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**GORDON J. SPYKMAN'S "NEW PARADIGM":
A PROPOSAL FOR RENEWED THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN THE REFORMED TRADITION**

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Chapter 1

Gordon J. Spykman's Life and Work: In Quest of a New Paradigm

This project aims to analyze the theological contributions of Gordon J. Spykman and assess their significance for contemporary theological discourse. The focal point of Spykman's renewal efforts is his threefold doctrine of the Word of God centered within a three-factor theological method. The two-part research question takes the following form: How does Spykman's new paradigm reconstruct the insights of Reformed thinkers into a model that addresses contemporary questions regarding theological methodology, the nature of divine revelation, and critical points of doctrine? Does the model contribute to ongoing development of methodology and revelation from a Reformed perspective? Throughout the survey of (1) Spykman's life, work, and motivating questions and (2) the key points of his three-factor method and doctrine of the threefold Word, specific issues related to the research question are denoted by bold-face type and summarized in the chapter's conclusion.

Part I: Gordon J. Spykman: Theological Contributions and Motivating Questions

I.1. Gordon J. Spykman (1926-1993): Twentieth-Century Theologian

Who was Gordon Spykman? This section outlines his academic training and vocation, his role as churchman, and the questions that gave distinct shape to the lines of theological inquiry he pursued.

I.1.1. Academic Preparation and Vocation

Almost eighty years after the first Dutch immigrants pioneered in Holland, Michigan (1847), under the leadership of Rev. Albertus C. van Raalte (1811-1876), Gordon J. Spykman was born into that established community.¹ Throughout his career as a theologian, Spykman contributed significantly to the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the denomination formed through those original settlers' efforts. Spykman's driving commitment can be summarized using the catchphrase he attributes to Henry Zylstra: "Nothing matters but the kingdom of God; but because of the kingdom, everything matters!"²

¹ Spykman produced a study recounting Albertus C. van Raalte's leadership titled *Pioneer Preacher: Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte; A Study of His Sermon Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Heritage Hall Publications, Calvin College and Seminary Library, 1976).

² Gordon J. Spykman, "Opening a Window on God's World," n.d., p. 1, Folder 2, Box 5, Series 3, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

Spykman completed an A.B. degree at Calvin College (now Calvin University) in 1949 and a Th.B. at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1952. The years spent at the CRC flagship institutions in the middle of the twentieth century exposed Spykman to the theological challenges present within the denomination itself, as well as those arising from the consequences of nineteenth-century liberalism. In this context Spykman found himself wrestling particularly with the relationship between philosophy and theology. According to his professors, philosophy and theology occupied different realms: philosophy dealt with matters of general revelation, and theology dealt with matters of special revelation.³ These answers, which he perceived as the consequence of dualistic, or two-factor, theologizing, left him with a deep sense of dissatisfaction. In response, he began to conceive of theology in terms of an entirely “new paradigm,” one that would yield a “deeper and fuller unifying perspective on life as a whole.”⁴

The systematic theology of Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), who held a long tenure at Calvin Theological Seminary (1906-1944), had proven to be direction-setting for Reformed dogmatics in North America. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, his *Systematic Theology*⁵ served as the classic work in Reformed theology for students at Reformed institutions. Because Berkhof worked within the prevailing two-factor model, Spykman referred to his dogmatics as “the seasoned end-product of Protestant scholastic thought,” and remarked that in the post-World War II years some were questioning the relevance of “the strong rationalist streak running through this accepted model.”⁶ Though Spykman does not offer a thorough argument regarding the disadvantages of the scholastic method, his evaluation of Berkhof’s work implies that the scholastic method depends more on rationalism than on biblical categories to shape its questions and answers. Spykman did not reject the role of rational thinking in dogmatics, but he did strive to free dogmatics from questions motivated by a rationalistic impulse to reach beyond divine revelation on matters to which Scripture speaks only sparingly. He cited “supra- and infralapsarianism, innate and acquired knowledge of God, creationism and traducianism on the origin of the soul,” and “the dualist idea of body and soul”⁷ as questions that characterize scholastic theology. What is the alternative? Faithfulness to John Calvin’s (1509-1564) hermeneutic of saying no more and no less than Scripture, which demands that one’s theological

³ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 13-15.

⁴ Spykman, *Reformational Theology* [hereafter *RT*], 15.

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932).

⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, “Musings on a Ninetieth Birthday,” *Kabats, het faculteitsblad van de Theologische Faculteit aan de Vrije Universiteit*, 6/5 (June 1993): 36.

⁷ Spykman, “Musings,” 36-37.

method be shaped by God's revelation.⁸ Whether or not Spykman was correct to lay these charges at the feet of the scholastic method (Reformed scholar Richard Muller has offered significant evidence to the contrary⁹), he understood his concern for greater faithfulness to Scripture in relation to theological method as a valid outworking of his Reformed heritage.

As Spykman chronicled in "Musings on a Ninetieth Birthday," a visit from Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996) to Calvin Theological Seminary sometime in the "early fifties" marked a decisive turning point for Spykman and others.¹⁰ The distinctive marks of Berkouwer's theological method captured the theological imagination of those who sensed that Reformed theology needed renewal in order to speak to contemporary issues. Convinced that "classic dogmatics gave profound answers to questions that no one asks anymore,"¹¹ Spykman called Berkouwer's "updating of the Calvin-Bavinck tradition . . . an option as vibrant and contemporary as that of Barthian neo-orthodoxy."¹² Berkouwer's "more indigenously Reformed ways of doing theology" motivated Spykman to pursue advanced studies at the Free University in Amsterdam under Berkouwer's tutelage, where he completed a Th.D. in 1955.¹³

Berkouwer reached across theological lines to engage positively with Roman Catholicism, and this likely provides some explanation for Spykman's dissertation topic: *Attrition and Contrition at the Council of Trent*.¹⁴ Spykman spoke of Berkouwer as possessing a "Bavinckian irenics," referring to the legacy of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921).¹⁵ Spykman continued this legacy of theological dialogue through engagement with the ideas of Karl Barth (1886-1968) and a range of theologians referenced in *Reformational Theology*. He recognized that the theological ideas of those who do not subscribe fully to the Reformed confessions may still contribute something to the renewal of Reformed theology.

Spykman's education in Dutch Reformed circles brought him into contact with Reformational philosophy, which was also known as neo-Calvinist philosophy because it built upon the neo-Calvinist

⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 6.

⁹ Richard A. Muller, *Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995). Muller has produced a series of works that attempt to clarify the relationship between Calvin and his Reformed scholastic successors, including the 4-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Spykman, "Musings on a Ninetieth Birthday," 36.

¹¹ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), xvii, quoted in Spykman, *RT*, 3.

¹² Spykman, "Musings," 37.

¹³ Spykman, "Musings," 37.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Spykman, *Attrition and Contrition at the Council of Trent* (Amsterdam: The Free University, 1955). Also published in English by Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955.

¹⁵ Spykman, "Musings," 37.

theology of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck. Tracing its roots to Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876),¹⁶ Reformational philosophy came to mature development and expression in the works of Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Spykman became convinced that to theologize without an explicit prolegomenon was an “impossible possibility” and that “the best prolegomena to Christian theology, more specifically to Reformed dogmatics, is a Christian philosophy.”¹⁸ On the North American front, H. Evan Runner (1916-2002) did much to popularize neo-Calvinist philosophy among students at Calvin College during his tenure as professor of philosophy (1951-1981).¹⁹ Runner provided intellectual and spiritual leadership to the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS) in its early years, “which was the organization that established the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto in 1967.”²⁰ Though Spykman gave no explicit indication of Runner’s influence upon him, he shared Runner’s core conviction: “Life is religion.”²¹ During the course of his career, Spykman maintained involvement with the AACS and incorporated neo-Calvinist philosophical principles within his own project.

1.1.2. Christian Reformed Churchman

Upon his return to North America from the Free University in 1955, Spykman pastored a Christian Reformed Church in Blenheim, Ontario (1955-1959) and then became Professor of Religion and Theology at Calvin College, where he taught for over three decades (1959-1991). Though Spykman served full time in the pastorate for only four years, his lifelong love for the church manifested itself in his theological reflection and in his ongoing service to the CRC at the synodical level. He contributed to the work of fifteen denominational committees, including the committee on “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority” (R44) (1972), the Committee on Creation and Science (1991), and the Education Committee (c. 1980). Spykman’s work on these topics resulted in multiple articles and books, many of

¹⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, “Roots of a Calvinist Tradition,” n.d., Part IV, pp. 1-7, Folder 15, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4 for further discussion of the interplay between Reformational philosophy and Spykman’s theology.

¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 7, 13.

¹⁹ Bernard Zylstra, “H. Evan Runner: An Assessment of His Mission,” preface to *Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*, ed. by Henry Vander Goot (St. Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1981), 12.

²⁰ Albert Wolters, “The Importance of H. Evan Runner,” *Comment*, January 1, 2003, accessed October 10, 2015, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/190/the-importance-of-h-evan-runner/>.

²¹ The significance of this phrase for Runner is indicated by the book title *Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*. In my conversation with Professor John Bolt at Calvin Theological Seminary, August 9, 2015, he confirmed that Spykman also was committed to this idea.

them written with a lay audience in mind. He also wrote over one hundred short articles for denominational publications. For Spykman, theological reflection had at least one clear goal: to be serviceable to the church.²² Of particular interest to him was theological training for the church's youth, and he wrote two books aimed at cultivating theological and catechetical literacy among young people.²³ He was a theologian who sought to illuminate the meaning of theology for every aspect of life, especially for Christian scholarship. In Gordon Spykman, the Reformed tradition has a faithful example of a twentieth-century life, rooted in the Calvinist principles of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, and committed to the ongoing renewal of that tradition.

1.2. Reformational Theology: A Legacy of Renewal in the Reformed Tradition

Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics (RT) constitutes Spykman's main contribution to the field of Reformed dogmatics, and thus the main reference point for this project. Preceding Spykman's death by one year, *RT*'s publication (1992) is the culmination of his many years of theological reflection. Spykman's importance for Reformed theology consists at least partly in the fact that *RT* represents the first attempt on American soil to produce a thoroughgoing dogmatics from a neo-Calvinist perspective.²⁴ The characteristics considered here provide structure for the renewal project embodied in *Reformational Theology*: (1) commitment to the Reformed heritage, (2) influence of neo-Calvinistic philosophy, and (3) interaction with contemporary theologians.

1.2.1 Commitment to the Reformed Heritage

In providing the rationale for his project, Spykman pays homage to his theological forebears. Convinced that theologies always arise out of a particular tradition, he acknowledges his theological heritage both to demonstrate his loyalty to it and to highlight the points he considers ripe for renewal.²⁵

²² Spykman, *RT*, 96; Gordon J. Spykman, "Theology: Queen or Servant," in *Christian Education in the African Context: Proceedings of the African Regional Conference of the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education, 4-9 March 1991, Harare, Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids: IAPCHE and Potchefstroom: PU for CHE, 1992), 20-21, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/spykman.htm>.

²³ Gordon J. Spykman and J. Marion Snapper, *Teach Me Thy Way* (Grand Rapids: Committee on Education, Christian Reformed Church, 1965) and Gordon J. Spykman, *Never on Your Own: A Course of Study on the Heidelberg Catechism and Compendium* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1969).

²⁴ Guenther Haas, review of *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, by Gordon J. Spykman, *Calvin Theological Journal* 30, no. 2 (N 1995): 501, accessed April 24, 2014, ATLA.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 4-5.

At the same time, Spykman does not intend to allow his tradition to act as the “norm for doing theology.” He maintains a commitment to the Word of God as the norm for all of life, including the task of theologizing.²⁶ His writings make it obvious that his primary concern is to avoid this pitfall by adhering to the hermeneutic principle of *sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone as the norm for theologizing – has been a distinctive of the Reformed Calvinist tradition from its beginnings with Calvin, and to this distinctive Spykman seeks to be faithful.

The impact of the Reformed tradition upon Spykman’s thought processes was mediated through many of its representatives, several of whom are mentioned in the following pages. Two of those – Calvin and Bavinck – will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters because of the magnitude of their work and influence.

Spykman perceives his own theological contributions as a continuation of the Reformed Calvinist tradition begun by John Calvin. He commends Calvin for reclaiming the insights of Augustine (354-430), the Apostle Paul, and Scripture and for giving expression to these insights in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.²⁷ What Spykman deems most significant about Calvin is his biblically-oriented theological method, which diverged from the method of medieval Roman Catholic theology. He describes Calvin’s “commitment” as follows: “Methodologically, biblical revelation sets the parameters for theological reflection.”²⁸ Spykman’s work in *RT* signifies his intention to allow the categories of Scripture to define theological reflection in a manner consistent with *sola Scriptura*.

Spykman’s work also relies on the principles established by a lesser-known figure of the Reformation tradition, Johannes Althusius (1557-1638). Though the German Althusius wrote about political ideas rather than theology proper, he did so from a biblical perspective, having been influenced by Calvin’s theology. Spykman does not mention Althusius in *RT*, but in several other writings he argues for the importance of Althusius’ pluralist social theory for a Reformational worldview.²⁹ Althusius’ work gave preliminary articulation to the principles of “sphere sovereignty” and “sphere universality,” which

²⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, “Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics,” 1981, p. 4, Folder 7, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI. See also *RT*, 5.

²⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 6.

²⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 6.

²⁹ Rockne McCarthy, Donald Oppewal, Walfred Peterson, Gordon J. Spykman, coordinator, *Society, State, and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Spykman, “Roots of a Calvinist Tradition”; Gordon J. Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David Holwerda and John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 163-208; Gordon J. Spykman, “The Principled Pluralist Position,” in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989), 78-99; Gordon J. Spykman, “Pluralism: Our Last Best Hope?” *Christian Scholars Review* X, no. 2 (1981): 99-115.

became integral to the Reformational outlook in nineteenth and twentieth century Dutch Reformed theology and philosophy. Considering these principles to be a faithful opening up of latent affirmations contained in Calvin's work, Spykman incorporates them into his Reformational theology. Most important for Spykman's dogmatics is Althusius' recognition of "the significance of the Biblical doctrine of creation as the basis for a renewed understanding of God's good order for societal life."³⁰ To the extent that the biblical doctrine of creation shapes the structure of Spykman's dogmatics, he counts himself an heir to Althusius.

From Calvin, Spykman traces the line of continuity in the development of a distinctively Reformed theology to Kuyper and Bavinck in the Netherlands in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.³¹ The scholasticism of the Counter-Reformation and the emphasis on human autonomy issuing from the French Revolution resulted in a loss of genuine Reformational thinking.³² Kuyper grasped the necessity of thinking biblically about all of life, and his public work, building upon that of Groen van Prinsterer, became the fountainhead for a "neo-Calvinist revival" in the Netherlands.³³ Despite the lack of evidence that "either Groen or Kuyper were acquainted with the legacy left behind by Althusius,"³⁴ the social vision articulated by Kuyper has similarities with that of Althusius.

Appealing to the Biblical doctrine of creation order, Kuyper, in reliance upon the pioneering work of Groen van Prinsterer, developed the complementary idea of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality as the normative structuring principle for a Christian social philosophy. God's creation Word is the law for ordering our life-relationships in all spheres of human endeavor.³⁵

Kuyper's development of these concepts and his focus on God's creation Word as that which normatively structures life in God's world provided the framework for what has come to be known as the neo-Calvinist worldview. Spykman's project is an attempt to be faithful to these strands of thought, which he believes reflect Calvin's thought and the Scriptures.

³⁰ Spykman et al., *Society, State, and Schools*, 44.

³¹ There was a long line of faithful theologians in the Netherlands between Calvin's time and that of Kuyper and Bavinck. John Bolt, Editor's Introduction to *Reformed Dogmatics*, by Herman Bavinck, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 11, points out, "Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, first published one hundred years ago, represents the concluding high point of some four centuries of remarkably productive Dutch Reformed theological reflection." However, Spykman, in his survey, wanted to draw attention to certain distinctives of Calvin's thought developed by Kuyper and Bavinck.

³² Spykman, *RT*, 23-27.

³³ Spykman, *RT*, 6.

³⁴ Spykman, "Roots of a Calvinist Tradition," Part III, 7.

³⁵ Spykman, "Roots of a Calvinist Tradition," Part V, 4-5.

Herman Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics* set forth a masterful interpretation of Calvinist thought for the twentieth century. For Spykman, the critical point about Bavinck consists in his biblical understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption. Though Bavinck employed traditional theological language (e.g. general and special revelation) in his discussions about nature and grace, he nevertheless “defined[d] and handle[d] them . . . in an untraditional, more reformatioal way.”³⁶ As Jan Veenhof has demonstrated, Bavinck stressed that “[g]race is opposed not to nature, only to sin.”³⁷ Spykman utilizes the theological principles related to creation and redemption and updates the classic theological language and categories used in discussions related to those principles. In his perspective, to escape the dualistic thought forms lying behind the nature/grace debates, Reformed theology must adopt language and categories that are truer to Scripture.³⁸

Spykman attributes his emphasis on Christian philosophy as the proper prolegomena for a Reformed dogmatics to hints of such a philosophical perspective in the works of Kuyper and Bavinck. Regarding their later years, Spykman comments, “Both Bavinck and Kuyper, it appears, were in the process of backing into a recognition of the prior importance of Christian philosophical reflection for doing Reformed theology.”³⁹ Spykman laments the fact that Reformed theology in general has “failed to pick up on Kuyper’s challenge or to follow through on Bavinck’s promising lead,” resulting in tendencies to claim either too much or too little for the discipline of dogmatics.⁴⁰ Setting his own project within the clear bounds of a Christian philosophy, he hopes to develop the Reformed Calvinist tradition in ways indicated by Kuyper and Bavinck.

Despite Spykman’s negative assessment of Louis Berkhof’s affinities with the Reformed scholastic tradition, he honors Berkhof as a theologian firmly rooted in the Calvinistic tradition. With “a deep sense of respect for his [Berkhof’s] theology,” Spykman recognizes Berkhof’s “formative influence on two or three generations of pastors and students, and through them on thousands of church people.”⁴¹ He quotes repeatedly from Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* throughout *RT*. Yet he writes, “For roughly half a century now, we have been walking in the shadow of his style of theologizing.”⁴² This

³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 69.

³⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2006), 577; Jan Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck*, trans. Albert M. Wolters (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2006), 13.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 90-92.

³⁹ Gordon J. Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena to Reformed Dogmatics,” n.d., p. 1, Folder 4, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁴⁰ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 2-3.

⁴¹ Spykman, “Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics,” 1.

⁴² Spykman, “Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics,” 1.

statement contains an implicit criticism of Berkhof's structure and method. Inasmuch as Berkhof's work is characterized by a "dualist mind-set,"⁴³ it fails to "redemptively update" theology in response to the need for theology itself to "constantly undergo reformation."⁴⁴ Spykman argues that new directions are necessary for the ongoing reformation of theology's task: by incorporating insights from the field of biblical theology and drawing upon a genuinely Christian philosophy, systematic theology can interact more directly with "teaching and preaching" and "the life of the Christian community as a whole," addressing contemporary issues in light of the major biblical movements of creation, fall, and redemption.⁴⁵

1.2.2. Influence of Neo-Calvinistic Philosophy

If the title of Spykman's book, *Reformational Theology*, indicates his commitment to a Reformed heritage, it also points to his dependence on that branch of Christian philosophy known as Reformational. Reformational philosophy, commonly linked with Dooyeweerd, is known in Dutch as *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* and translated into English as the "Cosmonomic Philosophy" or the "Philosophy of Law-Idea." In more popular terms, it is referred to as neo-Calvinist philosophy.⁴⁶ A number of North American scholars have worked to disseminate the ideas of the Cosmonomic Philosophy, including Runner, Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) (for a time, at least),⁴⁷ and Albert Wolters. The AACS, with which Spykman was associated, existed primarily for the purpose of promoting Reformational philosophy as the theoretical means by which Christians could understand kingdom renewal as applied to every area of life.

Why does Spykman align himself with neo-Calvinistic philosophy? He is compelled by its rejection of dualisms and its construction of a "totality picture"⁴⁸ of created reality – based on a revelational starting point – that could serve as prolegomena for Reformed dogmatics.

The rejection of dualistic thinking advocated by proponents of the Philosophy of Law-Idea does not extend to legitimate dualities, or distinctions, rooted in the creation order,⁴⁹ such as distinctions between the Creator and creation, heaven and earth, and male and female. But it does target

⁴³ Spykman, *RT*, 25.

⁴⁴ Spykman, "Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics," 3.

⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 7-12; "Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics," p. 2 of section titled [Description of this Project](#).

⁴⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 100.

⁴⁷ John M. Frame and Leonard J. Coppes, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Harmony Press, 1972), 1, footnote 2.

⁴⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 39.

⁴⁹ See Spykman, *RT*, 64-68, for his distinction between duality and dualism.

distinctions that represent a “conceptual distortion of reality,” such as a separation of life into sacred and secular categories, or a conception of nature and grace as opposing realms.⁵⁰ Following Kuyper’s famous declaration – “There is not a single square inch of the entire cosmos of which Christ the sovereign Lord of all does not say, ‘This is mine!’”⁵¹ – Reformational thinkers maintain that, despite sin’s penetration of every area of life, the structures of creation continue because of God’s graciousness, and grace reclaims all that is touched by sin.

The uneasiness Spykman felt as a student regarding the dualistic categories that defined the relationship between theology (limited to matters of faith) and philosophy (limited to matters of reason) led him to seek a genuine alternative.

Such misconstructions of the relationship between theology and philosophy are anchored in underlying dualist misconceptions of created reality itself. . . . For such dichotomies violate the integral unity which is woven into the richly variegated fabric of the creation order as well as the religiously whole sense of what being human means for our life in God’s world.⁵²

Within his project, he recasts the relationship of theology to philosophy, using a different model than the predominant two-factor, or dualist, model that has shaped theological reflection in the Western world.⁵³

Because of the neo-Calvinistic emphasis on the antithesis – “a spiritual conflict which cuts across all of life”⁵⁴ – the neo-Calvinist philosophical tradition asserts that every area of life and every area of study needs the renewing effect of Christ’s redemptive work. When applied to theology and philosophy, this means that one’s basic presuppositions must be based on God’s revelation rather than on human logic. The human mind, misdirected by sin just like every other aspect of creation, needs the corrective lenses of God’s Word to understand the truths of God’s world. Thus, the starting point for every human activity and endeavor is the revelation of God.

Based on his confidence in God’s revelation as the starting point for theoretical reflection in both theology and philosophy, Spykman asserts that a Christian philosophy supplies the necessary prolegomena for Reformed theology. “The major thesis at this point is therefore that the most fitting

⁵⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 68.

⁵¹ Spykman, *RT*, 100; Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty” (a public address delivered at the inauguration of the Free University, October 20, 1880), trans. George Kamps, 26, accessed December 29, 2015, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/SphereSovereignty_English.pdf.

⁵² Spykman, *RT*, 15.

⁵³ Spykman, *RT*, 13-15.

⁵⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 65.

prolegomena to a Reformed dogmatics is a Christian philosophy. The noetic point of departure for both is Scripture.”⁵⁵ In setting forth this thesis, Spykman was responding to two particular alternatives.

