, the question of (final) suffering, universalism and election.

This suggests a relationship between hell and the image of God. Theologian J.W. van der Velde states that the image of God influences thinking about hell⁷. He bases this conclusion on the popular books *Love Wins* by Rob Bell and *Erasing hell* of Chan and Sprinkle. His suggestion for further research recommend an examination of the context of the 21st century to see if and how it affects the image of God.

⁴ William Den Boer and Felix De Fijter, 'De Nieuwe Koers', *Is Het Vuur van de Hel Uitgedoofd?*, 1, 2020, 35.

⁵ weetwatjegeloof.nl, 'Enquete de Hel', *Enquete de Hel* (blog), n.d., <https://www.weetwatjegeloof.nl/enquetedeheil/>.

⁶ Ad Dussen van der, „Een gloeiende bakoven vol liefde“, 14. Februar 2020, Lezing gehouden op de studiedag van weetwatjegeloof. <https://www.weetwatjegeloof.nl/les/een-gloeiende-bakoven/>.

⁷ Willem Jan Velde van de, 'Helder preken over de hel' (Apeldoorn, Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2020).

The evangelical theologian Rob Bell wrote the bestseller *Love Wins* in 2011⁸. This book describes that a view of heaven and hell has everything to do with your image of God. According to the author, a belief in hell is no longer tenable if you also believe in a God of love. Hell on earth is something many can imagine, especially after the horrors of the last century. In contrast, hell as an eternal final destination is difficult to reconcile with a God of love. Mark Galli, American Roman Catholic author, editor, and former Protestant pastor wrote in response *God wins* (2011).⁹ He shows that a God of love does make belief in heaven and hell possible.

Also other authors see a connection between an image of God and the thinking and speaking about hell. Below are some quotes:

“As long as we do not understand who God is, all our questions are no more than chasing the wind.”¹⁰ – Mark Galli

“So the question of eternal conscious torment does come down to who God is. Is God the kind of God for whom this kind of punishment for sin would be necessary? Or is he not?”¹¹ - Danny Burk

“Every doctrine of hell implies a doctrine of God, and every doctrine of God will shape one’s theology of hell. Let’s consider some fundamental Christian claims about God.”¹² – Robin A. Parry

The survey by DNK and weetwatjegeloof.nl and the above authors shows that there are noticeable shifts with regard to views on hell. As indicated before, the book *Four views on hell* describes four different views. In this study, I want to focus on two views that are also discussed in this book. I choose two different views to illustrate, how thinking about hell is developing among Christians today.

The first view examined is the universalist view of hell. The vision stands for the atonement of all humanity and believes that God will reconcile all people to Himself through Christ. 1 John

⁸ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, First Edition (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011).

⁹ Mark Galli, *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins* (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011).

¹⁰ Mark Galli and Jetty Huisman, *God overwint: over liefde, hel en hemel* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 36.

¹¹ Sprinkle, *Four views on hell*, Chapter 1, Location 9.13.

¹² Sprinkle, Chapter 3, location 17.63.

2:2 indicates that Christ's sacrifice is for the sins of the whole world. God wants to redeem all people (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). The universalist view is on the rise.

The second view examined is hell as eternal conscious torment. This vision sees the severity of sin so great that irrevocable, horrific punishment follows. Hell is a state for the wicked where there is final separation, infinite experience and just retribution for evil. This view is declining in popularity but remains by far the greatest-represented view.

These two views will be examined by analysing some publications of representative authors of these positions. The hell as eternal conscious torment is in line with the classical Reformed confessions and reformational theology. Herman Bavinck supports this view. Herman Bavinck lived from 1854-1921. He is chosen in this study as he (and his dogmatics) was of great significance for Reformed orthodox theology.

The universalist version assumes a general reconciliation of humanity which is supported by the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann. Jürgen Moltmann (1926) is also called the theologian of hope, after his book: *Theologie der Hoffnung*. He is an influential theologian known for being focused on eschatology. Jürgen Moltmann lived through the Second World War, which marked his life. After the Second World War, he came to faith in a Scottish prisoner-of-war camp. This taught him that in every end lies a new beginning. He based his eschatology on this¹³.

Both authors hold represent different views on the concept of hell. Both authors live in different eras, which may have influenced their vision because they responded to the context in which they live. As authoritative theologians, they have also been influential in their contexts. From this context, they describe their image of God and hell. The context can serve as an extra dimension in relation to theology.

1.2. Research objective

This study has a descriptive and comparative purpose.¹⁴

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie*, 14. Aufl., 2. Aufl. der Taschenbuchausg (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).

¹⁴ Ben ... [et al] Baarda, *Basisboek Kwalitatief Onderzoek: Handleiding voor het opzetten en uitvoeren van kwalitatief onderzoek*, 3e druk (Groningen | Houten: Noordhoff Uitgevers bv, 2013), 35–36.

The descriptive purpose of the study is to describe and analyse the different visions of hell and the image of the popular conceptions, as well as of the academic theologians Herman Bavinck and Jürgen Moltmann.

The comparative aim is to contribute to the study of how different ideas about hell are related to the theologians' view of God. Hell as eternal torment and the universalistic view of hell will be analysed by specifying and describing God's dominant and understated attributes described by Bavinck and Moltmann. Popular theology will describe the current speaking about hell in the 21st century. The conclusion will point out, how the different visions of hell and the images of God from Bavinck and Moltmann can help us to speak about hell in the 21st century.

1.3. Research question

Which view of hell and image of God is implied in the vision of Herman Bavinck (eternal conscious torment) and Jürgen Moltmann (hopeful universalism) and what can we learn from it for our speaking about hell in the 21st century?

- 1. Which possible relationships are suggested between the image of God and the thinking about hell among various thinkers in the 21st century?*
- 2. What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Bavinck?*
- 3. What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Moltmann?*
- 4. What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann on the relationship between images of God and speaking about hell?*
- 5. What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann for our speaking about hell in the 21st century?*

1.4. Position of researcher

As a researcher, I stand in the Reformed tradition in which hell is perceived as an eternal conscious torment. The paintings *De brede en smalle weg* and *De Christenreis* by Buyan shaped my thinking about two final destinations: hell and heaven. Also, the warning and appealing preaching about the two ways taught me as a child the seriousness of being saved and the importance of faith in God. In this research, my own conviction and neutrally explore each view of hell. For me as a researcher, this requires sensitivity, humility and open-mindedness in understanding and processing knowledge about hell from the different views of the authors.

1.5. Methodology

This research will use a literature survey¹⁵.

Subquestion 1: Which possible relationships are suggested between the image of God and the thinking about hell among various thinkers in the 21st century??

Subquestion one requires a descriptive and analytical approach. The literature review is an analysis of the debate on hell in relationship to the image of God in the academic literature (*Four views on hell*) and popular conceptions of Bell, Chan and Galli (from 2011 to the present). The State of Art will provide a brief summary of DNK's research and then look at a cultural expression in the 21st century by Roman catholic theologian Frank Bosman, who is specialized in the theology of culture.

Subquestion 2: What is the image of hell and what image of God is implied in it in the theology of Bavinck?

Subquestion two requires a descriptive and analytical approach. The literature survey describes and analyses Bavinck's view of hell and the image of God in his *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (1895). Bavinck is an author who stands in line with the classical Reformed confessions and reformational theology. He does not represent the overall movement but is a leading theologian. He represented the view of hell as an eternally tormenting punishment.

Subquestion 3: What is the image of hell and what image of God is implied in it in the theology of Moltmann?

Subquestion three requires a descriptive and analytical approach. The literature survey describes and analyses Moltmann's view of hell and his image of God in his *Theologie der Hoffnung* (1964) and *Das Kommen Gottes* (1995). Moltmann is a prominent theologian and is known for his defence of a hopeful universalist position.

Subquestion 4: What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann on the relationship between images of God and speaking about hell?

Subquestion four requires an interpretative and comparative approach. A conversation about speaking hell and the possible connection between the image of God between Bavinck and

¹⁵P.J.M. Verschuren und Hans Doorewaard, *Designing a Research*, Fourth edition, edition 2010 (The Hague: LEMMA, 2010), 38.

Moltmann. I will compare the different views and analyse the similarities and differences that show up.

Subquestion 5: What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann for our speaking about hell in the 21st century?

Subquestion five requires an interpretative and comparative approach which provides an interpretative conclusion on discussing hell in the 21st century in which academic and popular concepts are brought into the conversation. The goal is to apply the insights from Bavinck and Moltmann about the relation between the image of God and their speaking of hell in their context.

2. Cultural contextual framework: Introduction to the theme.

This chapter will answer subquestion 1: *Which possible relationships are suggested between the image of God and the thinking about hell among various thinkers in the 21st century?*

This chapter describes the socio-religious context of the Netherlands and the West in the 'State of the art' of hell in the Western 21st century context, it then describes the popular conceptions of Bell, Chan and Galli and finally the book *Four views on hell*.

2.1. State of art

I want to briefly consider the socio-religious context of the Netherlands and the West in this section. The research conducted by *De Nieuwe Koers* and *Weetwatjegeloof.nl* contributes to a better understanding of the spectrum of beliefs about hell and the percentage of people who hold those beliefs. The research shows the interaction of theology about hell and how it is perceived in society. The cultural expressions of hell in the 21st century, explained by cultural theologian F. Bosman, show how the theology about hell has a place in today's culture in the West, and which aspects of hell are extracted or emphasized by people in our secularizing society with regard to hell. How hell is considered in society in the 21st century is captured through cultural expression and so it has an expression of meaning in the way hell is spoken and thought about in the 21st century.

2.1.1. Survey of hell in 2020 by *De Nieuwe Koers* and *Weetwatjegeloof.nl*

Since the second half of the 20th century, belief in hell has declined the most in comparison to other Christian dogmas¹. In 2020, *De Nieuwe Koers* and *Kennisplatform Weetwatjegeloof.nl* conducted a survey that was responded to by approximately 1500 Christians in the Netherlands. This is a follow-up of a survey by *CV.Koers* on hell in 2004 among pastors. The percentages of this survey are mentioned in the 'Introduction - problem statement'.

Some main points emerging from this survey are highlighted. Three-fourths of the respondents continue to choose a more traditional view of hell. Only half of the pastors who have been questioned still consider hell a crucial part of the Christian faith. This is reflected in the fact that in fifteen years the percentage halves to 25% of pastors who believe that hell should be preached about intensively. Also, one-third of pastors never preach about hell. A fourth of evangelical pastors call themselves universalists. People who cannot imagine people going to hell also find the doctrine of hell less crucial. A large majority of 57% consider hell essential to the Christian faith. One-third do not consider hell

¹ Derksen and Mousch, *Hemel En Hel in Kaart*, 201.

unimportant, but neither does it touch the heart of the gospel for them. In 2004, no universalist responses were recorded in this survey, as opposed to 2020, where five denominations have a universalist response. In small percentages, the idea occurs among pastors within the Gereformeerde Bond, Nederlands-Gereformeerden, Vrijgemaakten, Christelijk-Gereformeerden and Evangelical pastors (22%)².

2.1.2. Cultural expressions about hell in the 21st Century

Frank G. Bosman describes several movies and games in which there is a struggle between heaven and hell. In this, the image of heaven and hell that is visible in the 21st century becomes visible. He wants to contribute to the understanding of the ongoing interrelationship between lived and reflected faith and human culture as bearers and propagators of that same faith³.

Hell is presented in the movie *What Dreams May Come* (1998) as a dark island in the infinite ocean where wailing and screaming are deafening. Psychic torment is to be feared above physical torment⁴. *SouthPark - Handicaps Go To Hell* (2000) describes hell as a place of unending torment and inhuman sorrow, where sinners receive their deserved reward in eternity. Satan is like a red devil with a goat's legs and horns in hell⁵. *Atkinson – The Devil* (2006) describes the devil as decisive and kind. The devil welcomes hell-goers and classifies them according to the seven deadly sins. Each sinner is punished according to his offence. There is a connection between judgment and crime and punishment⁶. The game *Doom 3* (2007) shows that hell is not (only) a place where dead criminals are punished. Hell is shown primarily as a power that can bring about God's punishment in this mortal life. Man receives collective punishment for transgressive behaviour related to the destruction of creation. In hell, monsters carry out that punishment⁷. The game *Dante's Inferno* (2010) describes hell as a "domain" through which the soul must pass to come to God. In hell, the human soul must fight its way through various stages. These are vices such as lust, cursing, greed, anger, heresy, violence, fraud and treachery. In each stage, Dante faces his sins and shortcomings to put them behind him. This is based on *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri⁸.

² William den Boer and Felix de Fijter, 'Is Het Vuur van de Hel Uitgedoofd?', *De Nieuwe Koers* 1 (2020): 13–18.

³ Bosman, *Hemel En Hel*, 7.

⁴ Bosman, 195.

⁵ Bosman, 196.

⁶ Bosman, 197.

⁷ Bosman, 197.

⁸ Bosman, 198.

A tension in the cultural expression is visible between God's justice and love. These two qualities of God are often contrasted in the discussed cultural expressions. In the movie, *No News from God* (2001), the angels and the demon say that God wants to eradicate all evil, but cannot. God is therefore portrayed as either weak or a God who does not want to and cannot eradicate evil.⁹ All the games and films discussed operate somewhere between the existentially extreme poles of forgiving love and the judgment demanding righteousness of God. The idea of judgment immediately after physical death is assumed in all the games and films discussed (except the *Simpsons - The Father, the Son and the Holy Guest Star* (2005)). God's righteousness is identified with hell, but God's love is not identified with heaven. God's love is associated with a man who, through love, is able (or enabled) to bypass divine rules about justice and ultimately love conquers all, allowing the individual man to deflect righteous judgment away from himself or his neighbour¹⁰. Love thus makes it possible in special cases to evade God's justice. Heaven and hell are battling each other for the soul of every human being¹¹.

2.2. Popular conceptions

I would like to discuss below the popular views of hell (universalistic and eternal punishment) by the authors Bell, Galli and Chan and Sprinkle. Rob Bell discusses the universalistic version of hell in *Love wins* in relation to the current context. Galli, Chan and Sprinkle, view hell as eternal punishment and therefore react from a more orthodox evangelical perspective. They attempt to convey their thinking in an accessible way to the socio-religious context of the 21st century and look to connect in speaking about hell. First, the authors Mohler, Dorrien and Klaver offer their observations of how culture influences thinking about hell.

Mohler, an American Baptist theologian, is devoted to engaging the culture with Christian beliefs. He indicates that there is a (re)emergence of theological liberalism that is appearing due to the cultural context. For the past twenty years, there has been a movement in Christianity that avoids speaking using specifics and is more suggestive in argumentation than giving theological or doctrinal claims. The context is ground for a critique of evangelical Christianity with liberal Christians accusing orthodox Christians of being too concerned with doctrine and not engaging with culture. Theology has to respond to the questions the context poses, and the liberals and orthodox Christians anticipate in ways that are different. There is a shift within evangelical Christianity in the United States in which orthodox comes to be contrasted with liberal. Liberals want to save Christianity from itself by adapting or changing all dogmas that are difficult to explain.

⁹ Bosman, 207.

¹⁰ Bosman, 207.

¹¹ Bosman, 208.

Liberal American social ethicist and theologian Gary Dorrien, has noted here that the doctrine of hell is the first major departure from theological orthodoxy in the United States. The acceptance of hell and eternal conscious punishment does not correspond to God's character, according to liberal Christians¹².

Miranda Klaver (1962), a religious anthropologist at VU Amsterdam, who specializes in the evangelical movement, gives another interpretive perspective on the relationship between hell and the image of God¹³. Commenting on the research, Klaver says there has been a paradigm shift among evangelical Christians. Faith took on a this-worldly perspective instead of an other-worldly perspective. This shift occurred in the late 1980s and parallels societal changes. In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall ended the international tensions of the Cold War. Strong end-time expectations and related theology began to lose their meaning. Crisis awareness disappeared and with it the idea of the imminent return of Christ. Evangelicals began to feel at home in the world. The changes in society affected the culture of faith, the idea of a judgmental God and the need to be saved from the coming wrath changed for a therapeutization of the faith. In the evangelical sphere of faith, beginning in the 1990s, relationship and identity became central which changed the image of God. The incomprehensible sides of God or God's wrath receive little or no attention. Evangelical faith culture speaks a lot about God's love and mercy, life here and now. Eternity became less significant in this development.

It is therefore important to consider how Bell, Galli and Chan and Sprinkle discuss the concept of hell and how they describe God's character in it. That shows their way of interfacing with the current culture.

2.2.1. Rob Bell

In 2011, Rob Bell wrote the Book *Love Wins*. Rob Bell is a theologian, author, filmmaker and founder of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids. His book hit No. 2 on the New York Times Bestseller list in America. In this book, he describes a universalistic creative and unconventional view of heaven and hell¹⁴.

¹² Albert Mohler, 'We Have Seen All This Before: Rob Bell and the (Re)Emergence of Liberal Theology', 16 March 2011,

¹³ Tjerk de Reus, 'De Evangelische Christen Is Zich Thuis Gaan Voelen in de Wereld', *De Nieuwe Koers* 1 (2020): 22–23.

¹⁴ Rob Bell, *En de meeste van deze is ... Liefde: een eerlijk boek over hemel en hel*, trans. Linda Jansen (Utrecht: Kok, 2012).

View of hell

Bell takes the relevant Bible texts in which hell appears as the starting point for his discussion on hell. In this, Bell distinguishes between Sheol and Gehenna.

Sheol refers to a mysterious ominous place where people go after death (Ps. 6:6, 16:9-10, 18:6, 30:4 and 103:4). Sheol reveals God's power and strength over life and death (1 Sam. 2:6 and Deuter. 32:39) because He is present and involved in everything that happens after death¹⁵. According to Bell are life and death two ways of living, based on Deuter. 30 in which the people must choose life or death. In it, life symbolizes a strong union with the living God, through which you will experience increased peace and wholeness. And death symbolizes a way of living that can be seen as a decreasing connection leading to despair and destruction¹⁶.

According to Bell, Jesus uses *Gehenna* to express the valley (Ge) of Hinnom (Henna) where the waste was dumped. The Hinnom Valley was recognizable as an existing location for Jesus' audience. In that dump, fighting animals were gnashing their teeth, vying for scraps of food. There was a constantly burning fire digesting the waste. Therefore Jesus explains with this example that human's waste (sin/evil/injustice) goes somewhere, but the human himself does not have to go to that place¹⁷. For Bell, therefore, Gehenna is more a place for all the sinful things that happen in the world through humans. Sheol is an intermediate stage where man himself goes after his death before they will raise into heaven.

Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4) and Hades also mean something similar to hell¹⁸. Tartarus derives Peter from Greek Mythology and indicates the underworld in which Greek demigods were judged in the depths. Hades is the Greek equivalent of Sheol and is often translated as the realm of the dead. In the realm of the dead is human dead but has not yet died the death that brings life, as in the parable of poor Lazarus. When a man dies of his sin, he receives the passage to life. So, in the realm of the dead there is restoration after destruction (Ezekiel 16:53,55), because God does not reject forever (Lamentations 3). The realm of the dead is described in Matthew 25 as eternal where the goats are banished to *aion* of *kolasis* (Greek). According to Bell, *Aion* means an era or period but can also mean the intensity of the experience. *Kolasis* means the pruning or pollarding of branches. Therefore 'eternal' is for Bell an age or intensity/experience of a pruning turn in which things are straightened out.

¹⁵ Bell, 75.

¹⁶ Bell, 76.

¹⁷ Bell, 77–78.

¹⁸ Bell, 79.

Bell believes in a literal hell in which the evil, misery and sin in this world are visible¹⁹. Jesus uses images, illustrations and metaphors in his teaching on hell that describe concrete experiences and consequences when we ignore God-given goodness and humanity. Ignorance of God's goodness may cause a personal, communal or society-wide hell²⁰. God gives man freedom of choice and man can choose heaven or hell.

All humanity is like one big family which God wants to save. But humans are free to choose what they want and God respect this. Bell leaves open the question of whether God ultimately gets what He wants; the salvation of all. It can be that humans after a period of purification in hell may not want to repent of their evil ways and continue to do evil. Hell is therefore an image of humans' particularistic refusal to trust God but mainly focus on and trust themselves²¹. In that way is hell a place in which some humans take out it individually. Bell's view is universalistic in the fact that in the resurrection of Christ lies the power for the reconciliation, restoration and renewal of the earth and heaven, including all creatures. God's plan of salvation ends with God where He will be all in all.

Image of God

Bell begins his book by asking who God is and what the role of Jesus is²². Man forms an image of God and God forms man. For Bell, the image of God is love and God has unconditional love for humans. In this presupposes and loving relationship between God and humans is God the centre and the source. God as love also cannot coexist with evil in which God is portrayed as a cruel, insecure and violent torturer who provides an endless future full of horrors²³.