The first alternative, according to Spykman, has dominated the field of dogmatics in the Western tradition since the time of Augustine: a philosophy that “functioned as an antecedent and independently grounded system of thought” and “was viewed as providing the rational underpinnings for the superstructure of faith erected on it.”⁵⁶ In the context of a dualistic separation between reason and faith, or philosophy and theology, many Western theologians have aligned themselves with a major stream of philosophy, using its tenets to justify their theological assertions.⁵⁷ As they set forth “proofs” for the existence of God, or some similar argument, they reveal that their starting point is human autonomy rather than Scripture’s presupposition: “In the beginning GOD. . . !”⁵⁸ Spykman was concerned with appealing to a philosophy based on biblical givens rather than human logic.

The second alternative to which Spykman was responding was that of Barth. In Spykman’s judgment, Barth reacted against the traditional two-factor philosophical prolegomena by limiting prolegomena to a “first word,”⁵⁹ one “located within the very bounds of dogmatics.”⁶⁰ Spykman claims that doing theology apart from “a self-conscious philosophical orientation is an ‘impossible possibility’: possible in the sense that some theologians (Karl Barth and others) may pretend to do so; but impossible in the sense that philosophical reflection can never be effectively excluded from dogmatics.”⁶¹ Barth’s theological method, from Spykman’s perspective, lacks an acknowledgment of the possibilities for a Christian philosophy in relation to dogmatics, which corresponds to Barth’s recasting of revelation “in exclusively soteriological terms.”⁶²

A biblically Reformed dogmatics must orient itself to the world in the context of some philosophy. Spykman was convinced that a genuinely Christian philosophy, though it has a tentative nature, offers the best hope for avoiding unbiblical presuppositions and maintaining a biblical starting point. In *RT* he grounds his theological points in neo-Calvinist philosophy’s insights into the structure of

⁵⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 101.

⁵⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 191.

⁵⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 24-25 and 147-148.

⁵⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 147. Spykman remarks, “This opening line [of Scripture] offers a decisive cue for a biblically attuned dogmatics.” He understands this pre-theoretical assumption as setting the terms for philosophical as well as theological starting points.

⁵⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 54.

⁶⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 46.

⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 7.

⁶² Gordon J. Spykman, “On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation – A Rambling Discourse,” 1990, p. 10, Folder 7, Box 7, Series 5, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

“created reality”:⁶³ The structuring principle of all reality is the Word of God; the antithesis affects every aspect of life, human rationality included; all human activity flows from the religious orientation of the human heart, and thus all of life is religious in nature.⁶⁴

1.2.3. Interaction with Contemporary Theologians

Not only is Spykman concerned to be faithful to his theological forbears, but he also considers it important to learn from the works of his contemporaries. Three of the most important twentieth-century theologians mentioned regularly in *RT* are Barth, Berkouwer, and Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-1995). The relationship of Barth and Berkouwer to Spykman’s effort toward renewing Reformed dogmatics will be discussed in later chapters. Here, the basic contours of Spykman’s theological dialogue with these three theologians are considered.

Barth’s Reformed commitment to divine revelation over against the tenets of modern liberal theology commanded the attention of the theological world. As Spykman realizes, “Positively or negatively, nearly all leading theologians now feel compelled to define their positions in relation to his.”⁶⁵ Wherein Barth stressed the divine initiative in revelation and decried the natural theology resulting from “the traditional relationship between philosophy and theology,” his work offers much that can benefit those in the classic Reformed tradition.⁶⁶ While taking these insights seriously, Spykman seeks to provide an alternative to Barth, one which conceives of the theology/philosophy relationship in non-dualistic terms.

The modern roots of this alternative vision of the relationship between theology and philosophy lie in discernible movements toward a “relational” understanding of truth in mid-twentieth-century theology.⁶⁷ Spykman believes that, despite its lack of development since the time of the Reformation, the concept finds some basis in Calvin’s view of true knowledge as consisting of knowledge of God and knowledge of oneself. In Spykman’s judgment, though, the “relationality” of truth denotes a concept too vague to be of help in constructing a more biblical theological method. Berkouwer went a step further than others in defining the relationship between the objective and subjective sides of truth: he called it the “*correlatie motief*,” or correlation motif. “It functions as a linking concept, located at the very point of intersection of the God/man relationship. It is meant to hold together the grace of God, on

⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 7, 39.

⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 100-101.

⁶⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 45.

⁶⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 35.

⁶⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 50-51.

the one side, and man's response of faith, on the other."⁶⁸ Berkouwer did not apply this concept in a systematic fashion or provide an explicit prolegomenon that justified or supported it, but Spykman assesses his approach as "a promising movement in the direction of a three-factor dogmatics," one which profoundly influenced Spykman's own three-factor theological method.⁶⁹

Hendrikus Berkhof, a Dutch theologian in the Reformed tradition, also sensed the need to move beyond the traditional methods of handling the theology/philosophy relationship. Barth's emphasis on God as the Object of Christian faith and Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) emphasis on human religious expression as the Subject of the Christian faith find a meeting point in the work of Berkhof. Attempting to include both the objective and subjective nature of biblical revelation, he advocated a prolegomenon along the lines of Schleiermacher and a dogmatics along the lines of Barth. "The net effect of such synthesis is internal conflict. . . . This modern jockeying for position is more than merely a question of where and how to locate prolegomena. At bottom it involves a profoundly pretheological decision: Is prolegomena to take its normative starting point in divine revelation or in human religious response?"⁷⁰ For Spykman, Berkhof is a contemporary who, like Barth and Berkouwer and others, recognized the need for a genuine alternative to theological methods cast in dualistic terms, but who managed to do no more than recast the dualism in an untenable synthesis.

1.2.4. A New Paradigm

From his historical survey of methodological issues in theology, Spykman concludes that faithfulness to Scripture and to the Reformation heritage demands "a new paradigm." He wishes to avoid the scholastic method dominated by rationalism and dualistic syntheses, as well as the Enlightenment-inspired method emphasizing human response as the starting point for theological reflection. Encouraged by mid-twentieth-century pointers toward a mediating factor between God and humanity, Spykman proposes a theological model that explicitly defines the mediating factor between God and humanity as God's Word. Regarding theological method and the relationship between theology and philosophy, Spykman makes God's Word-revelation the starting point: the point beyond which we can claim no certain knowledge and the point toward which all human response is directed, consciously or unconsciously, obediently or disobediently. Spykman's claim is that the only way to bypass the problematic issues associated with traditional theologies and more contemporary

⁶⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 51.

⁶⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 52.

⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 54.

alternatives is through a “three-factor theology, in which the Word is recognized as holding a normatively structured place at the heart of the covenantal relationship between God and the world.”⁷¹ At every point of interaction with his world, God’s Word stands as the mediating factor. Spykman describes this mediation as both a “boundary” and a “bridge,” defining the limits of relationship to and knowledge of God but also serving as the means for response to God.

Regarding the usefulness of the three-factor alternative as a paradigm for re-structuring the relationship between theology and philosophy, this project asks the following questions: **Does it better honor the biblical givens? Does it provide a stronger foothold for approaching the problems inherent in the more traditional dualistic paradigm?** These questions will animate the discussion of subsequent chapters.

I.3. Spykman’s Motivating Questions

What were the motivating questions for Gordon Spykman? Which factors of his historical and theological context most influenced the direction of his dogmatic work? The overarching ideas that shape his reflections can be summarized as 1) the comprehensiveness of God’s Word (which corresponds to a broader definition of revelation) and 2) implications of the myth of religious neutrality for theological reflection (which forms the background for Spykman’s three-factor theology).

I.3.1. Comprehensiveness of God’s Word

By developing a more expansive concept of God’s Word, Spykman desires to counteract the Word-reducing effects of liberalism and fundamentalism. The theological perspective of liberalism, with its commitment to the historical-critical method of interpreting the Scriptures, devalues the biblical text by questioning the historical reality of the redemptive-historical events based on whether they can be empirically verified. Scientific tools replace the trust that Scripture itself calls for, and the theological term “Word of God” is emptied of its traditional meaning.⁷² Spykman contends that liberalism and fundamentalism share a dualistic viewpoint, but their conclusions place them on opposite sides of the dualism.⁷³ Whereas liberalism retreats from any certainty of a transcendent, divine revelation,

⁷¹ Spykman, *RT*, 75.

⁷² Gordon Spykman, “Scripture, Faith, and Science,” *Scripture and its Authority: Conference Papers, RES Conference on Scripture, Sydney 1972, International Reformed Bulletin*, no. 54 (Summer 1973): 27-28.

⁷³ Spykman, with reference to Kuyper, develops this argument in “Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique,” *Pro Rege* 15, no. 1 (September 1986): 10-21, accessed February 28, 2015, http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol15/iss1/3. See John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*

fundamentalism maintains the reality of revelation but tends to reduce it to the Word of God in Scripture. This view promotes a theology of redemption to the exclusion of a robust theology of creation.⁷⁴

For Spykman, an interpretation that takes seriously Scripture's own affirmations about its nature as the Word of God is foundational. In 1969, he worked toward such an interpretation through his service on a synodical study committee responding to questions from the Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands concerning the precise nature and extent of biblical authority. These questions pertained specifically to the relationship between Scripture's authority and its "content and purpose as the saving revelation of Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ The committee's conclusions, contained in a report known as Report 44, included an affirmation that Scripture's divine authority is integrally related to its redemptive purpose. Report 44 rejected progressive conclusions associated with the historical-critical method that reduced Scripture's authority to a spiritual or moral one with no grounding in a history of redemption. It also rejected the reductionism that assigns inspiration to lone words and phrases outside of their biblical context. Both liberalism and fundamentalism inadequately relate Scripture's divine authority to the full scope of its redemptive purpose.

What does this mean for Spykman's doctrine of the Word of God? For Spykman, this recognition of Scripture's authority in relation to its content and purpose serves not to limit Scripture's authority but rather to demonstrate its comprehensiveness as "a Word addressing the whole of life and calling one's whole life into the service of God."⁷⁶ In contrast to views that practically, if not theoretically, relegate Scripture's authority to matters of salvation only, the view indicated by Spykman and the committee is that Scripture speaks to the whole person in every arena of life. Yet, "The Bible is covenant history, the history of redemption, and it is only from within that perspective that it sheds its light upon the whole of human life."⁷⁷ This statement guards against the temptation to appeal to Scripture's authority in any way that does not consider Scripture's redemptive purpose, and it encourages Christians to grasp that God's redemptive purposes revealed in Scripture extend to every corner of the cosmos and human life. Spykman believed that liberalism and fundamentalism were not

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19-22, for a similar critique of "the complex legacy of dualism and nominalism in Western Christian theology" with mention of Spykman.

⁷⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 28, 77-78.

⁷⁵ See Christian Reformed Church, Acts of Synod 1972, Supplement: Report 44, 493, accessed December 29, 2015, https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Acts1972_nature.pdf.

⁷⁶ CRC, Report 44, 504.

⁷⁷ CRC, Report 44, 511.

the only choices; instead, there is a genuine “third way”⁷⁸ that serves to open God’s Word more fully and expansively so that God’s people can live more faithfully in response to it.

1.3.2. The Myth of Religious Neutrality and the Nature of Theological Reflection

Despite modern pretensions to scholarship without bias, Scripture teaches that every human being operates from a religious orientation. Dooyeweerd wrote of the “heart” as the religious center of the human person, reflecting biblical language such as that of Proverbs 4.23: “Out of the heart are the issues of life.”⁷⁹ A fundamental assumption of Cosmological Philosophy is that every person’s heart has a religious orientation that is inextricably involved in every dimension of life.

The impossibility of religious neutrality extends to the discipline of philosophy, and on this basis Spykman argues for the necessity of a Christian philosophy as prolegomena to theology. If, as he argues, a Christian philosophy is the proper prolegomena to theology, what implications does this have for theological reflection? The space Spykman devotes to prolegomenal issues in *RT* demonstrates the significance he attaches to the relevance of a Reformational philosophy for Reformed dogmatics. Looming large behind this focus stand the related maxims, “First things determine last things” and “starting-points are nearly all-important.”⁸⁰ For Spykman, this holds true for the philosophical commitments that shape one’s theology. It also holds true for the role of the doctrine of creation within one’s theology since the doctrine of creation contains fundamental assumptions about reality.

Because no discipline is neutral and all disciplines are equally dependent on revelation, Spykman redefines theological reflection in a manner consistent with these terms. He prefers to describe theology as “confessional” in nature. By this he means that it is rooted in the theologian’s faith commitment and aims to explain the content of the church’s faith-life and confessions. “The object of study, the field of investigation, the disciplined focus and point of concentration in theology is therefore the faith-knowledge/faith-life of Christian and non-Christian communities. Theology explores the pistical,⁸¹ confessional, certitudinal mode of our life together in God’s world.”⁸² Theology does not hold

⁷⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 10.

⁷⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 100-101, 128-129.

⁸⁰ Spykman, “Theology: Queen or Servant,” 1; see also Spykman, *RT*, 40.

⁸¹ Spykman follows John C. Vander Stelt in his use of this term, common in Calvinist philosophy. Vander Stelt argues that the object of theological study, properly speaking, is not God, revelation, or Scripture, but faith-life as one means by which Christians respond to God and his revelation. See John C. Vander Stelt, “Theology as Study of Faith-Life,” *Pro Rege* 18, no. 1 (Sept. 1989): 15-23, accessed October 21, 2016, http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol18/iss1/2.

⁸² Gordon J. Spykman, “Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History: A Working Paper,” 1986, p. 18, Folder 15, Box 5, Series 3, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

a normative status in relation to faith, but rather offers “theoretical reflection” on the truths and experiences of a particular faith commitment.⁸³ Christian theology, because it is subservient to God’s Word as the “norm” for all reflection, bears a more tentative status than that of faith-life or the church confessions. Spykman’s definition of the theological task as “confessional” accounts for the subjective element in all theoretical inquiry: theological reflection does not determine revelation but is rather a response to it.

Theology functions not as the “queen” of the sciences but as a servant in partnership with the other disciplines. Spykman acknowledges that theology, because it deals with the “pistic” aspect of reality, gives “direction to our other life-expressions” and “can affect the entire curriculum as no other special science can.”⁸⁴ However, because theology focuses on this narrower aspect of created reality, and because the antithesis finds expression in theology as well as the other disciplines, Spykman contends that her role is that of “servant partner” in relationship to other disciplines. The traditional assumption of theology as “queen of the sciences” is dualistic in nature – it assigns theological reflection to the sacred realm and all other disciplines to the secular realm. To move beyond this dualistic framework, Spykman assigns theology a place among the sciences that more truly reflects its limited and fallen nature but also its essential role in providing “direction” to the other sciences.⁸⁵

Spykman’s motivating questions consisted not only in matters of doctrine and theoretical inquiry but in the practical outworking of theoretical reflection in the life of God’s people, and these informed the tangible goals to which he directed his energies. He valued the creeds and confessions, and he believed they provided a basis for addressing the questions of contemporary culture.⁸⁶ In the spirit of *semper reformanda* (“always reforming”), he served as chairman of the committee that drafted the CRC’s “Contemporary Testimony.”⁸⁷ He wrote a theology that utilized insights from both biblical theology and dogmatics for the sake of developing a theology serviceable to the church. He gave prominence to the Trinity and to the biblical storyline in the structure of his theology. He explored the intersection of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in his thinking and writing because he desired to enable the

⁸³ Spykman, “Theology in Partnership,” 19.

⁸⁴ Spykman, “Theology in Partnership,” 19.

⁸⁵ For Spykman’s full argument, see “Theology: Queen or Servant,” 14-17, 20-23.

⁸⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, “Confessing the Reformed Faith Today,” in *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy in the Reformed Community Today*, ed. John Bolt (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1986), 82, accessed February 28, 2015, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/OrthodoxyAndOrthopraxis.pdf.

⁸⁷ *Agenda for Synod 1986* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1986), 340, accessed November 6, 2015, www.crcna.org.

church to be faithful in both. He expended himself on projects that would help to connect the church's youth to the truths of Scripture and to the relevance of the creeds and confessions.

A close connection between theology and the church is an important hallmark of theologians in the Reformed tradition, and, in this regard, Spykman gave evidence for his alignment with his tradition. John Bolt, who worked closely with Spykman and knew his personal character, confirms that he was a churchman of the highest order.⁸⁸ In the variety of projects and topics to which he devoted himself, Spykman aimed to practice his gifts with an attitude of submission to God's Word, love for God's church, and regard for the role of dogmatics within Christian theological reflection.

Part II: Gordon Spykman's Theology of the Word of God

II.1. Revelation

At the heart of Spykman's renewal project pulses a conviction that traditional theological methodology, which directly affects the doctrine of revelation, employs philosophical dualisms and fails to reflect the Word of God as the covenantal bond between God and his creatures. According to Spykman, this failure has two consequences: in terms of method, an underestimation of Calvin's emphasis upon the Word of God as the *relatio* between God and humanity; in terms of revelation, an undervaluation of Scripture's own witness about itself. Spykman's model of revelation depends upon (1) three-factor theologizing as a guide for theological methodology, (2) a biblically-normed understanding of the interplay between divine revelation and creaturely response, and (3) the Word of God as the "mediating structure" between God and his world. In addition to exploring these points, this section analyzes Spykman's application of a three-factor theology to the doctrines of election and reprobation.

II.1.1. Three-Factor Theologizing: A Guide for Theological Methodology

What is the "norm," or the authoritative focal point, for a biblical understanding of divine revelation? Closely related to this issue is the tension between transcendence and immanence. When attempting to understand the nature of God's self-revelation, should a theologian emphasize God's otherness, or God's movement toward the world and his presence in the world?

⁸⁸ Dr. John Bolt, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, August 9, 2015.

In his survey of Western theology since the time of the early church, Spykman suggests that neither of these options accounts fully for God's ways of relating to his world. The work of Schleiermacher represents a theological tendency to pull the revelational norm down to humanity's "side," with human religious experience as the foundation for theological reasoning. Kuyper says of Schleiermacher's work: "There were no longer two, God and man, the former of whom has imparted knowledge of Himself to the latter; there was, in fact, nothing else but man . . . who according to the subjective-empiric school, experienced subjective perceptions, from which he formed for himself subjective representations of a religious character."⁸⁹ In recent years, Bruce L. McCormack has argued that Schleiermacher's central concept of "feeling" as a precursor to objective revelation was motivated by a desire to locate "a point of access to God . . . which overcomes the restrictions Kant placed on theoretical knowledge without recourse to practical knowledge."⁹⁰ Even so, Spykman maintains that Schleiermacher's work set the stage for theological liberalism, which opts for personal subjective experience as the "norm" for theological reflection.

Dethroning human reason as the authority for theological knowledge, Barth aims to recover divine transcendence and a more biblical route by which to reflect theologically on the divine-human relationship. His theology, explicitly based on the Word of God, affirms the reality and priority of revelation. Scholars vary in their assessments of Barth's complex theology and how closely his doctrine of revelation conforms to the Scriptures, so any simplistic statement of Barth's position and its implications will fall short of the greatness of his work. But Spykman judges that, in terms of locating the norm for revelation, "Barth's theology overloads the divine circuits."⁹¹ In his perspective, Barth's theological method does not account adequately for human response to divine revelation.

Both Schleiermacher and Barth have wielded tremendous influence over the development of modern theology, and Spykman draws a direct line from these theological giants back to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant's philosophy, based on the distinction between pure reason and practical reason, cemented for future philosophers and theologians the dualisms present in Western intellectual thought from the Greeks through the medievalists and into the Enlightenment period. The structure of Kant's thought reinforced the idea of separate realms for theology and philosophy, the sacred and the secular,

⁸⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898), 314-315, accessed October 29, 2016, <https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/encyclopediaofsa01kuypp>.

⁹⁰ Bruce L. McCormack, "Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition," *Journal of Religion* 78, no. 1 (Jan. 1998): 22, accessed October 11, 2016, ATLA.

⁹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 33.

promoting two-factor thinking as the model for modern theoretical reflection. In the wake of Kant's "watershed" thinking, "[g]eneral knowledge and knowledge of God go their separate ways."⁹² Spykman argues for the necessity of an alternative to the two-factor model, noting that "[t]wo factor theologies create irresolvable problems in doing theology in an authentically biblical and reformed way."⁹³ Difficult questions such as election/reprobation, the nature of God's decrees, and the function of civil government, to name a few, are framed in abstract ways, disconnected from the biblical emphasis on God's Word as the locus of revelation and response. In handling such questions, theologians appeal either to an unknowable purpose in the mind of God or to a view that overestimates human response.

Spykman's discontent with the work of Reformed theologians such as L. Berkhof stems from their failure to pursue a genuine alternative to the framework inherited from Kant. If theology continues to work along the lines of a two-factor, or dualistic, view of reality, there will be missed opportunities for responding to theological questions in ways that align more closely with Scripture's own presentation of reality. Spykman identifies the elements of a three-factor view of reality in the Calvinist tradition as articulated by Kuyper, who holds "that the three fundamental truths undergirding all Christian scholarship are (1) the revealing God, (2) the responding man, and (3) revelation as the spiritual link binding these covenant partners together."⁹⁴ By recognizing the Word of God – or God's revelation – as the mediating factor between God and his world, a three-factor theology explicitly gives the "mediating Word of God a normatively structured place in its thinking," which lends to theological reflection a more "relational" and "covenantal" approach.⁹⁵

II.1.2. Revelation and Response

To stand within the Reformed tradition means to confess (1) the reality of divine revelation – that there is a God who reveals to his creatures knowledge about himself and how they should respond to him – and (2) the sovereignty of the God who reveals. Creatures have no access to God or to knowledge about him apart from his revelation. Yet, as Spykman points out, the biblical idea of a revealing God includes the idea of creatures who receive and respond to God's revelation. "A knowable

⁹² Cornelis Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: A Diptych*, trans. Donald Mader (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 225-226, 243, accessed May 23, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹³ Gordon J. Spykman, "A New Paradigm for Doing Reformed Dogmatics," n.d., p. 10, Folder 9, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁹⁴ Gordon J. Spykman, "Christian Higher Education in Global Perspective: A Call to Ongoing Reformation," *Pro Rege* 11, no. 4 (June 1983): 19, accessed March 11, 2015, http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol11/iss4/4.

⁹⁵ Spykman, "A New Paradigm," 10. See also *RT*, 92-95.

God and a knowing man – this is the foundation of true religion.”⁹⁶ Revelation in Scripture elicits response. Scripture highlights human responsibility – a word that in English incorporates the word “response” – to know what God has revealed and to act in accordance with it. Spykman, borrowing from the insights of contemporary biblical theology, seeks to incorporate into his dogmatics “a keener sensitivity to revelation as existential confrontation with God’s personal self-disclosure as Maker, Lord, and Redeemer of the cosmos.”⁹⁷ For him, a biblically attuned doctrine of revelation must take seriously both Revealer and responders, taking note of the Creator/created distinction, but always in terms of the Word-relationship that binds them together.