Bell characterizes God by attributes and names. Bell mentioned in his book attributes of God like infallible²⁴, sovereign²⁵, gracious and loving, goal-oriented, persistent, mighty and powerful²⁶. God creates order out of chaos²⁷. God is righteous and judges evil and injustice. God speaks justice and calls people to account²⁸. God's greatness is seen through the renewal and reversal of humans²⁹. Bell

¹⁹ Bell, 80.

²⁰ Bell, 89.

²¹ Bell, 176.

²² Bell, 29.

²³ Bell, 179–81.

²⁴ Bell, 110.

²⁵ Bell, 110.

²⁶ Bell, 111.

²⁷ Bell, 153.

²⁸ Bell, 122–26.

²⁹ Bell, 118.

mentions names of God such as: friend, supporter, protector, father³⁰ and rock³¹. This illuminated God from a positive perspective of a loving God who cares for His creatures by being in a relationship with them.

God's love is especially manifested through Jesus. Jesus is the loving revelation of what God intends for the world³². Jesus' death on the cross is the end of the sacrificial service so that ever needs to make a sacrifice again. Jesus' death on the cross opens the way to life (rebirth) for everyone and gives something that is worthless; value³³. In this, a defendant goes free and the relationship is restored. Through Jesus' resurrection, God liberates all creation³⁴.

Thus, Bell prioritizes God's love which liberates the creation from hell. Bell pays much attention to Sheol or Hades and calls it hell, but then sees it as a temporary phase in which humans are reconciled, restored and renewed to live eternally with God in heaven. Gehenna is then the place where all iniquity and sin disappear to. Herein God's love is visible, which can also be so just which is seen through punishing sin in Gehenna, but at the same time can be loving in giving a restored relationship.

2.2.2. Mark Galli

In response to Bell, Mark Galli wrote his book *God Wins* (2011). Galli is a historian and former editor. He studied at the University of California and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. He belongs to the evangelical movement. Galli assumes hell as eternal torment. He emphasizes the Trinity through which the gospel is based on the very nature of God, and from this flows His plan of creation and redemption³⁵.

View of hell

Galli describes hell as Gehenna and furthermore has a focus on the last judgment. He mainly focuses on the character of God that is visible in hell and the last judgment.

According to Galli, Gehenna is used as the place where sinners were punished after death. Hell comes from the Greek word Gehenna. This is derived from the word Valley of Hinnom, Ben-Hinnom. This valley was notorious for burning children in pagan sacrificial rituals (2 Chron.28:3). The New

³⁰ Bell, 112.

³¹ Bell, 151.

³² Bell, 155.

³³ Bell, 136.

³⁴ Bell, 141.

³⁵ Galli and Huisman, *God overwint*, 10.

Testament represents hellish suffering as fire (Mark 9:43), darkness (Math. 25:30, 2 Petr 2:17) destruction and being removed from the presence of the Lord (2 Thes. 1:9, Math 7:21-23)³⁶. Hell is endless and the final destination where people are separated from God; from the power of His Holy Spirit. People do not have the freedom in hell that enables man to trust Christ³⁷.

Hell is connected with the last judgment, in which God is the judge of the whole world. Everyone is judged fairly. This judgment consists of punishment for those who do evil and reward for those who are faithful. The Father Himself does not pass judgment on anyone, but He entrusts the judgment to the Son, Jesus (John 5:22). This is important for Galli because for him it affects the questions about hell and judgment. Jesus often speaks of the love of God, but at the same time, Jesus also acts in the role of judge, on behalf of God. Also in John 5:30, Jesus says: 'By myself, I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me'(NIV)³⁸. Jesus makes himself known in the gospels as completely righteous and completely merciful. This Jesus executes the final judgment with punishment for those who do evil and reward for those who are faithful³⁹. Through Jesus, divine love is revealed on the cross, where grace, love and justice come together. Jesus' salvation is possible for everyone through His offer on the cross. Therefore, He will also be fair and good, perfectly just and loving in the last judgment.

Image of God

Mark Galli begins his book by discussing our attitude toward God. The questions that we ask God should always come second. The most important question is the question Christ asks of us: who do you think I am⁴⁰? (Matt. 16:15) This question is revealed on the cross and will have to be accepted by us. Galli described three aspects of God. First God is a Creator, Lord and Lawgiver. That means that God is a transcendent authority, merciful in the forgiveness He offered and He is almighty. Secondly is God an acting person because He does things for and with humans. And third, God is love in His deepest essence above all other aspects. Before He became a creator, Lord, Lawgiver or acting person, He was already a loving person. God shared love between the three Persons of the divine being from eternity. Trinity is characterized by unity. Through Christ's incarnation, we may also become one with the Father thanks to Jesus. To share in the love of God is to participate in life within the Trinity (Joh. 17). The divine love makes humans in heaven completely one with Him, without disappearing into

³⁶ Galli and Huisman, 120–21.

³⁷ Galli and Huisman, 161.

³⁸ Galli and Huisman, 123.

³⁹ Galli and Huisman, 126.

⁴⁰ Galli and Huisman, 36.

Him⁴¹. This is what God is in His being. Through His love, humans also come to know God as creator, lord, lawgiver and acting Person. In this, he shows that the Holy Spirit also has an important role. The Spirit convicts of guilt and leads to righteousness, allowing humans to participate in heaven. The Spirit leads to the truth of Christ. The Spirit connects with the Father and Jesus⁴².

Galli describes the image of God as God who cannot be encompassed or described by human words and cannot be known by the human mind. This gives a distance that immediately reveals the positions in the relationship between God and humans. God wants His majesty and glory to be known. In the redemptive work of Jesus, the way is opened for humans in which they can receive atonement for their sins, applied by the Holy Spirit. This is necessary to escape hell. God wants all people to come to faith and repentance and be saved, but God wants also wants justice. God's love is the basis of His redemptive plan, but that does not exclude His other attributes. Galli describes His righteousness as an attribute that brings about justice.

So, hell is justified by Christ being the judge, who Himself descended into hell. God is love, and this love is made visible through the cross in which forgiveness for sins is possible, and so that humans may share in the love shared in the Trinity. In this respect, this love is not visible or possible in hell because there is a separation from the power of one person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. So God's love, according to Galli, will not be visible in hell in this way, but acceptance or participation in God's love is a condition for escaping hell.

2.2.3. Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle

The book, *Erasing Hell* (2011), was written by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle in response to the debate about the eternal hell that has emerged. Chan is an author and theologian. He founded Cornerstone Church in 1994 and was involved until 2010 as senior pastor. He taught at Eternity Bible College. Sprinkle is a theologian, who studied at The Masters's Seminary and earned a New Testament doctoral degree from the University of Aberdeen. He taught at the University of Nottingham in England and Cedarville University in Ohio. At the moment he is teaching at the Eternity Bible College in Simi Valley⁴³.

⁴¹ Galli and Huisman, 165.

⁴² Galli and Huisman, 167.

⁴³ Francis Chan, Preston M. Sprinkle, and M.J. Strengtholt, *Bestaat de hel?: een bijbelse verkenning* (Heerenveen: Medema, 2012), 147–50.

View of hell

The authors discuss first first-century Judaism's views on hell, second Jesus' teaching on hell, and third the views of Jesus' followers on hell to get to a solid conclusion on hell.

According to Chan and Sprinkle, first, the *first-century Judaism's view on hell* sees hell as Sheol or Hades and Gehenna and describes hell as a place of fire, darkness and lamentation⁴⁴. Sheol (Hebrew), Hades (Greek) is a place where bad people go after dying. In Hades, sinners wait for judgment. The Hades is not usually presented as a place of punishment, although sinners can undergo suffering⁴⁵.

Gehenna is a place of fire and torment, where sinners are tormented, grieving and sorrowful of punishment. This punishment is not corrective or purifying but it is retributive punishment from God for man's sin. They can no longer repent there. Gehenna is seen by some Jews as a perpetual punishment and others Jews believe in hell as a place of destruction⁴⁶. Gehenna is a symbol of the horrific things that happen in the Valley of Hinnom, such as the sacrifice of children or bodies thrown there. Jesus uses this symbolic image as a metaphor for God's punishment of sinners in hell.

Jesus teaching on hell is consistent with the dominant Jewish vision at the beginning of the era in the New Testament⁴⁷. Jesus sees hell as a place of punishment after judgment (Math 25:21-46, Math 5:22, Math 23:33), and a place of fire (Math 13:30, 40-43, 49,50, 18:8-9). Hell is the picture of darkness, whining and gnashing of teeth (Math 8:11-12, 22:13, 25:13). In hell there is no repentance. There is no section where Jesus talks about hell in which He explicitly says that hell will last forever⁴⁸. *Aionios* is a word that can be translated as lifelong, permanent and everlasting. In Matthew 25:46, this word *aionios* is used twice. The authors believe that the reference in Matthew 25 implies everlasting punishment. First, because the contrast between *aionios* life and punishment indicates that *aionios* is used for both. Eternal life is about the age to come: therefore it can also be applied to eternal punishments. Second, verse 41 says that it is eternal fire for the devil and his angels. Revelation 20:10 says that these will suffer a never-ending punishment. Chan leans strongly toward the eternality of hell⁴⁹.

To explain the *vision of hell of Jesus' followers*, Chan and Sprinkle use the books of Paul, Peter, Jude and John (Revelation). Paul does not use the word hell in his letters. However, Paul does describe the

⁴⁴ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 47.

⁴⁵ Chan, Sprinkle, und Strengholt, 46.

⁴⁶ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 48–49.

⁴⁷ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 64.

⁴⁸ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 71.

⁴⁹ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 75–76.

sinner's fate with terms such as "perishing, being destroyed, wrath, condemned, tried and punished. In Acts 17, Paul tells Gentiles the gospel of how humans can face eternal judgment. Paul's view of hell can be derived primarily from 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Paul sees hell as punishment. The wrath of God is an act of retribution. The avenging wrath of God affects people who do not follow Jesus and obey the gospel.

Peter and Jude describe hell as a ruin, loss, punishment, judgment, the Tartarus, suffering as retribution, deep darkness, and never dying fire (2 Peter 2). Hell here is a destination for wicked angels, false teachers and unjust or ungodly sinners⁵⁰. Revelation 14: 9-11 speaks in pictorial words of torment, fire, sulphur, eternity, anger and God's wrath. John describes the torment of those whose smoke rises to eternity. John describes hell as an eternal punishment of the devil and unbelievers (Revelation 20 and 21). The second death conceives Chan metaphorically or figuratively, making it a death which describes the condition of those who will be separated from God forever in a permanent state of torment⁵¹. The cross stills the wrath of God. Those who accept the gift of Jesus on the cross are saved by grace.

Image of God

The authors distinguish God's moral will and God's sovereign will. God's moral will are values that are pleasing to Him. Humans as moral beings can oppose God in his moral will because humans have the freedom of choice and action. The sovereign will of God is the events He causes independent of what humans decide or do⁵². The authors describe God as a potter who can do whatever He wants as the sovereign creator of the cosmos (based on Romans 9:20, 21, 22, 23).

God is perfect, good and righteous in all that He does, but that does sometimes embarrass humans regarding certain attributes of God that we do not perceive as good. God's wisdom, exaltedness, greatness and perfection should lead to a humble realization that God's ways and thoughts are much higher than the ways of us humans⁵³. God has a plan of redemption in which God wants all kinds of people to be saved. God also has a plan of punishment in which God's wrath is terrifyingly visible. There is a tension visible in the Bible book Revelation between the image of punishment and a loving God who allows His Son to die for enemies⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 89.

⁵¹ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 93.

⁵² Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 29.

⁵³ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 118–22.

⁵⁴ Chan, Sprinkle, and Strengholt, 90.

Therefore, hell for Chan and Sprinkle is primarily Gehenna in which an eternal state is seen for sinful humans. The distinction between God's sovereign will and His moral will clearly reflects what God wants regarding hell. God wants all humans to be saved and also wants His will to be done on earth. However, this will can be opposed by humans as moral beings. There are values that please Him, His moral will, but there are also events that He causes which is His sovereign will. Human freedom is capable of thus preferring hell to pleasing God. Chan and Sprinkle try to maintain simplicity in all the attributes of God by putting God's sovereignty at the top, making human participation already subordinate to divine thought.

2.2.4. Preliminary analyses

Remarkably, the popular conceptions speak in relation to hell much about the attributes of God and they try to explain it from their point of view. Bell links his image of God to love. Bell illustrates God's plan of salvation in Jesus and presents the resurrection as the foundation of the ultimate act of love through which a way is opened for all. This influences his vision of hell in which thus ultimately an image of God's love is also apparent in the atonement of mankind. J. McClymond characterizes *Love Wins* as a book which immanentizes the eschaton and links God's kingdom to a call for social amelioration⁵⁵. Galli takes the Trinity as an example of the diversity in the three Persons, but where there is unity in love. He therefore also sees room for God's distinctive attributes, yet connected in the deepest being of God: love. Therefore, God's attributes such as righteousness, mercy, just, etc. can stand side by side. Galli emphasizes that God is fair because he considers it important to leave judgment and what is deemed right, to Jesus. Chan sees a strong tension between God's love and justice. Hell is justified because humans do not accept Jesus' death on the cross. In this, God is an incomprehensibly great God in which His plans cannot be comprehended.

In conclusion, love is an attribute that is mostly contrasted with justice and righteousness. Bell sees God's love as relational love toward humans expressed in the salvation, reconciliation, and restoration of humans through which they escape hell. Therefore, for Bell, God's love is visible in hell because there is the possibility of restoration. Galli, Chan and Sprinkle also view love as the reconciliation with God on earth, but primarily as one with God's being and therefore they concretize less how God's love for humans is concretized but emphasize more the love in God's being through which God is love. So this love as part of God will not be able to contradict justice or right, as also part of God and to that extent also visible in hell.

⁵⁵ Michael James McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 972.

2.3. Four views on hell

The book *Four views on hell* describes the academic discussion of various views of hell with Sprinkle as editor-in-chief. I want to discuss the authors with the different visions below and link to the image of God that appears in each view of hell. The relationship to popular conceptions becomes apparent as several authors refer to Bell, Chan and Galli.

2.3.1. Denny Burk

Denny Burk is a Professor of Biblical studies and the director of the Centre for Gospel and Culture at Boyce College. Burk is a Baptist and uses extensive scriptural argumentation to articulate his view on hell as eternal conscious torment⁵⁶.

View of hell

According to Burk, hell is a place or state of wickedness. Hell is called Gehenna in the Bible⁵⁷. Hell has three characteristics: final separation, infinite experience and just retribution⁵⁸.

First, after the final judgment of humanity, there is a *final separation* in which the resurrected wicked and righteous people are irrevocably separated (as described in Math. 25:21-46). In this second death, the wicked receive a body that is fit to suffer the final punishment. They are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). The wicked are separated from the presence of God's mercy and grace and His power to raise people from death. People in hell will experience God's wrath because God Himself will "afflict" them and Jesus will give them retribution (2 Thes. 1:6,8)⁵⁹.

Second, hell is for the wicked an *infinite experience*. The punishment is always consciously experienced and is not diminished by annihilation or redemption. The body will be eternally punished by an immortal worm and an unquenchable fire (Isa. 66:22-24). The image of fire can be understood metaphorically as the holy presence of God as consuming fire, or a just retribution for those who allowed innocents to pass through Moloch's fire⁶⁰.

Third, hell is *just retribution* for evil and unrepentant sins from unrighteous humans⁶¹. Daniel 2:2-3 predicts a dual destiny for those who "sleep" in death, and therefore God will raise the unrighteous to contempt to suffer judgment and punishment in order to demonstrate His justice. This punishment for

⁵⁶ Sprinkle, *Four views on hell*, Chapter Introduction, Location 8.25.

⁵⁷ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.40.

⁵⁸ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.15.

⁵⁹ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.75.

⁶⁰ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.43.

⁶¹ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.23.

sin is eternal (Matthew 25:46), and retributive in nature, without any notion of rehabilitation or restoration (Revelation 14 says that there is no rest day or night)⁶². The judgment takes place outside the city (Isa. 66: 24) in the valley of Hinnom, which is a place where abominable idolatry was practised. According to Burk, it is an eternal state of dishonour (Isa. 66:24).

Image of God

Burk says humans' emotional reflex to the doctrine of hell reveals what humans believe about God⁶³. Therefore, he uses a parable to make clear that the image of God is decisive for him. In the parable, he takes the reader through a story of someone pulling out the legs of a grasshopper, which is still considered reasonably acceptable. But then successively different animals come up - a frog, a bird and a puppy - in which this act increases in seriousness. Finally, he takes as an example the baby whose legs someone pulls off. This horrifying scenario shows that it matters to whom you do something. The God of our representation must correspond to the God revealed in the Bible. Burk believes that sin and judgment must be pondered when a human takes God seriously. God is holy and infinite. God is merciful and gracious, precious and unimaginably noble⁶⁴. God created the world to exalt the glory of His own name (Isa. 42:8; 43:7)⁶⁵. God is glorified in the mercy He grants to believers. People who do not follow Christ are like Pharaoh. God uses Pharaoh to demonstrate His power making His Name known throughout the world (Rom 9:23).

Thus, hell eternally demonstrates the glory of God's righteousness in the judgment of sin to unbelievers. This vision of God's judgment is a source of joy and praise for Christians (Rev. 18:20,19:3)⁶⁶.

2.3.2. John G. Stackhouse Jr.

John G. Stackhouse Jr is the Samuel J. Mikolaski Professor of Religious Studies and Dean of Faculty and Development at Crandall University in Moncton, New Brunswick. Stackhouse tethers biblical exegeses of relevant text with theological argumentation for his view of hell as annihilationism⁶⁷.

⁶² Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.58.

⁶³ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.12.

⁶⁴ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.11.

⁶⁵ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.121.

⁶⁶ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.13.

⁶⁷ Sprinkle Chapter Introduction, Location 8.26.

View of hell

Stackhouse emphasizes the need for reconciliation between God and humans that should happen on earth. Therefore, he needs to show the opportunity offered on earth for everyone to come into a restored relationship with God through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. When a human is not reconciled with God, (s)he must make atonement by suffering and dying. In the first death, there is a period of pain and suffering. Humans are not immortal but must receive immortality from God as a gift for believers. Unbelievers are raised for judgment but do not receive an immortal soul. Therefore they cannot suffer eternal torment.

After the final judgment, there is in hell a one-time eternal destruction (cf. 2 Thes. 1:9) and separation from God, as the source of life⁶⁸. Hell is a logical, metaphysical and therefore inevitable outcome of God's decision to reject unbelievers⁶⁹. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, hell will also be utterly unrestorable, causing humans to disappear forever⁷⁰. So hell is an image of a dump to which evil is taken and destroyed⁷¹. Hell possesses fire to purify and to test and judge things from the essential nature of things. The chaff is burned away from the wheat (Luke 3:17)⁷². In hell, there is a difference in punishment, and God keeps the wicked alive until their debt has been paid.

According to Stackhouse 'eternal' means that it has eternal implications. Just as salvation through Jesus has eternal implications (Heb. 9:11-12) so hell has eternal implications (Heb. 6:2). Therefore he says: "eternal life" (...) is not only life that doesn't end (a quantitative idea) but also is the kind of life lived in the light of the coming kingdom of God, the wholesome, flourishing life that will be enjoyed after Jesus returns and yet can be tasted even now (a qualitative idea)⁷³."

Image of God

According to Stackhouse, two characteristics of God must be taken into account by speaking about hell. Firstly, God's holiness, which is visible in God's moral rectitude and cleanness, God's detestation of all that is wrong and his relentless action to make everything right. God is a perfectionist. Secondly, God's benevolence becomes visible in God's kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice. God is a lover⁷⁴. God loves the good and does everything God can to bring forth as much good as possible⁷⁵.

⁶⁸ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.10, 13.12.

⁶⁹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.12.

⁷⁰ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.38.

⁷¹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.14.

⁷² Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.6.

⁷³ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.34.

⁷⁴ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.6.

⁷⁵ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.90.

Therefore, God shows in hell that He keeps His word⁷⁶, but at the same time, He respects human freedom. The hellfire is an example of God's holiness and intends to judge all things, make their true nature clear and purify them. Through Jesus' work of redemption, God's 'fire of goodness' forever consumes evil from His good creation and makes God's wrath unnecessary.

2.3.3. Robin A. Parry

Robin A. Parry, an evangelical universalist, has a PhD from the University of Gloucestershire. He argues extensively from Scripture that the Bible itself teaches a universalistic view of hell in which future judgment will be followed by reconciliation⁷⁷.

View of hell

Parry's view is that in the end, God will reconcile all people to Himself through Christ⁷⁸. This view was well known from Origenes in the early Christian church⁷⁹.

The context in which Parry discusses hell is 'from creation to a new creation'⁸⁰. God is the origin and destiny of this world (Rom. 11:36). Everything in creation and human life must be directed toward this purpose. God created man in His image, so God will always be faithful to man as a reflection of His being and wants to redeem all people (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Because of the Fall, sin entered the world. This sin deserves eschatological judgment and punishment, but salvation is possible in the end⁸¹. God wants to destroy sin from unfaithful humans to make them faithful because God hates sin and that cannot coexist with His purpose for this world. Jesus undoes the damage caused by sin for the whole world (1 John 2:2) and makes it possible for mankind to enter into a relationship with God. All the divine punishment has a pattern of judgment followed by restoration and became a normative paradigm in the Bible⁸².

Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection. This is the foreshadowing of what is to come for all mankind⁸³. There is tension in the resurrection process. On the one hand, in the person of the risen Christ, everyone has already been redeemed. God has already reconciled the world to Himself in Christ (Rom.

⁷⁶ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 13.16.

⁷⁷ Sprinkle, Chapter Introduction, Location 8.27, 8.28.

⁷⁸ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.5.

⁷⁹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.6.

⁸⁰ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.22.

⁸¹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.5.

⁸² Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.73.

⁸³ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.47, 17.48.

5:18; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19-20). On the other hand, only those united to Christ by the Holy Spirit now participate in that redemption (and then only in expectation of the general resurrection). By obediently trusting the gospel and being united to the Spirit, the believer subjectively participates in justification⁸⁴.

For Parry, human freedom is an important aspect. God does not save anyone against his will. Parry believes that a human does not choose God and reject Him because a human does not yet have full knowledge of who God is. Hell is therefore a place that people choose, due to a lack of knowledge of God. Any reasonable thinking being will accept God, through His Spirit, when he realizes that this God is also his purpose and final destination. Upon full knowledge of God, there will be no more rejection of God but salvation is possible for every human being, even after death. Then in hell God's loving justice becomes visible that He cares for sinners.

Image of God

For Parry, a doctrine of God is important because he believes that a doctrine of God forms your theology of hell. Parry assumes a hermeneutic rooted in the Trinity, manifested in Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension⁸⁵.

Parry characterizes God as essentially good⁸⁶ and that love breaks all boundaries and saves sinners, even after death. Also, God's faithfulness to His creatures is manifested in His never-ending care, even beyond death. God is righteous in His being. This righteousness causes God to punish in hell. This is a loving justice that makes wrong things right. "This is a love of cauterizing holiness and of a righteousness whose only response to evil is the purity of a perfect hatred. Wrath and justice are both ways in which such love must show itself to be love in the face of its denial."⁸⁷ Therefore is divine goodness manifested in loving justice and righteous love.

Thus, the different situations with regards to hell also highlight various sides of God's attributes, such as holiness and justice are projected mainly on sin and love on human salvation. God's image of goodness corresponds to hell in which God's goodness is also present in the possible salvation of humans. Human freedom does not negate God's goodness.

⁸⁴ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.51-17.58.

⁸⁵ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.13.

⁸⁶ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.64.

⁸⁷ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 17.66.

2.3.4. Jerry L. Walls

Jerry L. Walls is a professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University. He argues that the righteous in Christ will undergo a time of sanctification in purgatory⁸⁸.

View of hell

Walls takes a traditional view of hell but argues that the righteous in Christ will undergo a time of sanctification between their death and resurrection. The doctrine of purgatory can be understood in terms of (1) sanctification, (2) purification, or (3) a combination of both⁸⁹. Walls does not believe that purgatory will consist of satisfaction (or atonement) of sin, but of sanctification (growth toward holiness). Purgatory is a symbol of hope. Scripture says that nothing unclean will enter heaven (Re.21:27) or that believers without holiness will not see the Lord (Heb. 12:14)⁹⁰. And therefore Walls argues that believers who are not fully sanctified in this life will complete the process of sanctification after death. He bases this, among other things, on the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis, saying that the purpose is to become like Christ: fully holy⁹¹. Lewis described the deeper problem of our sinful tendencies that lead to sinful actions. Humans must be healed of sinful tendencies, habits and tendencies that keep us from loving God and one another. Human's free cooperation is required during the sanctification process.

Image of God

For Walls, God is holy⁹² and that requires the holiness of believers to be able to see God. God is sovereign and grants salvation as a gift⁹³ and therefore humans depend on God's goodness and power⁹⁴. The purgatory shows God's grace to finish our sanctification process to enjoy the glories of heaven⁹⁵. God gives optimal grace, which shows that God will do everything He can to communicate the gospel to people and bring about a positive response from humans. This shows God's love for fallen children and His willingness to save them all⁹⁶. This is rooted in the triune God who is love by nature because the three Persons have loved and delighted in each other from all eternity. God's love is revealed to His creatures who become objects of that love. That love is present even if punishment is a part of the sanctification process. Pain in purgatory is used for a radical transformation to achieve

⁸⁸ Sprinkle, Chapter Introduction, Location 8.29, 8.30.

⁸⁹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.31.

⁹⁰ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.11.

⁹¹ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.59.

⁹² Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.107, 21.114.

⁹³ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.109.

⁹⁴ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.79.

⁹⁵ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.142.

⁹⁶ Sprinkle, Chapter 2, Location 21.21.132.

perfect holiness. Thus, the attribute of God's holiness strongly corresponds to his view on the purgatory, which required the holiness of humans.

2.3.5. Preliminary analysis

For Burk, his view of God is especially evident when he talks about the right retribution for evil, which is justified by sin. In this, he does not want to violate God's sovereignty and discusses God's attributes from a morally appealing perspective. Burk himself links the view of God with his view of hell⁹⁷.

Stackhouse especially emphasizes the two characteristics of God that become visible in the destruction of people. These characteristics do not contradict His attributes but are both operating. Hell then is a sign of reliability in which God keeps His word. Parry also sees a similarity between the image of God and his theology on hell. God is good and love and that corresponds to saving the world. For Walls, the holiness of God also requires the holiness of people. So a relationship is noticeable and named by the authors themselves. And it became apparent from the analysis that the relationship is also observed in their theology on God and hell.

2.4. Conclusion

The exploration in this chapter provides interesting insights into the different views of hell. This conclusion will answer the question: *Which possible relationships are suggested between the image of God and the thinking about hell among various thinkers in the 21st century?* I want to focus mainly on hell as eternal torment and the universalist view of hell.

First, I want to discuss the vision of hell from different aspects of the vision of hell, then discover the differences in the image of God. Finally, describe a possible relationship between the image of God and hell among thinkers in the Western socio-religious context of the 21st century.

2.4.1. Vision of hell

Several aspects came out of the above data that deserve more attention. Hell as eternal torment and a universalist version of hell is highlighted in this conclusion. Hell as eternal torment is represented by Galli, Chan and Sprinkle and Burk. Hell as a universalist vision is represented by Parry and Bell. The following aspects will be dealt with below: the judgment and sin, the cross and the resurrection and God's presence in hell.

The judgment and sin

⁹⁷ Sprinkle, Chapter 1, Location 9.12.

All reviewed authors state that hell follows judgment and they agree that those who go to hell are not in contact with God in this life. All the reviewed authors agreed that sin belongs in hell.

Hell as eternal torment judges the *sinner* with a punishment. Galli and Huisman and Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle emphasize sin and therefore mention the sinner going to hell. The punishment in hell is a just retribution for all the evil, the sin with which the sinner is imbued. The penalty for sin is death, and it is therefore given to the sinner in judgment.

Hell in a universalist view judges *sin* (the injustice and evil) eschatologically. The judgment is followed by reconciliation. Here sin is treated primarily as an object which must be removed from humans to become a new creation.

Cross and resurrection

The cross or resurrection is emphasized differently in the various visions of hell. The cross is central to the vision of hell as an eternal torment. Burk speaks of a double resurrection after death, where the righteous and unrighteous are both raised to different destinies. The distinction between those resurrections lies in the salvation of people during life through the sacrificial death on the cross of Christ. Galli and Huisman and Chan and Sprinkle also speak of salvation through the cross through which salvation is possible and can be appropriated by faith in Jesus. On the cross, God's wrath over sin is stilled.

The universalist view centres around the resurrection of Christ. Bell and Parry speak of the cross as a payment of Christ for the sin of the whole world, which opens the way for the resurrection of all humanity. Jesus' resurrection is then the resurrection of all people. The resurrection ends up in universal salvation.

God's presence in hell

(The presence of) God in hell is viewed differently. The view of hell that sees hell as eternal torment sees primarily an absence of the power of God, of the Holy Spirit (according to Galli and Huisman) who brings about salvation. It also sees an absence of His mercy (Burk). The universalist view of hell sees God's power in life and death and God's presence and involvement in all that happen after death. God remains faithful to His creation, human made in His image, because it is a reflection of His being. Therefore salvation is possible for humans after death.

2.4.2. The image of God

The image of God as depicted by the various authors, is very diverse, but there are also similarities. All authors characterize God by discussing His attributes such as righteousness and justice. There are different views on how God applies those attributes.

Hell as eternal torment emphasizes God's sovereignty. The attributes of God's love and holiness or righteousness are much discussed. Burk, Stackhouse Jr. and Walls especially discuss God's holiness. Burk, with his parable of the pulling out of legs, speaks primarily of an infinitely glorious being against whom we as sinful human beings are guilty. The relationship here is that of a God versus a tiny, sinful human being. This God has the right to do as He pleases. With the image of the potter, Chan and Sprinkle also show this relationship between God and human beings. This tension between a loving and righteous God is also visible in cultural expressions in the 21st century, as described by Bosman. Galli and Huisman say precisely not that love overcomes (i.e., an attribute of God) but that God Himself conquers. In this way they lay the foundation in the Trinity of God, thereby elevating the Trinity over attributes of God. In the Trinity, love, justice and mercy are expressed.

Bell and Parry, from the universalist view of hell, see God primarily as love. From this love, He also acts righteous and just. This is especially visible in that God removes the wrong, sinful, and evil from this world and makes it a new creation. We also see the basis of the triune God reflected in Parry's universalist view of hell, but Parry sees love as a foundation of the Trinity.

2.4.3. The possible relationships between the image of God and the thinking about hell among various thinkers in the 21st century

The view of Bell and Parry and the view of Galli and Huisman, Chan and Sprinkle, and Burk and Walls, have differences in the way they approach hell. Galli and Huisman, Chan and Sprinkle, and Burk and Walls want to treat the Bible in its totality, and there they do not shun the uncomfortable sides of God. Galli describes that he does not need to make God popular. God Himself determines what is good, and in this, humans only have to communicate His message⁹⁸. Therefore, they rely on thorough exegesis and do not avoid difficult sections.

Instead of Bell and Parry who approaches hell primarily with attributes of God that are positively formulated, allowing connection to the Western context by exposing the loving side of God. This view sees also a clear relationship between the image of God and hell and therefore they cannot reconcile hell with a loving God. Therefore, in this view, hell serves the purpose in which God's love for man is manifested in salvation.

⁹⁸ Galli and Huisman, *God overwint*, 13.

However, the *DNK*'s research shows that the universalist view is increasing, especially also among evangelical pastors. Klaver notices that there is a corresponding line where the culture of faith is influenced by society. Mohler notices a re-emergence of the liberal theologian from a need to engage with the culture.

The question is how Bavinck and Moltmann represent their view of hell and what image of God is visible in it, in order to research hell and how it can be discussed in the 21st century. Moreover, several questions are important to include in the study of Bavinck and Moltmann. First, It seems that the difference between the judgment of the sin or sinner is decisive. Therefore, it is important to consider how Bavinck and Moltmann describe "sin" in relation to hell. Second, the emphasis on the cross and resurrection seem to hold an important place in the discussion and therefore are aspects that need further investigation by Bavinck and Moltmann. Third, the presence of God is a point on which the two views differ. To what extent is God still involved in hell can be further researched. And finally, it is necessary to look at the Trinity because it seems to be decisive. Because since Parry and Galli and Huisman both look for the basis in the Trinity, but both come to different views, the question is how the Trinity is perceived in the universalist view of hell and the view of hell as eternal torment.

3. Theological position 1: hell as an eternal punishment

This chapter will answer subquestion 2: *What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Bavinck?*

This chapter describes first who Herman Bavinck was, then investigates Bavinck's vision of hell and closes with Bavinck's image of God and how the two are related to each other.

3.1. Herman Bavinck

Herman Bavinck is born on December 13, 1854. His father, Jan Bavinck, was an influential minister in the Dutch Christian Reformed Church (Christelijke Gereformeerde kerken). Bavinck's church, family and spirituality were shaped by strong patterns of deep pietistic Reformed spirituality¹. This pietistic Reformed spirituality is influenced by the Second Reformation and the evangelical revival movement, the Reveil. Bavinck was an excellent student and studied at the Theological School in Kampen. After one year he decided to move to the University of Leiden's theological faculty. This faculty was renowned for its aggressively modernist, scientific approach to theology. This experience influenced Bavinck's life. He perceived it as a tension between his commitment to orthodox theology and spirituality and his desire to understand and appreciate what he could about the modern world with his worldview of pietism and modernism and culture². Bavinck honoured the theological and confessional richness of the Reformed tradition dating from Calvin.

At this time he came under the influence of Abraham Kuyper³. Bavinck wrote a doctoral thesis in Leiden and after that, he became pastor of the congregation in Franker in 1881. From 1883 to 1901 Bavinck became a teacher at the Theological University in Kampen. He wrote the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* at this time.

Kuyper and Bavinck were key figures in the union of the Reformed Churches in 1892. In 1902 Bavinck left for the VU to teach there⁴. Bavinck died on 29 July 1921⁵.

Van den Belt states that Bavinck's work remains relevant because he seeks an existential connection between the Christian faith and the broader questions of science, culture and society. He sees the

¹ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1999), 10.

² Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, 11.

³ James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London, North York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc University of Toronto Press [distributor], 2014), 4.

⁴ John Exalto, 'Herman Bavinck. De Ziel Overwint', *Verder Kijken. Honderdvijfendertig Jaar Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in de Samenleving. Zesentwintig Portretten*, 2016, 45.

⁵ Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 5.

Christian faith as a worldview, a perspective from which he interprets the whole world and life meaningfully⁶. According to Bolt, an American-Dutch Reformed theologian, the dogmatics of Bavinck shows a tension between the claims of modernity, this-worldly perspective, scientific orientation and the other hand the reformed otherworldly pietist orthodox tendency. Bavinck is fully cognizant of his historical-intellectual context. He uses issues from the late nineteenth century to show that he took modern thought and science seriously⁷. This tension is discussed by Eglinton who describes that Bavinck, as an orthodox theologian, is focused on culture and society⁸. Bavinck sought to appropriate modernity critically and sought to answer the modern worldview via the doctrine of the Trinity⁹.

Bavinck sought a trinitarian synthesis of Christianity and culture. The concept of the unity of thought in theology is very important to Bavinck. That is why Bavinck bases his theology on the concept of the triune God in whom diversity emerges but also there is unity. Bavinck underscores the task of the theologian to think about God's thoughts after Him and trace the unity of God¹⁰. For Bavinck, the Trinity provides an epistemological basis for the knowledge of God. All human knowledge is an ectype of the archetypal knowledge of God. Based on his organic thinking, Bavinck takes his starting point in the possibility and reality of the knowledge of the triune God through revelation¹¹.

In his dogmatics, Bavinck engages in a dialogue with theologians well known in his time including Nietzsche, Schweizer, Strausz, Schleiermacher and Hoekstra¹² and discussing with them their various views of the doctrine of hell¹³. Furthermore, he addresses views on humanitarian developments from the 18th century onward by taking an example from them for the understanding of law and justice¹⁴. Bavinck is grounded in Scripture and does a thorough exegesis in each sub-topic to explain the biblical line from Scripture. Bavinck responds to questions in his time in which it becomes clear that there is a decrease in the number of Christians and whether it is justified that so many people who have not yet heard of God can go to hell. This shows that context-related questions are signalled and discussed in his dogmatics.

⁶ van den Belt, Henk, 'Herman Bavinck: Het Christelijk Geloof Als Zuurdesem En Parel', *Tijdschrift over Geloof En Wetenschap*, 2021, 152–62.

⁷ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1999), 13.

⁸ Dr P. De Vries, 'Een Engelstalige biografie over Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)', *Dr. P. de Vries - artikelen en opinie* (blog), 24 March 2021,.

⁹ Changjun Choi, 68

¹⁰ Changjun Choi, 'Herman Bavinck and John Calvin on the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Image of God: A Comparison' (Apeldoorn, Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2021), 59,

¹¹ Changjun Choi, 60

¹² Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 7e druk, vol. 2 (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 217.

¹³ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:687–689.

¹⁴ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:690.

3.2. Bavinck's vision of hell

Herman Bavinck's eschatology is discussed in the Reformed Dogmatics part four: about the last things. In the section 'The Intermediate state' (60) he discusses Sheol. In the section 'The return of Christ' (61) he discusses the resurrection and the judgment. This is important for eternal punishment in combination with the image of God about justice and love. In the section 'The consummation' (62), Bavinck gives attention to hell, called Gehenna, and heaven. These aspects give insight into Bavinck's theology of hell from

3.2.1. Sheol

Bavinck sees Sheol as the place where all people go after death, because of the immortality of humans. There the believers receive provisional salvation and unbelievers provisional torment¹⁵ where the wrath of God will be felt more severely by unbelievers in comparison to believers¹⁶.

Bavinck discusses Bible verses that discuss the Sheol, and he concludes that it is not hell, but a realm of the dead, the underworld, a great tomb that contains all the graves of those who have died. No return is possible from Sheol, unless by a miracle. But usually, the Bible says it is a grave from which no one rises, like a prison. Jesus was also in the Sheol as long as He was dead (Acts 2:27,31) but did not remain in Sheol. Christ's death was eschatological. In His God-forsakenness, it was not a feeling or illusion, but it was a reality. He experienced the true essence and character of death as the wages of sin¹⁷. Jesus tasted death in all its bitterness to deliver humans from the fear of death and death itself.

Sheol is an eternal home, an area of darkness, a shadow of death. Death indicates the absence of God's grace and favour. Bavinck sees death as a breaking of harmony and a cutting off of the various life relationships in which a creature lives in relation to its nature. The dead are weak, weakened and without strength¹⁸. Therefore the creature returns to the elemental, chaotic being that underlies the entire cosmos¹⁹. Death is a disruption and breaking of the God-willed right relationship with Him, but does not teach annihilation²⁰. Death is the consequence and punishment of sin. Jesus broke the power of sin (Math. 16:18), and gives a believer death as a passage to eternal life and the grave as a resting place until the resurrection²¹. Dead people have no work, wisdom or science and therefore they don't

¹⁵ Bavinck, 4:583.

¹⁶ Bavinck, 4:606.

¹⁷ Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology, v. 21 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), 229–30.

¹⁸ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:576.

¹⁹ Bavinck, 4:590.

²⁰ Bavinck, 4:567.

²¹ Bavinck, 4:591.

participate in earthly things. Therefore, it is a place of destruction, destruction itself, without fixed outlines and clear distinctions (Job 10:22). It is a land of rest, silence and forgetfulness.

In the Bible, death is often positioned negatively against life on earth or the land of the living and communion with God.

In Sheol, God and men are no longer seen (Isa. 38:11) and God is not praised and thanked. God's virtues are no longer proclaimed and His wonders are no longer beheld (Ps. 88:11,13). God dwells in heaven but His spirit is also present in the Sheol²². The Christian church at the time of Bavinck and in the century before saw a quick increase of non-Christians. This brought the church to the question, of whether Christ and the apostles in Sheol also preached the gospel. This had already been defended by Clement and Origenes based on 1 Peter 3:18, 19, but rejected by Augustine and others. Bavinck faced in this way the questions of his time and follows a biblical exegetical line in this. The millions of humans who have not known the way of salvation in Christ, and thus have not been allowed to accept or reject it with a believing heart, are judged by a different standard than people who have known the way of salvation. According to Bavinck, nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of preaching the gospel in Sheol and therefore there will be no preaching of Christ in Sheol through which there can be repentance and faith in Him²³. The preaching of the gospel precedes dying because the purpose of preaching is that people will not die but live²⁴. At the resurrection, the sea, death and Hades return all the dead humans so that they can be judged according to their works (Rev. 20:13).

3.2.2. Resurrection and the judgment of God

The Sheol ends when Christ returns. Then the dead will rise as an effect of the mighty creative act of God in Christ²⁵. The general resurrection of all humans restores the temporary disconnection of the bond between soul and body in all humans (John 5:27-29) and places them before God's judgment seat to receive judgment. Bavinck sees the soul as an active living principle but never identical to life itself. God alone is life itself and immortal (1 Tim. 6:16). This means that the soul persists through God's omnipresent and omnipotent power²⁶. This soul cannot be killed and will be raised together with the body. Through the resurrection, the soul and body are freed from the dominion of death.

²² Bavinck, 4:579.

²³ Bavinck, 4:607.

²⁴ Bavinck, 4:608.

²⁵ Bavinck, 4:674.

²⁶ Bavinck, 4:570–71.

Believers receive from Christ a soul and body which is renewed and enters into fellowship with Christ. In this way, they are recreated in God's image (Rom 8:11,29 and Philippians 3:11)²⁷ and restored to their destiny²⁸.

After the resurrection comes the judgment in which all men are judged. The judgment is carried out by Christ, who is appointed judge. The main question in the final judgment is that of faith or unbelief. The measure in judgment is the gospel (John 12:48) and the law and the works and fruits of humans are taken into account. Also, the degree to which a person has received the revelation of God is counted. Those who have not heard the gospel are judged according to the law alone²⁹. After the final judgment, the place of torment in the unquenchable and eternal fire, Gehenna, will become a full reality³⁰.