The responder’s position of listening “servant” occurs within the context of covenant relationship. Spykman renders covenant in this way:

Covenant is that biblical concept which describes our total life situation as creatures of God, defining our relationship of response in faith and obedience to God, which in turn defines our relationships to our fellow men and the world around us, and thus lays the basis for an all-encompassing Christian way of life.⁹⁸

He defines “covenant” not only as a soteriological reality but as a creational reality, with the implication that human life as created by God is fundamentally covenantal in nature. This creation-oriented view of covenant connects with Spykman’s definition of the Word of God, explored more fully below. He insists that God’s revelation, and thus his covenant, frames reality and confronts his creatures at every point of being and living.

II.1.3. The Divine Word as Mediating Structure

In Spykman’s paradigm, the covenantal, revelatory Word of God functions in a manner that parallels its function in Scripture. God reveals his character and purposes in and through his Word, eliciting an ongoing response from his imagers; humans respond to his Word, either keeping covenant or breaking it. Spykman refers to this function and role of God’s Word as that of “mediating structure” between God and his world. He employs this terminology to acknowledge explicitly the *relatio* that he discerns in the theologies of Calvin, Bavinck, and Berkouwer. Conceiving of the Word as mediating structure also accords with Calvin’s emphasis on knowledge of God being dependent upon God’s coming

⁹⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus* (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1992), 14. Though the publishing date for *Christian Faith in Focus* is 1992, Spykman indicates in the Foreword (p. 7) that the “chapters first appeared as a series of study guides for churches and schools” in the 1960’s.

⁹⁷ Spykman, “Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics,” 10.

⁹⁸ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 153.

out to us in his Word.⁹⁹ Spykman's explanation of the "mediating structure" includes 1) the Word's role as boundary and bridge between God the Revealer and humans the responders and 2) the Word in relation to God himself.

Reformed theology affirms the biblical distinction between God and his creation. The self-sufficient and eternal God animates his creatures by his Spirit, but his creatures do not share in his essence. This otherness of God limits the possibilities of creaturely response to him. His Word sets the *boundary* between himself and the world, confirming his uniqueness and the world's dependence upon him. Spykman emphasizes the role of the Word in setting this boundary because it is the Word that defines the parameters of human knowledge about God: theological and philosophical tools of inquiry cannot lead beyond the boundary of God's Word. However, God's Word also functions as the *bridge* between God and his world, the means by which he communicates his self-revelation. Access to God comes through his covenantal, revealing Word. The Word of God, even as it clarifies the boundary lines of the Creator-creature relationship, also conveys that God himself takes the initiative to establish a bridge with his world.¹⁰⁰ Through the boundary-bridge analogy, Spykman emphasizes the scriptural perspective that God – from creation through redemption – communicates with his creation by means of his Word; correspondingly, God's Word functions as the "norm" for creaturely response.

What status does Spykman attribute to the Word of God? Does he conceive of God's Word as belonging to the essence of the Godhead? Does he conceive of it as a concrete reality distinct from God, thus positing a metaphysical distinction between God and his Word? Several reviewers of *RT*, including Richard B. Gaffin, David N. Field, Michael Williams, and Guenther Hass, find this to be a puzzling question that Spykman does not address adequately in *RT*. Gaffin states that Spykman's portrayal of the Word renders it a "reified entity *between* God and his creatures."¹⁰¹ Field says pointedly, "It is not clear as to whether the Word is to be seen as a third ontological factor distinct from God and creation or as some combination of the two."¹⁰² Williams, a personal friend of Spykman, recognizes a lack of clarity in Spykman's conception of the Word of God, but acknowledges his orthodox intentions: "But is Christ

⁹⁹ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), I.1-5, as referenced by Spykman, *RT*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Spykman's explanation of the Word as boundary and bridge can be found in *RT*, 75, 93-94.

¹⁰¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A New Paradigm in Theology?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 387, accessed August 13, 2014, ATLA.

¹⁰² David N. Field, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 84 (September 1993): 72, accessed August 13, 2014, ATLA.

then to be understood as neither divine or human? As some middle being? Clearly, this is not Spykman's intent. He speaks of the Word as a third 'factor' rather than an ontic structure."¹⁰³

Spykman gives clearer indication of his thinking regarding the nature of the Word in the essays "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena to Reformed Dogmatics" and "A New Look at Election and Reprobation." In "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena to Reformed Dogmatics," Spykman offers the following explanation: "His decreeing Word is extrinsic to God, not intrinsic. It belongs to his outgoing work, not to his inner essence. We must accordingly posit a certain distance between 'the reality of God as he necessarily is and the reality of the decree.'"¹⁰⁴ This indicates that the Word in Spykman's paradigm is distinct from God in the sense that it goes forth from him as the means by which he accomplishes his purposes. The Word consists in the covenant revelation by which God binds himself in relationship to his world.

However, in accord with Williams's assessment, Spykman argues that the Word is not a "reified entity" with "ontological status" in his paradigm.

This *relatio*, rooted analogically in the covenantal Word of God, should not be construed as a third ontic reality, having an independent existence alongside God and the creation. It is rather the dynamic historical/trans-historical religious point-of-contact and interaction between the revealing God and responding mankind. . . . Viewing this *relatio* as religious in nature, rather than ontic, should not be construed, however, as rendering it less real than the metaphysical constructs developed by scholastic systems of thought.¹⁰⁵

He acknowledges that there is some distance between God and his decree (Word), but he suggests that the *relatio* (or mediating structure) should be considered a religious reality rather than an ontic reality. This conception of the relationship between God and his Word reflects the influence of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. It represents an attempt to frame the doctrine of the divine, mediating Word in terms different from the rationalistic impulses often associated with traditional Reformed theology. Spykman endeavors to ground the reality of God's Word in the biblical terms of God's will and law to which humanity, with its inescapably religious nature, must respond.

This may explain why reviewers of *RT* question the viability of the Word as the covenantal bond between God and his world as depicted in Spykman's model. Evaluating the three-factor theology

¹⁰³ Michael Williams, "Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics (Book Review)," *Pro Rege* 20, no. 4 (June 1992): 31, accessed December 30, 2015, http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol20/iss4/7.

¹⁰⁴ Spykman, "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," 16. (In this quotation, Spykman references James Daane, *The Freedom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], 77.)

¹⁰⁵ Gordon J. Spykman, "A New Look at Election and Reprobation," in *Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*, ed. Henry Vander Goot (St. Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1981), 180.

through the lens of traditional metaphysical categories yields two options: the Word must be assigned the status of an ontic reality distinct from God or of a subordinate reality belonging to the essence of God. Spykman argues for a whole new “paradigm,” a shift toward biblical rather than philosophical categories. This paradigm assumes the religious nature of every action – it is all obedience or disobedience to the Word. The Word stands apart from God, yet belongs to Him, and constitutes a religious reality (not ontic) to which creatures are always responding either faithfully or unfaithfully.

In summary, Spykman knows that his efforts to establish a “new paradigm” are direction-setting but incomplete, requiring the collaboration of other theologians to work out and establish the details.¹⁰⁶ Though his definition of the Word of God as mediating structure lacks philosophical depth, critics of the model should seek to evaluate it in the terms in which it was cast – religious rather than metaphysical.

Does his model succeed in positing “the Word of God as covenantal bond between God and the world”? Is this model consistent with Scripture’s witness and the understanding of Calvin and Bavinck? The legitimacy of his “new paradigm” depends on the answer to these questions. Does Spykman’s conception of the Word as “mediating structure” provide a firm basis on which to construct a more biblical perspective on God’s revelation in and through the created order? Is Spykman theologically justified in his conception of the Word of God as a religious rather than ontic reality? These questions fuel the reflections of succeeding chapters.

II.1.4. Applying a Three-Factor Theology to the Doctrines of Election and Reprobation

Spykman believes that a three-factor theology could chart a new course of discussion for difficult doctrines such as election and reprobation. He sets the doctrine of predestination in the context of “the covenantal Word of God,” giving the Word “a more normative and decisive place as the central operative principle in it.”¹⁰⁷ Rather than an either/or framework that gives primacy either to God’s eternal decrees or to human responsibility, a three-factor theology recognizes the role of God’s Word as mediating both divine revelation and human response. While this approach is not irrational, it requires a cessation of the impulse to rationally account for every detail of the mystery of salvation. Scripture provides the boundary points for theological reflection, meaning that the focus is on the call to faith issued by God’s Word. Because Spykman views election and reprobation as having their source in God’s Word to his world, he treats these doctrines in a way that emphasizes the space/time conditions of God’s call and man’s response instead of an appeal to eternal decrees. Since Jesus embodies the

¹⁰⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Spykman, “A New Look at Election and Reprobation,” 180.

fulness of divine revelation, the nature of one's response to him illuminates the meaning of election and reprobation.

Following Calvin's example, Spykman handles the doctrine of election as an aspect of soteriology, framed by the biblical storyline, rather than an aspect of the doctrine of God.

. . . we would do better to follow the pattern of the central historical motifs in Biblical revelation, namely, creation/fall/redemption. This means listening, *first*, to God's two-sided Word of election/reprobation as given with creation (his 'Yes' with a threatening 'No' side to it); *second*, his reprobating Word of judgment in the aftermath of man's fall; and *then* God's redeeming counteraction in the reiteration of his 'Yes' Word unto the election of a renewed humanity in Christ Jesus.¹⁰⁸

The Word of election/reprobation was given in and with creation: obey me or you shall die. Adam as representative head plunged all of humanity under the judgment "you shall die." Reprobation, or "under condemnation," became the baseline reality for every descendant of Adam and Eve. Reprobation, rather than being defined primarily in terms of an eternal decree, should be viewed with reference to the universal condemnation rendered by the fall. The wonder is that God acts to reverse the reprobating Word at all.

The mystery of these doctrines, then, unfolds in terms of the historical reality (though not defined by history, thus slipping into historicism) as God's chosen arena for the outworking of his electing and reprobating Word. One's response in and of itself does not determine God's election or reprobation; rather, one's response to His Word reveals either God's electing grace or the sinner's continued unfaithfulness as one "under condemnation." Beyond that, theology simply cannot reach. Spykman believes that reframing the doctrine of predestination in terms of revelation and response to the mediating Word and locating it within the context of creation-fall-redemption-consummation accomplishes three objectives: (1) it avoids the trap of speculation regarding the eternal mind of God, (2) it acknowledges that reprobation is the post-fall starting point for all persons in relation to God, and (3) it anchors the thorny issue of predestination in God's coming out to humanity in Christ.

II.2. Threefold Word of God

Besides using a three-factor lens ("God/his mediating Word/and the world"¹⁰⁹) to interpret reality, Spykman utilizes a threefold understanding of the Word of God itself: the creational Word, the

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, "A New Look at Election and Reprobation," 185.

¹⁰⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 75.

scriptural Word, and the incarnate Word.¹¹⁰ Central to this formulation is Spykman's commitment to Scripture as the authoritative norm – “the central criterion of judgment” – for understanding God's revelation.¹¹¹ In order to shape his theological pattern so that it reflects Scripture as fully as possible, Spykman defines the Word of God more expansively than traditional theologies. He devotes considerable effort to exploring the meaning of God's Word in and for creation, because he evaluates the trajectory of North American evangelicalism as one in which “[s]pecial revelation eclipses general revelation.”¹¹² This section includes an examination of how Spykman defines each aspect of the threefold Word (creation/Scripture/Christ) and how he interrelates them.

II.2.1. The Word of God for Creation

God's Word is inextricably related to God's creation. As Spykman states, God spoke his first Word “concreationally – with and in and for creation.”¹¹³ To say that the Word was spoken **with** creation highlights the purposefulness of God's Word, which accomplished the works for which God had spoken it. To say that the Word was spoken **in** creation (or “manifest in creation”¹¹⁴) is to acknowledge that God's Word, while transcendent, directly impinges upon the created order and relates to it in a mediatorial fashion.¹¹⁵ To say that God's Word was spoken **for** creation makes clear that this Word is not pantheistic but transcendent; by it God exercises a “holding power . . . for all created reality.”¹¹⁶ Taken together, these three angles on God's Word in relation to creation – with, in, and for – demonstrate the “interchangeable” nature of God's “worded work” and “his working Word.”¹¹⁷ Every aspect of creation – God's work – responds “reflexively” to his divine Word.¹¹⁸ Even though the phrases “the Word **in** creation” and the Word **with** creation” can be interpreted in a genuinely biblical way, Spykman advocates use of the phrase “the Word **for** creation” to avoid potential misunderstandings.

¹¹⁰ Readers may be familiar with the fact that Karl Barth's theology also maintains a threefold concept of God's Word, but Barth defines the three aspects differently than Spykman: the Word incarnate as the primary form of God's revelation, attested by Scripture and proclaimed by God's servants. Barth considered Scripture and proclamation to be revelation in a more secondary or derivative sense.

¹¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 77.

¹¹² Spykman, *RT*, 176. Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 14, accessed October 31, 2020, ProQuest Ebooks Central, express agreement with Spykman's evaluation.

¹¹³ Spykman, *RT*, 83.

¹¹⁴ Spykman, “Scripture, Faith, and Science,” 19.

¹¹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 79.

¹¹⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, *Spectacles: Biblical Perspectives on Christian Scholarship* (Potchefstroom, S. Africa: Univ. for CHE Potchefstroom, 2008), 25, accessed May 24, 2014, <http://allofliferedeemed.co.uk/spykman.htm>.

¹¹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 79.

¹¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 80-81.

“Thus Scripture distinguishes between God’s Word and his creation. Clarity therefore demands that we speak of God’s Word *for* creation.”¹¹⁹ This language conveys the dependence of the creational structures upon God’s upholding Word, provides more “concrete language” for describing God’s Word-centered activity in relation to creation, and guards against a reductionism that defines God’s Word in terms of the Bible alone.

When Spykman and others from the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship presented the idea of the threefold Word in the early 1970s in the context of a Reformational vision for education, they faced criticism within CRC circles. Reverends Lambertus Mulder and John G. Klomps, through articles and personal correspondence with Spykman, expressed concern that Spykman was *equating* creation with the Word of God and suggesting that one can dispense with the Bible once it has been used to access the creational Word.¹²⁰ In reply, Spykman was emphatic about his position: 1) “Nor should we say that creation is the Word of God.” 2) “Not that such a renewed beginning of perfect obedience (in the language of the Heidelberger) in interpreting God’s creation Word means outgrowing our need of Scripture’s light upon our way. No, the moment we drop our ‘spectacles’ darkness settles upon us (e.g., in secular education).”¹²¹ Here, as elsewhere, Spykman avows that creation itself cannot be identified with the Word of God; creation is a *response* to God’s Word, which upholds creation and grants it meaning. He also affirms the ongoing necessity of wearing the spectacles of Scripture. The world can be known because it is structured and arranged by God’s first Word given in and for creation, but Scripture serves as the sole infallible guide to all true knowledge of God and his world.

On what basis does Spykman justify his understanding of the Word of God for creation, and what biblical language does he use to explain and describe it? There are several traditional concepts undergirding Spykman’s defense of extending the term *Word of God* to the ways in which the created order reflects God and his will. He connects the Word of God for creation directly with wisdom, law, and related ideas as aspects of God’s one creative Word. His goal is to draw these various terms into focus as expressions of God’s self-revelation manifested in his creation.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 23-24. Bernard Zylstra to Gordon J. Spykman, October 20, 1971, Folder 27, Box 5, Series 3, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI, encourages Spykman on this point: “Perhaps we should speak of the Word as the order-for . . . reality.”

¹²⁰ Lambertus Mulder, “The Word, the Word, and the Word,” *Banner*, June 25, 1971, 13-14; John G. Klomps to Gordon J. Spykman, October 28, 1971, Folder 27, Box 5, Series 3, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹²¹ Gordon J. Spykman, draft of letter to *Calvinist Contact* Editor and Readers, [1971?], p. 4, Folder 27, Box 5, Series 3, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹²² Spykman, *RT*, 80.

The “*reflexive, responsive*”¹²³ nature of God’s Word for creation implies that God’s revelation through the created order is not immediately accessible. It must be discerned, with the light of Scripture, through the responses of God’s creatures to the Word. Spykman refers to creation as a “sounding-board, echoing God’s Word for the world,” and as a “mirror, reflecting God’s laws for human life.”¹²⁴ The biblical concept of “wisdom” parallels this idea of the Word for creation as reflexive and responsive in nature. Scripture aids believers in determining what is consistent with God’s Word, and thus wise, in various life-settings. This wisdom exists as a faithful response to the Word of God as it holds for human life and relationships and stewardship of the world.¹²⁵

God’s wisdom reflects his will, understood in more concrete terms as his law. God’s laws convey the orderly structure he instituted for his creation. There are so-called “natural” laws that hold for reality and function independently of human faithfulness, and there are moral laws by which God communicates to his imagers his standard of holiness and to which they can respond faithfully or unfaithfully. Laws reveal that God is a governing, ruling God. His Word given in and with creation mediates his rule over creation.¹²⁶

God’s Word for creation also effected and continues to effect ordered beauty in the structure of created reality. Despite the intrusion of sin, “[t]he world is not chaos, but a ‘cosmos’ (John 3:16) – a unified, structured, intermeshing whole. We live in a universe ordered by the Word of God.”¹²⁷ Order and structure imply meaning, and the Word in Scripture leads God’s people to grasp this meaning, embodied in God’s great works of creation and redemption. Reading creation with corrected vision yields an understanding of the “revelational pattern of coherence” of God’s world.¹²⁸

Like the biblical ideas of wisdom, law, will, and order is the concept of creational “norms.” Spykman uses “norms” to refer to the creational givens, the laws of God that hold for his creatures. He quotes the following lines from Kuyper as justification for his emphasis on this concept:

Oh, it is so profoundly untrue that God’s Word lets us hear only appeals for the salvation of our souls. No, very definitely also for our national existence and for our social life together, God’s Word gives us fixed ordinances; it marks out lines which are clearly visible.¹²⁹

¹²³ Spykman, *RT*, 81.

¹²⁴ Gordon J. Spykman, “The Word of God,” in *The Word of God*, Paul G. Schrottenboer and Gordon J. Spykman (Toronto: Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, 1971), 10.

¹²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 81-82.

¹²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 80.

¹²⁷ Spykman, “Scripture, Faith, and Science,” 22; see also *RT*, 180.

¹²⁸ Spykman, “Scripture, Faith, and Science,” 21.

¹²⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, trans. Dirk Jellema (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein Publishers, 1950), 55, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/ChristianityandtheClassStruggle.pdf quoted in Gordon J. Spykman, “Principled Pluralism

Kuyper's interrelated concepts of sphere sovereignty and sphere universality find their source in norms that hold for each sphere of created reality. Reformational philosophy makes extensive use of norms, applying the concept broadly to marriage, art, political life, education, and other arenas of society. Because norms sometimes represent an application of God's law to something about which Scripture says little or nothing, determining the norm depends on interpreting for specific situations the general directives given in Scripture. While recognizing the challenge of discerning norms in particular cultural contexts, Spykman maintains that they are an important outworking of creational revelation.¹³⁰

Where does the fault lie for humanity's present inability to "read" God's Word for creation and discern creational norms? Spykman answers that problems in perceiving God's creational revelation reside on the responders' side.¹³¹ "God did not cancel the normativity of created reality, but sinful man chose to live in an anti-normative way. Such were the effects of the fall."¹³² In a fallen world, divine revelation is no longer "uni-focal (revealing the goodness of God, Gen. 1:31)" but "bi-focal (revealing the goodness and severity of God)."¹³³ The uni-focal/bi-focal distinction brings clarity to the problem of "reading" God's creational Word in the current context: interpreting creation in the light of Scripture involves recognizing both God's "goodness" and "severity" and fitting these signs of grace and judgment into the pattern of God's redemptive purposes.

Following the Psalms, where a variety of words (statutes, ordinances, decrees) are used to refer to God's law, Spykman considers wisdom, law, order, and norms as terms that reflect and illuminate God's Word for creation. These terms provide a handhold for grasping the concrete manifestations of God's Word in created reality. Spykman emphasizes the creational Word in his theological structure because of the biblical testimony to it and the role it has in Calvin's and Bavinck's theologies, developed more fully in the post-Bavinck Reformational tradition. He concludes, "The creative Word of power by which God in the beginning called the world to order is as truly revelational as his Word in Scripture."¹³⁴

Position: The Wheat and the Tares," *Covenanter Witness*, July 1987, 8. Jellema's translation of Kuyper's work actually reads, "it marks out lines that are **very** clearly visible" (bold mine). In this section of the work, Kuyper was addressing the Christian's response to land ownership and related social problems.

¹³⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 178-182.

¹³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 87-88.

¹³² Gordon J. Spykman, "Christian Societal Responsibility: A Reformed 'Model,'" 1977, p. 4, Folder 4, Box 12, Series 9, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹³³ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 16; see also *RT*, 125.

¹³⁴ Spykman et al., *Society, State, and Schools*, 152.

His conviction that “the creation Word remains his [God’s] fundamental and abiding revelation”¹³⁵ leads him to give the creation Word a firm position in a biblically-oriented theology of the Word of God.

II.2.2. The Inscripturated Word of God

Though some in the Christian Reformed community expressed fears that granting creational revelation the status of the Word of God would detract from the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, Spykman holds the creational Word and inscripturated Word together as differing modes, or manifestations, of the one Word of God. He never strays from affirming that Scripture serves as the noetic and hermeneutic “key” to God’s revelation for creation and in Christ.¹³⁶ “Given the reality of sin with its profound and sweeping effect on our minds, it is now ‘by Scripture alone’ as Word of God that we can begin to arrive at a renewed understanding of God’s Word for creation and his Word incarnate in Christ.”¹³⁷ He highlights two consequences of affirming the Protestant Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”). The first is the rejection of all other possible “starting points” in human knowledge of and about God. Calvin’s analogy of Scripture as spectacles confirms Scripture as the noetic starting point. The second is the recognition that *sola Scriptura* “does not close the door to other forms of revelation,” but serves as the lens for an accurate understanding of them.¹³⁸ The spectacles analogy supports this interpretation, pointing toward God’s work in creation as something that can and should be “read” by Scripture’s light.¹³⁹

Spykman develops the doctrine of Scripture in terms of 1) Scripture’s redemptive focus and 2) Scripture’s function as the “hermeneutic key” to the fullness of divine revelation.¹⁴⁰ It should be noted that although Spykman occasionally uses the phrase “Word in Scripture,”¹⁴¹ he rejects the view – often associated with Barth’s theology – that the Bible only contains the Word of God; Spykman accepts and affirms that Scripture in its entirety *is* the Word of God.

¹³⁵ Spykman et al., *Society, State, and Schools*, 152; see also *RT*, 125.

¹³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 76-88. See also “Scripture, Faith, and Science,” 19.

¹³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 77.

¹³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 77-78.

¹³⁹ See Spykman, *RT*, 76. Eric Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575-1715*, trans. Peter Mason (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), accessed October 31, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central, shows the prevalence of the idea of “reading” the Book of Nature in the Dutch tradition, mentions its roots in Augustine and the Reformation, and shows the eventual effect of Cartesianism on the relation between nature and Scripture. See especially pp. 29-30, 35, 44-45, 47, 58, and 414.

¹⁴⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 87.

¹⁴¹ Spykman, *RT*, 84.

Redemption, restoration, renewal, republication – such words dominate Spykman’s discussion of the nature of Scripture. Though its content is that of redemptive knowledge suited to the post-fall needs of humanity, the Word of God given verbally in human language and written down by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration was not God’s first Word for the world.

In this unfolding drama Scripture plays its uniquely decisive role. Its good news links creation and re-creation. Its message is qualified by the prefix *re*, the “re-“ factor. It is a redemptive *re*-publication of God’s enduring Word – “Heaven and earth may pass away, but my Word abides forever” (Mark 13:31). It is a second, revised edition of God’s creational Word, now in lingual form.¹⁴²

The lingual revelation given in Scripture reveals God to be both Creator and Redeemer. At every point, creation’s response to God’s first – and once sufficient – Word now reflects brokenness and *misdirection*. The Word in Scripture meets humanity at the point of need: it presents God’s renewed covenant, re-enacted through his calling out of Israel as his chosen people, and made effective for all time through the blood of his Son, the Redeemer. The scriptural Word testifies to the great events of redemptive history as a reiteration of the creation Word, underscoring it and introducing a new element of God’s covenant relationship with the world.

The conjunction of the scriptural Word and God’s Holy Spirit in the life of the believer points back to God’s original intentions for his world and forward to a time when the entire cosmos will be fully restored. “God accommodates his Word to our changing situations. It meets us where we are in order to bring us back and onward to where we ought to be.”¹⁴³ Speaking of Scripture as the “re-publication” of God’s original Word does not mean that Scripture simply speaks the same Word that God spoke for creation. The Word in Scripture creates a new situation, that of redemption.¹⁴⁴ Spykman stresses that there is no “inner tension or contradiction” between creation and Scripture: they are different modes of the same Word of God.¹⁴⁵ The unity between the two modes exists because they share the same source: both are God’s Word, spoken by him to create a people for himself to rule over his creation on his behalf. “We believe that there is a basic agreement between this twofold revelation of the one God. In both creation and in Scripture we hear the voice of our Father. . . . In both creation and in Scripture God addresses us with full divine authority.”¹⁴⁶ Because God speaks authoritatively in both creation and

¹⁴² Spykman, *RT*, 88.

¹⁴³ Spykman, *RT*, 85.

¹⁴⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 85.

¹⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 86.

¹⁴⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, “Biblical Authority (3),” *Banner*, January 19, 1973, 8.

in Scripture and because Scripture itself takes creation seriously as reflecting the Word of God, Reformed theology, in Spykman's perspective, should honor the creational Word no less than Scripture.

The necessity of the Word inscripturated for understanding *the Word incarnate* constitutes a basic assumption of Reformed theology. The necessity of the Word inscripturated for understanding *the creational Word* also stands as a given in the Reformed tradition but is less developed than the relationship between Scripture and Jesus. Spykman attributes this to a two-factor view of reality that relates the Bible to spiritual matters and generally fails to see that redemption (the so-called "sacred") restores creation (the so-called "secular").

Spykman asserts that "[t]his inscripturated Word is given in order to lead us back to an attentive listening to God's Word for creation which holds from the beginning."¹⁴⁷ If this is true, it seems fair to say that this is not the only reason for the giving of God's Word written. Might it be more balanced to say that the inscripturated Word is given to direct us to Christ and to effect renewal of our hearts so that we might respond with faithfulness to the fullness of God's Word? Having been so renewed, the believer can and should display "attentive listening to God's Word for creation." This, ultimately, is what Spykman hopes to convey. Against all notions of the Word in Scripture becoming an end in itself, he argues that responding to God as both Creator and Redeemer involves learning his ways in creation as well as redemption.

While recognizing that the creational Word and written Word are distinct, and that "[t]hey differ . . . in their message and in the nature of their authority," Spykman rejects any system that would pit them dualistically against each other.¹⁴⁸ "When the distortion called sin entered our world, Scripture was given as a corrective, reinforcing the original revelation upon our minds, redirecting our attention to the meaning of it all, refocusing the intent and purpose of creation."¹⁴⁹ Following Bavinck, he contends that creation provides the very structure for redemption; the created order serves as the object of the Lord's redemptive acts.¹⁵⁰ God is reclaiming his original work.

In summary, by the Word in Scripture God redeems his people and by the "spectacles" of Scripture God's people are enabled to discern God's renewing purpose in the cosmos. The written Word sheds light on the creational Word, which has been obscured by sin. To say this does not imply an ability

¹⁴⁷ Spykman, "Scripture, Faith, and Science," 21.

¹⁴⁸ See Spykman, *RT*, 125.

¹⁴⁹ Spykman, "Principled Pluralism Position: The Wheat and the Tares," 9.

¹⁵⁰ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 117; Spykman, *RT*, 88-90; Herman Bavinck, "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace,'" trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 59-62, accessed May 2, 2014, ATLA.

to gain perfect knowledge of God's creational revelation, since the day of full and final restoration has not yet come. However, believers can begin, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, to take dominion in the various spheres of life, striving to be faithful to God's Word in its unity and diversity, confident that his redemptive purpose corresponds to his original, creating purpose.

II.2.3. The Incarnate Word

Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, stands as the center and climax of God's Word to the world.¹⁵¹ In Jesus God revealed fully his covenant love and his will "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1.20). To him God the Father has given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28.18). The Old Testament prophecies about him, and the New Testament testifies to his person and work. Jesus is the "Word made flesh" (John 1.14), a reality that transcends the bounds of finite human reasoning. This section includes discussion of the significance of Christ's role as Mediator of creation as well as christological and pneumatological ambiguities present in Spykman's paradigm.

Just as God's Word in the unity of its threefold structure functions in a mediatory role, so Jesus Christ in his unique role as the incarnate Word of God is the Mediator of redemption, the one who atoned for sin and who intercedes for his people at the right hand of God the Father. He is also the Mediator of creation, the one through whom the Trinity brought creation into existence and continually upholds it. Jesus Christ's redemptive work bears a close relationship to his creative work: he mediates both, and the goal of his redemptive work is to make "all things new" (Revelation 21.5).

"Christ Jesus as Word of God is therefore the key to the meaning of creation. In 'all things' (*ta panta*) he is central and dominant. He is also the heartbeat of the biblical message from the first word to the last."¹⁵² Spykman attributes to the incarnate Word the central significance which Scripture accords him. He sees that Christ's role as Mediator of both creation and redemption demands that a biblically-oriented theology take seriously the unity between creation and redemption. While maintaining the classic Reformed positions concerning the divine-human nature of Christ and the meaning of his atoning work, Spykman directs attention to the meaning of Christ's Lordship for creation and redemption, following Paul's message in Colossians 1.

To delineate the relationship of the incarnate Word to the creational Word and the scriptural Word, Spykman concentrates on three points: (1) Because Christ is Mediator of both creation and

¹⁵¹ See Spykman, *RT*, 83-84, 376.

¹⁵² Spykman, *RT*, 84.

redemption, redemption covers the full scope of creation. (2) There is an organic connection between knowing Christ and understanding Scripture. “Biblical history has direction. In it all, Christ is central. His coming is the unifying theme of all Scripture. Therefore knowing Christ is the key to handling aright the Word of Truth.”¹⁵³ (3) Through the Word in Scripture, the incarnate Word rules over every aspect of creation and creaturely response. The nature of one’s response to the person of Christ serves as the litmus test for how one will respond to the inscripturated and creational Word. In this way Christ serves as the final boundary and bridge between God and his world. He is the “one mediator between God and men” (I Timothy 2.5).

This perspective on the one Word of God given in three ways “opens the door to studying the Word-of-God as manifest in all creation in the light of (recall Calvin’s ‘spectacles’) the written Word-of-God in Scripture under the rule of God’s incarnate Word in Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁴ What Spykman hopes to achieve with his threefold understanding of God’s Word is the incorporation of language that is closer to that of Scripture itself, and a means of grasping the practical implications of God’s Word for the life of his people in the world. Some *RT* reviews critique Spykman’s schema for generating confusion about the status of Jesus Christ. As Word of God, is he an entity outside of God? Is he ontologically subordinate to God the Father? Spykman contends that his schema captures the dynamic nature of God’s mediating Word as the relational bond between God and the world without moving outside orthodox lines concerning the nature of Christ’s divinity and eternal status as God. Though Spykman certainly holds an orthodox viewpoint on the nature of Christ, “the relationship between Christ as Word and creation-and-Scripture needs further work by the tradition,” notes Spykman’s friend and correspondent Dr. Michael Williams.¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, it seems that the threefold Word concept gives insufficient attention to the Holy Spirit, who, biblically speaking, works in conjunction with God’s Word: he is present at creation; inspires kings, prophets, and the writers of Scripture; fills the life of Christ from beginning to end; and empowers believers. Throughout his writings, Spykman affirms the Holy Spirit’s person and role, recognizing that the Spirit too has a mediatorial role in joining believers to Christ the Word.¹⁵⁶ However, he does not

¹⁵³ Gordon J. Spykman, “Biblical Authority (2),” *Banner*, January 12, 1973, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Spykman, “The Word of God,” 10.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Williams to Gordon J. Spykman, September 8, 1992, p. 1, Folder 13, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹⁵⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 94, follows Calvin’s general line of thought from *Institutes*, III.1: “God’s Word for creation, further revealed in Scripture and in Christ the Mediator, is the dynamic bond uniting the Creator and all his creatures, just as the Holy Spirit is the living bond (the ‘second Mediator’) uniting us to the incarnate and glorified Word made flesh.” See also *RT*, 419-420.

develop the Spirit's conjunction with the Word to a great extent beyond acknowledging the Trinitarian nature of all three modes of God's Word-revelation.

II.2.4. Revelation = The Word of God

The distinctiveness of Spykman's model lies in his equating of creation revelation, traditionally termed "general revelation," with God's Word. Though the Reformed tradition has always affirmed that God truly reveals himself as Creator in and through his works of creation, the term "Word of God" usually refers only to Scripture and to Christ. On what basis did Spykman feel justified in calling creational revelation the Word of God? Spykman underscores the many passages in Scripture where God's movements in the created order are referred to as his Word going forth. This reality establishes God's first Word for the world as an ongoing and integral aspect of revelation. "The recurring dangers of natural theology may not drive us . . . to a diminished appreciation of the continuing reality and unretracted fullness, forcefulness, and clarity of creation (general) revelation."¹⁵⁷ The abiding relevance of creational revelation rests on the divine authority with which it was given.¹⁵⁸

To apply the term "Word of God" to creation, Scripture, and Christ does not imply that each dimension of God's Word functions in the same manner. Spykman realizes that each mode of the Word has a unique nature, and he outlines this in his unpublished paper "'Follow-up' Project: An Exploration." He notes that in a general sense, "Revelation is of God, but it is not God."¹⁵⁹ However, in speaking particularly of the incarnate Word, one must recognize that Jesus *is* identified with God; he is the Word, and he is God, and thus his nature as the Word of God differs from that of Scripture and creation. Though it is appropriate to refer to Scripture as the Word of God, a further distinction between Scripture and Christ consists in the fact that "[w]e are to reverence the written Word," while "[t]he incarnate Word calls for both reverence and worship."¹⁶⁰ With regard to creation, Spykman recognizes Scripture's clear line of demarcation between Creator and creatures. While it is inaccurate to conceive of creation as divine, it can be considered "sacred, in the sense of standing responsively before the face of God."¹⁶¹ Like Scripture, its origin is God and his divine authority, but its identification as Word of God is more indirect, since it functions reflexively – as a response to the Word.

¹⁵⁷ Spykman, "On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation," 11.

¹⁵⁸ Spykman, "On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation," 5. Spykman references Report 44 on "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" regarding the divine authority of revelation.

¹⁵⁹ Gordon J. Spykman, "'Follow-up' Project: An Exploration," January 1990, p.5, Folder 8, Box 7, Series 5, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹⁶⁰ Spykman, "'Follow-up' Project," 6.

¹⁶¹ Spykman, "'Follow-up' Project," 6.

II.3. The Threefold Word: Implications for the Doctrine of Revelation

The threefold Word as conceived within Spykman's new paradigm offers a fresh perspective on the Reformed doctrine of revelation. This section considers structural implications for reflection on revelation, Spykman's reframing of general and special revelation, his insights regarding the bi-unitary dimension of revelation, and practical implications for Christian life and work.

II.3.1. Structural Implications for Theological Reflection on Divine Revelation

Setting aside for the present the potential problems of Spykman's model, this section highlights the theological gains to be made by understanding God's Word as threefold in nature. It may be that Spykman's basic insights provide new directions for dogmatics, even though the inclination to systematize those insights into a rigid model raises legitimate questions. **Can theologians utilize Spykman's signposts, which represent his attempt to incorporate contemporary developments from the field of biblical theology?** These signposts include (1) the *unity* and *diversity* of God's revelation, (2) the significance of the *biblical storyline* in relation to God's revelation, and (3) the *Trinitarian* nature of divine revelation, with a focus on Christ the Mediator.

Spykman's motivation for presenting a more expansive theology of the Word of God comes from his conviction that Scripture asserts a "fundamental, revelatory unity underlying" all aspects of God's revelation.¹⁶² In his assessment, a tendency to focus on either the Bible or Jesus as the Word of God, without a corresponding consideration of the relationship between creational revelation and redemptive revelation, constitutes an aberration of Reformed theology as articulated by Calvin. The Word of God is one Word, not three. Yet, the "underlying unity of God's revelation" finds concrete expression in "the rich diversity of ways in which the revealing God comes to us."¹⁶³

How can we in our theology honor both the integral *unity* and the rich *diversity* within the full sweep of God's revelation? How can we open up meaningfully the essential oneness of all revelation, while at the same time reckoning seriously with the fact that God revealed himself first in creation, then – after our fall into sin – in Scripture, and finally in Jesus Christ?¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Spykman, letter to *Calvinist Contact* Editor and Readers, 2.

¹⁶³ Spykman, "The Word of God," 8-9.

¹⁶⁴ Gordon J. Spykman, "A Confessional Hermeneutic: Alternative to the Historical-Critical Method," *Reformed Ecumenical Synod Theological Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (Dec 1973), 6, accessed May 9, 2015, <http://allofliferedeemed.co.uk/spykman.htm>

Spykman intends not to give new content to the doctrine of revelation, but to clarify its meaning in accordance with Scripture's testimony to the profound unity that undergirds the many angles of revelation and response.

To reclaim the historical significance of God's revelatory acts, Spykman recommends the biblical storyline (creation/fall/redemption) as the pattern for organizing dogmatic reflection rather than the traditional *loci* method. At the end of the prolegomenal section of *RT*, Spykman states that this "notable revision . . . aims at overcoming the abstract and rationalist way of dealing with Christian doctrines," an abstract rationalism that he attributes to the "influences of Protestant scholastic thought."¹⁶⁵ Though Spykman's critique of "Protestant scholastic thought" reflects the accepted attitude toward scholasticism in his time, the positive reasons he offers for re-thinking the order of dogmatics commend his approach. For Spykman, a doctrine of revelation centered on God's attributes and abstracted from his actual movement toward man is not sufficient. He remarks, "Scripture is therefore not a record of isolated and unrelated mighty acts of God, but a sustained and integrally unified narrative."¹⁶⁶ Following the biblical storyline makes it possible, in Spykman's judgment, to capture the thrust of Scripture's single story. He connects this structural choice to Calvin's "organizing principle" of "the *twofold knowledge of God* revealing himself as Creator and as Redeemer."¹⁶⁷ He does not intend to lose the traditional themes, but to show more clearly the relatedness of God's revelatory acts in history and to maintain the "essential goodness of the original creation" over against modern theological tendencies to paint creation in unbiblical terms.¹⁶⁸

Describing revelation in terms of one Word of God expressed in a threefold manner creates space for recognizing the unified yet diverse work of the Trinity. As Spykman notes, "[W]hile the work of creation, redemption, and consummation involves *pervasively* all three Persons of the Trinity, yet through it all each Person is ascribed a work which is *prevailingly* his own."¹⁶⁹ Within the unfolding progression of revelation, each Person of the Trinity had a distinctive role, but the work of each Person was carried out in unified conjunction with the work of the other two Persons. Despite Spykman's stated commitment to a trinitarian-structured dogmatics,¹⁷⁰ this aspect of his dogmatics needs more

¹⁶⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 135.

¹⁶⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 128.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon J. Spykman, "Thoughts on 'Creation Order,'" in *God's Order for Creation*, ed. P. G. Schrotenboer (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994), 38.

¹⁶⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 135, 143-144.

¹⁶⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 136.

¹⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 135-136.

development. Previous mention of Spykman's relatively infrequent inclusion of the Spirit can be related to his lack of trinitarian follow-through in the structure of his dogmatic work.

II.3.2. General and Special Revelation: Reframing the Distinction

Though in agreement with the Reformed understanding of "general" and "special" revelation, Spykman desires to move beyond the general/special language because of its dualistic overtones, which obscure the unity between the various modes of revelation. In the essay "De Openbaring Gods" ("The Revelation of God") by A. D. R. Polman (1897-1993), Spykman discovered alternative terms: fundamental and redemptive revelation.¹⁷¹ This discovery constituted a major step forward in the development of his own thinking regarding the doctrine of revelation. In his assessment, the fundamental/redemptive terminology better distinguishes between the realities represented by "general" and "special" revelation, while maintaining their unity (or "bi-unity") as two aspects of God's one revelation.

Spykman found support for a threefold understanding of revelation in Klaas Schilder's (1890-1952) sermon notes on Matthew 2.¹⁷² Schilder interprets the progression of the magi in terms of apprehension of the creational revelation (the star), to clarification by the words of Scripture, and finally to worship of the Word incarnate. The unity of these three modes of revelation in the magi's journey propelled Spykman to consider how the Reformed understanding of revelation might be renewed to better reflect Scripture's testimony about God's various ways of communicating his Word to the world. He believes that the threefold language he endorses is closer to the "concrete language of Scripture" than the more "nondescript" terms of general and special revelation.¹⁷³ However, he maintains the distinction between the temporal priority of God's revelation expressed for creation and the noetic priority of God's revelation in Scripture.

In Spykman's judgment, the traditional language of "general" and "special" revelation conveys that general revelation is a relatively independent sphere of knowledge. If knowledge of creational structures is considered "autonomous" knowledge, accessible to regenerate and unregenerate alike with the aid of human reason, a door is opened to the concomitant ideas of natural law and natural

¹⁷¹ A. D. R. Polman, "De Openbaring Gods," in *Het Dogma der Kerk*, eds. G. C. Berkouwer and G. Toornvliet (Groningen: Jan Haan, 1949), 80-110. See Spykman, *RT*, 91.

¹⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 91. The passage to which Spykman refers is found in Klaas Schilder, *Licht in de Rook* (Delft, Netherlands: Meinema), 1951. Schilder's challenges to the Reformational view of "common grace" will enter the discussion in Chapter 4.

¹⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

theology. Natural theology presupposes that observation of the created order yields knowledge of certain aspects of God's character, apart from the "spectacles" of Scripture and Christ. Spykman denies the premise of natural theology, arguing instead that all knowledge of God potentially apprehended through creation depends on revelation and, in a post-fall context, must be illumined by scriptural revelation. Spykman's concern for the unified nature of revelation, considered in the context of a three-factor understanding of God's relationship to the world – wherein God's Word stands as the boundary and bridge – results in a renewed approach to the interrelationship of general and special revelation.

II.3.3. Creation and Redemption: A Bi-Unitary Revelation

The relationship of general and special revelation can be expressed more generally through the terms "creation" and "redemption," which denote God's revelation through Word and work in the context of the biblical narrative. Spykman's quest to accentuate the unity between creation and redemption is the driving force of his theological renewal project. He asserts that this unity should receive greater recognition within Reformed theology, he emphasizes the cosmic scope of redemption, and he maintains that the structure of redemption corresponds to the structure of creation.

"The most fundamental issue in Reformed dogmatics is, therefore, a right understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption."¹⁷⁴ Creation and redemption together represent God's "bi-unitary" revelation: "bi-" because God speaks with full, plenary, continuing authority in two different modes, and "unitary" because his revelation possesses an essential unity and coherence.¹⁷⁵ "Creation and redemption are . . . not competing or complementary sets of realities."¹⁷⁶ To prioritize redemptive revelation without considering its unity with creational revelation, or to consider the relationship between creation and redemption as a tangential rather than fundamental point, opens the door to unbiblical conclusions about God's covenantal relationship to his world. At the very least, failure to consider the unity of God's revelation will skew the emphases of theology, usually resulting in the dualist mindset of which Spykman is wary. Consider Spykman's definition of sanctification, a doctrine often defined in terms of inward holiness: "Sanctification is the lifelong re-creation of the whole creational life."¹⁷⁷ Recognizing the cosmic and holist dimensions of creation, fall, and redemption leads Spykman to define sanctification in broad terms that connect it to God's original creating work.

¹⁷⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 88.

¹⁷⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 88.

¹⁷⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 89.

¹⁷⁷ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 88.

Through redemption, creation is regained.¹⁷⁸ Just as creation, in a post-fall world, needs the illuminating power of redemption, so redemption depends upon the structures of creation as the context for the working out of God's purposes. The material of creation is also the material of redemption, or re-creation. However, though redemption is aimed toward the structures of creation, it does not find its power in creation.¹⁷⁹ Its power lies in the work of the Word made flesh, effected and applied by God's Holy Spirit. Redemptive revelation differs in its message and content but not in its goal.¹⁸⁰ Divine redemption reclaims all that has been defaced by sin in the original structures of creation. Theology that fails to recognize the cosmic dimensions of redemption will tend toward a truncated view of redemption that posits a different end goal for redemption than for creation.

What Spykman offers is a theological paradigm that celebrates the unity of God's creating and redeeming work. "Recognition of this bi-unitary revelation . . . is a liberating, life-renewing experience"¹⁸¹ that spurs renewed theological reflection on topics such as Christian scholarship, sanctification, common grace, and eschatology. So crucial was this idea for Spykman both personally and professionally that he staked a lifetime of theological work on propounding it and its implications for Christian theology and redemptive living.

II.3.4. Practical Implications: "Opening a Window on God's World"¹⁸²

A dualistic framework, employed theologically, tends to focus on the so-called "sacred" or "spiritual" dimensions of life, without recognizing that spiritual realities are pervasive in character. This often leads to extended reflection on those aspects of God's law that pertain to one's inner character and to the morality of one's actions in relation to others. Less attention is given to the ways in which God's Word, or law, holds "for the full range of human activities."¹⁸³ Beyond personal devotion, personal morality, and church involvement, in the spheres of creation where most people spend most of their time, the fullness of God's Word is seldom brought to bear in a way that identifies creation as the realm of God's redemptive activity.

¹⁷⁸ Albert M. Wolters has helped to disseminate this neo-Calvinistic idea through the title of his book, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

¹⁷⁹ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 87-90, 558-560. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 577; Bavinck, "Common Grace," 59-60.

¹⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 89-90.