3.2.3. Gehenna

According to Bavinck, the wicked are sent to Gehenna after the judgment. Gehenna was originally the name of the valley of Hinnom located southeast of Jerusalem. This valley was used for the cult of Moloch, where children were slaughtered and burned. This took place in the time of Achaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 16:3, 21:6, Jer. 32:34, 35). The apocryphal book of Enoch describes that, in this valley, wicked people would be gathered to judgment. Therefore, the name Gehenna takes on the meaning of a place of punishment for the wicked after death. Jews use a different meaning and refer to it as throwing away and burning all kinds of uncleanness. Through this interpretation, Gehenna is the place where the unclean and wicked underwent punishment and suffering in eternal fire. Fire has traditionally been a revelation and symbol of the Lord's wrath and grimness. The Old Testament records that God comes in a fire once to justice to finally impart justice on the earth and punish the wicked (Deuter. 32:22, Ps 11:6, 83:15, Isa 30:33ff). That fire burns to the lowest Sheol (Deuter. 32:22) and is never quenched (Isa. 66:24) and burns forever (Jer. 17:4)³¹. This idea is also found in the New Testament. It is the punishment place of wicked people after judgment day. It is destined for the beast from the abyss and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20), for Satan and his angels (Rev. 20:10), for death and Hades (Rev. 20:14) and wicked men (Rev. 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15, 21:8). They are cast into it after the resurrection and final judgment. There is a punishment of eternal unquenchable fire and darkness, the worm that gnaws that does not die and eternal torment. Gehenna is outside located in the depths so

²⁷ Bavinck, 4:675.

²⁸ Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology, v. 21 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), 111.

²⁹ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:682.

³⁰ Bavinck, 4:583.

³¹ Bavinck, 4:685.

that one can be cast into it and is far from fellowship with God and Christ. God's wrath reveals itself in full horror so that Gehenna is not only a place of lack but also of grief and pain of both the soul and body. The Gehenna is the second death³².

Bavinck focused much on an exegetical explanation of Sheol and Gehenna. He seeks to exegete the Bible as absolute truth and takes that as the starting point for his faith and theology. He defends different views of hell in light of science, formulating a response from Scripture while respecting alternative views.

3.2.4. Eternal punishment

Since the 18th century, a different humanistic worldview has emerged, but for Bavinck, it brings also one-sidedness and dangers. Because the notion of right and justice, of guilt and law-breaking is weakened when the measure of all these things is not in God but in humanity and society. For Bavinck, all security and safety are then lost when society is the deciding factor, because then there is no boundary between right and wrong and the law is in danger of being at the mercy of power. Therefore, in determining right and law, humans cannot decide, but as Bavinck states: "all appearances notwithstanding, it is infinitely better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into human hands (1 Chron. 21:13)"³³.

And this also applies to the notion of eternal punishment. Bavinck says the doctrine of eternal punishment is grounded in the Bible. Jesus as the supreme love speaks of punishment often, threatening with the severest punishments. Here Christ shows the salvation of eternal life that He has acquired for believers and the catastrophe of eternal destruction for the wicked. The punishment of eternal destruction is never-ending, which cannot possibly change. Humans lack in the Gehenna the fullness of life that is given to believers through Christ. The Bible speaks richly and universally about the work of Christ since it has infinite value and benefits the whole world and humanity in its organic existence³⁴, but for Bavinck, the Bible does not speak of universalistic atonement.

To justify and understand eternal punishment, one must recognize the deeply destructive nature of sin and the justice of God. Sin is a violation of the law, rebellion and enmity against God, negation of His right and authority and even of His existence. Sin is finite in the sense that it is accomplished by a finite creature in a finite time. It is not about the duration of time, but the inner nature is measured when punished. Sin is infinite in the sense that it is committed against the supreme God. God's justice

³² Bavinck, 4:685–86.

³³ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:690.

³⁴ Bavinck, 4:693.

demands retribution for the destructive nature of sin. God's goodness then cannot conflict with God's justice, since everything that is just is also good. And everything good is righteous. If goodness destroys justice it is no longer true, substantial goodness. As earthly miseries and temporal punishment are proof of the foretaste of hell³⁵ and must not cause a human to doubt God's goodness, eternal punishment must not cause humans to deny God's goodness. God's justice is shown in eternal punishment in such a way that His goodness and love remain intact. In hell, God does not like to plague people either, but grief is a way of glorifying His virtues and is thus determined by this ultimate goal in its intensity and extent³⁶. God's love becomes visible in Christ. Christ's blood is the price of saving people from eternal destruction. For Bavinck, the price of Jesus' blood would have been far too expensive if it were not to save humanity from eternal destruction in hell. The punishment varies according to the degree of each person's iniquity. There is then no more room for forgiveness or repentance. Punishment is in its essence; enforcement of justice. In the various degrees of punishment, each human receives retribution according to his works. Bavinck sees God's mercy in this. The judgment day is about justice in its full extent, which is the righteousness of God. God will fully justify Himself on judgment day. Every tongue will for all eternity confess, willingly or unwillingly, that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father³⁷.

3.2.5. Preliminary analyses

Bavinck distinguishes between Sheol and Gehenna and views Sheol more as an intermediate stage for all people. Gehenna is truly hell in which the definite, irreversible separation is visible between believers and unbelievers. Bavinck shows a missiological aspect in which he warns that the punishment of sin is death, but the believer can find life in Christ. He addresses moral questions about whether eternal punishment can be justified. According to Bavinck, humans' destructive nature of sin is the reason why humans deserve death and therefore God is right in His judging. This judgment manifests God's attributes such as: God's righteousness, God's love that is visible primarily in the salvation that is possible for people and God's mercy is noticeable in the particularistic degradations in the punishment with regard to each person. The next paragraph will examine Bavinck's view of God and how this influences his theology of hell.

³⁵ Bavinck, 4:691–95.

³⁶ Bavinck, 4:697.

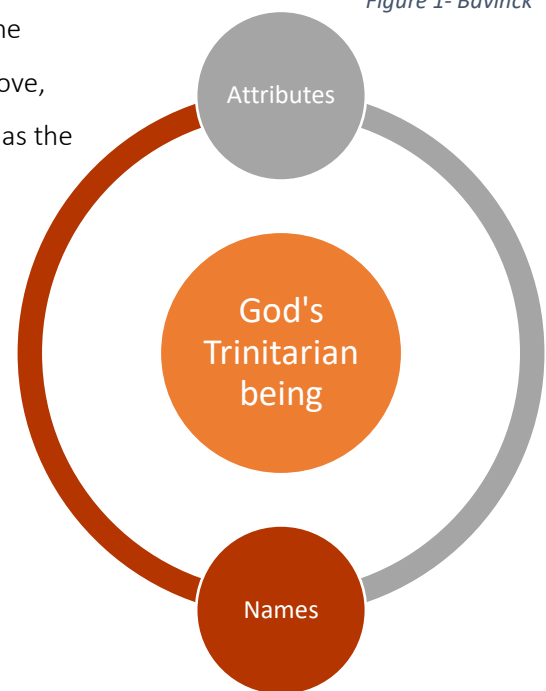
³⁷ Bavinck, 4:696.

3.3. Bavinck's image of God

This section seeks to examine Bavinck's view of God in relation to his view of hell. Here, certain elements of Bavinck's dogma of God, as described in Reformed Dogmatics volume II, will be discussed that affect his theology on hell. Bavinck sees all other doctrines as an explication of the dogma of God³⁸. The knowledge of God serves to admire and worship Him. Bavinck starts with the incomprehensibility of God, which cannot be grasped by a human being. Bavinck zooms also on the knowability of God, as He reveals himself through His name, virtues and attributes.

For Bavinck, the Trinity is the centre from which God reveals himself. "Only by the Trinity do we begin to understand that God, as He is in himself, is the independent, eternal, omniscient, and all-benevolent One, love, holiness and glory"³⁹. God is a trinitarian being distinguished as the Father, Son, and Spirit, each fulfilling their tasks and highlighting various sides of God's being⁴⁰. Mattson describes that, according to Bavinck, the Trinitarian essence of God shows His distinctions to humans but "there is nevertheless a genuine connection both ontologically (trinitarian, ontological and economic) and epistemologically (incomprehensibility and knowability) by virtue of God's perspicuous revelation"⁴¹.

Figure 1- Bavinck



3.3.1. The incomprehensibility and knowability of God

Bavinck sees a distinction between Creator and Creature. All creation is an ectype of the archetype of the triune God, which means that there is no conflation between the divine and humanity⁴². Due to its trinitarian nature, it precludes all attempts to see God and the world on a continuum⁴³. "The doctrine of divine incomprehensibility necessarily gives rise to a distinction between God's ontological immanent trinitarian relations and His economic manifestations"⁴⁴.

According to Bavinck, God is infinitely beyond our understanding, imagination and language⁴⁵.

Therefore, God cannot fully reveal in us His knowledge because humanity is limited in the ability to

³⁸ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 2:2.

³⁹ Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology, v. 21 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), 36.

⁴⁰ Bavinck, 2:229.

⁴¹ Brian G. Mattson, 238.

⁴² Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 2:173.

⁴³ Brian G. Mattson, 238.

⁴⁴ Brian G. Mattson, 27.

⁴⁵ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 2:13.

fully know God (1 Cor. 13:12)⁴⁶. God comes into human reality showing God to be a living person, with His existence and will, a conscious and free being who is above nature. The purpose of God's revelation in Scripture and nature is that humans come to know God and thereby receive eternal life (John 17:3, 20:31). The creation leads humans to God because it is a mirror of His virtues, and is a manifestation of His thoughts.⁴⁷ Therefore, God can be the ultimate goal of all things⁴⁸. With regard to hell, this is important because thus even in hell God remains the ultimate goal.

3.3.2. The simplicity of God

Regarding hell and the attributes of God discussed therein, Bavinck emphasizes the importance of simplicity. God's simplicity means that God is beyond all compositions and therefore no real distinction can be made between His being and His attributes⁴⁹. "God is identical with each of His attributes; He is what He possesses.⁵⁰" All attributes and names of God are equal and there is perfect harmony between them⁵¹. Therefore every provision, every name thereby is an enrichment of the knowledge of His being⁵². God gives Himself a Name that is identical to His virtues (1 Peter 2:9) or perfections that God reveals. In the Bible, God's being is always connected to His attributes. No dualism should be brought when thinking of God by distinguishing between attributes, such as God's mercy and justice by the view on hell. God is the true, only, infinitely full being⁵³, and therefore remains God.

The distinction in attributes is grounded in the revelation of the triune God⁵⁴. The revelation of God varies from creature to creature. The nature and being of humans determine their relationship to God, and therefore they all reveal God in different degrees and ways⁵⁵. Therefore, when Bavinck speaks of hell, it is important to observe simplicity and distinctions. God is one, and there is no distinction between attributes of God, such as His love and justice in hell. However, God reveals himself in different degrees, creating variety in the degree to which God's attributes are experienced.

⁴⁶ Bavinck, 2:40.

⁴⁷ Bavinck, 2:39.

⁴⁸ Bavinck, 2:122.

⁴⁹ Bavinck, 2:87.

⁵⁰ Bavinck, 2:87.

⁵¹ Bavinck, 2:92.

⁵² Bavinck, 2:148.

⁵³ Bavinck, 2:93.

⁵⁴ Bavinck, 2:97.

⁵⁵ Bavinck, 2:140.

3.3.3. *The Attributes of God*

The attributes of God that Bavinck discusses are too many to discuss them all, therefore the attributes that emerge primarily in relation to hell are highlighted.

Immutability

For Bavinck, God's immutability shows a distinction between the Creator and His creatures. God does not change in His being, knowing or wanting, but remains eternally who He is, allowing a human to trust Him⁵⁶. As God does not change, He must have an awareness and knowledge of everything that exists outside of His being, including human freedom, sin, hell and destruction (Proverbs 15:11)⁵⁷. That means that hell is also enabled by God who is immutable, but has already included this in His plans for world history. According to Bavinck, humans' freedom of will with its antecedents and motives, decisions and consequences, is enabled by God by being included in the order of causes⁵⁸. Sin is a deformation in which it is an object and content of God's knowledge, but because of the archetypal nature of God's ideas, sin is not an idea of God. Sin is made subservient to His glory in God's wisdom. Bavinck says this about God's wisdom: "*it creates and governs all things, leading them onward to their destination, which is the glorification of God's name*⁵⁹". Therefore, sin is not an idea of God in His wisdom, but a robbery by evil.

Perfectness

Because God is infinite in His being, He is perfect and does not need to increase or decrease His Being. His perfectness includes a fullness that is not subject to change in space or time⁶⁰. God is not an immobile being, but He is in a relationship with His creatures. Therefore God can be alive, sharing in alternations and participating in human life. When Bavinck describes the image of God in this way, he shows that God is trustworthy in His revelation and His Being. God's metaphysical truth shows that the ontological immanent trinitarian relations have unity in thought and being, and the logical truth of God shows that things are equal to what He thinks. God is truth in the ethical sense because of His economic manifestations, revealed in speech and action, are equal to who He truly is. Therefore, God's descent toward man shows God's trustworthiness and compassion for humans. This is why a human can trust God concerning a fair final judgment and entrust his life to this God. The final

⁵⁶ Bavinck, 2:126.

⁵⁷ Bavinck, 2:159.

⁵⁸ Bavinck, 2:169–70.

⁵⁹ Bavinck, 2:174.

⁶⁰ Bavinck, 2:128.

judgment will therefore also not be subject to cultural shifts or insights of time or place, but God can make an honest, fair and just judgment.

Eternity

God's eternity shows that God is not limited by anything finite and human. "He remains eternal and inhabits eternity, but uses time with a view to manifesting His eternal thoughts and perfections. He makes time subservient to eternity and thus proves Himself to be the King of the ages⁶¹". The eternity of God is more like an eternal present, with no past or future. Eternity is at one with God's being. Therefore, the eternity of God is also not abstract and transcendent over time, but it is present and immanent in every moment. Time or the temporal is subservient to eternity. Time is created with things, without origin in itself. God as the eternal One is the cause of time. Time is a continual becoming that has no existence but must rest in an unchanging Being. God carries time in the whole and every moment. Thus God is in relation to time and He as Eternity comes in time. Bavinck states that in hell there is no eternity, but only time⁶². This seems to suggest that God, as the eternity, is not present in hell. At the same time, hell is also subordinate to God which means that God is above hell and in this way does control it and thus will be present there to some extent. Moreover, Bavinck says that God is present in all things, in hell as much as in heaven⁶³. And God's omnipotence shows that He is a king who rules over all things for all eternity (Ex. 15:18, Ps. 29:10)⁶⁴.

Gods goodness

God's goodness is an attribute that is often disputed by people who do not assume hell as eternal torment. Bavinck says that God's goodness was originally not intended to be relational goodness which has no independent positive content, but receives it from the purpose to which someone or something is to serve. This goodness varies from culture and time. When God's goodness is discussed in relation to hell, this relational goodness is often disputed⁶⁵.

Bavinck opposes this and defines the goodness of God as of absolute value⁶⁶. That means that God is perfect and blessed in Himself as the source and fountain of goodness. God's goodness in Himself is also good for humans to enjoy. God's goodness extends over all His works and endures for all eternity (Ps. 136). God's goodness indicates God's special affection for His people. It is related to God's

⁶¹ Bavinck, 2:134.

⁶² Bavinck, 2:134.

⁶³ Bavinck, 2:139.

⁶⁴ Bavinck, 2:215.

⁶⁵ Such as Bell questioning whether God can be good when He allows people to go to hell . God could then only be good if he does good, and therefore has a 'good' final purpose available for humanity.

⁶⁶ Bavinck, 2:178

covenant (Neh. 1:5) and is ground for forgiveness, grace, and comfort, and is everlasting (Isa. 54:8,10). God's goodness is revealed in Christ and is revealed to believers to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4, 11:22, Gal. 5:22)⁶⁷.

Bavinck describes various forms of God's goodness such as His, mercy, longsuffering, grace and love. Grace is the goodness of God given to humans who deserve evil. This grace is given from God to His people. In the New Testament, grace means favour and affection from God which is given to sinners entirely voluntarily and undeservedly. Instead of death, they obtain undeserved grace from Christ (John 1:14). God's goodness is also manifested in God's love. "It (= love) has its origin in him and also —by way of His creatures—returns to Him"⁶⁸. God's love is manifested in attributes or virtues (such as righteousness and justice, Ps. 11:7, 33:5, 37:28, 45:8) and is given to humans. That means that this love must be grounded in the Trinity since the Trinity is the centre of God's being and expresses itself in names, attributes and virtues. Therefore in the Trinity is full, pure, divine love. Christ is the son of God's love which God used to manifest love to humans. God speaks of general love to the world and all creatures but usually, God's love only reveals in relation to His chosen church. As God's love is identical to God's being, it is independent, eternal and unchanging as God Himself. Therefore, in hell, a 'general' love is visible from God because it belongs to His Being, but in hell the damned do not share in the full divine love of God for His chosen people and in Christ as the Son of love.

God's holiness, justice and righteousness.

Bavinck sees the concept of holiness as an expression of a relationship between God and the world. The word holiness means being cut off or set apart. This refers to persons or things that are set apart from general use and placed in a special relationship to God and His service. This sanctification proceeds from God alone (Exodus 31:13), and a profane person or thing cannot contribute to sanctification. Due to God's holiness, He is also righteous and just. This holiness of God is the principle of punishment. God punished Israel because they broke His covenant and Law and dishonoured His name. When human beings desecrated His covenant He sanctifies Himself by righteousness and justice (Isa. 5:15, Ezek. 28:22). God does not forget His people and continues to grant redemption to Israel because of His holiness. He will cleanse Israel from all iniquities (Ezek. 36:25, 39:7)⁶⁹.

The Old Testament sees the holiness of God primarily through punishment. In the New Testament with Jesus coming as the Holy One of God, holiness takes a different form; as the sanctification in the Holy Spirit of the church. Believers are completely liberated and cleansed from sin and eternally

⁶⁷ Bavinck, 2:180.

⁶⁸ Bavinck, 2:182–84.

⁶⁹ Bavinck, 2:189.

dedicated to God with soul and body (Eph. 1:1 and 4, 2:19, Col. 1:2, 22, 3:12, 1 Cor. 7:14)⁷⁰. Therefore, through Jesus, the human is cleansed and sanctified, but without Jesus, the unholy will be judged to eternal punishment in the Gehenna.

Justice of God is closely related to the holiness of God. God's justice includes that someone is right and has the law on his side, that person is just and good and agrees with the law. Punitive justice sees God as the Judge of the earth who judges humans according to their works (Gen. 18:25)⁷¹. God is bound by His covenant and the law established by Him for His name and honour to bring His people to salvation and to punish the wicked. This is how justice can come to reign and triumph. Justice must be done for the world to be saved⁷². Bavinck argues that because of the nature of sin, there must be forced to maintain: " Law is not law unless it is enforced, if necessary, by coercion and punishment. (...) It is sin that forces the order of justice, in keeping with its nature, to compel respect by means of violence and coercion⁷³".

Justitia Vindicativa is the justice in the punishment of God to the wicked from which God's wrath is usually derived. This justice reveals itself in the wrath of God, also represented as grimness or wrathfulness. It is often compared to a fire, fire, hot, heat, or smoking wrath. Wrath is generated by theocratic sins against the covenant of God. Wrath is terrible and works with terror, grief, punishment, and destruction. Associated with this wrath are hate, revenge and jealousy. God's hate is towards sinful acts and objects. God's revenge appears on the judgment day and God's jealousy corresponds to the fact that God will be all in all and therefore wants to be served by people.

Bonam partem is the justice of God in which He justifies the righteous and exalts them to honour and salvation. The Justitia Vindicativa of God is much less at the forefront of the Bible than the bonam partem of God's justice. The righteousness of God is more often understood as bonam partem in which God as the proper judge judges according to justice⁷⁴. Justice must be understood as righteousness Bavinck states: "justice above all is the way in which the grace and love of God are maintained and made to triumph⁷⁵". Righteousness does not form a contrast with mercy, as wrath does, but is related and synonymous with it.

⁷⁰ Bavinck, 2:189.

⁷¹ Bavinck, 2:190.

⁷² Bavinck, 2:197.

⁷³ Bavinck, 2:197.

⁷⁴ Bavinck, 2:194.

⁷⁵ Bavinck, 2:197.

In the Old Testament, there is a longing for the Messiah as the source of righteousness. Believers are sinners who trust that God will do them justice and crown them with His salvation. This salvation consists of forgiveness of sins, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that God will be fully their God and they will be wholly His righteous people. In the New Testament, Christ brings righteousness but does justice to the unrighteousness. All justice is deeply grounded in the will of God. God's righteousness and holiness, mercy and goodness are visible in heaven and hell⁷⁶.