¹⁸² Spykman, "Opening a Window on God's World."

¹⁸³ Spykman, "Scripture, Faith, and Science," 20.

Reclaiming a robust doctrine of creation that illuminates the cosmic scope of creation's goodness and God's redemptive work to restore that goodness: this, for Spykman, is the biblically attuned benefit of recognizing the threefold nature of divine revelation. Giving credence to the idea of creational revelation as a mode of God's Word presses upon the believer an obligation to know and respond obediently to God's Word in its fullness.¹⁸⁴ In terms of Christian ethics – "Christian reflection, decision-making, and action" – appealing to the norms of creation, given with the Word for creation, deters arbitrariness while providing a more expansive view of God's law. This is reinforced by Scripture and is dependent upon Scripture, but it recognizes there is more to God's law-Word than that which is given explicit expression in the Bible.¹⁸⁵ In his zeal to point out Scripture's positive role in clarifying creational tasks, Spykman sometimes neglects to develop the priority of the believer's union with Christ – a significant dimension of the Holy Spirit's work, which in *RT* also lacks development relative to its significance. But he does point Christians to a fuller embrace of a life lived in the revelation light that traverses "the entire spectrum of God's world."¹⁸⁶

A threefold Word more firmly anchors God's creating and redeeming work in the context of history, not just the history of God's way with Israel and his way in Christ, but history as it extends backward to the very beginning. This approach helps to prevent one of the primary consequences of dualism: assigning to creation a lesser status than that of redemption, and thus pitting creation and redemption – the material and the spiritual – against each other. "Redemption does not abolish creation, nor replace it, nor oppose it, nor draw us away from it. Redemption restores creation."¹⁸⁷ Spykman offers the threefold Word concept as a step in the direction of honoring the biblical unity between these two distinct yet unified acts of God, the one Creator-Redeemer.

Part III: Evaluation

"Scripture speaks to all of life. But how does it speak to us? . . . How we read Scripture will certainly shape the way we understand our Christian calling in and for the world."¹⁸⁸ These words

¹⁸⁴ See Gordon J. Spykman, "How is Scripture Normative in Christian Ethics?" in *The Interpretation of Scripture Today: RES Theological Conference, Chicago 1984* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1984), 52, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Spykman/GJSScripture.pdf>: "Scripture re-articulates God's will which lays its claim upon us from the beginning and re-directs us to obey it."

¹⁸⁵ Spykman, "How is Scripture Normative?," 52-53.

¹⁸⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, "On General and Special Revelation," 1988, p. 9, Folder 6, Box 7, Series 5, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹⁸⁷ Spykman, "How is Scripture Normative?," 52.

¹⁸⁸ Spykman, "Christian Societal Responsibility," 2-3.

capture the thrust of Spykman's efforts to construct a theological model grounded in a hermeneutic that fully recognizes the unity of creation and redemption.

The questions highlighted throughout this chapter comprise several areas of inquiry. (1) Did Spykman correctly interpret his tradition, particularly as related to Calvin, and develop it in accordance with its insights and priorities? (2) Does a three-factor theology better honor the biblical givens, or was Spykman trying to justify the assumptions of Cosmogenic Philosophy? (3) Does his model of the threefold Word offer a way forward in Reformed dogmatics, and does it illumine the calling of Christians in the world?

This project includes two facets. In the first place, it analyzes and interprets Gordon Spykman's most significant theological contributions in terms of continuity with his tradition. Though *RT* was his *magnum opus*, the thoughts and conclusions undergirding *RT* sometimes find clearer and more thorough articulation in his other essays, articles, and correspondence, some of which are not readily available to the interested reader. In the second place, it evaluates Spykman's model in terms of its effectiveness for his own dogmatics and its potential for recalibrating the Reformed tradition. Should his model be given renewed attention? *Reformational Theology's* minimal impact may be due to its being less a dogmatic work than a polemical one. Though it includes a dogmatic component, the core of his project is a critical evaluation of traditional theological method. In its place, he introduces a new theological method and attempts to persuade others of its significance as a working model.

Chapter 2

Gordon J. Spykman's Appropriation of John Calvin's Doctrine of Revelation

"The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!" (Psalm 119:64)

In this verse, the Psalmist testifies to the unity between the Word for creation and the Word in Scripture. They are distinct yet interrelated, and in one breath the Psalmist can express his joy in both aspects of God's revelation of himself to his people. Psalm 119:64 exhibits a pattern similar to that of Psalm 19, which John Calvin interprets in this way: "I have shown in the commencement, and it is also evident from the scope of the whole discourse, that David, before coming to the law, sets before us the fabric of the world, that in it we might behold the glory of God."¹

In identifying himself with the Reformed tradition, particularly as it was renewed and developed by Calvin and his successors, Gordon Spykman appropriates several of Calvin's emphases in support of his own effort to renew Reformed dogmatics. He points to the Janus-like nature of Calvin's role as a second-generation Reformer: "Thus the line of development in Christian theology which I intend to follow runs from the Scriptures through Augustine to Calvin, taking Calvin then as an historical starting point for the further development of a Reformed dogmatics."² Calvin reached back across centuries of misdirected theology to its source in Scripture, and his reclamation of biblical doctrine created a decisive turning point for Christian thought, opening the door to a flourishing of Protestant theology. This chapter considers Spykman's assessment of Calvin's vital contributions to Reformed dogmatics, with particular attention to Calvin's doctrine of revelation as one that assumes a basic unity within divine revelation.

Part I: Why Calvin?

In Spykman's judgment, Calvin's work overcomes the "prevalingly dualist patterns of . . . medieval and Trentine theologies,"³ primarily through demonstrating the unity of nature and grace. Scripture, the only divine authority for faith and life, testifies to God as both Creator and Redeemer. For those to whom God reveals himself as Redeemer, Scripture functions like spectacles to illumine God's

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. I, trans. James Anderson, Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. IV (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 314.

² Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 22.

³ Spykman, *RT*, 22.

revelation of himself as Creator.⁴ Spykman leans heavily on Calvin's metaphor of Scripture as the "indispensable pair of glasses" to offer a more holistic perspective of God's creating and redeeming work in human history.⁵ Despite the presence of a unified view of nature and grace, or creation and redemption, in Calvin's theology, Spykman evaluates the theological work done in the post-Calvin period as having fallen prey once more to dualist patterns of thinking.⁶ The "seeds of renewal" – meaning, a theological method rooted in unity rather than dualism – planted by Calvin's theological impetus were "choked out."⁷ According to Spykman, these seeds began bearing fruit again in the mid-nineteenth century among Dutch Reformed scholars.

An important feature of this "renewal" consists in discerning the meaning of creation for Christian formation and discipleship. Following Abraham Kuyper's and Herman Bavinck's lead, equipped by the Reformational philosophy of Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd, neo-Calvinist thinkers have used the concept of creational "norms" to formulate Christian perspectives pertaining to a wide variety of life "spheres." Spykman, in his promotion of the concept of sphere-sovereignty and its application to social organizations, traces these ideas to Calvin's thought and work.⁸ Conceptualized more fully by Johannes Althusius and later by Kuyper who "expressed them in the idea of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality,"⁹ these concepts function as justification for Spykman's call for Christians to respond faithfully to God by discerning the creation ordinances embedded in the creation order for every sphere of relationship and activity.

For Spykman, the validity of these theological reflections depends on God's written Word. He intends to adhere strictly to Calvin's hermeneutic method of remaining within the parameters of Scripture.¹⁰ In setting the stage for his dogmatic study, Spykman self-consciously places himself at the heart of the Reformed tradition by acknowledging the primacy of Scripture for all theological reflection.¹¹ However, Spykman is working within the post-Schleiermachiian and post-Barthian milieu, seeking a normative position for the mediating Word of God within a theological climate of either/or: *either* anthropocentrism *or* theocentrism takes priority in theological discussions. Spykman observes,

⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.6.1.

⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 76.

⁶ See Spykman's brief assessment of this trend in *RT*, 23.

⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 23.

⁸ See Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," 163-208.

⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 85.

¹⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 6, 120-122.

¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 5-6.

“Current theology oscillates between these two fundamental positions.”¹² To avoid this dualistic conundrum, Spykman claims God’s Word as the “norm” for all theology and life.

Spykman argues for a return to a more biblically oriented pattern of theology such as that found in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and this constitutes another reason for his reliance on Calvin. He believes that when systematic theology follows the biblical narrative of creation-fall-redemption in its ordering of *loci*, similarly to Calvin’s arrangement in the *Institutes*, the sharp distinction between biblical and systematic theology developed over the past few centuries is minimized, and “we can deal more fruitfully with the teaching of Scripture.”¹³ He also suggests that incorporation of Scripture’s story line into dogmatics fosters a more biblical understanding of the “bi-unitary” nature of revelation – the interrelatedness of creation and redemption.¹⁴ Taking his cues from Genesis¹⁵ and from Calvin, he assumes the existence of God rather than presenting proofs for God’s existence, and he proceeds from “The Good Creator” through the major themes of Scripture.

Regarding the use of a creedal pattern among Calvin and his immediate successors, Richard Muller comments, “Theological topics result not from a process of logical argument but from fairly traditional extraction of theological *loci* from Scripture.”¹⁶ A concern to be open to Scripture – shaped and formed by it in very explicit ways – which Spykman believes is evidenced in Calvin’s works, motivates him to reconfigure the task of theology along biblical pathways, not eschewing the questions of logic altogether, but subordinating them to the flow of salvation history.

Why Calvin, then? Because Calvin represents the Reformed commitment to honor God’s Word as the source for all theologizing, including both structure and content, and as the source for faithful living *coram Deo*.

Part II: Divine Revelation: Key to Renewal

Spykman’s model of the threefold Word embodies a particular understanding of divine revelation that he derives mainly from Calvin and Bavinck. He believes this model of revelation offers a

¹² Spykman, “Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History,” 8-9.

¹³ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena”; see also *RT*, 8-12.

¹⁴ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 14.

¹⁵ See Spykman, *RT*, 147-148.

¹⁶ Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 178-79. The later (post-1700) movement from a creedal pattern to one of logical argument in the arrangement of *loci* is one element of what Spykman has in mind when he criticizes “scholasticism.” He uses the term “scholasticism” in a negative sense in accordance with the common view of his time that Calvin’s work manifests substantial discontinuity with the scholasticism that preceded and followed him.

key for better grasping the ongoing interaction of God's Word with God's world. The following section includes discussion of several topics related to Spykman's thought: (1) differences between Spykman's post-Enlightenment and Calvin's pre-modern perspectives; (2) a biblical view of revelation and response, grounded in Calvin's insistence on the positive relation between knowledge of God and knowledge of self; (3) Spykman's conception of the Word of God as boundary and bridge; and (4) the relationship between creation and Scripture as accommodated and complementary forms of God's one Word.

I.1. Theological Assumptions Concerning Divine Revelation

Since much of Spykman's use of Calvin hinges on Calvin's theology of divine revelation, one must consider the following question: What are the challenges of translating Calvin's exegetical and theological insights concerning revelation, shaped and formed by his sixteenth-century context, into a model that serves the needs of Spykman's twentieth-century context?

II.1.1. Calvin's Pre-Modern Assumptions

Living as he did before Immanuel Kant and before the Enlightenment's elevation of reason beyond scriptural limits, Calvin assumes the reality of revelation: God addresses his imagers, who are called to acknowledge and respond in faith to the divine Word. Cornelis van der Kooi provides a glimpse of the challenge of re-constructing Calvin's doctrine of revelation:

In short, Calvin has no revelation problem as the centre of his theology. He begins with the religiously, ethically charged reality in which man will henceforth find himself. This reality is that of the man alienated from God, who is again sought out by God and enticed to a way in which community with God can again be found.¹⁷

With certainty that God speaks, and that his speaking is definitive for human existence and for salvation,¹⁸ Calvin proceeds to elucidate the revelation given by God. The structure of the *Institutes* illustrates the contours of Calvin's view of revelation: Book I deals with "Knowledge of God the Creator," and Book II, "Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ." In this way, Calvin situates humanity in immediate and direct relationship to God as Creator and Redeemer, without feeling the need to establish God's existence or to prove humanity's relationship to him through rational argumentation. He accepts these truths by faith in God's revelation, yet he does not discount the proper role of reason.

¹⁷ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 40-41.

¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 26, notes that in Calvin's pre-Enlightenment worldview, "Divine self-revelation was accepted as the basic and unquestioned reality. Self-knowledge is secondary."

II.1.2. Post-Enlightenment Assumptions

When Spykman claims, as he often does, that the Word of God functions as the “norm” for creaturely response to God, including the response of theological reflection, he is attempting to construct a starting place for theology that captures the pre-Enlightenment assumptions of Calvin. In Calvin’s sixteenth-century context, divine revelation was a given. However, the post-Calvin march toward modernity set the stage for Kant’s radical bifurcation of faith and reason and the resultant shift from the object of knowledge (God) to the knowing subject (the person).¹⁹ The problem of the relationship between faith and reason was not new, but Kant’s framing of the problem drew new lines along which theology and the other sciences must operate. Kant’s framework includes two realms of thought: the first realm, “pure reason,” includes those disciplines which can be empirically verified. The second realm, “practical reason,” includes all that cannot be empirically verified and thus “cannot be the object of theoretical reflection.”²⁰ As Spykman summarizes the situation, “Kant’s dualist restatement of the traditional philosophy/theology, prolegomena/dogmatics problem remains the formative backdrop for all modern theologizing.”²¹ The options for theology in the wake of Kant consist in using human reason to construct a path to God, or else describing God as essentially unknowable.

In response to the new theological situation defined by Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher attempted to re-create a firm foundation for Christian theology. He did so by appealing “to the phenomena of religious experience,” but because he accepted Kant’s assumptions, “[h]is approach was . . . just as man-centered and subjectivist as Kant’s.”²² Against this influential human-centered trend, Karl Barth theologized on the conviction that divine revelation is radically theocentric: “he allows the full emphasis to fall on the absolute transcendence of God.”²³ According to Spykman, Barth believes his doctrine of revelation to be “true to Calvin and the Reformation”²⁴ in its rejection of natural theology²⁵ and the “anthropocentrism of modern liberalism.”²⁶ However, Barth continues to allow the Kantian

¹⁹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 227, 233, asserts, “Summed up in one comprehensive definition, modernity is characterized by the turn to the subject and a shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric way of life. . . . The new centre is found in man himself, as the thinking, feeling, willing subject.”

²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 41.

²¹ Spykman, *RT*, 41-42.

²² Spykman, *RT*, 31.

²³ Spykman, *RT*, 33.

²⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 174.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 172-174, and Spykman, “On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation,” 14.

²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 176.

dilemma to define the theological enterprise at its most basic level: one must choose between locating the norm in the divine realm or in human history.²⁷

If Schleiermacher's influence on modern theology can be characterized as "doing theology *von unten*," and if Barth's method, developed in reaction to the anthropocentric approach of modern theology, can be characterized as "doing [theology] *von oben*,"²⁸ Calvin's approach reorients the theological enterprise to the *relational* nature of divine revelation. "Calvin refuses to get locked into the fruitless dilemma of anthropocentric versus theocentric theology."²⁹ Citing the intuition of certain twentieth-century Reformed theologians to gravitate toward a "mediating factor" for theological reflection,³⁰ Spykman proposes a solution that he believes is rooted in the pre-Kant assumptions of Calvin: "Only a three-factor theology, in which the Word is recognized as holding a normatively structured place at the heart of the covenantal relationship between God and the world, can avoid these pitfalls."³¹ With this "new paradigm," Spykman seeks to overcome the Kantian dilemma embedded in modern life by a return to the doctrine of revelation as conceived by Calvin.

II.2. God's Word: The "Norm" for Divine Revelation and Human Response

The inescapable, God-defined relationship between God and his imagers provides a starting point for delineating the basic contours of revelation as conceived by the Calvinist tradition. Consequently, Spykman's basic definition of divine revelation reflects Calvin's positive correlation between knowledge of God and self.

II.2.1. Knowledge of God and Self-Knowledge

The opening statement of Calvin's *Institutes* famously declares: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."³² For Calvin, knowledge of God has a correlate in knowledge of self; likewise, knowledge of self has a correlate in knowledge of God.³³ If relationship to God is at the core of human identity, a fundamental and proper understanding of self depends upon a true knowledge of God.

²⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 70-72.

²⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 45.

²⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 198-199.

³⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 51-58.

³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 75.

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, I.1.1.

³³ Willem van 't Spijker, *Calvin: A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 30, notes the following regarding Calvin's correlation of knowledge of God

Assuming with Calvin that creaturely access to this dual knowledge of God and of self comes only through divine revelation,³⁴ one may ask the following question: What knowledge of himself does God reveal? Scholars generally refer to Calvin's concept of the knowledge of God as the *duplex cognitio Dei*, a two-fold knowledge of God. The order Calvin employs in the *Institutes* corresponds to the historical progression of God's self-revelation. God first revealed himself as Creator, but because of sin, the true knowledge of God as Creator remains hidden. Knowledge of God as Redeemer, bestowed upon a sinner through God's Word and Spirit, includes within it the essential knowledge of God as Creator.

What knowledge of the human self, then, does God reveal? Calvin forthrightly states, "This knowledge of ourselves is twofold: namely, to know what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam."³⁵ Throughout *Institutes* I.15, Calvin expounds upon the "originally upright nature" of human beings prior to the fall to demonstrate that God did not create them with any "defect." The result, he hopes, is that when he teaches about the invasive and pervasive effects of sin on human nature, remembrance of "our original nobility" will "arouse in us a zeal for righteousness and goodness."³⁶ However, since sin renders the self unable to know rightly the truth of its createdness or its sinfulness, the path to knowing God as Creator and oneself as created in God's image now lies through the regenerating knowledge of God the Redeemer and oneself as renewed in the image of Christ Jesus.

Spykman writes of the difference between these "ontic" and "noetic" orders of reality:

Noetically, given the effects of sin, we must now come to know God as Redeemer in Jesus Christ as the avenue by which we come to a true knowledge of God as Creator. Ontically, however, the order of things runs in the opposite direction. Redemption presupposes creation. This is the historical order of biblical revelation. It is this ontic order which Calvin adopts as 'the order of right teaching' (*Institutes*, I,2,1; I,6,1; II,1,1; II,6,1) – that is, for theological instruction.³⁷

An acknowledgement of the noetic path to true knowledge of self should not obscure the fact that createdness, apart from sin, was the original condition of humanity. Spykman emphasizes that "our creatureliness is an abiding reality."³⁸ Against modern dialectical trends that would reverse "Calvin's 'right order of teaching,' namely that ontically creational integrity takes priority over the realities of sin

and self: "One comes across this same idea in Luther, Zwingli, and Bucer, but in Calvin it functions not as a starting point but as an existential reality integrated into every part of doctrine."

³⁴ See T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (1952; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 13.

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.1.

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.3.

³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 145.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 195.

and grace,”³⁹ Spykman cites two of Calvin’s salient comments. In *Institutes* II.1.10 Calvin affirms that sin cannot be attributed to God or to humanity’s original state, but that “we have degenerated from our original condition.” In *Institutes* II.1.11 he declares that the corruption of human nature “is an adventitious quality which comes upon man rather than a substantial property which has been implanted from the beginning.”⁴⁰

Though sin and redemption now form the noetic basis for genuine self-knowledge, a biblical perspective acknowledges that “[t]hey represent the misdirection and redirection of our creaturely status.”⁴¹ Theologically speaking, the “right order of teaching” is one that begins with the original relationship between the Creator God and his responding creatures. This “right order of teaching” prompts Spykman to advocate a more genuinely Calvinist order of theological topics. Spykman believes that following Calvin and the Scriptures by assuming the Creator and his creation as the starting point for theological reflection will result in greater illumination of redemption’s cosmic scope.

Revelation, as communicated by Calvin, finds its center in this dynamic of divine self-giving and human reception and response. Taking seriously the relational character of Calvin’s concept of revelation, Spykman attempts to place the “lifelong, all-embracing covenant relationship of revelation and response” at the heart of his threefold model of revelation.⁴² When God speaks, as he does continually, those to whom he speaks must respond. Being made in God’s image necessitates response to God’s Word, though that response may take the form of “obedience or disobedience”: “No part of our lives stands outside of this compelling relationship of response to God’s revelation.”⁴³ To be human is to stand in relationship to God, with every action a response, faithful or unfaithful, to his life-giving and life-redeeming Word.

II.2.2. Knowing God ad extra

In Spykman’s judgment, one of the more crucial aspects of Calvin’s view of the knowledge of God is his contention that the primary need of humans is to know God in terms of who he has purposed to be in relationship to them. Calvin says, “For it is not so much our concern to know who he is in himself, as what he wills to be toward us.”⁴⁴ The relationship God has initiated with his world forms the

³⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 197.

⁴⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 197. He mistakenly gives the second *Institutes* reference as I.1.11 instead of II.1.11.

⁴¹ Spykman, *RT*, 196.

⁴² Spykman, *RT*, 94.

⁴³ Gordon J. Spykman, “Foundations for Christian Social Action,” Christian Action Foundation, n.d., p. 2, Folder 7, Box 12, Series 9, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.6.

context for humanity's knowledge of him. In other words, seeking insight into the essence of God lies beyond the scope of what God has revealed. Rather, what can be known of God and his nature is based on the character he displays in his works of creation and redemption. Calvin's intention is to allow God's written Word to provide the boundary marker for theological questions and reflection. When Calvin speaks out against scholasticism and scholastic theologians, he has in mind those who subject God's Word to the scrutiny of human rationality and who build theological structures on the foundation of logic and reason.⁴⁵

Similarly, Spykman understands the questions of scholastic theology – in both its medieval and post-Calvin Protestant forms – to be directed toward the type of knowledge with which Calvin is less concerned: knowledge of God *in se*, or *ad intra* (as he is in himself or within).⁴⁶ Spykman writes of “Calvin's sixteenth century rejection of this scholastic notion of the knowledge of God *ad intra* (God in himself) in favor of the idea that God reveals himself *ad extra* (in an outgoing way, in his works, in relationship to us).”⁴⁷ Calvin describes God's Word as the “sure rule for understanding” and cautions believers not to “exceed the bounds of the Word.”⁴⁸ For Calvin it is important that theological questions be determined by God's Word rather than by a vain desire for knowledge that lies outside God's self-revelation.⁴⁹ The course of a theology rooted in Scripture should run parallel to that which God has revealed of himself through the various means by which he has chosen to speak, act, and relate. God wills that he be defined by his creating and redeeming movements toward his creatures.

II.2.3. The Nature of Human Response

When analyzing human response, where does Spykman locate the theological center of human life? Spykman capitalizes on the biblical idea of “heart” put forward by Calvin as an expression that includes the wholeness of human life and its response to God. He references the words of *Institutes*

⁴⁵ Though numerous twentieth-century studies have cast sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed theology in a negative light, Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 77, interprets “scholasticism” to denote a method rather than specific content and argues that the scholastic theologians who developed Reformed doctrine in the wake of Calvin built upon the structure of the *Institutes*. Van 't Spijker, *Calvin*, 127-128, offers an assessment more specific to Calvin: “In this theology [*scholastica theologia*], Calvin disapproved of how people wanted to explore things that God has not revealed to us. . . . The theologians of the Sorbonne want to inquire into what God has decided to keep hidden. . . . Calvin reproaches these theologians for engaging in word battles that become competitions in using clever arguments.”

⁴⁶ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 125, explains, “Calvin's interest lies more with God's acts than with God's essence.”

⁴⁷ Spykman, “Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History,” 14.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.21.3 and III.21.2.

⁴⁹ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.21.3.

I.5.9, where Calvin insists that “sound and fruitful” knowledge of God “takes root in the heart.”⁵⁰ Spykman also appeals to “the visual symbol of Calvin’s thought, the flaming heart in the outstretched hand,” as evidence for a view that corresponds to Scripture’s emphasis on the heart as the all-encompassing source of human knowing, loving, and willing.⁵¹ He notes that Barth articulates a similar view of the heart, citing *Church Dogmatics*, III/2.⁵² Spykman considers this an essential element of Reformed theology that avoids the dangers of limiting human response to one or another human faculty and positions the whole person in relationship to God.

Building on Calvin’s use of the biblical idea of “heart,” Spykman considers the “heart” a key component of a proper understanding of self in relation to God. Given that there are “[m]ore than 800 references to heart” in Scripture, Spykman interprets this biblical emphasis as follows:

The heart represents the unifying center of man’s entire existence, the spiritual concentration point of our total selfhood, the inner reflective core which sets the direction for all of our life relationships. . . . The Word of God, in addressing us, speaks directly to the heart, setting the spiritual direction of all our bodily activities. The heart is, therefore, the focal point of religion, that is, of life.⁵³

Human response to divine revelation involves not just one aspect or dimension of personhood but the whole person, captured in the word “heart” used so often by the biblical writers. Spykman believes that Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin grasped this more holistic view of heart in a unique way, differentiating them from medieval theologians, other Reformers, and the Protestant scholastics who succeeded them.⁵⁴ In particular, Calvin’s symbol of “the flaming heart in the outstretched hand,” accompanied by a prayer of offering one’s heart to the Lord, illustrates the idea of the heart as the source of religious response, a response that has implications for every area of life.⁵⁵

Calvin indicates his interest in the whole person, as opposed to reason alone, when he writes about faith: “that very assent itself . . . is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.”⁵⁶ Calvin’s discussion of the impact of sin on the human person also draws from a holistic account of what it means to be human:

From this it follows that that part in which the excellence and nobility of the soul especially shine has not only been wounded, but so corrupted that it needs to be healed and to put on a

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.9.

⁵¹ Spykman, *RT*, 217-218.

⁵² Spykman, *RT*, 218: “Note the following oft-repeated line from Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*: The heart represents ‘man in a nutshell, the whole man – not only the seat of his activity, but its summary’ (III/2).”

⁵³ Spykman, *RT*, 218.

⁵⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 217-218.

⁵⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 217.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.8.

new nature as well. We shall soon see to what extent sin occupies both mind and heart. Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole man is overwhelmed – as by a deluge – from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin.⁵⁷

Without reducing “heart” to emotion, as is common in the modern English use of the term, Calvin indicates that “the whole man” suffers the effects of sin and stands in need of divine healing.

In Calvin’s thought, restoration to the image of God in Christ matches the wholeness of the human person relating properly to God through the mind, affections, and will – in short, the heart – as Adam did in his created state. “Consequently, the beginning of our recovery of salvation is in that restoration which we obtain through Christ, who also is called the Second Adam for the reason that he restores us to true and complete integrity.”⁵⁸ Spykman considers the integrity of the human person to be a key hermeneutic principle, one that shapes an understanding of God’s Word as that which “always confronts us as whole persons, looked at now from one point of view, then from another.”⁵⁹ He refers to Barth and Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer as contemporary scholars who have affirmed this perspective.⁶⁰

Just as modern theologians like Spykman face the challenge of the philosophical turn from the object to the subject, so Calvin faced the challenge of certain pre-modern assumptions about the universe and humanity’s place in it. Spykman, from his twentieth-century context, critiques some of Calvin’s anthropological assumptions. When he argues from Calvin for the holistic concept of “heart,” Spykman acknowledges that “Calvin’s emphasis on the centrality of the heart is not completely free of certain ambiguities.”⁶¹ He addresses this issue more directly in his discussion of “The Whole Man: Body and Soul.”⁶² Here, Spykman contends for a more integrated anthropology characterized by the understanding that the person *is* body and *is* soul, in contrast to dichotomous or trichotomous views of the human person that distinguish sharply between the various aspects of the human person and thus fail to take account of the unity of personhood as portrayed in Scripture. He comments, “Calvin betrays his dependence on Hellenist philosophies, borrowing their concepts of man as a ‘microcosm’ of the world, with the body as ‘the prisonhouse’ of the soul.”⁶³ These less reformed aspects of Calvin’s

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.9.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.4.

⁵⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 219.

⁶⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 218, 221-222.

⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 218.

⁶² Spykman, *RT*, 233-245.

⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 235. Calvin uses Aristotle’s designation of man as a “microcosm” in *Institutes* I.5.3 and in his comments on Acts 17.27 in *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. II, trans. Henry Beveridge, Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XIX (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 167. Calvin refers to the body as a “prison house” of the soul in *Institutes* I.15.2, II.7.13, III.3.20, III.7.5, and III.9.4.

anthropology prohibit the development of a thoroughly biblical view of the person, in Spykman's assessment.⁶⁴

II.2.4. Spykman's Definition of Revelation

Calvin's concept of divine revelation, funded by his pre-modern reading of Scripture, affirms at least three realities: (1) knowing God occurs within a divinely established context of God sharing himself with his creatures; (2) human response is subordinate to divine revelation; and (3) right knowing of God correlated to a right knowing of self is manifested by the whole person responding obediently to God. Spykman accepts each of these aspects in his formulation of divine revelation. Maintaining self-knowledge as "secondary," he finds "the priority of knowing God" in Calvin's theology to be a corrective for modern theologies that tend to "stress 'becoming'" according to self-definition and self-realization rather than "'being'" in a world pre-defined by God.⁶⁵ With his emphasis on the "heart," he honors Calvin's perspective by reclaiming the wholeness of the responding person from the compartmentalization of head, heart, and hands characteristic of the post-Kantian thought world.⁶⁶

In addition to reclaiming aspects of Calvin's doctrine of revelation, Spykman uses Calvin's insights as the basis of a model of revelation that explicitly outlines the significance of human response, since questions about self-knowledge and the reality of God's presence have greater urgency in his twentieth-century context.⁶⁷ Calvin's movement toward recognition of the integrality of man allows Spykman to develop a model that explicitly acknowledges the created order and the necessity of human response in both the material and immaterial domains of life. Spykman is reticent to accept a definition of revelation that focuses only on "divine self-disclosure" and does not include, as part of its very definition, a place for human response to revelation.⁶⁸ "To simply define revelation, therefore, as 'divine self-disclosure' leaves the impression of the kind of transcendentalistic abstractness which is typical of scholastic theologizing, an otherness which hovers over creaturely reality without impinging

⁶⁴ Derek J. Brown agrees with this assessment in his paper titled "A Prison House of Riches: Calvin's Theology of the Body" (presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, Milwaukee, WI, Nov. 14-16, 2012), accessed April 6, 2017, <https://fromthestudy.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/derek-brown-calvin-theology-of-the-body-ets-draft.pdf>, concluding on p. 18, "Although he remains tethered to Scripture throughout the *Institutes*, thus forming a generally positive view of the human body, Calvin fails to separate himself completely from Platonic ideas about the body."

⁶⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 26-27.

⁶⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 221.

⁶⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 198.

⁶⁸ He considers Louis Berkhof's definition inadequate, focusing as it does on divine self-communication without an emphasis on human response. See Spykman, "'Follow-up' Project: An Exploration," 3.

existentially on it.”⁶⁹ For this reason, Calvin’s perspective on revelation as relational in nature constitutes an insight that needs to occupy a central position in a renewal of Reformed dogmatics.

A biblically-shaped definition of revelation that follows in Calvin’s line maintains the correlate between knowledge of God and knowledge of self: “This ‘knowledge’ refers (‘objectively’) to revelation as it comes out to us from God; it refers, at the same time, to revelation as it (‘subjectively’) is appropriated by us.”⁷⁰ Spykman discerns a Calvinist emphasis in the definitions of revelation set forth by Kuyper and Bavinck and in the *correlatie motief* employed by Berkouwer.⁷¹ In attempting to maintain this correlate, Spykman seeks to avoid the error of a speculative, “self-contained” knowledge of God untethered from scriptural revelation, or that of a “self-contained” and prideful knowledge of self that defines the self without reference to God and his will for his imagers.⁷² He concludes that the modern identity crisis is a concomitant of the modern religious crisis: though humanity still manifests the religious character of those who were made to know God, a lack of true knowledge of him results in a lack of true knowledge of self.⁷³

Ultimately, Spykman derives his definition of revelation primarily from Calvin and Bavinck: “First, all divine revelation is relational (Calvin). Second, life as an ongoing series of responses to revelation – that is, all of life, life in its entirety, the full-orbed way we live our lives – is religion (Bavinck).”⁷⁴ Spykman’s appropriation of Bavinck will be examined in Chapter 3. Here, the main point is that Calvin’s correlate between knowledge of God and knowledge of self contributes to Spykman’s project through its assumption of the relational nature of divine revelation.

II.3. The Mediating Function of God’s Word

Based on the relational nature of revelation gleaned from Calvin, Spykman describes the Word of God as that which makes the divine/human relationship possible. The Word mediates by functioning as both boundary and bridge for humanity. Christ, the incarnate Word, serves as the Mediator of both creation and redemption, a role that has implications for that of renewed humans in the church and in the world.

⁶⁹ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 4.

⁷⁰ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 3.

⁷¹ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 3-4.

⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 198-199.

⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 216-217.

⁷⁴ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 4.

II.3.1. The Word of God as Boundary and Bridge

God directs his self-manifestation to specific purposes in human life – worshipful acknowledgement of the Creator and obedience defined by right use of his gifts and genuine delight in them. These comprise the divinely ordained human response to the revealing God, according to Calvin.⁷⁵ The biblical idea of revelation cannot be divorced from creaturely response, which is defined by God’s Word.

Spykman’s conviction that the Word of God holds a mediating position between the two *relata* – the revealing God and the responding world as represented by human beings – leads him to explain the Word as constituting both a boundary and a bridge.⁷⁶ As a boundary, God’s Word defines the order of the world and the contours of human knowledge of God. As a bridge, it establishes communion and relationship on God’s terms, according to the means of his self-accommodation to human understanding. Spykman states, “For his Word is not only the boundary, expressing limitation, but also the bridge, expressing communion. God is true to his Word. And his Word faithfully reveals him. There is doubtless more to God than what is revealed through his Word. But all that lies beyond it is more of the same.”⁷⁷ He goes on to argue that the “analogical” approach should control theological language about God: what can be said about God from Scripture is true, but God’s revelation does not include all that there is to know about him, and so the creature’s position must be one of humility.

Spykman believes this focus on God’s accommodated revelation, or the Word of God in its various forms, as he prefers to speak of it, reflects a key component of Calvin’s thought that must be reclaimed for contemporary Reformed theology. The “three-factor” model of God/his Word/the world gives proper place to God’s Word as the means for knowing and relating to him. In the aftermath of Kant, where the emphasis often rests on the subjective knower, or, in reaction, on God as the objective Revealer, Spykman offers a model which he believes gives the Word of God in all its forms the proper position in relation to the revealing God and his responding creatures.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See, for example, John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, Vol. I, trans. John King, Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 64-65.

⁷⁶ See Spykman’s diagram, *RT*, 75; see also 92-93 for his discussion of the *relata* in *relatio*.

⁷⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 74-75.

⁷⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 75.

II.3.2. Christ the Mediator of Creation and Redemption

“The cosmic scope of biblical revelation and the full sweep of redemption history reach their point of concentration in the mighty acts of God embodied in his Son.”⁷⁹ These words convey Spykman’s intent to anchor all of God’s purposes with the world – both creation and redemption – in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He indicates his reliance on Calvin when he notes that Calvin does acknowledge the “mediatorial role of the Son in creation,” if only “latently and implicitly.”⁸⁰ Spykman develops the understanding of Christ as Mediator of creation according to the fact that “Augustine, Calvin, and others” apply the mirror analogy to Christ, the one who reflects to us the image of the invisible God, as stated by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1.15.⁸¹ “He fully mirrors the Father’s heart and will. . . . He is God’s first, middle, and last Word for the world. All God’s dealings with the world – creation, preservation, judgment, redemption, consummation – are through Christ.”⁸² Both creation and redemption – wrought by the Word of God – are mediatorial acts of the eternal Son of God.

Calvin applies the mirror analogy to Christ in *Institutes* IV.8.5: “Therefore, holy men of old knew God only by beholding him in his Son as in a mirror (cf. II Cor. 3:18). When I say this, I mean that God has never manifested himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, his sole wisdom, light, and truth.” Though the usual context for Calvin’s discussion of the nature of Christ’s mediatorial work is that of redemption, he does refer to Christ as the Word and Wisdom of God through whom all things exist. Interpreting Galatians 3.19, Calvin states, “We are thus to understand, that, since the beginning of the world, God has held no intercourse with men, but through the agency of his eternal Wisdom or Son.”⁸³ A striking passage regarding the interplay of creation and redemption as aspects of Christ’s mediatorial role occurs in the “Argument” preceding Calvin’s Genesis commentary:

For Christ is that image in which God presents to our view, not only his heart, but also his hands and his feet. I give the name of his heart to that secret love with which he embraces us in Christ: by his hands and feet I understand those works of his which are displayed before our eyes. As soon as ever we depart from Christ, there is nothing, be it ever so gross or insignificant in itself, respecting which we are not necessarily deceived.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 376.

⁸⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 142.

⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 84.

⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 84.

⁸³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XXI (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 102. Calvin distinguishes here between two meanings of mediator: one who brings reconciliation and ‘an ambassador employed in promulgating a law.’ He understands Paul’s use of the term Mediator in Galatians 3.19 to refer to Christ’s work as “the Mediator of all doctrine.”

⁸⁴ Calvin, *Genesis*, 64.

Calvin's focus falls squarely on the Christ who unifies in his death and resurrection the old and new covenants, encompassing creation and all of God's revelation disclosed by means of his mediating Word.

For Spykman, holding together the activity of Father and Son in creation as Calvin does guards against the "eclipse" of creation noticeable in the evangelical theologies of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ Spykman desires to give this line of thinking a more pronounced place in Reformed reflection on creation, the Word of God, and the incarnate Christ. Practically speaking, the recognition of Christ as Mediator of creation affirms both his divine Lordship and his intimate involvement in creation.

II.3.3. Theological Implications of Christ's Role as Mediator

Establishing that Christ is the Mediator of creation and redemption implies, for Spykman, that Christ's mediatorial office contains a pattern for the renewal of the original human office. The threefold office of Christ the Mediator – consisting of his prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles – lends significance and direction to the renewed "office" granted to his body, the Church, in the world. "As a second-generation Reformer, Calvin developed even more fully a theology of office. . . . This theology of office inaugurated by Calvin was further developed in the neo-Calvinist movement around the turn of this century."⁸⁶ Spykman, appropriating Calvin as interpreted by Kuyper, concludes, "Structurally our common human officership (given in Adam, restored in Christ) involves a mediating role. Standing in office means occupying an in-between position, a position in relationship. We stand both *under* and *over* – under God and over the rest of creation."⁸⁷ As Mediator of creation and redemption, Christ redeems his people and restores them to office in a way that corresponds to Adam's original office. Through this lens Spykman formulates a theology of the Christian life that finds expression in faithful response to God through the fulfilling of creational tasks.

Calvin spends a chapter of the *Institutes*, II.15, developing this theological idea, drawing on the Old Testament offices given to individuals as a grid for interpreting Christ's work. As Calvin describes the ways in which Christ fulfilled and continues to fulfill each aspect of his mediatorial office, he references the implications of those tasks for Christ's church. His people take up his prophetic task, by the "power of the Spirit," "in the continuing preaching of the gospel."⁸⁸ Concerning Christ's kingly task, Calvin claims that "he shares with us all that he has received from the Father. Now he arms and equips us with his

⁸⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 176-178, 78.

⁸⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 230.

⁸⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 230-231. Spykman explores the significance of Christ's work as Prophet, Priest, and King under the heading "The Mediator's Presence Among Us," *RT*, 406-416.

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.15.2.

power, adorns us with his beauty and magnificence, enriches us with his wealth.” By these gifts, believers are enabled to “bring forth fruit to his glory.”⁸⁹ Finally, as God’s people “offer” themselves and their “sacrifices of prayers and praise” to him, they demonstrate that Christ has welcomed them “as his companions in this great office” of the priesthood.⁹⁰ Christ Jesus the Mediator, even as he carries out the tasks of his divinely appointed office in a unique manner,⁹¹ calls and equips his redeemed people to join him in a more limited manner as they are empowered by his Holy Spirit.

Based on Calvin’s statement that “our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and the name of Adam in order to take Adam’s place in obeying the Father,”⁹² Spykman argues that the sharing of believers in the office of Christ is a restoration of the original office given to Adam, an office consisting of “servanthood, guardianship, and stewardship.”⁹³ In an indirect way “Calvin attests reflexively to man’s original status as officer in God’s world.”⁹⁴ Christ’s threefold mediatorial office, as explicated within the Reformed tradition, informs Spykman’s anthropology, providing a bridge between the original meaning of human “office” and its renewed meaning under the Lordship of Christ.

As the message of redemption, Scripture assumes and builds anew on the givens of creation. Accordingly it presupposes both the idea of man as image of God and man in office. . . . The term “office,” referring to man’s place and task in the creation, is largely absent from Scripture. Yet the idea of office is implicitly present in the full sweep of biblical revelation.⁹⁵

Spykman’s perspective reflects the further development of the idea of “office” by Kuyper, who emphasized the “relationality” of office.⁹⁶ Whereas Calvin’s description of the church as sharing in the functions of prophet, priest, and king focuses primarily on the spiritual nature of these roles, Spykman

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.15.4.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.15.6.

⁹¹ Calvin, interpreting Jesus’s words in John 6.46, comments on the uniqueness of Christ’s office: “When he says that he alone hath known the Father, he means that it is an office which belongs peculiarly to himself, to manifest God to men, who would otherwise have been concealed.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Vol. I, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVII (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 259.

⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.12.3; Spykman, *RT*, 230.

⁹³ Spykman, *RT*, 231.

⁹⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 230.

⁹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 229.

⁹⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 230-231. Spykman cites Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 19ff. Sections I and II of *Lectures on Calvinism*, “Calvinism a Life-System” and “Calvinism and Religion,” express Kuyper’s general idea of man in relationship to God, other men, and the world, with all life activities carried out before the face of God according to patterns inherent in the created order. See also the Belgic Confession, Article 12, which refers to the Father having given to “every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator,” as well as the Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 31 and 32, concerning Jesus’ ordaining and anointing as Prophet, Priest, and King, and the corresponding implications for those who have membership in Christ and thus partake “of his anointing.”

extends the idea to the duties of human existence and relationships. He is attempting to develop Calvin's insights, with the goal of relating redemption in Christ to humanity's original status given in creation.

II.4. Creation and Scripture: Accommodated and Complementary Forms of God's One Word

Analyzing Spykman's use of Calvin in conceiving of the relationship between creation and Scripture involves at least two questions: (1) Is there support in Calvin – as Spykman believes – for referring to God's works in creation as a form of God's Word? (2) How do the inscripturated Word and the creational Word complement one another, assuming that "Word" is a term appropriately applied to God's works?

II.4.1. Creation's Integrity and Significance as a Form of Revelation

Spykman's three-factor view of the world, comprised of a revealing God and responding creatures related by the mediating Word, assumes accommodation to be a fundamental aspect of divine revelation. In creation, this is necessary due to creaturely finitude; in redemption, this is necessary due to human sinfulness. In the forms of the one Word, we see degrees of accommodation related to the progression of human history from creation, through the fall, to redemption. Spykman insists that the Word for creation, by which God accommodated revelation to creaturely limitations, continues to be a valid form of accommodation, even after the fall.

Throughout his work, Spykman refers repeatedly to Calvin's affirmation of "general" revelation, or creational revelation, as Spykman calls it, as the basis for his updated emphasis on the reality of divine revelation given in, with, and for creation. He cites *Institutes* I.5.9, I.5.1, and I.3.3, passages where Calvin states that "the ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God," a mirror which everyone is "compelled" to view and which nature will not let them forget.⁹⁷ He also discusses the incorporation of this idea in the Belgic Confession (1561), primarily authored by Guido de Brès (1522-1567) and generally understood to be a faithful statement of Calvinist theology.⁹⁸ The Belgic Confession famously references the "two books" of revelation, confessing, "We

⁹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 171. Spykman incorrectly references *Institutes* I.3.3. as I.4.3.

⁹⁸ The Belgic Confession adheres to the order of the Gallican, or French, Confession (1559), authored by Calvin with the aid of Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534-1591). See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. I, 6th ed., revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 493, 506.

know God by two means,” the book of the universe and the book of God’s holy and divine Word.⁹⁹ While the book of God’s written Word is a more explicit means of revelation, the book of the universe provides visible pointers to the invisible realities of God and his relation to the world.¹⁰⁰ Given Calvin’s context, this view is unremarkable for him. It becomes problematic for those who live post-Enlightenment, for whom the world has been split into two realms requiring different methods of inquiry.

Though Spykman works with the terms “general” and “special” revelation because they constitute traditional theological terminology, he desires to distinguish between the forms of revelation in a way that better captures the historical progression of divine revelation. Rather than accept a Kant-inspired division between knowledge of God the Creator, given in so-called general revelation, and knowledge of God the Redeemer, given in so-called special revelation, he argues that creation as a means of revelation persists by the gracious mediation of God’s inscripturated Word and his Holy Spirit. Spykman also maintains that though Scripture and Jesus serve as the entry points to knowledge of the Creator in a fallen context, creation itself has continued significance for Christians. Renewed by Word and Spirit, Christians are called to turn their attention again to God’s initial revelation, as Calvin himself urges. Instructing the believer “to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most beautiful theater”¹⁰¹ was for Calvin a given, but for the modern person constitutes a dilemma: how does special revelation relate to general revelation in the wake of Kant? Spykman works toward a resolution by appealing to Scripture and to Calvin in support of the unity of creation and redemption.

II.4.2. God’s Word in Relationship to God’s Works

According to Calvin, God accommodates knowledge of himself to human beings through his works and through his Word. Directing attention to God’s works, Calvin speaks thus:

⁹⁹ Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age*, 56, 47, recognizes the tremendous influence of Calvin on the Dutch reading of the “Book of Nature” during the 1600’s. He writes, “There is a direct link from the Bible, via Augustine and Calvin, to article II of the *Belydenisse des gheloofs* (or Belgic Confession, as it is better known) and the Reformed spiritual culture in the Netherlands. Knowledge of God is possible through the Bible and the Book of Nature. But no matter how important the latter was, the Word of God always has priority.”