God's will

God is sovereign. For Bavinck that means God is the Creator, Owner, Possessor and Lord of all, and He alone has absolute control. His will does not strive for anything it desires but decides always, over everything and lies in God Himself, His self-love. That will is the final cause of all things⁷⁷. God remains His own goal. God uses humanity to achieve His goal which is to be glorified and to manifest His perfection. God does not find His purpose in creatures but instead, they find their purpose in Him. God made everything for His own sake, even the wicked for the day of calamity (Proverbs 16:4). God does not rejoice in punishing wicked people or their suffering, but celebrates in the triumph of His virtues⁷⁸. Also, transgressors of God's commandment serve God's counsel and are (unwillingly) instruments of His glory⁷⁹. God wants all humans for Himself as a means for His glorification, but there is a distinction between creatures and the degree of God's affection. God is a Father to all His creatures but especially to His children.

God's will is not random, accidental or uncertain, but His free will is eternally determined and unchanging. The will of God is at one with all His virtues. Therefore, humans can rest in an omnipotent benevolent Father⁸⁰. God does not want sin and punishes it, but still, it is under His control. God wants the salvation of all creatures but still, He takes care of whom He wills and hardened whom He wills (Rom 9:18). Humans fall and sin is included in God's decision and in a sense willed by God, even though the reason is unknown⁸¹. The human fall and sin have an inevitable outcome that there is hell. Therefore, even hell is not something God wants, but it is His decision and is under His control and thus contributes to His purpose.

⁷⁶ Bavinck, 2:351.

⁷⁷ Bavinck, 2:198.

⁷⁸ Bavinck, 2:352.

⁷⁹ Bavinck, 2:215.

⁸⁰ Bavinck, 2:210.

⁸¹ Bavinck, 2:213.

3.4. Conclusion

Finally, I want to reflect (critically) on Bavinck's view to answer subquestion 2: *What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Bavinck?*

View of hell

Bavinck sees hell as eternal torment and makes a distinction between the first death, leading to Sheol and the second death bringing humans to Gehenna or heaven. For Bavinck, death is a breaking of harmony and relationships, because of sin. Death happens to all humans. In the Sheol, there is no more repentance and human beings will no longer be able to praise God. After the first death, there is a resurrection of all humans and a final judgment follows. This judgment judges humans in which the question of faith is decisive for the human's destiny. The unbelievers, the unrighteous end up in Gehenna, hell. Here is a punishment that is eternal and never-ending. There is a distinction in the punishment for humans, by God's grace. Sin is important for Bavinck in his view of hell, and he perceives sin as a violation of the law, rebellion and enmity against God. Moreover, a negation of His right and authority and even of His existence. Bavinck distinguishes sin as finite and infinite. Sin is infinite in the sense that it is committed against the supreme God and therefore demands God's justice as retribution for the sinful nature of sin. Sin is inherent in every human being and it causes death. For Bavinck, this makes the cross extra special because on the cross Jesus broke the power over sin and death for all who believe in Him.

Image of God

For Bavinck, the image of God implicitly reflects why he chooses certain aspects of hell. Bavinck's view of God is grounded in the Trinity as the centre of God's being. The Trinity shows that God and humans are distinct, but a connection is possible through ontological (immanent and economical) and epistemological revelation. Bavinck mainly emphasizes the immanent ontological Trinity instead of the economic manifestations. From this Trinitarian being, God's attributes, names and virtues become apparent. Within this framework, Bavinck discusses the attributes of God.

Because of the simplicity of God, it is not possible to play the characteristics of God against each other. Bavinck therefore treats God's goodness and justice equally and have equal value, as synonyms. Bavinck describes God's goodness which includes His mercy, longsuffering, grace and love. From God's holiness flow his justice and righteousness. It is wrong to attribute the revelation of God's mercy to the elect and His justice to the lost. In heaven and hell, God's justice, mercy and goodness emerge. Eternal life or eternal punishment are tools to achieve the ultimate goal of the glory of God and the

revelation of His attributes. In this God's sovereignty emerges that God wants to establish His glory in this way⁸².

The discussion of hell is mainly about God's attributes. As God is infinite and humans have limited knowledge of God, He is incomprehensible to humans. God reveals Himself to varying extents to mankind, allowing humans to know God. Therefore, the knowledge of God's attributes and virtues also varies from one human being to another. In discussing God's will, it became clear that the end goal is for God's glory and the manifestation of His perfections. God does not find His purpose in creatures but the creatures find their purpose in Him. God made everything for His own sake, even the wicked for the day of disaster (Proverbs 16:4, NIV). When God the wicked punished in hell, He celebrates the triumph of His perfections (Deut. 28:63; Ps. 2:4; Prov. 1:26; Lam. 3:33). This shows that God will be all in all. All humans will (consciously or unconsciously) glorify these virtues. God's perfections mean for Bavinck that heaven does not need hell to reveal God's righteousness, but righteousness, holiness, grace, love, etc. are all fully manifested in His kingdom. The virtues of God are also visible in God and show the glory of God and the manifestation of His perfections. The state of glorification is the real and immediate purpose God has in mind with His creation⁸³.

Bavinck describes eternity to be one with God's being. God is the cause of created time and therefore time is also a servant to God and eternity. According to Bavinck, there is no eternity in hell, only time. What this means for the eternity of hell is unclear, because this may suggest that hell is then temporary, which is contrary to Bavinck's view. At the same time, eternity is something that coexists with God's being and that is not in hell. Therefore, is God not present in hell? Bavinck says that the unrighteous are cast into hell, far away from communion with God. However, at the same time, hell is there for the glorification of God's virtues. It seems that Bavinck, therefore, shows that God is present in a certain way, but that there will be a different dimension of God's presence in hell where some virtues are present and others are not. Moreover, Bavinck says that the creature finds rest only in his Creator. From this reasoning, it can be assumed that this rest is not visible and present in hell, since there the creature is removed from communion with God. God's goodness extends over all His works and lasts for eternity (Ps. 136), which corresponds to Bavinck's saying that something of God's goodness is also visible in hell. To what extent God's blessings are present in the Gehenna is unclear.

⁸² *Calvin and Calvinism*, 'Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) on Infra- and Supralapsarianism', 2008,

⁸³ *Calvin and Calvinism*, 'Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) on Infra- and Supralapsarianism', 2008,

In the next chapter by researching Moltmann's vision, it is useful to consider the extent to which traits have a place in speaking about hell, and to what extent the Trinity determines the being of God in the vision of hell. How Moltmann views sin is also important because Bavinck links it to judgment and justice. It is precisely these aspects of God that are often disputed in relation to God's love.

4. Theological position 2: the universalistic view of hell

This chapter will answer subquestion 3: *What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Moltmann?*

This chapter describes first who Moltmann was, then investigates Moltmann's vision of hell and ends with Moltmann's image of God.

4.1. Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann was born in Hamburg on April 8, 1926. He grew up in a secular family. He wanted to study science and mathematics, but that changed dramatically during his experience in and after the Second war. He was a prisoner after World War II in Nottingham, England where he got the New Testament and Psalms from an American military chaplain. After becoming interested in Hebrew, history ethics, and theological literature, he found God. When he returned to West Germany, he studied theology at the University of Göttingen. In 1952 he married Elisabeth Moltmann-Wedel and moved to Berlin. In 1953 he became pastor of the Evangelical congregation of Bremen-Wasserhorst. In 1957 he completed his Habilitationsschrift in Göttingen under the supervision of Weber, someone who greatly influenced him. In 1958 he left for the Kirchliche Hochschule in Wuppertal. In 1963 he moved to the University of Bonn and in 1967, again at Weber's suggestion, to the University of Tübingen, where he was a professor of systematic theology until he retired as professor emeritus of theology in 1994.

The context in which Moltmann lived influenced his theology. First, he was a prisoner of war who returned to his motherland, Germany, after the Holocaust. In July 1943, his hometown Hamburg was destroyed and while fighting for the city he lost a dear friend. War, tragedy and suffering influenced his theology to speak of hope and suffering. Through this, Moltmann gained a sense of the theological necessity to affirm God's solidarity with human pain, suffering and victimization. "He realized that God suffers for, with and through human suffering¹". Jesus' question; 'My God why have you forsaken me', or in other words, 'God where are You,' is for Moltmann the question that lies at the centre of the contemporary clash between religious faith and secularism. Moltmann did not solve the problem of suffering, but he shows a God who suffer with humans.

Second, Moltmann had been influenced by Barth, but he came to the conviction that his theology regarding eschatology was unsatisfactory. According to Moltmann, Karl Barth "transported eschatology into eternity by positing redemption as a category of the future beyond history and

¹ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 813.

time²". He is much in dialogue with Barth in his work about the nature, role and importance of revelation, eschatology, soteriology and the doctrine of God.

Third, Moltmann does not strictly adhere to any creed or confession even though he did start as a Reformed theologian. Therefore, he may still sometimes question assumptions or beliefs in Reformed theology³. Moltmann preferred variety and spontaneity as part of his methodology and is not bound by particular schemes or structures.

Nevertheless, Moltmann has become a leading figure in theology. His theology is especially characterized and encompassed in the theology of hope⁴. This theology of hope had a foothold in the 1960s through which there was a rapid spread. These times were seen as years of change, new expectations, new freedom and openness, both socially and ecclesiastically⁵.

4.2. Moltmann's vision of hell

Moltmann states that the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of the double exit (heaven and hell) can both be Biblically grounded. Accordingly, he believes that eschatological questions should provide Christological answers⁶. The doctrine of universal salvation is the only outcome the Bible teaches about the very last goal of God's plan of salvation: He will make all things new (Rev. 21:5)⁷. "*The true Christian rationale for the hope of all-atonement is the theology of the cross, and the only realistic consequence of the theology of the cross is the restoration of all things*"⁸. "The doctrine of universal salvation shows a boundless trust in God and God's faithfulness to His creatures and creation. Whatever God wants, He can and will do"⁹.

² Ian S. Markham, ed., *The Student's Companion to the Theologians*, Paperback edition (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 466.

³ Ian S. Markham, ed., 462.

⁴ Ian S. Markham, ed., 470.

⁵ *Hoe zullen wij over God spreken?: de poëtische theologie van het alledaagse van Rubem Alves* (The Netherlands: publisher not identified, 2010), 107.

⁶ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', in *All Shall Be Well': Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2011), 418.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop*, 269.

⁸ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 279. Translation: "Die wahre christliche Begründung der Hoffnung auf Allversöhnung ist die Kreuzestheologie, und die einzig realistische Konsequenz aus der Kreuzestheologie ist die Wiederbringung aller Dinge".

⁹ Moltmann, 272.

Moltmann's dialectic between the cross and resurrection represents the cross God's absence and the resurrection represents God's presence. Jesus' death on the cross is an event that transpired between the Father and the Son¹⁰.

Moltmann describes hell from the perspective that through the cross there is an atonement for all mankind. He does not treat hell as an "object" that he dissects descriptively, but remains superficial in his exegesis regarding the verses in the Bible that deal with hell. Through the universal resurrection, humanity is renewed to its true being and destiny. Moltmann describes two resurrections: the general and universal resurrection. The general resurrection of the dead is the first resurrection of humans that begins by entering into eternal life here on earth with Christ during the Chiliastic age¹¹. This conquering of death by eternal life already begins here with Christ and is only experienced by believers in the spirit of life here and the revival of their bodies¹². The resurrection of the dead is the universal second resurrection of the dead before the final judgment that everyone will undergo. God's justice will be visible in the world's judgment¹³. For Moltmann, the cross and the resurrection are the very locus of Christ's revelation¹⁴.

4.2.1. Hell

Moltmann's vision of hell is Christologically by looking at Christ's destiny in His going to hell and His experiences in hell. "The Christian doctrine of the redemption of all things denies neither damnation nor hell; on the contrary, it assumes that Christ, in his suffering and death, suffered the real and entire hell of God's abandonment for the reconciliation of the world and experienced the real and entire damnation of sin for us. This is the divine reason for the reconciliation of the universe¹⁵". Therefore, Moltmann understands hell not as a place but primarily as an '*Existenzerfahrung*' of the wrath and curse of God upon sin and the wicked being¹⁶.

God suffered in hell to be in the human experience of hell. In Christ, hell and death have been abolished, because through Christ's hell experience, the walls and doors of hell have been opened and hell has been destroyed preliminary. Moltmann uses Balthasar's explanation of hell, where he argues: "The wicked man is abandoned by God and in this respect 'damned'. He experiences the self-chosen

¹⁰ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 814.

¹¹ Moltmann, 220.

¹² Moltmann, 131.

¹³ Moltmann, 220.

¹⁴ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 419.

¹⁵ Moltmann, 279. Translation: „Die christliche Lehre von der Wiederbringung aller Dinge leugnet weder die Verdammnis noch die Hölle, im Gegenteil: sie geht davon aus, daß Christus in seinem Leiden und Sterben die wirkliche und ganze Hölle der Gottverlassenheit für die Versöhnung der Welt erlitten und die wirkliche und ganze Verdammnis der Sünde für uns erfahren hat. Genau darin liegt der göttliche Grund für die Alversöhnung des Alls.“

¹⁶ Moltmann, 281.

hell¹⁷". Christ is in hell a companion and brother of the damned and brings each one out of hell into trinitarian communion with the Father. "This is the solidarity of the dead Christ with the dead humans: In this way, he disturbs the absolute loneliness sought by the sinner; the sinner, who wants to be damned away from God, finds God again in his loneliness, but God in the absolute powerlessness of love, who unpredictably solidarizes in the nihil with the one who damns himself¹⁸". According to Moltmann, the nihil is a withdrawal of God from creation to make room and create a field of nothingness for creation to later replenish, complete and restore. The nihil in which God creates his creation is God-forsakenness and therefore called hell and absolute death. "A hell that begins for Moltmann before creation when God forsakes space so that there may be a world¹⁹". This nothingness partially negates the divine being insofar as God is not yet the creator of the restored and completed creation²⁰. The nihil ends when there is no longer space between humans and God because of the trinitarian indwelling of the divine Persons in a human. Jesus shows giving love in the nihil for death lost, degraded and despised humans.

Moltmann denies the eternity of damnation. *Aionios* is an equivalent of *widely* (Hebrew), and means without fixed end, long time, not eternal as absolutely timeless²¹. This applies to damnation or hell. For Moltmann, only God himself is eternal in an absolute sense. Moreover, salvation and damnation in Matthew 25 are asymmetrical when it speaks of the blessing prepared from the beginning of the world for God's Kingdom. The fire has not been prepared from the beginning of the world for the damned and it therefore does not have to be eternal. Also, Paul and John speak about being lost only in the present tense, and not in the future. In conclusion, Moltmann considers that unbelievers are not lost for all eternity, but for time, a limited time and therefore judgment, damnation and eternal death are eschatological and *aionios*, not eternal.

The fire of hell in Mark 9:49 is a cleansing fire and an educational, teaching punishment. When the damnation takes place is not described. Moltmann describes that the history of God with our lives will continue after death until the completion is reached in which the soul finds rest, comes into its own and becomes happy in God. This process of completion does not take place in the kingdom of God but occurs in a *Lebensraum* between temporal life and eternal life²².

¹⁷ Moltmann, 282. Translation: "Der Gottlose ist von Gott verlassen und in dieser Hinsicht 'verdammt'. Er erfährt die selbstgewählte Hölle".

¹⁸ Moltmann, 282. Translation: "Das ist die Solidarität des toten Christus mit den Toten: Damit stört er die vom Sünder angestrebte absolute Einsamkeit; der Sünder, der von Gott weg verdammt sein will, findet in seiner Einsamkeit Gott wieder, aber Gott in der absoluten Ohnmacht der Liebe, der sich unabsehbar in der Nicht-Zeit mit dem sich verdammenden solidarisiert"

¹⁹ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 437.

²⁰ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 818.

²¹ Moltmann, 269.

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop*. 123.

4.2.2. *Lebensraum*

According to Moltmann humans who die are in communion with God in a *Lebensraum*, in expectation of the coming kingdom and resurrection in the future new world²³. In that interim, there is no time that is like the linear human lifetime from cradle to grave. However, there is a relational time of Christ for creation and humans. God's Spirit is experienced as the source of life. Therefore, the dead people have time in Christ because Christ has time for them there. Christ descended into hell to preach the gospel to the dead (1 Pet. 4:6) so that even the dead humans can come to faith because death is not a boundary for Christ's power. The unbelievers are damned but not lost but neither are they yet ultimately saved. Even in death, the dead still face the antichrist as an enemy²⁴. Because of God's righteousness, a life that has died prematurely has the chance to develop further in the *Lebensraum*²⁵.

4.2.3. *The judgment of God*

The last judgment is a universal revelation of Jesus Christ completing His work of salvation. "His goal is the restoration of all things for the building of the eternal kingdom of God"²⁶. The last judgment will take place after the second universal resurrection of the dead and at the end of the *Lebensraum*. God, in the last judgment, gives a free, creative, loving Word of God based on the principle of grace to set humans free²⁷. Therefore, grace and a judgment that eternally condemns do not go together according to Moltmann when he states: "Jesus can judge but not condemn"²⁸. This judgment establishes a redemptive kingdom of God in which all sin, wickedness, violence, and injustice will be condemned and destroyed. All sinners, evil, murderers, violent, Satan's children, the devil and the fallen angels are freed from mortal corruption and saved by transformation to their truly, created being²⁹, because God is faithful and cannot give up on anyone He created³⁰. Moltmann's hope lies in Christ's death on the cross at Calvary where Jesus has become judged. In the final judgment is Jesus the judge of the living and the dead.

Moltmann argues that representations of "judgment" and "kingdom" have been taken from the political world³¹. The last judgment will be the universalistic maintenance of God's justice for the new

²³ Moltmann, 125.

²⁴ Moltmann, 127.

²⁵ Moltmann, 139–40.

²⁶ Moltmann, 279. Translation: „Sein Ziel ist die Wiederbringung aller dinge für den Aufbau des ewigen Reiches Gottes“.

²⁷ Moltmann, 136–37.

²⁸ Moltmann, 283. Translation: "Jesus kann richten, aber nicht verdammen"

²⁹ Moltmann, 278.

³⁰ Moltmann, 282–84.

³¹ Moltmann, 151.

creation of all things³². Justice is not retributive justice directed primarily at offenders where evil must be repaid. According to Moltmann justice consists of: creative justice, social justice, justice of peace and cosmic justice. Creating justice means that God provides justice to victims of injustice, and this demonstrates God's mercy³³. Justifying justice means that God pronounces justice on offenders and thus comes to His justice before His creatures³⁴. Offenders receive justice so that they can be redeemed along with their victims. Offenders of injustice must die for their crimes and be raised to new life (Born Again). 1 Cor. 3:15 as through fire" is the picture of God's consuming love. Everything that contradicts God is burned so that the person loved by God is saved. The goal of justice is not reward or punishment but creative justice from God. This is not leading to heaven or hell, but it is the great Day of Atonement of God on earth where judgment is a re-creation of all things³⁵.

God's social justice reconciles humans to Himself (since offenders are also often victims and vice versa). The judgment is for all humans because all have sinned through the political or social structures of sin, and therefore no individual reward or punishment follows. Social justice is relational in nature and aims to restore relationships between humans.

God's justice of peace, is aimed at the re-creation of all things. And Moltmann sees it as a cosmic judgment, in which all dislocated attitudes in creation are rectified so that the new creation can stand and rest on the soil of justice. Death is killed and there is then no more power of evil. Creatures are separated from sin so that they can be with God³⁶. Therefore, the sinner has to be transformed to be redeemed from his sin.

4.2.4. *The soul*

Moltmann sees the soul differently from the philosophical Platonic tradition, which indicates that the soul of humans is an essentially immortal substance. Moltmann sees the soul as created, finite, changeable, capable of love and suffering and therefore human and not a god. The Holy Spirit in humans makes man alive (breath of life of God in humans) and brings a human to God after death (Ps. 31:6). The Holy Spirit is immortal and the divine life spirit in humans shows an immortal relationship between God and humans created in God's image. In that way can the mortal, beloved and animated soul be immortal because it is involved as a whole human being in an immortal God³⁷. That involvement is through interaction and dialogue between the Spirit of God and the soul of humans³⁸.

³² Jürgen Moltmann, 271.

³³ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.*, 71.

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.*, 76.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.* 149.

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.* 151.

³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.* 111.

³⁸ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 89–91.

The resurrection power makes humans aware that they are children of God and participate in the Father's divine nature (Rom. 10:9)., God will bring judgment to the unjust and justice to the righteous beyond the limits of death.

4.3.5. Death

Moltmann opposes the idea that death is privatized, but tries to let death be like a passage in which the living are connected to the dead in communion with Christ. Death is therefore a transition to the world of the ancestors³⁹. This death is an attribute of the imperfect, timely creation but runs into a new creation of all things in which death is overcome⁴⁰. God's promise makes death a hopeful event through Jesus' descent into hell. Jesus' death shows that death was sent by God and therefore is the death of God. His death is a God-forsaken death, as judgment, as a curse, as exclusion from the promised life, as rejection and condemnation⁴¹. Jesus' resurrection is a victory over the deadly nature of this death. A victory over forsakenness by God, judgment and a curse. This victory is a promise for all believers through which death can give hope.