¹⁰⁰ Van der Kooij, *As in a Mirror*, 126-127, reiterates this fundamental perspective of the Belgic Confession when he submits “that for Calvin the world and Bible function as an open invitation to the knowing of God.”

¹⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.20. Richard A. Muller, foreword, in Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), x, says of Schreiner’s work that “in contrast to the claims of Barthian scholarship, Schreiner’s understanding of Calvin’s approach to the natural order, human nature, and ‘natural’ knowledge points toward a logical as well as temporal priority of nature over grace.”

Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, . . . but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.¹⁰²

God's works define the reality of being human in God's world and form an inaudible speech that testifies to God the Creator. However, using audible speech, God communicates knowledge of himself by means of his Word spoken and written.

This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips. . . . [B]esides these common proofs he also put forth his Word, which is a more direct and more certain mark whereby he is to be recognized.¹⁰³

In Calvin's usage, "Word of God" refers primarily to the Holy Scriptures and to the Word made flesh, God's Son Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴ However, as evidenced in the above passages, Calvin includes God's works as a legitimate and essential channel of God's invitation to recognize him.¹⁰⁵

Spykman argues that God's works are an expression of God's Word, and thus a form of God's Word. He stresses Scripture's portrayal of the intimate association between divine works and Word. Against the modern Western tendency to construct an unhelpful distinction "between 'words' and 'deeds,'" he asserts, "God's words and his works are equivalents. Repeatedly they are used interchangeably."¹⁰⁶ When God acts, the "powerful, active, dynamic, creative, purposeful" nature of his activity is attributable to his Word and its unailing effectiveness.¹⁰⁷ Spykman finds this view especially evident throughout the Psalms, where a variety of terms are used to capture God's interaction with his world through his Word.¹⁰⁸ His view concurs with that of Calvin in his commentary on Psalm 147, where Calvin shows the effectual nature of God's will disclosed in the "sending forth of his word."¹⁰⁹ Spykman, like Calvin, considers God's benevolent works to have an experiential dimension, intended to "meet us

¹⁰² Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.9.

¹⁰³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.6.1.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, *Institutes* I.6.1, quoted on the previous page, where Calvin uses the term "Word" of God to designate the clearer revelation of Scripture in distinction from the knowledge to be gleaned from the created order, now useless in terms of salvation to those whose eyes and hearts are darkened.

¹⁰⁵ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 86, points out that Calvin, with his pre-modern, pre-Kant mindset, was more willing to recognize the ongoing validity and possibility of knowledge of God as Creator, though "this source of knowledge was insufficient for faith."

¹⁰⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. V, trans. James Anderson, Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. VI (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 301.

where we are,” pulling us “irresistibly into a living confrontation with him.”¹¹⁰ The contemplation-inducing confrontation of God through his “worded works” and “working words”¹¹¹ leads Spykman to acknowledge a “dialogue . . . which is simultaneously theocentric and anthropocentric.”¹¹² In this way he roots his assumptions about the inescapable nature of divine revelation in Calvin’s correlate between divine and human knowledge.

Because of the inseparableness of God’s Word and his works, Spykman believes that the only way to do justice to the testimony of God’s written Word is to designate God’s works as a form of “God’s Word.” He does so cautiously, recognizing that creation itself is not God’s Word but that it *reflects* God’s Word, as in the mirror analogy employed by Calvin. He articulates the association of God’s Word and creation as follows: “Perhaps we can capture this biblical emphasis best by saying that God’s Word, that is, the Will of God *for* creation, is revealed *in* creation.”¹¹³ God’s Word, which conveys his Will, finds expression in his works; correspondingly, his works inaudibly but visibly testify to the reality and character of his creating and sustaining Word.

Spykman identifies three forms of the one Word of God: creation, Scripture, and Jesus. Calvin does not delineate the three “forms” of the one Word of God in the more systematic and developed sense that Spykman does, but he does indicate that there has been change in God’s method of revelation, despite the fact that God “does not show himself subject to change.”¹¹⁴ Calvin distinguishes the “forms” of revelation in the context of denoting the specific and unique functions of each one, yet he also affirms the unity and wholeness of divine revelation.¹¹⁵ By constructing a more systematic model that incorporates these “modes,” or means, of God’s relationship with the world, Spykman acknowledges creation’s integrity as a genuine display of God’s wisdom and will, and he confirms the unity of the various forms of divine revelation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 199.

¹¹¹ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 23.

¹¹² Spykman, *RT*, 200.

¹¹³ Spykman, *RT*, 79.

¹¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.11.13.

¹¹⁵ The primary thrust of the passage from *Institutes* II.11.13 is the “constancy” of God’s revelation, particularly the unity between the Old and New Testaments: “Thus, God’s constancy shines forth in the fact that he taught the same doctrine to all ages In the fact that he has changed the outward form and manner, he does not show himself subject to change. Rather he has accommodated himself to men’s capacity, which is varied and changeable.” Parker, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 13, says of Calvin’s view, “Properly speaking, there is . . . only one revelation of God; that is, the Word of God. . . . There is, however, more than one form of the one revelation.”

¹¹⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 86: “God’s Word exercises its normatively steadying power from creation, through fall and redemption, onward toward the recreation of all things in Christ Jesus. . . . In the march of time the mode of

Though Scripture begins with creation and thus follows the ontic order of revelation, the Scriptures themselves constitute the noetic starting point for Reformed theological reflection. Blinded by sin to the realities conveyed by God's works, humanity needs the "spectacles" of Scripture.¹¹⁷ Calvin asserts, "[N]o one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture."¹¹⁸ Scripture takes precedence in all genuine knowledge about God, which leads to right worship of him and right ways of relating to the created world. As Spykman interprets the Reformation tradition, *sola Scriptura* does not exclude other means by which knowledge of God is communicated to us, but it subjects all of them to Scripture as the "central criterion of judgment."¹¹⁹

Calvin witnesses to this truth in *Institutes* I.6.1, saying that even though God "sets forth . . . his presence portrayed in his creatures . . . it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe." Article II of the Belgic Confession speaks of "his holy and divine Word" as the means by which God makes himself "more clearly and fully known." Spykman criticizes the older translation for "suggest[ing] that in creation God reveals himself 'less clearly and fully' than in Scripture,"¹²⁰ preferring a newer translation that reads, "He makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word."¹²¹ In Spykman's estimation, the word "openly" better captures the progression of revelation given by God in the aftermath of sin. He desires to avoid any language that might place "a wedge between the 'two books'" or imply that there is a lack of clarity in the "book" of creation.¹²² He evaluates Calvin's language more positively, interpreting him to mean that "[T]his 'better help' was 'added,' not in view of a deficiency in general revelation, but in view of our predicament."¹²³

God's works and God's Word both reflect God's character (knowledge of God) and illuminate the human condition (knowledge of self), though to varying degrees. The written Word has a confirmatory and complementary role in relation to God's works. Calvin states, "We have taught that

revelation changes. But its essential meaning remains constant. There is no inner tension or contradiction between the creational Word, the inscripturated Word, and the incarnate Word."

¹¹⁷ Calvin's famous metaphor from *Institutes* I.6.1.

¹¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.6.2.

¹¹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 77.

¹²⁰ Spykman, "On General and Special Revelation," 8.

¹²¹ Spykman, "On General and Special Revelation," 8. Though Spykman does not specify the source of the newer translation, the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics offers a translation that uses the word "openly" rather than "clearly and fully" and states that the translation "is based on the French text of 1619." (Accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html>). Spykman also critiques the common English phraseology in his essay "On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation," 14.

¹²² Spykman, "On General and Special Revelation," 8-9.

¹²³ Spykman, "On General and Special Revelation," 9.

the knowledge of God, otherwise quite clearly set forth in the system of the universe and in all creatures, is nonetheless more intimately and also more vividly revealed in his Word.”¹²⁴ Even so, “the knowledge of God set forth for us in Scripture is destined for the very same goal as the knowledge whose imprint shines in his creatures, in that it invites us first to fear God, then to trust in him.”¹²⁵ Calvin’s doctrine of revelation assumes an essential unity of purpose among the various forms of divine self-manifestation.

Spykman follows Calvin by emphasizing Scripture as the noetic starting point for theological reflection, contending that this is a crucial component of renewal for contemporary theology. Beginning with Scripture aids in avoiding the subjectivist pull toward locating the “norm” for theology within the created realm. At the same time, listening to Calvin’s positive evaluation of creation offers a corrective to those who would respond to subjectivism by closing the door to creation as a legitimate source of divine revelation.

Part III: Theological Development and Renewal

Spykman seeks to be faithful to the contours of the Reformed tradition as well as to “update” the Reformed tradition based on new insights. The topics of sphere-sovereignty and election/reprobation serve as points of update in his “new paradigm.” Regarding sphere-sovereignty, Spykman develops ideas that came to expression primarily in the work of Kuyper but which he believes were anticipated by Calvin. Regarding election/reprobation, Spykman attempts to construct a more dynamic and Word-centered view of the divine/human relationship, with appreciation for Calvin’s general doctrine of election but with challenge concerning his approach to reprobation. The following sections explore Spykman’s contributions in these areas, concentrating on his parallels with and divergences from Calvin.

III.1. Sphere-Sovereignty

Spykman’s essay on “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition” represents his most extensive and focused analysis of Calvin’s work. He opens with a claim and a qualification. His claim is that sphere-sovereignty and its ramifications constitute Calvinism’s most unique contribution to Christian theological reflection in the West: “[T]he underlying thesis of this chapter is that the greatest influence of Calvin and the Calvinist tradition upon, and its most uniquely significant contribution to,

¹²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.1.

¹²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.2.

Western Christianity lies in its development of a Biblically Reformed world-and-life-view structured along the lines of the principle of sphere-sovereignty.¹²⁶ Spykman connects the principle of sphere-sovereignty to the differentiation of tasks, functions, and societal structures in the modern world, noting also the positive effect of sphere-universality, the correlate of sphere-sovereignty, in maintaining the unity of life over against individual autonomy and totalitarianism.¹²⁷

As a qualification, Spykman considers to what degree the Reformed tradition can legitimately appeal to Calvin as the source of the sphere-sovereignty principle:

Just how much can be claimed for Calvin, historically and theologically, on the question of sphere-sovereignty? . . . In researching Calvin on sphere-sovereignty, it is possible, on the one hand, to claim too much. On the other hand, one can also claim too little. Seeking to avoid these two extreme approaches, I believe something substantial can indeed be said on the issue at hand.¹²⁸

Tracing the discussion of sphere-sovereignty from the writings of contemporary Calvinist scholars back to Calvin, Spykman demonstrates that there is precedence for identifying intimations of the principles of sphere-sovereignty within Calvin's writings.¹²⁹ Those whom he quotes, among them Dooyeweerd, Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), Louis Berkhof, Bavinck, and Kuyper, concur with the basic principle of sphere-sovereignty, particularly as it bears upon church-state relations. These thinkers agree that Calvinist theology leads one to take seriously the relatively independent but derivative and mutually beneficial authority of society's institutions.

Consonant with "Calvin's commitment to the overarching, all-pervading sovereignty of God,"¹³⁰ the tradition that grew out of Calvin's work emphasizes the kingship of Christ within every realm of human life. In the sixteenth century, this truth became a liberating factor for Calvin and others whose consciences led them to honor God rather than rulers, both civic and ecclesiastic, who would bind their consciences. Calvin's insistence on the sovereignty of God determines his view of both God and persons. He is concerned to express a biblical view of "the radical distinction between the Divine and the human."¹³¹ However, he also grants humanity an uplifted status as individuals who are responsible

¹²⁶ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 163.

¹²⁷ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 164-170.

¹²⁸ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 163.

¹²⁹ Though Luther's view of the "three estates" – *ecclesia*, *politeia*, and *oeconomia* – might be included as a source for the idea of sphere-sovereignty, Spykman focuses on Calvin, mentioning Luther only by way of critique regarding the "two-kingdom idea" that led to a "coalition" between church and state in Lutheran Germany that "Calvin expressly repudiates," according to Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 193.

¹³⁰ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 186.

¹³¹ François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 151.

to God both as *imago Dei* and as sinners. This renewed understanding of human responsibility before God, coupled with the translation of the Scriptures into the languages of the people, issued in new views of the individual's relation to the state: if conscience, bound to God's Word, takes precedence over ecclesiastical and political judgments, the whole basis of the medieval system is challenged.

The pattern of church-state relations Calvin advanced in Geneva provides insight into his desire to invest each sphere with its proper authority. Calvin certainly "thought the two powers, civil and religious, ought to be complementary."¹³² At the same time, "each power had, theoretically at least, its well-defined domain."¹³³ Calvin's theory allowed the church to maintain autonomy over ecclesiastical matters but to expect that the civil authorities would respect the church's domain and protect her role in society. In Geneva, where the civil and religious authorities buttressed one another in the defense of orthodoxy and morality, this arrangement was generally beneficial. However, in many places where Reformed theology took root in the sixteenth century, churches found themselves battling the civil authorities for their very existence.¹³⁴ In this context, an ideal of separation between church and state was born that has taken various forms in different nations.¹³⁵

Based on Calvin's support for differentiation of temporal and spiritual authority,¹³⁶ Spykman contends that there is warrant for extending the principle of differentiation to other institutions, such as family, school, commerce, and science.¹³⁷ He locates this warrant in Calvin's comments on Exodus 18.13-27 and Ephesians 5.21-6.9. In his interpretation of these passages, Calvin seems to assume a

¹³² Wendel, 309.

¹³³ Wendel, 79.

¹³⁴ Gordon J. Spykman, "The Institutional Church in History," *Rediscovery of the Church*, F1 no. 341 (Potchefstroom: IRS, PU for CHE), 17, accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/spykman.htm>, notes that "this Reformed tradition appealed most strongly to Christians in situations where the church had to rely solely upon the authority that Christ bestowed upon his church, where such believers stood as a minorities in society, with neither a strong state or a powerful hierarchy to support its stand for the gospel."

¹³⁵ Spykman et al., *Society, State, & Schools*, 42, points out that Calvin's argument for recognizing the distinction between the spheres of church and of state should not be equated with the modern notion of "separation of church and state": "In Calvin this idea means the separation of church and state as two social institutions, not – as in much contemporary thought – the separation of a so-called public-secular from a private-religious order."

¹³⁶ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 194, says, "Historically it is understandable that for Calvin the issue of the sovereignty of the spheres in life should revolve about those two formidable institutions in life which by this time had come to a loosely differentiated prominence in society and which perennially demonstrated an inordinate tendency to expand their powers, namely, church and state."

¹³⁷ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 166-167. See also Spykman et al., *Society, State, & Schools*, in which he and the other contributors set forth pluralism as a social theory that harnesses the insights of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality; they then apply this pluralistic philosophy to the sphere of education in the USA. Spykman also outlines this vision in "Pluralism: Our Last Best Hope."

proper differentiation of tasks among various peoples and groups within a society.¹³⁸ Spykman also draws upon Calvin's commentary on I Peter 2.13, where Calvin refers to divinely given "human ordinances" that provide an "ordered" framework for the "building" of human society, in which are located various "compartments."¹³⁹ This assertion is crucial for the concept of sphere-sovereignty, for it lends to each institution its own legitimacy, stemming from the potentials given in and with creation.

Spykman considers *Institutes* IV.11.1 as "perhaps the most classic statement on the principle of sphere-sovereignty in Calvin."¹⁴⁰ There, in the first paragraph of the passage, as well as in IV.20.1-5, Calvin teaches an appropriate distinction between the "civil" and "spiritual" polities but also a connection between them characterized by peaceful mutuality. The distance between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries presents a difficulty in evaluating Calvin's distinction between civil and spiritual polities: though he made genuine strides, certain aspects of his implementation of the distinction appear inconsistent to the modern mind. Spykman advocates interpreting Calvin's position in light of his genuine insights: "Religiously he sees both church and state under the sovereign judgment and redemption of God. . . . But he no longer identifies the state with nature and the church with grace."¹⁴¹ As evidence that "the rough contours of a Biblically Reformed view of communal life emerge in Calvin with unmistakable clarity," Spykman highlights the establishment of the Geneva Academy in 1559.¹⁴² While associated with the church and the civil authorities – corresponding to the idea of "sphere-universality" – the school "was also granted a certain sovereignty within its own sphere of operations."¹⁴³ This development reflects the "foundations" Calvin laid for a biblical recognition of the divinely ordained structures of society and the divinely derived authority given to them.

Spykman claims, "That there are such 'laws of nature' woven into the very fabric of creation, 'ordinances' which are normative for an orderly human society, is for Calvin a hermeneutic pre-

¹³⁸ See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Vol. I, trans. Charles William Bingham, Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 302-308, and Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 316-317.

¹³⁹ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 198; Spykman incorrectly references the Scripture passage as I Peter 1.12-17. See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, ed. and trans. John Owen, Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XXII (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 80.

¹⁴⁰ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 200.

¹⁴¹ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 192. David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), argues for the opposite interpretation of Calvin and the Calvinist tradition. What Spykman terms ambiguity in Calvin's thought, VanDrunen interprets as support for a two-kingdom theory.

¹⁴² Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 207.

¹⁴³ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 206.

understanding which pervasively shapes his interpretation of Scripture.”¹⁴⁴ This perspective, taken up and developed by the neo-Calvinists, offers a corrective to contemporary thought. The existence of creation ordinances that define humankind and human tasks means that contrary to the cultural *zeitgeist*, humanity is not authorized to define itself. Its identity and relative authority are anchored in the Creator and the creational structures he designed.

III.2. Election/Reprobation

Spykman considers Calvin’s hermeneutic, emphasized within the very context of his theology of election, to be instructive for developing the parameters for the discussion: “On the one hand, he holds, we must seek to say no more than what the Bible says, lest we fall into speculation. . . . On the other hand, says Calvin, we must try to say no less than Scripture says, lest we impoverish its message.”¹⁴⁵ Given Calvin’s placement of the doctrine of election near the end of Book III of the *Institutes*, after the other aspects of salvation and the Christian life, and given the “pervasively relational”¹⁴⁶ nature of Calvin’s thinking, Spykman advocates a more existential understanding of election. Without ignoring the “deeper background to history,”¹⁴⁷ Spykman views the doctrine of election as God’s one Will expressed in his one Word, which produces fruit in the historical responses of men and women to God’s final Word in Christ, the “mirror of our election.”¹⁴⁸

In the Dedicatory Preface of his treatise “The Eternal Predestination of God,” Calvin offers a summary of the relationship between election and faith in Christ:

Wherefore, whosoever shall hold faith to be the earnest and pledge of adoption, will assuredly confess that it flows from Divine election as its eternal source. And yet the knowledge of salvation is not to be sought from the secret counsel of God. Life is set before us in Christ, who not only makes Himself known, but presents Himself to our enjoyment in the Gospel. Into this mirror let the eye of our faith ever fixedly look. Nor let it ever desire to penetrate where access to its sight is not given.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty,” 196. According to Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (2004; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 367, one of the “essential main components” of Calvin’s view of natural law is its “normative” nature. Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 222, perceives law as “one of the basic concepts of Calvin’s theology”; “it is related closely to the idea of natural order, or God’s orderly will in creation,” and “spans the two orders of the knowledge of God” – creation and redemption.

¹⁴⁵ Spykman, “A New Look at Election and Reprobation,” 174-175. See also *RT*, 507-512.

¹⁴⁶ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 177.

¹⁴⁷ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 188.

¹⁴⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 181.

¹⁴⁹ John Calvin, “The Eternal Predestination of God,” *Calvin’s Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God the Secret Providence of God*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1987), 21.

This statement discloses at least two points concerning Calvin's doctrine of election. (1) God is the "source" of saving faith. God's decree concerning the believer's election occurred prior to the believer's experience of election through faith, which itself is a gift of God's electing grace.¹⁵⁰ (2) Though election should prove to be a source of comfort to the believer, the source of knowledge concerning one's election is Christ, not the eternal decree. To know Christ is to know that one has life, and this knowledge offers abundant reason for contentment and assurance.¹⁵¹

Calvin's doctrine of election took shape at the intersection of his polemical arguments and scriptural exegesis. With direct statements, he defends the justice of God's character and the sovereignty of God's will over against those who would reduce election to mere foreknowledge. He treats both election and reprobation as having their basis in God's decree rather than in an individual's response: just as the individuals elected by God possess no inner goodness or meritorious works that would incline God to give them faith in the words of life, so it is not the unworthiness of the reprobate that moved God to abandon them to destruction.¹⁵² At the same time, Calvin insists that God's Word be our final reference point in comprehending his elective purposes.

For just as those engulf themselves in a deadly abyss who, to make their election more certain, investigate God's eternal plan apart from his Word, so those who rightly and duly examine it as it is contained in his Word reap the inestimable fruit of comfort. Let this, therefore, be the way of inquiry: to begin with God's call, and to end with it.¹⁵³

Calvin also reminds his readers of the continuity between God's eternal will and the Word of Christ by which he calls believers to repentance and faith:

Moreover, since he [Christ] is the eternal wisdom of the Father, his unchangeable truth, his firm counsel, we ought not to be afraid of what he tells us in his Word varying in the slightest from that will of the Father which we seek. Rather, he faithfully reveals to us that will as it was from the beginning and ever shall be.¹⁵⁴

This statement places the will of God in its biblical context of covenantal relationship.

Spykman judges Calvin's centering of election on the Word offered in Christ to be a beneficial approach. He argues that focusing on the electing and reprobating Word given with creation, renewed

¹⁵⁰ See John Calvin, "Articles concerning Predestination," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. by J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXII (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 179.

¹⁵¹ Calvin, "Eternal Predestination of God," 29, says, "For our salvation is then sure to us, when we find the *cause* of it in the breast of God."

¹⁵² See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.23.1; "Eternal Predestination of God," 123.

¹⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.24.4.

¹⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.24.5.

in Scripture, and fulfilled in Christ unlocks the door to a three-factor view of reality that better captures the covenantal relationship in which God's electing and reprobating meets a person's response to Christ. Because he views the doctrine of predestination as a point of critical outworking for the three-factor view of reality he proposes as a more normative structure for the Reformed tradition, I quote him at length:

To restate the main thesis: our theology of predestination would profit greatly from granting the covenantal Word of God, as a functioning reality and as the religious *relatio* between God and man, a more normative and decisive place as the central operative principle in it. . . . A more significant breakthrough toward such theological renewal could be achieved by taking seriously the analogy used by Augustine, Calvin, and others, which depicts Jesus Christ, God's Word incarnate, as 'the mirror of our election.' *He* is God's ultimate Word on election/reprobation. We have no Word beyond this Word. He fully reflects the Father's heart and will.¹⁵⁵

To avoid what Spykman perceives as "a bi-polar tension between time and eternity" inherent in a two-factor view, which focuses either on God or on humanity, he advocates limiting theological reflection within the bounds of the "decreeing Word."¹⁵⁶

Both theologically and pastorally, "we would do better to follow the pattern of the central historical motifs in Biblical revelation, namely, creation/fall/redemption."¹⁵⁷ This involves recognizing that "[t]here is continuity between the revealed dimension and the concealed depth of God's Word."¹⁵⁸ Since the revealed Word provides the material for theological reflection, it is the Word's "abiding standard for covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking" that should rivet theological attention.¹⁵⁹ In the Word, God's will finds expression in the promises and threat communicated to Adam and Eve: the threat is realized in the curse that falls on Adam's race due to his sin, and the promises are realized through the continuity of God's revealing Word and its culmination in the redemptive work of Christ. According to Spykman, locating questions in the context of God's revelation mediated by his Word better incorporates an insight he attributes to Calvin: "All knowledge of God's decrees is relational. And the *relatio* which binds God and man together as covenantal *relata* is God's mediating Word."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 180-181.