The Spirit is a foreshadowing and collateral of the promise of the future universal resurrection of life. The Spirit kills the things of the flesh and gives freedom for the future. This Spirit gives people communion with the suffering of Christ and makes them conformed to His death, carrying people by hope in dying⁴². The resurrection is an entrance into eternal life and makes human life alive (Rom. 8:11)⁴³. The promise of hope strives and propels toward its fulfilment. Therefore the resurrection of Christ strives for life in the spirit and eternal life that fulfils all⁴⁴. Personal eschatology has the hope that everything will be recreated, but that expands in wider circles to a cosmic eschatology that includes animals, creation and all of humanity⁴⁵.

Moltmann emphasizes the importance of love for life on earth. This love gives relevance to the hope that frees humans from the fear of death. Love makes life immortal with soul and body because it is raised in a resurrection⁴⁶.

With the rise of liberal Protestant theology around 1900, the relationship between sin and physical death was challenged. Sin, judgment and punishment were no longer linked to physical death⁴⁷. Death

³⁹ Moltmann, 68.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, 96.

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, 192.

⁴² Jürgen Moltmann, 193.

⁴³ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 86.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 194.

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 87.

⁴⁶ Moltmann, 88.

⁴⁷ Moltmann, 105.

is thus a natural death, the end of life. According to Moltmann are death and sin related in human beings, but there is also sin without death and death without sin. Like the sinned angels (2 Pet. 2:4) who remain immortal. Sin is not only against God but also against others, life or the world (Gen. 6:5-7). God's commandment to humans to be fruitful and multiply has as its logical consequence mortality. For without dying and being born, there is no generational succession⁴⁸. Death by sin in the world has a correlation to natural death in temporal creation. But humans do not die as punishment for Adam's sin or in a personal judgment of God. "We do indeed die a natural death, as everything that is born dies once. But we die in solidarity with the groaning and waiting for the redemption of the community of all living creatures (Rom 8:19) because we wait for the redemption of the body⁴⁹". Moltmann does not try to explain evil or sin but provides a theology of hope for God's final triumph over all evil and suffering⁵⁰.

Theologian Nik Ansell describes Moltmann's annihilation of hell as the present tendency to annihilate ourselves in sin coming to an end⁵¹. Due to Christ dying substitutionally for the sins of all humans, He brings divine reconciliation to everyone. God grants and decides people's salvation. Redemption or reversal takes place at Calvary. A person who believes has experienced and received this reversal to salvation, but not the reversal itself. Redemption gives people faith and redemption is grounded in Jesus' death on Calvary. The universal eschatological redemption is manifested in Christ's resurrection as the victory of death and the beginning of eternal imperishable life⁵². From this moment, divine life begins and thus can be experienced already here on earth.

4.2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can briefly say that for Moltmann hell is present on earth because God withdraws and gives humans space, a nihil. Human beings will feel hell mainly as an existence experience. God has experienced God forsakenness in hell and will be in human's God forsakenness in solidarity with humans. Hell comes to an end when humans' tendencies to self-destruct in sin come to an end and humans have the indwelling of the triune God.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, 109.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, 110. Translation: "Wir sterben tatsächlich einen natürlichen Tod, wie alles, was geboren wird, einmal stirbt. Wir sterben aber in der Solidarität mit der seufzenden und auf Erlösung wartenden Gemeinschaft Aller lebendigen Geschöpfe (Röm8:19), denn wir warten auf des Leibes Erlösung".

⁵⁰ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 819.

⁵¹ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 437.

⁵² Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 123.

4.3. Moltmann's image of God

This section seeks to examine Moltmann's view of God in relation to his view of hell. Moltmann's eschatology is strongly Christological. According to Moltmann Christology is: "The chiliastic hope grounded in the coming, in the surrender to death on the cross and the raising of Christ from the dead⁵³". For Moltmann, Jesus being raised from the dead by God is the core point of Christianity (Rom 10:9)⁵⁴ and the ground for the inclusive hope of Christ's universal future.

This section starts with the Trinity, which is the foundation of Moltmann's image of God, then an eschatological method in which Moltmann describes God's (be)coming which determines his view of hell. 'New life' is part of God's (be)coming and will be given to humans after the resurrection. After that, the God of hope is the image which stamps the theology of hell and from which Moltmann bases his universalistic hope. To end with God's attributes; love and will and His righteousness.

4.3.1. Trinity

Moltmann's image of God is based on the Trinity. This is important to mention because the way Moltmann speak about hell is based on his theology about the Trinity. Moltmann presents the Trinity in such a way that it achieves ecumenical goals. Moltmann seeks to connect with Jewish theology that emphasizes the passion and suffering of God⁵⁵. Moltmann also seeks to promote unity between Eastern and Western Christianity.

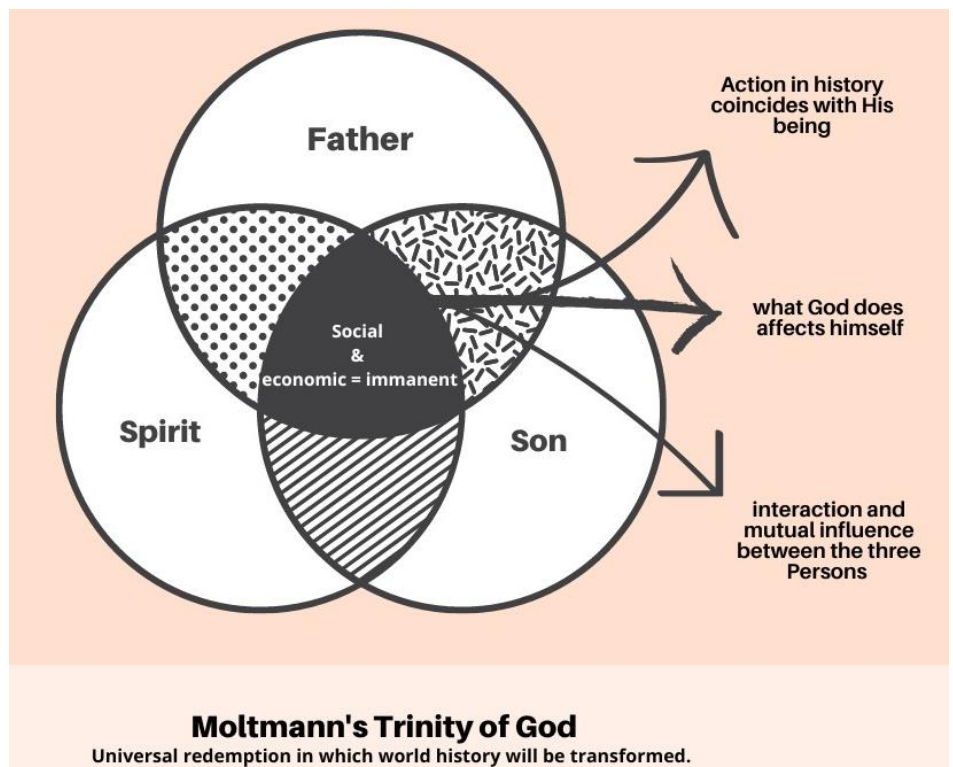


Figure 2 - Moltmann's theology of the Trinity

⁵³ Moltmann, 219. Translation: „Die chiliastische Hoffnung im Kommen, in der Hingabe zum Tod am Kreuz und in der Auferweckung Christi von den Toten begründet“

⁵⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, 150.

⁵⁵ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction* (Theological Students Fellowship, 1987), 97.

The revelation of the triune God describes and proves Himself by Himself⁵⁶. God reveals Himself as sovereign and self-sufficient, where all the glorification of God emanates from God Himself. God's self-glorification consists of self-exaltation. God exists by Himself and is sufficient, complete, perfect and blissful in Himself.

Moltmann emphasizes the three Persons of the divine being and does not want to distinguish between the economic and immanent Trinity. He argues that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. Moltmann sees the doctrine of God also as a social Trinity. The social Trinity shows that the realms of the Father, Son and Spirit are concurrent, not successive kingdoms and in accordance with the economy laid out in the Bible⁵⁷. There is a distinction between the Persons of God but they are equal to each other in social relations. Here he avoids tritheism, for he sees unity in the divine being.

That gives three manifestations. First, one of the elements of the new life is that the analogies of history are a revelation of the trinitarian God Himself and therefore God's actions in history coincide with His being⁵⁸. Because of the trinitarian manifestations in history, people can trust God for the future, including therefore with regard to His goodness to humans with regard to salvation. Second, Moltmann shows that what God does also affects himself. Moltmann emphasizes this perichoresis between creation and God because he believes it is important that we see God as having the capacity to suffer and respond from love. This drastically changes the image of God from a doctrine that sees God as one who cannot suffer and is untouchable, to a revolutionary proposal of suffering as a constitutive principle of God's being⁵⁹. So, God can have solidarity with the God-forsaken and miserable humans⁶⁰. According to Moltmann, Christ is the only answer here that can resolve the questions of Theodicy, because His suffering is the suffering of all God-forsaken in the world. The cross shows God identifying himself, through Christ, with humanity (full of misery, death, guilt, and suffering) and takes up into His divine being the story of human sin and sorrow⁶¹. Christ's suffering unto death is not a sacrificial way for the sin of the world, but a surrender to the end for human beings abandoned by God⁶².

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, 47.

⁵⁷ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 100.

⁵⁸ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 98.

⁵⁹ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 817.

⁶⁰ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 86.

⁶¹ Stephen Williams, 87–88.

⁶² Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop*. 78.

Third, Moltmann wants to show the interaction and mutual influence between the three Persons to make it clear that there is communion between all Persons rather than domination. The Three Persons each have their part in the universal redemption of the transformation of world history, through the world's creation, the Son's incarnation and the transfiguration of the cosmos by the Spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit are eternal and always related in their personal activities. Therefore, Moltmann can also speak of three subjects or centres of activity rather than Persons. The interaction and mutual influence is also manifested in God's love towards humans. The three Persons all have complete self-love but there is also selfless love visible between the three Persons. The essence of God's self-love must become selfless love for others. "In the sense of self-interest, He is enough for Himself, in the sense of selfless love He is not enough for Himself⁶³". Just as the Trinity has self-love and selfless love, God has also included creation in this mutual relationship between the divine Persons, thus coming into communion with God's love. This love by which God is glorified causes all beings to become conformed to divine self-love, to love God and thus find their happiness in Him.

4.3.2. *God's (be)coming*

Moltmann discusses his eschaton vision as the '*Eschatologie des kommen Gottes*', the future and arrival of God, which means God is the future and God's kingdom is coming⁶⁴. This is closely related to Moltmann's view of hell called the nihil - God's forsakenness, hell or death - in which God withdraws from creation to later (be)come to full fulfilment and to complete the creation. This has far-reaching implications for Moltmann's view of God: as moving and coming. For Moltmann, God is a dynamic being which comes to its fullness from a glorious being in the end times⁶⁵. With God coming into the world, comes eternal life and eternal time⁶⁶. Moltmann applies the biblical emphasis on the future to the essence of God. God's name "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14) shows His faithfulness for the present (and history) time. 'I will be who I will be' shows His future Being. It means that God is there and wants to be there in the future. Therefore Moltmann has no difficulty in saying that God is 'still not yet'⁶⁷. Humans will always be in the coming presence of God when the time is fulfilled that God comes again (Mark 1:15)⁶⁸. The human conversion or becoming will be fulfilled with the coming of God (Math 4:17). Christ in His resurrection is already on the way to the Father's kingdom but has not yet fully reached it. In that meantime, there is Christ's reign and He does take the living and the dead along that road to the Kingdom in a Christ-like community fellowship. In that way are Christians carried by

⁶³ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 353.

⁶⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, 39.

⁶⁵ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 81.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, 40.

⁶⁷ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 81.

⁶⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, 42.

Christ, but they are not yet in the coming new world⁶⁹. So, the trinitarian process of new life, giving life, regeneration or resurrection starts with Christ's resurrection and extends until the goal of the new creation of all things is achieved⁷⁰. Moltmann speaks of an Advent expectant time concept in which time transforms from future time (Moltmann means historical time is future time) to eternal time, which will happen at the coming of God's glory⁷¹. Therefore, hell will be over when God's glory will come. And in that interim, the intermediate stage or life on earth, there is an Advent period when humans expect the Kingdom.

4.3.3. *New life*

Moltmann speaks of "Categorie Novum" in which God says that out of the old something new will be made (Isa. 43:18). This is part of the '*Eschatologie des kommen Gottes*' which shows that creation is not already in the eschatological kingdom, but is still on its way to the radical new future, through a restoration of the entire creation now subject to sin and death.

Specifically, this means that there are two elements for Moltmann in which that new making is visible in the Bible and which determines his view of hell and judgment as well. (1) That new life is announced in a judgment over the old. Moltmann's theology about the final judgment is based on the new life that humans receive through Christ dying on the cross. The final judgment of Christ with the recreational judgment on the total cosmos and humanity, has the goal that new life will emerge. (2) The anticipation of the new future that God has promised to create is based on the analogies of history. The promises in the Bible are a universal manifestation in the history of the trinitarian God Himself (Isa. 6:3). From an eschatological perspective, the old is not destroyed but is taken up and made new. That is visible in God's descending into hell, His reign in history in faithfulness and fulfilment of His promise, to be a remembrance of and reliance on His historical reign and deeds and the expectation of His universal reign in which the world and all peoples and things become His universe, His reign and His praise⁷². It becomes also visible in the resurrected Christ who remains the same as before, but in a glorified body (Phil. 3:21)⁷³. For Moltmann, after the resurrection, the body of the human is raised in a body that finds healing and will be rewarded and in completion⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ Moltmann, 125.

⁷⁰ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 819.

⁷¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie*, 43-44.

⁷² Jürgen Moltmann, 196-197.

⁷³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie*, 46.

⁷⁴ Moltmann, 88.

4.3.4. *God of hope*

Moltmann's eschatology of the (be)coming of God and the new life that will begin for all is grounded in the God of hope (Rom 15:13)⁷⁵. Moltmann comes up with the theology of hope during the 1960s which fits well with the reconstruction after the second world war, but also responds to the unrest and revolutions in Western Europe, leading to the proposition that God is dead. His theology of hope is a product of personal, theological reflection, in which he argues that God is not dead but he allows hope to be born⁷⁶.

Moltmann's theology of hope is important for understanding why he comes to universal salvation and the annihilation of hell. This Christian eschatology is closely linked to the promises of God that apply to humanity. Hope is founded in the person and history of Jesus⁷⁷, manifested in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The revelation of God's promises (in history) is the foundation of hope and the promise of the future; that all things will become new⁷⁸. Confirmed, renewed, extended or supplemented promises in history reveals God's identity, His being, in faithfulness and are guarantees for the future. Therefore, humanity cannot know God outside of historical narrative and memory and prophetic expectation⁷⁹.

Due to the nihil of the world and God's withdrawal, there is the not yet realized future of promise in contrast to the present reality for those who want to live now of promise and hope⁸⁰. God promises righteousness, resurrection from the dead, general reign of Jesus, new life, etc. and gives desire that these promises of God be fulfilled so that God will be all in all⁸¹. In Jesus' cross and resurrection, God reveals himself in a universal eschatological perspective as the God of all humans⁸². In hell as an experience of existence, the God of hope is present in bestowing hope in this hopeless situation or experience for the future. Jesus' resurrection from the dead shows the power of God that makes possible a universal fulfilment of the promise⁸³.

4.3.5. *God's love and will*

Moltmann discusses God's love and will as attributes of God that emerges when discussing hell. He distinguishes between God's being and His will to understand why God wanted mankind, otherwise,

⁷⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*.

⁷⁶ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction*, 78.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 13.

⁷⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, 75.

⁷⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, 106.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, 204.

⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, 208.

⁸² Jürgen Moltmann, 128.

⁸³ Jürgen Moltmann, 131.

there will be a dilemma in which God created humans, but does not need humans for His complete self-glorification. God suffices by Himself, His glory and beatitude in His being and this sense does not need humans to be fully God. We also have already seen that the triune God in love (self-love and selfless love) needs humans to share His selfless love. God chooses humans to be His bandmates and gives them existence, due to His overflowing goodness and eternal love in His being. God goes out of Himself and will the existence of another, a non-divine being. "Creation, reconciliation and redemption come from free will, not from God's eternal being, and yet are not divine arbitrariness, for God wills and does what pleases Him and in what He is well pleased. In what God wills, He corresponds to His nature⁸⁴". God can only choose what corresponds to His goodness, because of God's love⁸⁵. God's nature, according to Moltmann, is full of goodness and love, and from there He wants human creation, reconciliation and redemption.

God is love and that is at the very heart of God's being, but also the source and basis of the possibility of the wrath of God. God's wrath is love that is repulsed and wounded and assumes the form of such anger but remains love. Moltmann calls this the overweight of love over wrath. God's wrath becomes visible to humans who leave the law unfulfilled or violate it. Law and promises are incompatible because the law opens the way to death and brings death, but on the other hand, the promise possesses power for the promised life and resurrection. God's love, wounded by human injustice and violence, becomes the love of God which endures pain and God's wrath becomes His compassion⁸⁶. Therefore, in the last judgment, love outweighs God's wrath for a justifying justice. God's love, visible in the grace He bestows, endures for a lifetime (Ps. 30:6), while His wrath is for a moment. "God's wrath is merely temporal and thus temporary and God's love is eternal and therefore final⁸⁷". Love is the attribute, belonging to the core and essence of God, which causes God to will the atonement and thus prevents hell and God's wrath from having an eternal place.

4.3.6. *Righteousness*

Moltmann discusses God's righteousness as attributes of God that emerge when discussing hell. He embedded God's righteousness in the Trinity, by one of the three manifestations; God's actions in history coincide with His being. God's righteousness is praised in the Old Testament for it reminds

⁸⁴ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 352-353. Translation: „Schöpfung, Versöhnung und Erlösung kommen aus dem freien Willen, nicht aus dem ewigen Wesen Gottes, und sind doch keine göttlichen Willkürlichkeiten, denn Gott will und tut das, was ihm gefällt und woran er Wohlgefallen hat. In Dem, was Gott will, entspricht er seinem Wesen“.

⁸⁵ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 425.

⁸⁶ Ansell and MacDonald, 427.

⁸⁷ Ansell and MacDonald, 427.

Israel of God's faithfulness to the promise of the covenant⁸⁸. When Moltmann sees righteousness in the light of the covenant, it means that it is history and therefore human beings can "story" it, therefore human beings can rely on it for the future and expect their salvation from this justice or righteousness⁸⁹. Man can therefore also rely on God's righteousness in hellish experiences, so that God remains faithful to His promises. For Moltmann, God's righteousness is universal because God's righteousness exists due to the works of God, that is all of creation. Moltmann sees God's righteousness as synonymous with existence and the reason for worldly existence. Therefore, without God's righteousness, nothing can exist but everything sinks into nothingness.

Moltmann's eschatology is dialectical in the sense that it recognizes a contradiction between the cross and the resurrection so that the promise of God defies present reality⁹⁰. In the cross and resurrection lies the promise of a new righteousness and the justification of humans (Rom 6:23) which is the ground for a new creation for humans who could not exist under the wrath of God in a legal and ontological sense. This righteousness provides an all-inclusive eschatology that expects a new being for all things, a new reason for existence and a new right to life of all creation without hell.

Moltmann uses Paul's explanation to explain righteousness as God's faithfulness to the community. This is a God-induced event from which new creation and new life emerges and this righteousness is revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17) and visible in faith.

Sin is an unrighteousness, a "being" without reason and without a right by which it cannot exist. As a result, humans rebel against God and die and sink into nothingness. However, the righteousness of God is promised as a commitment to new life. This is in a process where righteousness is promised but also defies present reality. God receives His justice of creation when humans confess their sins and thus come right before God again. The justification of the sinner is the reflection of God's exclusive reign⁹¹.

4.4. Conclusion

Finally, I want to reflect (critically) on Moltmann's view by answering the sub-question 3: *What is the view of hell and what image of God is implied in the theology of Moltmann?*

⁸⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, 185.

⁸⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, 186.

⁹⁰ McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 814.

⁹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, 188.

View of hell

At the creation of the world, God has withdrawn and gave humanity space, called the nihil. For Moltmann this is synonymous with God-forsakenness and therefore hell and absolute death. This hell is already present before creation when God makes the room so that there can be a world. Therefore, Moltmann speaks of hell as an 'Existenzerfahrung'. He bases this on Christ's descent into hell where He experienced God-forsakenness. There is damnation in which humans go to hell, but humans choose hell themselves. The wicked is also being damned by God in the way that there is a space between the wicked and God. Humans experience hell, God forsakenness, and there will be loneliness until it is filled with the indwelling of the divine Persons. Jesus is in solidarity in hell with the damned so that the damned humans can realize how lonely they are without God. God has a particular focus on human transformation through hellfire, as a cleansing fire and an educational teaching punishment. Moltmann denies the eternity of hell.

According to Moltmann, death is a passage to another world in which humans are raised in a new creation. Death is not a punishment for sin. After the first resurrection, a human who dies is not yet in God's fullness but is in a Lebensraum. In that intermediate stage experience humans communion with Christ but wait for the coming kingdom and resurrection of the whole world. There is relational time there with Christ and His creatures. After the second universal resurrection of all humanity, there will be a final judgment that everyone will undergo. Offenders and victims will experience justice in the righteousness that God brings. God's purpose is for justice to be done and all things to be restored to their original purpose in the eternal kingdom of God. The judgment and hell are exhausted and completed through Jesus' death on the cross⁹².

Image of God

Moltmann's image of God is based on the Trinity. He understands the Trinity socially in which there is an interaction and mutual influence between the three divine Persons. The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and this is evident from Moltmann's view that the actions in history coincide with His being. God's being is dynamic in moving and coming, which will be completed when the Kingdom of God is established. On the way to the Kingdom, God's actions influence Himself, and therefore God can also suffer for humanity. Moltmann sees God's essence as love and goodness. From this, God's being is full of (co-)suffering for humanity that suffers. A question in this is if suffering belongs to God's being, God must therefore continue in suffering, but there is likely no place for it in the coming

⁹² McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 818.

kingdom⁹³. God's love has the possibility that God also knows wrath, but that remains grounded in love. For Moltmann, God's righteousness is universal because God's righteousness exists thanks to the works of God, which is all of creation. It seems that God's righteousness does not exist from eternity and therefore does coincide with God's being, or that it has to develop during 'God becoming'.

Moltmann's eschatological methodology of hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus which has the power to reach all. This resurrection is the foundation for his claim that God will make all things new, after the last judgment. With the resurrection, a new life began for Jesus, and this is the ground for the idea of a new life for humans. Moltmann compares it to a rebirth. So it will also be after the final judgment, in which man is transformed to his own originally intended state, and a new life begins. Moltmann argues this because he sees all this in the substantive premise that God of hope is faithful. God's faithfulness is revealed in the history in which God fulfils and confirms His promises.

Moltmann's minimal exegesis on hell has been criticized, causing the concept of hell to remain vague. Moltmann mainly looks at the continuing line in the Bible and then arrives at Revelation where it says that God will make all things new. Even what exactly is damnation remains unclear, because Moltmann sometimes speaks of damnation, as a separation between God and humans; being forsaken of God or choosing to leave God. He sees the damnation of sin as something that God has experienced for us that is temporary, and that cannot have a place on God's new earth. Moltmann uses the words damnation and hell synonymously. Hell is primarily an 'Existenzerfahrung', but then it is not clear whether it is an experience about the damnation of sin or only about a separation, the distance between God and humans abandoned by God or chosen by humans himself. A self-chosen hell seems illogical since a hell experience is generally not desirable. If loneliness in hell is to bring man back to God, the question is why in earthly life loneliness and hell experiences do not accomplish this.

Speaking of the God of hope cannot be separated from Moltmann's context under which this theology emerged. Moltmann was surrounded by so much suffering at the time of World War II, but it was precisely in these circumstances that he experienced God as hope. Therefore, for Moltmann, hope and suffering are also inseparable. He especially also links the suffering of God to the descent into hell of Christ in which Christ in the experience of hell can be in solidarity with humans who experience hell. In Christ's resurrection, there is a hope that reaches beyond the boundaries of hell and has a universal application.

⁹³ McClymond, 830.

5. Conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann

This chapter analyses Bavinck's and Moltmann's visions by answering sub-question 4: *What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann on the relationship between the image of God and speaking about hell?*

This chapter provides a conversation between the two authors looking at a relationship, differences and similarities in their speaking about hell and their image of God.

5.1. The similarities and differences in the image of God

Bavinck and Moltmann approach the image of God from a different perspective with similarities and differences. Figure 3 explains the differences and similarities between the image of God and the view of hell. Each subsection will briefly present the views of both authors and provide a conclusion to answer the sub-question: *What are the similarities and differences in the image of God between the two authors?*

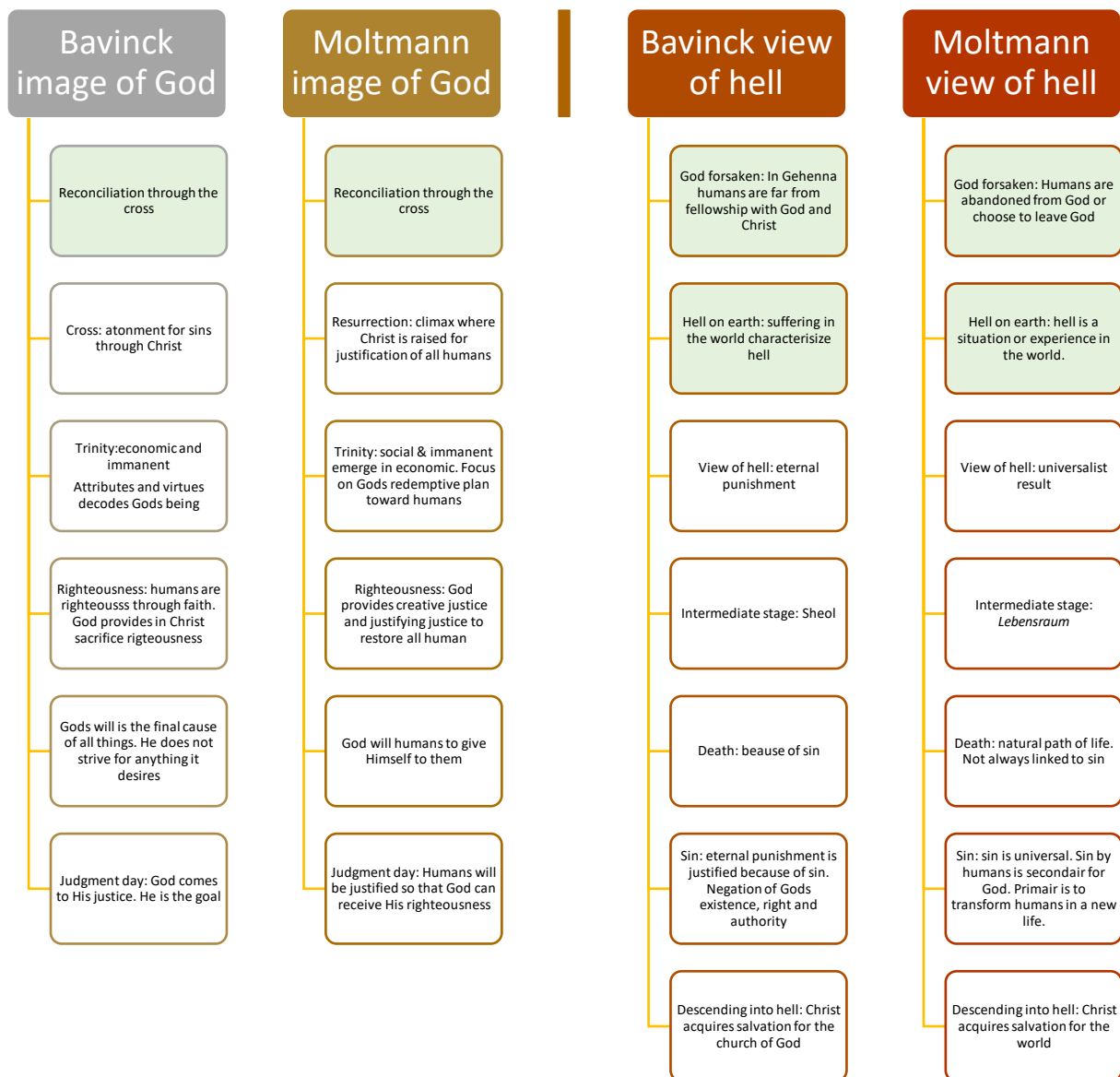


Figure 3 – Differences (White) and similarities (green) in the image of God and view of hell

Similarities between Bavinck's and Moltmann's image of God

Reconciliation through the cross

Bavinck sees the cross as the place where atonement for sin is made possible through the blood of Christ. According to Moltmann, the atonement and the re-creation of the world into an eternal kingdom lie in Christ's death on the cross at Calvary⁹⁴. Both authors see the cross as a decisive action in which reconciliation is made possible.

⁹⁴ Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 278.

Differences between Bavinck's and Moltmann's image of God

Resurrection versus Cross

Bavinck, in his view of hell, mainly emphasizes the cross where atonement took place for human sins through Christ. Therefore the cross is given a prominent place regarding hell because Bavinck emphasizes the need for humans' atonement for sins to escape hell. The resurrection is for Bavinck universal, but the judgment that follows will be distinctive in the outcome where the question of faith in Christ is decisive. Hell is illuminated by Moltmann from the perspective of the cross and the resurrection. On the cross is God's suffering visible which God experienced and can therefore show solidarity with humans in hell. On the cross of Christ took God the sin, evil and rejection on Himself and transformed it into goodness, grace and election⁹⁵. However, for Moltmann, the resurrection is a climax in the history of God's action because it points toward the eschaton, based on Romans 4:25 where Paul says that Christ was raised for our justification. In the resurrection comes a new beginning for Christ and sharing in his resurrection comes a new beginning for all humanity⁹⁶. Both authors see the cross and resurrection as acts of Christ necessary for the atonement of sin and to escape hell. Moltmann places more emphasis on Christ's resurrection through which there is a universal resurrection and reconciliation with heavenly life for all. Bavinck emphasizes the cross where forgiveness of sin is given to individual humans. The resurrection is also universal, but the cross and the forgiveness that comes with it are essential for a heavenly life.

Trinity

Bavinck combines primarily the attributes of God in his view of hell as a way of decoding God's being. Bavinck balances God's attributes in his discussion of hell. Bavinck then places particular emphasis on the immanent Trinity in which he wants to expose God's being. This shows that God is unchanging in His being, which for Bavinck reflects the trustworthiness of God.

For Moltmann, there is a strong relationship between his vision of the coming God in his eschatology and hell. The economic and the immanent merge and hence, God's actions coincide with God's being. As a result, Moltmann views God as dynamic and moving toward a future being. Thus Moltmann sees God primarily as a being in becoming, and therefore changeable. Regarding hell, Moltmann sees primarily the Person of Christ, full of love and co-suffering, in His work of redemption for humans. The different approach to the Trinity shows that Moltmann primarily focuses on God's action toward man and Bavinck primarily decodes who God is in His being. Bavinck prioritises clarifying God's attributes in

⁹⁵ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 421.

⁹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.*, 83–85.

relation to aspects of hell such as eternity, punishment, the judgement. According to Moltmann, it is important in relation to hell to talk about what God does for humans, showing solidarity, taking away sin, etc.

Righteousness

Bavinck and Moltmann see God's righteousness as an important aspect of God through which He will do justice on judgment day. This is described in 2 Peter 3:13: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (NIV). Both authors state that humans provide righteousness to God when they acknowledge God in who He is.

For Bavinck, a human is righteous because of Christ's sacrifice. Human's final goal is a heaven in which righteousness dwells or a hell in which the unrighteous are punished in hell. Here on earth, humans must be justified by faith and if this does not take place on earth, then that righteousness will take place in the last judgment. Also, Bavinck assumes that a human provides righteousness to God when they acknowledge God in who He is. As a result of the Fall, humans by nature are not inclined to do/be righteous and therefore they deserve eternal punishment in hell.

Moltmann explained righteousness in an eschatological way where justice is creative justice and justifying justice to restore all humans⁹⁷. God shows His creative justice that conquers the power of death and hell. God's righteousness is more of a restoration that takes place among perpetrators and victims of injustice. Thus, God creates justice where there is injustice and this is how God provides righteousness. All humanity is raised together for justification. The restoration of humanity and the world will be fulfilled when humans provide righteousness to God. Thus: Moltmann sees righteousness as creative justice for humanity which will make eternal hell unnecessary in contrast to Bavinck who emphasises retributive justice as a condition for reconciliation and restoration and hell is reality without this condition.

God's will

According to Bavinck God will not strive for anything He desires but decides always, over everything and lies within God himself, His self-love. That will is the final cause of all things. God remains His own goal, and from there He also wills creatures. God does not find His purpose in creatures but these find their purpose in Him. In hell, God is also the ultimate goal of contributing to glorifying God's virtues.

Moltmann explicitly distinguishes between God's being and His will. God's being is love and goodness and He wants to give Himself to people. God wants the atonement of all and therefore He annihilates eternal hell.

⁹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, 71.

Judgment day and God's justice

Bavinck and Moltmann agree that God will judge on judgment day. The content of justice is different. Bavinck says that all human beings will be resurrected for the final judgment where God will ask about faith or unbelief. For Bavinck, it is justice to its full extent because God will fully justify Himself on judgment day and humans praise God for all eternity. This is different from Moltmann who sees the judgment day as the universal resurrection day when humans undergo a final judgement and will be saved by transforming into their true created beings. God's justice benefits humans, creation and the world. God does justice to humans to receive back His righteousness through humans. Thus, for Moltmann, God needs humans indirectly to reveal His righteousness. While for Bavinck the main focus is that God comes to His justice, and human beings are minor because God does not need them for His justice.

5.2. The similarities and differences in the view of hell

Similarities between Bavinck's and Moltmann's view of hell

Bavinck and Moltmann approach the view of hell from a different perspective with similarities and differences. Figure 4 explains the differences and similarities between the image of God and the view of hell. Each subsection will briefly present the views of both authors and provide a conclusion to answer the sub-question: *What are the similarities and differences in the view of hell between the two authors?*

Godforsaken

According to Bavinck, in the Gehenna, human beings are separate from fellowship with God and Christ. Moltmann speaks of hell as being abandoned by God or forsaking God. This shows that for both authors there is a (self-chosen) distance between God and human beings in hell.

Hell on earth

Bavinck and Moltmann perceive hell on earth. Bavinck sees the suffering in the world as the characteristic of hell and therefore he cannot deny hell. For Moltmann, hell is a situation or experience.

Differences between Bavinck's and Moltmann's view of hell

View of hell

According to Bavinck, hell is a place where the wicked are sent after judgment. The punishment of eternal destruction is eternal and never-ending. The punishment varies according to the degree of each person's iniquity. Moltmann sees hell primarily on earth in the God-forsakenness and suffering of humanity⁹⁸. So, hell is an 'existenzerfahrung' about the distance, wrath and curse of God because of sin and iniquity. God needs hellfire to cleanse humanity and use educational, teaching punishment. The human who is damned in hell by God is eternal in hell because the damnation and eternal death are eschatological and *aionios*. God uses fire, punishment and His presence of solidarity, to bring damned humans to the understanding that they need God. Therefore, hell is not the final goal but is used to bring humans to their ultimate goal.

Intermediate stage

Bavinck and Moltmann see an intermediate period between the first and second death (Bavinck) or resurrection (Moltmann) as a period where all humans will come, the wicked and righteous people. According to Bavinck, this is a period when no return or change of state is possible and Christ is no longer preached. God is present in Sheol with His Spirit, but for Bavinck, the manner or reason is unknown. There will be nothing there that makes it joyfully because it is a degradation of 'life'. According to Moltmann, there is still "life" in the intermediate stage in the sense of development and growth and humans can be in relational contact with Christ. In this '*Lebensraum*' humans can be reconciled with God⁹⁹.

Death

Bavinck sees death as a breaking of harmony and a cutting of the various life relationships. The cause is sin. Moltmann sees death, grounded in the resurrection and death of Jesus, as a hopeful event where God promises that humans will return to life in general. The imperfect, temporary creation will die and be changed into a new creation of all things in which death is overcome and has no place. The history of God with our life after death will continue until the completion is reached in which the soul finds rest, comes into its full potential and becomes happy¹⁰⁰. For Moltmann, sin does not always have the consequence of death, whereas Bavinck sees death as the consequence of sin.

⁹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, 153.

⁹⁹ Mike Nagtegaal, 'De Praxis van de Christelijke Hoop. De Visies van Joseph Ratzinger En Jürgen Moltmann' (Amsterdam, 2009), 36.

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.*, 123.

Sin

According to Bavinck, sin causes death. Sin or the sinful human state is the reason for judgment and eternal punishment. This is because sin especially affects God in His being. Humans need atonement for this violation of the law, rebellion and enmity against God, negation of His right, authority and existence. For Bavinck, Christ's redemptive work is decisive and necessary for human beings whether they stand right before God.

For Moltmann sin is secondary when he states that God primarily came for wicked people to raise them to a new life and secondary for the sin we do and the forgiveness we need for it¹⁰¹. Moltmann sees sin as unrighteousness, a being without reason and without a right by which it cannot exist. Human beings are not good and right before God because of their sin, but Christ takes sin upon Himself and undergoes the wrath of sin. Therefore, it seems that humans do not necessarily make it right with God but Christ undergoes it, to ensure that it is right for human beings in the end. The transition from sin to salvation takes place in and through the cross, and that seems to occur quite apart from any human response to faith¹⁰². For Moltmann, the annihilation of hell is when the present tendency to annihilate ourselves in sin comes to an end. Thus, Bavinck justifies hell by man's unforgiven sin, while Moltmann sees Christ's descent into hell as Christ's preliminary total annihilation of sin.

Descending into hell

Christ's descent into hell is important for both. For Bavinck, Christ thereby acquires salvation and its benefits such as reconciliation, justification, sanctification and glorification. Bavinck says that this is acquired for the church of God, but has significance for all creation¹⁰³. Moltmann says that these benefits are acquired for all creatures in the resurrection. The descent into hell is for Moltmann primarily that Christ in His suffering and death experienced that real and total hell of God's forsakenness and the damnation of sin in full reality and completeness for the reconciliation of the world. Therefore God can have solidarity with people (who choose to be) in hell.

5.3. The relationship between hell and the image of God

The sub-question: *How do the authors speak of a relationship between hell and the image of God?* will be answered by looking at each author's relationship between the image of God and hell.

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Moltmann, 83.

¹⁰² Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 420.

¹⁰³ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 4:546.

Bavinck

Bavinck sees a relationship between the image of God and hell. Bavinck's view of God is based on the Trinity (ontological) and the epistemological revelation of God. Bavinck concluded that the Father, Son and Spirit are at the root of creation and re-creation¹⁰⁴, and therefore the world starts and ends with God as the ultimate goal. The dogma of hell concerns the three Persons, especially Christ. Christ is the one who broke the power of sin, and through Christ's redemptive work on the cross is salvation possible. God's love becomes visible in Christ and in His blood is the price of saving people from eternal destruction. Faith in and a relationship with Christ determines the final destination of humans¹⁰⁵. God's Being is unchangeable and therefore reliable for humans. Bavinck reveals God's attributes, names and virtues in relation to hell. For Bavinck, divine simplicity is very important, which is why he bases his theology on the concept of the triune God. The distinguishing between the three Persons shows that God's being is manifold but at the same time a unity. In hell, God's being is a unity, but different attributes of God are revealed to humans in varying degrees. God does remain the same God in hell as He is in heaven. According to Bavinck, every attribute, virtue or name reveals God and is equal and in harmony with God's being. When Bavinck talks about hell, he wants to discuss the different attributes of God in such a way that they are not mutually exclusive but can stand side by side. For example, Bavinck sees the Gehenna as the place where God's wrath fully reveals itself and manifests itself in eternal punishment. Bavinck justifies this punishment by the sinful nature of man. Bavinck defends eternal punishment with God's virtues of righteousness, justice, love and goodness. For God's justice is as also present in Gehenna as God's goodness.

Bavinck describes hell as a way to glorify God's virtues, in which God celebrates the triumph of His virtues. Here it becomes clear that, for Bavinck, the main issue is virtues, the attributes through which humans come to know God even in hell. The degree to which humans have enjoyed the revelation of God varies, and consequently so does the knowledge of God. Everything ultimately comes together in the centre; God's triune being in which He is glorified and known through humans.

Moltmann

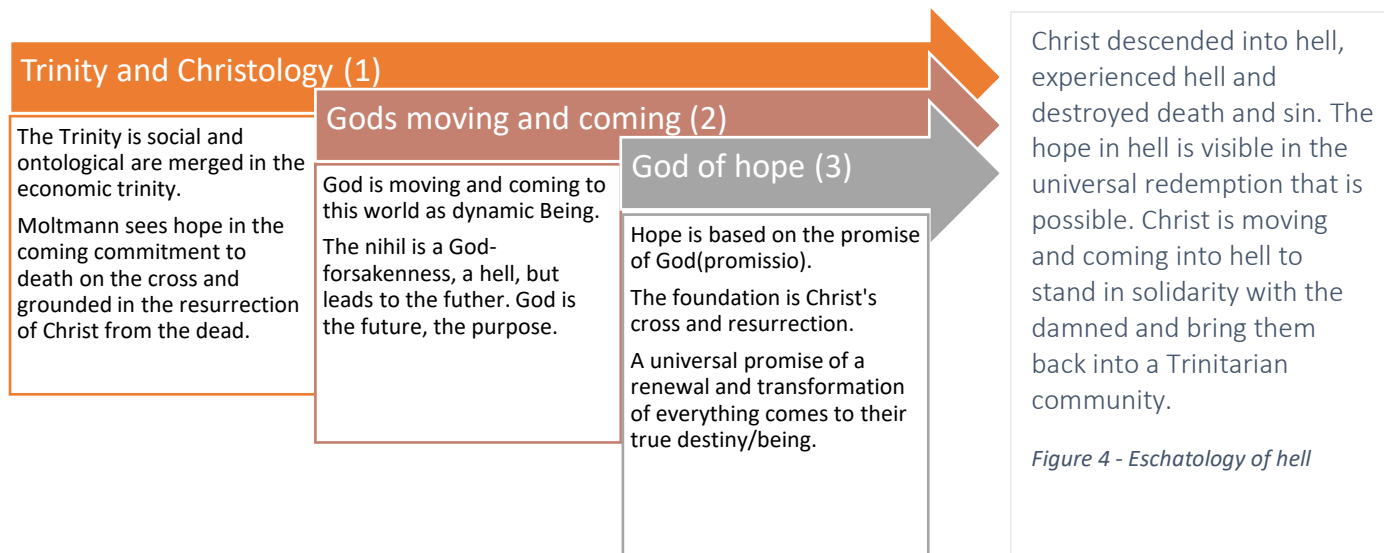
Moltmann bases his eschatology on the eschatological approach to the coming of God.

Figure 3 explains Moltmann's image of God in relation to hell. First, Moltmann's view of the Trinity is social and the economic and ontological Trinity are merged. As a result, Moltmann sees God as relational (social Trinity) in which God in His being is therefore also relationally involved with humans, and His actions affect His being. God being consists of (co-)suffering. Hell can only be explained by

¹⁰⁴ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 1998, 2:229.

¹⁰⁵ Bavinck, 2:681.

looking at Christ's destiny and experience in His descent into hell. That is why Moltmann also approaches the concept of 'existenzerfahrung' for God and humans when he speaks of hell. So in hell as existence, God can fully give Himself and be in solidarity with humans. Christ comes to humans in



hell, seeks them out, offers them restoration and salvation, and has opened hell to make possible the way for reconciliation¹⁰⁶. The coincidence of the ontological and economic Trinity shows that God is visible in His actions in history. The cross and resurrection are the key points of the promise He gives to humanity in which all will be raised to new life.

Secondly, is God moving and coming on the way to His Kingdom. God is a dynamic being, and therefore changeable, interactively and reactively. The 'still not yet' God created the world and withdrew, creating a nihil. This God-abandonment Moltmann calls hell and absolute death. However, God comes back to this world to complete His creative task. God reveals Himself, and His purpose and future are (in) Himself. In that way, God is the future of humans what comes to us. God reveals Himself in history and will do so fully at the end of time.

Third, the theology of hope is the core focus of Moltmann. Hope and suffering are linked together. In the hopeless situation of hell are God's promises (promissio) available that He looks after humans, and is connected to their history and future. The promise lies explicitly in Christ's cross and resurrection and the hope is expressed in the universal promise of a renewal of everything in which the cosmos and humans transform to come to their true destiny/being.

Love and goodness belong to the core and essence of God. This causes God to will the atonement of humanity and thus prevents hell and God's wrath from having an eternal place. God's righteousness is

¹⁰⁶ Piet Ravensbergen, 'Zonder hoop vaart niemand wel!', 2017., 31.

visible in history and therefore grounds to rely on God that He will provide justice and righteousness for all humans on the Great Day of Atonement¹⁰⁷.

Therefore, God's being, based primarily on the economic trinity, is the reason for his eschatological vision of *Das kommen Gottes*, and in this interim, the God of hope is there for humans in their Godforsakenness, or hell.

The relationship between the image of God and the view of hell by Bavinck and Moltmann.

Bavinck and Moltmann differ in their view of hell and their image of God. Next, we analyze the relationship between their view of hell and their image of God.

Ontologically

Bavinck's and Moltmann's image of hell is determined by their view of the Trinitarian being of God. Bavinck's emphasis on a more ontological Trinity and Moltmann's coincidence of the economic and ontological Trinity reflects a difference in their view of hell. As a result, Bavinck sees God as unchanging because God's attributes do not change, but at most highlight a little more in certain aspects. Moltmann sees God as a coming God, and therefore God's attributes or virtues are not fixed but are dynamically defined by God's actions.

Epistemologically

Bavinck emphasizes epistemological knowledge of God by examining His names, attributes, and virtues in the exegesis of texts discussing hell. Bavinck, therefore, has more of a focus on the different attributes of God in relation to hell and approaches them as equal and unity. In hell, God is glorified by the glorifying of His virtues and attributes. For Bavinck, God's essence is thus revealed to humans, so that they can know God. Moltmann, on the other hand, receives the epistemological knowledge mainly through God's action in history and so he discovers an eschatological methodological line in the Bible from which God's essence is known. Moltmann is more focused on what are for him the prominent attributes of God's beings, such as love, suffering and goodness, and looks at what these qualities mean for God's wrath, judgment and hell. Humans come to know God in a process that will not be complete until creation is completed.

¹⁰⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *In het einde ligt het begin. Een kleine leer van de hoop.*, 149.

Atonement

An important difference is visible in the atonement for sin. According to Bavinck, atonement is possible because of Christ's death on the cross and humans must appropriate it personally. Without atonement, hell is reality. Moltmann sees the atonement as an action that comes from Christ, in which between the cross and the resurrection there is a transition for humanity from rejection to election and from sin to grace¹⁰⁸.

Context

Bavinck's view of hell is little influenced by his context. He does enter into dialogue with his context in which mainly different points of view or visions of hell or problematic issues related to hell are discussed that require attention in his time, such as eternal punishment, the sense of right and justice and the question of whether salvation is possible after death. Bavinck approaches his context by approaching the topics mainly exegetically and thus describing hell and the image of God.

Instead, Moltmann's theology is very much shaped by his context, especially by his experiences in the Second World War. Moltmann experienced in suffering the presence of God which brings hope. The cross, which symbolizes suffering, is the place where God was abandoned by God so that humans need never again be abandoned by God. This shapes his whole theology in hope in the midst of suffering as a hopeless situation and his image of a suffering God, so he can say that God is still not yet, but that God is also on the way to the kingdom of God. God as a dynamic being can respond in love and compassion.

5.4. Conclusion

Finally, I want to reflect on the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann by answering sub-question 4: *What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann on the relationship between the image of God and speaking about hell?*

Following these insights, it can be concluded that the image of God determines how hell is viewed. Hell as eternal punishment presents a different view of God than the universalist view of hell. The decisive point in the image of God is how the Trinity is perceived and how epistemological knowledge of God is obtained. Bavinck sees the Trinity in relation to hell as the start to understand God's attributes. Moltmann's focus is primarily on God's action toward humans. Also concerning hell, this action of God becomes visible in his seeking the damned in hell, the solidarity of Christ the final judgment in which justice will be done for victims and offenders.

¹⁰⁸ Ansell and MacDonald, 'The Annihilation of Hell and the Perfection of Freedom.', 421.

The simplicity and equality of the attributes of God are important to Bavinck. Moltmann, on the other hand, sees a dynamic aspect in the properties and prioritizes properties as love and goodness over others.

The context has a decisive role in how the image of God is established and how that affects thinking about hell by Bavinck and, even more, Moltmann. The conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann provides important insights for speaking about hell in the 21st century. Therefore, it is important to consider in the next chapter how the ideas of the discussed authors of the 'Cultural contextual framework: Introduction to the theme' correspond to Bavinck and Moltmann in their image of God and their view of hell.

6. A conversation about the speaking of hell in the 21st century

This chapter is a conversation about the speaking of hell by answering sub-question 5: *What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann for our speaking about hell in the 21st century?*

This chapter will first look at the theological answers of Bavinck and Moltmann in combination with the previously investigated works in sub-question 1, then will look at what the conversation yields for the belief in hell and the view of God in speaking about hell in the 21st century.

6.1. The theological answers of Bavinck and Moltmann and the relation to the popular conceptions and Four views of hell

This section will investigate how the theological answers of Bavinck and Moltmann relate to the popular conceptions and the book *Four views of hell*. A focus will mainly be on the vision of hell as eternal punishment by the authors Chan and Sprinkle (*Bestaat hel?*), Burk (*Four views of hell*) and Galli and Huisman (*God overwint*), and the universalist view of hell by the authors Bell (*Love Wins*) and Parry (*Four views of hell*).

From the conclusion in the contextual cultural framework (2.4) it became clear that several questions needed to be explored.

First, how does sin relate to hell?

Second, what place do the cross and resurrection have in speaking of hell?

Third, what can be said about God's presence in hell?

Fourth, how is the Trinity perceived?

First, the literature from the 21st century discourse will be characterized by answering briefly the above questions, then it will be discussed how Bavinck or Moltmann can contribute to answering the questions.

Hell as eternal punishment

The first answer to the above first question is that Chan and Sprinkle, Burk and Galli and Huisman view sin and evil as justification for the eternal punishment of sinners. Bavinck perceives sin as part of human nature that needs to be redeemed through Christ's sacrifice on the cross (3.2.4).

Secondly, Chan and Sprinkle, Burk and Galli and Huisman emphasize the cross as the means of reconciliation and escape from hell and it reveals God's love, grace and justice. Bavinck also

emphasizes the cross where reconciliation takes place for the church of God but has significance for all creation. Third, they see an absence of God's power in hell. Bavinck does not speak of the absence of God's power but speaks about God who is present in hell (3.3.3. – God's eternity) and shows His attributes such as God's mercy in punishment degrees (3.2.4). Bavinck does say that there is no change of state in the Sheol, which may indicate that God has become powerless in this sense. Fourth, the Trinity is perceived only by Galli and Huisman. They discuss the attributes of God in relation to the three Persons in the divine being and see God as an acting Person, driven by love for humans and comes close to Bavinck in this regard. The Trinity is seen as the decisive point in how the image of God takes shape in Bavinck and Moltmann. It is therefore remarkable that the Trinity is not mentioned in Chan and Sprinkle and Burk, but they mainly start with attributes that describe God's essence. All the authors try to maintain the simplicity of God's attributes when they discuss God's righteousness, mercy, justice and love, visible in hell. However, the authors of 21st century literature differ on the focus on the Trinity in relation to hell and therefore, in speaking about hell, it is important first of all to consider what theology about the Trinity is espoused to then consider the attributes that result from the Trinity and how they can be considered in light of the Trinity.

Universalistic view of hell

The first answer to the above first question is that Parry and Bell view sin as a 'waste' which must be taken away by God and brought into hell (2.2.1) Sin will be eschatologically judged and punished by God and humans will be delivered of all iniquity. Human is thus delivered by God from all this iniquity. This is in line with Moltmann who sees sin primarily as an iniquity from which humans must be freed before it sinks into nothingness. Sin has no place in God's kingdom and will be judged. Bell also sees sin as something that is taken into the Sheol. In the Sheol, humans must *die* and *be cleansed* of their sins to obtain passage into eternal life. Moltmann speaks of a *Lebensraum* in which communion with the Father is possible and in which man can continue to develop. To what extent sin still has a place there and can be done is unclear to Moltmann. The difference between Bell and Moltmann is that according to Moltmann, God instead of throwing sin in hell, will take this sin upon Himself and suffer it, without necessarily making it right with God. Sin is secondary to the primary focus of the restoration and liberation of humanity. Moltmann adds that hell will be destroyed when the current tendency to annihilate ourselves in sin comes to an end (4.3.5). Secondly, Parry and Bell give the sacrifice on the cross and especially the resurrection of Jesus, and therefore of all humanity, a prominent place. In Jesus' resurrection, God liberates all creation. In Jesus' resurrection lies the beginning of God's reconciliation, restoration and renewal of earth and heaven (2.2.1). According to Moltmann, the cross is the heart of salvation. Between the cross and the resurrection, a

transformation takes place in which humanity is elected by grace instead of rejected because of sin. The resurrection is the climax of God's actions toward humans because it brings them to the kingdom of glory. Third, the representative authors of a universalistic view see God's presence in hell in solidarity with the damned. Fourth, Bell did not mention the Trinity but mainly focused on God's love. Parry approaches God as a trinitarian being showing what each Person of the divine being does for humanity. Moltmann's image of God is grounded in the economic, ontological and social Trinity, showing God's actions towards humans. Regarding hell is God emphasised from the economic Trinity, showing what God does for humanity to save them and be solidary with them.

Bell's view of hell differs from Moltmann's view that hell is for humans who need a period of purification to *repent* of their evil ways. This is not addressed by Moltmann but he sees hell primarily as an experience of existence, the God-forsakenness, because of the space between humans and God. Parry shows that sin must be *destroyed* because it cannot coexist with God's purpose in the new world. Parry joins Moltmann in his view of the faithfulness of God who does not let go of the work of His hand, humans as His likeness. In short, there are many differences between the universalist version of sin and the way sin is forgiven or destroyed.

6.2. The relationship between the image of God and the view of hell in our speaking about hell in the 21st century.

This section wants to investigate what the relationship between the image of God and the view of hell means for our speaking about hell in the 21st century.

Trinity

Almost at the end of the research, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the image of God and the view of hell.

However, the Trinity is a decisive factor in Bavinck and Moltmann's view of hell but does not emerge as decisive in popular literature. The question here is whether the authors of the popular conceptions pay little or no attention to it because speaking of hell in the 21st century is mainly about God's attributes. In the background, you see that the properties of God are illuminated by an ontological Trinity or an economic manifestation of the Trinity. Hell as eternal punishment especially emphasizes God's ontological Trinity through attributes that clarify God's being and try to maintain simplicity in it and see all attributes as equal and one unity. God's being is unchangeable. The universalist view of hell

sees the attributes of God primarily as attributes that are related to man and from which man must therefore obtain goodness and/or love. The economic manifestations of the Trinity become visible in history or God's dealings with man, which coincide with His being. So, God is perceived as a dynamic being who is on the way to the coming Kingdom. Therefore, in speaking about hell, it must be clear which image of the Trinity is used.

Attributes

The approach to hell that has been used by the universalist view of hell and hell as eternal punishment is different. Hell being seen as a righteous retribution for sin can clarify this by looking at God's justice and justice in relation to His love and goodness. Therefore, hell as eternal punishment focuses on these attributes. The popular conceptions of Bell and Parry try to negate the attributes of God, such as His justice and righteousness, by contrasting them with the love of God. In contrast to Moltmann who has no focus on God's attributes but mainly looks at God's essence. That is also part because there are no fixed attributes or virtues of God because they are dynamically defined by God's actions. Instead of God's essence which is always full of love and compassion. Therefore God, through His experience of God-forsakenness, will assist humans in the God-forsakenness of hell. In speaking about hell it is important to know if there is simplicity if all of the divine attributes are taken into account, or whether some attributes are prioritized.

Context

The universalists view hell mainly as God-forsakenness and the suffering that is noticeable in this world. Moltmann experienced God's presence precisely in his suffering and became visible in God's solidarity with him to bring hope in his hopeless situation. Moltmann's context shaped his theology. Bavinck responds with exegetical answers to questions or events in his context. Bavinck, a theologian in the reformed tradition, appropriated modernity critically and sought to answer the modern worldview via the doctrine of the Trinity¹⁰⁹. Bavinck lived in a context in which there was a gap between orthodox and liberal theology, which he also experienced noticeably during his study time in Leiden. In the 21st century, there is also a re-emerge of liberal theology which also again raises the discussion about hell. According to A. van Kralingen, the modern and secular context also has resistance to eternal punishment such as immorality, dysfunctionality within Christian theology, a split image of God between love and justice, an outdated view of man in which autonomy and self-

¹⁰⁹ Changjun Choi, 68

actualization have no place, and the disproportionality of punishment¹¹⁰. Therefore, discussing hell in the 21st century cannot be separated from the context in which theology is formed.

Humanity in God's purpose

Hell as eternal torment sees God as the goal of all things. Everything ultimately comes back to Him as the source. In hell, God will also ultimately be the goal of hell. According to Bavinck, hell is related to God's virtues or attributes(3.3.3.). The attributes and virtues of God are glorified even in hell. God does not need humans, but humans are used by God, and everything returns to God in the end.

Moltmann, in line with his eschatology, sees the goal in the restoration of all things (humanity and cosmos) to their original purpose: the eternal kingdom of God, and then become God all in all.

Therefore, according to Moltmann, humanity is actively engaged in the purpose of the world. Speaking of hell cannot be separated from a human's place in God's purpose.

Methodology

The authors who see hell as eternal punishment defend their view primarily from a biblical-theological exegesis in which they look primarily at the exegesis of Bible texts that speak of Sheol, Gehenna or hell. They give much attention to exegesis, especially visible in Burk's case, and do not want to deviate from it or make concessions. This should not be seen as rigidity but is partly explained from their view of God. God reveals Himself in nature and His word and that is why the authors take the exegesis seriously. The image of God does influence exegesis and the use of Scripture. God who does not change, is and remains the same through the ages and is not subject to changing context, but God reveals himself to humans in different degrees and ways. The authors' exegesis primarily ends up with God as the purpose of all things. However, the universalist view on hell shows that the methodological line is important in explaining the eschaton. In it, they take the entire Bible as their basic point of view and try to discover a line in God's purpose with all things. This is in line with the universalists' view of God which in line with Moltmann, sees God primarily as an ongoing process in which change and dynamism are observable. This dynamic movement is also observable in their methodology by detecting in the Bible the common, dynamic thread regarding hell and the eschaton. The different methodologies are deeply rooted in the image of God. In speaking about hell it is important to look at the methodology and what image of God is being used.

¹¹⁰ Arjen Kralingen, van, 'De Hel Vandaag', Weetwatjegelooft.NI, n.d., <https://soundcloud.com/wwjg/de-hel-1-de-hel-vandaag-arjen>.

6.3. Conclusion

At the end of this sub-question in which there was a conversation about the speaking of hell, it is clear that the 21st century can learn from Bavinck and Moltmann for their speaking about hell. The sub-question for this fifth chapter is: *What can we learn from the conversation between Bavinck and Moltmann for our speaking about hell in the 21st century?*

The image of God is the most determining factor in how humans view the dogma of hell. Various aspects emerge from the image of God. Which theology of the Trinity is attributed to God is a decisive point in the discussion of hell. The attributes of God flowing from it show which theology is predominantly adhered to. The degree to which the unity, simplicity, and equality of the divine properties are perceived is important in the discussion of the properties related to hell. The context influences the theology of hell, which is visible in Moltmann. God's purpose for the world and man's role in it determines how God wants or needs humans. The methodology is grounded in the image of God and reflects that an approach to hell cannot be separated from the image of God.

Summary

This study aimed to describe Bavinck and Moltmann's different views of hell and in relation to the image of God. The comparative goal was to see how the different ideas about hell are related to the theologians' image of God and what this has to say about speaking about hell in the 21st century.

First, we have seen from the cultural contextual framework that there is a clear connection between the image of God and hell. The different authors then mainly name the attributes of God that seem to be consistent or inconsistent with God. Cultural expression in the 21st century also shows this image of God. There is a decrease in the number of people who believe in hell as eternal torment, especially also because the image of God does not seem to match the vision of hell and an increase in the universalist view.

Second, Bavinck view of hell as eternal torment and the universalist view of Moltmann show important insights. Bavinck, who sees hell as final eternal punishment, bases his view of hell primarily on the attributes of God such as righteousness, holiness, goodness and mercy, and maintains in them the simplicity of God. The attributes of God reveal His immanent trinitarian being. Moltmann, defending the universalist version of hell, sees here the methodological line from creation up to re-creation. In this, God and humans are together on the way to the Kingdom of God. Hell is God-forsakenness that takes place in the human experience and is a human's self-chosen state. In this, God wants to be in solidarity with humans and is therefore also present in hell. The economic Trinity and immanent Trinity are not distinct but coincide. This is visible in Moltmann's emphasis on God's action toward humans (especially also in history) which coincides with His being.

Finally, speaking of hell cannot be separated from the context in which Bavinck and Moltmann live. Moltmann's theology was shaped primarily by his experiences of suffering in the Second World War and the hope that God's presence brought. Bavinck's context is different and is instead a more theological conflict between orthodox and liberal Christians in which he seeks to do justice to God's word and God through thorough exegesis. Both contexts shape the theology of hell, but the God-image behind it is distinct and does affect the vision of hell.

Thus, the (Trinitarian) image of God has given much insight into hell. In this research, the main focus is on the image of God and hell. At the same time, this research is one-sided because the image of humans is inextricably linked to it. Suggestions for further research can be, to what extent the freedom and responsibility of humans are important and how humans as God's image take shape in hell. Also from the context, there was a contrast between the image of God and the vision of hell between liberal and orthodox Christians. It would be interesting to know whether this distinction also took shape in Origen and Augustine in early history or whether a shift is noticeable.

2 Peter 3:13 and 18 describe the new earth on which righteousness will dwell. Both authors look forward to it in their way. But then all the glory will be to God forever.

But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3: 13,18

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