¹⁵⁶ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 186.

¹⁵⁷ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 185.

¹⁵⁸ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 186. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 150, observes, "Seen from the human perspective there is a double will. First there is the revealed will of God's decree. Next, Scripture informs us of the existence of a comprehensive will of God that determines all things. But in his revelation God has not permitted us insight into his will. Man knows only the existence of this comprehensive will. He knows nothing from the perspective of God; his knowledge is limited to what is revealed to him. Finally, Calvin argues for living within these set boundaries in obedience and responsibility."

¹⁵⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 509.

¹⁶⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 508.

To the degree that Calvin expresses agreement with a rigid concept of “double predestination,” Spykman believes that Calvin is not allowing his basic relational and covenantal framework to control his conclusions.¹⁶¹ However, Spykman’s primary assessment of Calvin’s thought – “God’s revelation as the abiding covenantal boundary and bridge between man and his Maker”¹⁶² – offers the elements needed for moving beyond the idea of reprobation as a “horrible decree” (*decretum horribile*)¹⁶³ that finds resolution only in an inaccessible “set of eternal decrees.”¹⁶⁴ With the mediating Word anchoring both election and reprobation, Spykman urges, “The decree of election/reprobation is to be viewed not as intrinsic, but extrinsic to God. Its locus is not God’s inner Being, but his outgoing works.”¹⁶⁵ In the going forth of God’s Word, particularly his Word in Christ, and in the faithful or unfaithful response of every human being, “God remains true to his electing and reprobating Word.”¹⁶⁶ For believers, consideration of the doctrine of election is best placed as Calvin placed it – a post-soteriological reflection designed to bring comfort, encouragement, and certainty of God’s redemptive faithfulness.¹⁶⁷

In his less polemical reworking of the doctrine of election in terms of the threefold Word, Spykman calls for even greater restraint toward the eternal decrees than does Calvin. Compared to *Institutes* III.22.4-6, Spykman does not deal as seriously with Paul’s argument concerning Jacob and Esau in Romans 9-11. He handles those passages that speak of a “pre-temporal” decree in a rather cursory way, suggesting that a three-factor view of reality could yield a substantially different interpretation, though he does not offer one. He agrees with “the Christian conviction that there is a deeper background to life’s drama,” but he is reticent to affirm an absolute correspondence between God’s intrinsic Being and the Word as given to and for the world.¹⁶⁸ This is not because he perceives a lack of consistency between God’s inner life and his relationship to the world but because he prioritizes the reality of God’s Word as the means for God’s gracious coming and speaking. In fact, Spykman judges the infralapsarian/supralapsarian question to be an unhealthy consequence of attempting to probe behind God’s revealed Word.¹⁶⁹ Even though the doctrine of election as articulated by Calvin may lead logically to an affirmation of a reprobating decree prior to the fall, Spykman tries to remain within the biblical storyline by emphasizing the position of reprobation common to all men and women in Adam.

¹⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 508.

¹⁶² Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 176.

¹⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.23.7.

¹⁶⁴ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 189.

¹⁶⁵ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 186.

¹⁶⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 509.

¹⁶⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 507-509.

¹⁶⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 510, and “Election and Reprobation,” 188.

¹⁶⁹ See Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 172, and *RT*, 508.

However, he does not deny that the reprobating Word transcends human history and experience, as is evident from his reference to “a deeper background to life’s drama.”

Some might categorize Spykman’s view as a type of foreknowledge wherein God’s election is to some extent related to an individual’s response to God’s Word. Some might charge him with seeking “to make [the doctrine of predestination] palatable to late modern sensibilities,”¹⁷⁰ though his theological assumptions regarding God’s sovereignty and the bondage of the human will are entirely consistent with those of Calvin. In his doctrine of election, considered within the entirety of his theology, Spykman moves beyond the tendency toward two-factor thinking that he finds at times even in Calvin. Affirming the unity of divine revelation, he refers to election and reprobation as having been “given simultaneously as integrally constitutive aspects of the single, abiding Word of God.”¹⁷¹ Rather than asking an either-or question about God’s sovereignty or man’s responsibility, he holds these realities in tension, offering a perspective rooted more in the dynamic interplay of God, his Word, and the human heart.

III.3. The Basis for a Threefold Model of Revelation in Calvin

Because a threefold model lies at the heart of Spykman’s renewal effort, one must ask whether this model has any precedent in the work of Calvin. Spykman uses the model to explain (1) the nature of revelation as involving God, the world, and his mediating Word, and (2) the dimensions of God’s Word as comprising his creational Word, his scriptural Word, and his incarnate Word. Concerning the nature of revelation, Spykman relies on Kuyper’s articulation of the three basic elements of revelation: “All revelation assumes (1) one who reveals Himself; (2) one to whom He reveals Himself; and (3) the possibility of the required relation between these two.”¹⁷² Spykman considers this to be an accurate interpretation of Calvin’s relational model of knowledge of God and knowledge of self.¹⁷³ Concerning the dimensions of God’s Word, Spykman believes Calvin grants a genuine revelatory status to creation as well as to Scripture and to Christ, and he seeks to articulate this insight theologically with his model of the threefold Word of God.

¹⁷⁰ R. Scott Clark, “Election and Predestination: The Sovereign Expressions of God (3.21-24),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, eds. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 96. Clark does not mention Spykman; he merely expresses his general concern.

¹⁷¹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 190.

¹⁷² Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 14, quoting Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 257, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89018163071?urlappend=%3Bseq=9>.

¹⁷³ See the opening statement of Calvin’s *Institutes*, I.1.1.

According to Muller's definitive work on post-Reformation dogmatic development, some of Calvin's contemporaries and earliest successors interpreted his doctrine of the knowledge of God in a threefold rather than a twofold sense.¹⁷⁴ The possibility for a threefold approach stems from Calvin's assumption that natural revelation exists and that it is "*in se* a true knowledge of God."¹⁷⁵ Calvin lends weight to the reality of this revelation in God's works by opening the *Institutes* with an exposition of the knowledge of God experienced through the benefits of daily life as an expression of God's favor upon creation (*Institutes* I.1-5). Because this knowledge is faint at best and obscured by humankind's willful rejection of it, Calvin moves quickly to the necessity of supernatural revelation for a proper and true knowledge of God as both Creator and Redeemer (*Institutes* I.6). Calvin's concern in stressing creation's witness to the Creator is not to construct a "natural theology" (he "nowhere uses the term *theologia naturalis*"¹⁷⁶) in the sense of reasoning about God apart from revelation, as later theologians do. He affirms God's continued relationship with creation after the fall, but always with the assumption that no knowledge outside of Scripture has soteriological value.¹⁷⁷ The Reformed belief is that without the Scriptures, theology veers sharply and inevitably toward falsehood and yields no salvific content.

Creation's lack of soteriological value does not, however, render useless either creation or God's power manifested through creation. Calvin, in keeping with his pre-Enlightenment worldview, evidences a clear belief in the efficacy of God's original Word of creation for its continuation and preservation. He considers the Word "by which he [God] once commanded" as being "continually in force."¹⁷⁸ Using the creation of fish as an example, he maintains "that the force of the word which was addressed to the fishes was not transient, but rather, being infused into their nature, has taken root, and constantly bears fruit."¹⁷⁹ At the very least, this recognition of God's Word, spoken to all creatures and effective not only to call forth into existence but also to call forth continually (*creatio secunda*), should prompt careful study of the relationship of God's initial spoken Word to the Word written.

¹⁷⁴ Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 292-295, mentions, among others, Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590), and Edward Leigh (1602-1671).

¹⁷⁵ Muller, *Prolegomena*, 274.

¹⁷⁶ Muller, *Prolegomena*, 274.

¹⁷⁷ See David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Collins, 1973), 147-148, whose assessment corroborates that of Muller: "Calvin's witness to a general revelation cannot be questioned. But equally without hesitation he rejects the notion of a valid natural theology. He does not use the word, but he consistently denies that there is any true system of knowledge of God built up by natural reason on the basis of the divine revelation in nature and the relics of the image in man."

¹⁷⁸ Calvin, *Genesis*, 90.

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Genesis*, 90.

Spykman applies himself to this task, lamenting that contemporary evangelical theology tends to skew the emphasis to the scriptural Word without proper consideration for the “first Word.”¹⁸⁰

In attempting to correct this perceived problem, Spykman does not intend to detract from the priority of Scripture but to explore the import of God’s original speaking. Like Calvin, he endeavors to reflect the breadth of the Word’s own self-authenticating testimony, according to the following “thesis”: “Taking Scripture seriously as the Word of God leads us to recognize that there is more to the Word of God than Scripture alone. For the Bible itself points to realities beyond itself which it identifies as Word of God.”¹⁸¹ He offers a more systematic presentation of the Word’s breadth, gathering up the many words of Scripture about the Word of God and organizing them into a three-pronged concept. In doing this, he goes beyond Calvin.

A magnified view of creation should, in turn, lead to a greater magnification of the Word written and the Word incarnate. What God has spoken in Scripture and achieved in Christ is a unified Story in which his redemptive pursuits correspond to his intentions in creation and his continued work of providence. Spykman believes that the positive relationship between creation and redemption affords opportunities to use one’s being-renewed mind to explore the possibilities inherent in God’s good creation. One implication of a regenerate “reading” of creation through the “spectacles” of Scripture is this: The Christian scientist (or artist, mechanic, theologian, etc.) does not necessarily come to more accurate or in-depth conclusions in her field of study or work, but because of the re-ordered nature of her heart and mind, she can pursue science *coram Deo*, before the face of God, “without falling into idolatry,” and in a relational manner, as a religious activity oriented in the right direction.¹⁸² Such a Spirit-enabled and Scripture-enriched approach to life in God’s world reflects faithfully the intuition and directions of Calvin.

Part IV: Evaluation

By proposing a three-factor view of reality and a threefold model of the Word of God as the basis for a renewal of Reformed dogmatics, Spykman believes that he is doing “nothing more than stating explicitly as a normative structuring principle what is already implicitly present in the mainstream of Reformed thinking.”¹⁸³ Considering himself an heir of Calvin, he draws repeatedly from Calvin’s work,

¹⁸⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 78.

¹⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 78. In the essay “Word of God,” 10, he articulates a similar idea: “Recognizing this unbreakable bond between creation and the Word of God honors the language of Scripture itself.”

¹⁸² Schreiner, 106.

¹⁸³ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

finding there the initial development of Reformed distinctives such as the relational nature of revelation and a focus on the mediating Word of God. Calvin's hermeneutic principle, though grounded in pre-modern assumptions, provides a platform from which Spykman can maintain the priority of divine revelation over against "the turn to the subject,"¹⁸⁴ which is demonstrated by an excessive emphasis on the dimensions of human response. Spykman also desires ongoing reformation, and from his twentieth century post-Enlightenment context, he uses Calvin's hermeneutic principle to further renew certain elements of Calvin's thought, such as Calvin's anthropology and his doctrine of election.

Sensing that Reformed theology has somewhat failed to incorporate Calvin's dynamic view of God as one who actively participates in the life of his creatures by means of his revealing and mediating Word, Spykman illumines significant strands of Calvin's doctrine of revelation that have been overlooked or downplayed in the structuring of Reformed dogmatics. Based on his assessment of the history of Reformed theology, he uses the threefold model of the Word of God to restore the dynamic element of the Reformed doctrines of God, creation, and redemption in a way that reflects the insights and 'Weltoffenheit'¹⁸⁵ – openness to the world – of John Calvin.

¹⁸⁴ Van der Kooij, *As in a Mirror*, 233.

¹⁸⁵ See Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 289, who recognizes Calvin's 'Weltoffenheit.'

Chapter 3

Gordon J. Spykman's Doctrine of Revelation as a Unifying Factor of Creation and Redemption: Calvinist Development along Bavinckian Lines

With gratefulness for the foundation and new directions laid by John Calvin, Spykman pinpoints the Calvinist renewal that occurred through Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in the latter part of the nineteenth century as the next key influence upon his own work. Bavinck's theology provided a *puzzle* and a *model* for Spykman in his "student days," according to a story he relates.¹ Contemplating the nature of the relationship between the theology course he took in one room and the philosophy course he took in another room, Spykman "would read a dash of Bavinck's theology" only to find that Bavinck's discussions referenced both theologians and philosophers, "often within a single paragraph."² The ease with which Bavinck moved between the thought-worlds of theologians and philosophers surprised Spykman and sent him to his professors for clarification on the relationship between the two areas of discourse. He found the answers unsatisfactory: philosophy handles "matters of reason," working "in the realm of common grace" or "general revelation"; theology handles "matters of faith" pertaining to "special revelation" and "special grace."³

In Spykman's judgment, the uneasy connection between theology and philosophy conveyed by these responses reflects "the long-standing medieval dilemma"⁴ between nature and grace. Bavinck, he sensed, handled theological material in a way that took account of pertinent philosophical issues. Such integration of theology and philosophy contrasts with the lack of integration as Spykman encountered it in his formal studies – thus his *puzzle* and the career-long question he sought to address: what is the relationship between creation and redemption? And, in terms of doing theology, how does the content of special revelation connect with the knowledge available through so-called general means?

Not only was Bavinck proficient in analyzing the philosophical background of theological topics and discerning the interplay between the two, but he was also gifted in applying theological truth to various educational and social questions of his time. Spykman similarly strives to illuminate the relevant connections between theology and fields such as politics, education, and science. Though he does not achieve the breadth, depth, and precision of Bavinck in his systematic work and his applied theology, he

¹ Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 14. He also tells this story in "Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History," 11-13.

² Spykman, *RT*, 14.

³ Spykman, *RT*, 14.

⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 14.

finds in Bavinck a *model* for theology both thought and lived in the various sectors of human community.

Spykman honors Bavinck as “the seasoned systematic theologian of the neo-Calvinist movement,” claiming that “[h]is venerable dogmatics has a perennial freshness about it” because “[i]t recaptures much of the original genius of the sixteenth century Calvinian reformation.”⁵ Though Spykman makes fewer direct references to Bavinck than he does to Calvin, Bavinck’s influence on Spykman can be discerned throughout *Reformational Theology (RT)*. For example, Spykman’s historical summary of the relationship between theology and philosophy, especially his assessment of the significance of Kant, appears to borrow from the general thrust of Bavinck’s historical summary, despite its very different character.⁶ Bavinck displays exceptionally learned knowledge about even minor characters and historical movements, while Spykman paints a broad stroke, giving late twentieth century readers an overview of the most influential thought patterns shaping their time.

Spykman’s discussions of monism, pantheism, and dualism demonstrate an internalization of the basic categories of Bavinck’s thought. For Bavinck, these dangers were ever present; he argues that every truth deformation ultimately leads to one of these positions, and the defining characteristic of each position is a false concept of the relation between God and creation.⁷ Spykman, again without referencing Bavinck directly, assumes the accuracy of Bavinck’s diagnosis regarding possible responses to revelation, and he updates this diagnosis to include more modern theological variations on the themes of dualism and monism.⁸

⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 6; “A New Paradigm for Doing Reformed Dogmatics,” 5. John Bolt, “Grand Rapids between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (November 2003): 277, accessed May 17, 2014, ATLA, attributes North American familiarity with Bavinck to L. Berkhof: “It is largely through Berkhof’s manual [*Systematic Theology*] that Herman Bavinck has influenced the theology of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.”

⁶ See Spykman, *RT*, 41-50. Spykman, from his later vantage point, deals with Karl Barth’s theology in relation to Kant, as well as with other post-Bavinck thinkers and developments; see *RT*, 50-60.

⁷ See “Herman Bavinck’s Modernisme en Orthodoxie: A Translation,” trans. Bruce Pass, *Bavinck Review* 7 (2016):97, accessed July 17, 2017, bavinckinstitute.org, along with Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 418-420, 435-439 (hereafter cited as *RD*). See also John Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 111, accessed July 6, 2017, EBSCOhost. Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology Series, Vol. 21 (Leiden, NL: BRILL, 2011), 27, accessed September 2, 2017, ProQuest Ebrary, observes, “Non-Christian thought, for Bavinck, *invariably* reduces to one or the other [Deism or pantheism]; very often the one *becomes* the other; and, in the final analysis, the two ‘options’ are ‘two sides of the same coin,’ and reduce to metaphysical monism.”

⁸ See Spykman, *RT*, 64-65, where he recognizes the “dualist . . . thought pattern” that results in “two-factor worldviews,” and the importance of the Creator/creature distinction for navigating dualist thinking; on pp. 70-73, after discussing the problem of “Locating the Norm,” he lists five possible positions resulting from “two-

Spykman's reliance on Bavinck appears in his central contention: "The most fundamental issue in Reformed dogmatics is, therefore, a right understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption. In the terminology of classic theology, it is the relationship between general and special revelation."⁹ This contention echoes Bavinck, who describes the "problem" in this way:

And even now, underneath and side by side with the Christian religion a rich stream of natural life continues to flow. What, then, is the relation of Christianity to this wealth of natural life, which, originating in creation, has, under the law there imposed upon it, developed from age to age? What is the connection between nature and grace, creation and regeneration, culture and Christianity, earthly and heavenly vocation, the man and the Christian?¹⁰

Bavinck answers this challenge by developing key insights of the Reformation tradition inherited from Calvin, which have been summarized using the formula "grace restores nature."¹¹ Spykman credits Bavinck's insistence that "grace restores nature" with offering "a real alternative to other major modern theologies."¹² Spykman claims for his project a commitment to this "alternative method," which "alters refreshingly the very contours of dogmatics" and "creates a strikingly different approach to prolegomenal issues."¹³ Spykman's work also reflects the horizontal unfolding of revelation whereby God's design for reclaiming creation is achieved, a perspective voiced by Bavinck when he speaks of the "one thread" of God's works that "runs through the history of mankind."¹⁴

For his development of Bavinck's primary theme, Spykman depends on Jan Veenhof's conclusions regarding Bavinck's work, particularly on the section from Veenhof's dissertation *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1968) translated by Al Wolters and published as *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck*. Veenhof argues that "grace restores nature" is the overriding theme of Bavinck's work; his interpretation, similar to that of Eugene Heideman,¹⁵ dominated Bavinck studies for half a century.¹⁶ Though in recent decades some scholars have challenged Veenhof's

factor thinking" (i.e., confusion regarding the proper distinction between Creator and creation): deism, pantheism, Gnosticism, voluntarism, and monism.

⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 88.

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," *Princeton Theological Review* 7, no. 3 (1909): 437-438, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/princeton theolog7319arms-dmd004>.

¹¹ Bolt, Editor's Introduction, *RD*, I:18, asserts that "the fundamental theme that shapes Bavinck's entire theology is the trinitarian idea that grace restores nature."

¹² Spykman, *RT*, 70.

¹³ Spykman, *RT*, 70.

¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Lexington, KY: Alev Books), 115.

¹⁵ Eugene Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959). Spykman does not reference Heideman's work.

¹⁶ John Bolt, review of Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* and James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of*

conclusions,¹⁷ the present analysis of Spykman's relationship to Bavinck assumes the credibility of the Veenhof interpretation, since Spykman read Bavinck in that light. This chapter explores Spykman's dependence on Bavinck in the following areas: (1) the meaning of revelation and its consequences for philosophy and theology; (2) the Reformational perspective on nature and grace; and (3) covenant and eschatological implications of a theology rooted in creational givens. This chapter seeks to determine Spykman's faithfulness to the theological directions cast by Bavinck and to measure his success in building upon Bavinck's thought within a twentieth-century context.

Part I: Revelation: Its Meaning, Forms, and Consequences for Philosophy and Theology

Bavinck defends the Reformed understanding of revelation as God's sovereign and authoritative speaking to and in the world. Though mostly assumed in Calvin's time, this view was yielding to the pressures of modernity in Bavinck's late nineteenth-century context. Fast forward a century, and Spykman recognizes that the erosion of objectivity in the late twentieth century presents a major impediment to a biblical understanding of revelation.¹⁸ At the same time, the subjective dimension of human faith jostles for recognition in Bavinck's and Spykman's respective theological contexts. Though both men wrestle with the Kantian divide between object and subject, Spykman gives human subjectivity, or faith-response, a more definitive role in his theological structure.¹⁹ This move, reflective of the theology of Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, accounts for changes in the theological landscape since

Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif, *Calvin Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (April 2013), 172, accessed October 17, 2016, ATLA.

¹⁷ The newer studies argue for a more nuanced understanding of the "grace restores nature" theme within Bavinck's overall dogmatic purpose; see Bolt, review of *Restored to Our Destiny* and *Trinity and Organism*, 172, 174. Syd Hielema critiques the traditional neo-Calvinist interpretation of "grace restores nature," contending that Bavinck's language indicates a restoration that exceeds the original creation; see Syd Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," (Th.D. thesis, Wycliffe College [Toronto School of Theology], 1998), accessed September 1, 2017, www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD_0011/NQ35452.pdf.

¹⁸ The impact of modern assumptions about reality and the acceptance of the Kantian object/subject divide exerted pressure on the doctrine of revelation, so that Bolt refers to it as "perhaps the single most discussed theological issue of the twentieth century" (Bolt, Editor's Introduction, *RD* I:21). Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 11, also recognizes the deleterious effects of modern thinking upon the doctrine of revelation: "Like many other stretches of Christian teaching, the Christian doctrine of revelation suffers from the distortions of its shape introduced by attempts to formulate and expound it in relation to and, in some measure, in dependence upon, dominant modern intellectual and spiritual conventions."

¹⁹ John Bolt, "An Opportunity Lost and Regained: Herman Bavinck on Revelation and Religion," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013): 90-91, accessed January 16, 2016, ATLA, commends Spykman's desire to theologize outside of the Kantian dualism but suggests that by his focus on the correlation between revelation and response, Spykman succumbs to the dualism he seeks to deconstruct. Bolt's analysis will be mentioned again in Chapter 6 of this project, concerning Spykman's relationship to Berkouwer.

Bavinck's time, including the perceived need to justify the activity of the human subject in relation to a God about whom great uncertainty now exists.²⁰ Even more pronounced in Spykman's theological context than in Bavinck's is doubt concerning the significance of revelation. No longer is it assumed that God speaks and that it is one's duty to respond to him. The contemporary mind seeks to determine the possibilities and contexts for divine speaking, along with the conditions and varieties of expression for human response. Within such a climate, Spykman highlights the inescapable nature of revelation and response, and, in so doing, brings the covenantal nature of God to the fore in his concept of revelation.

Spykman expresses his concordance with the historic Reformed doctrine of revelation, stating that a "transcendent and authoritative revelation" serves as the Christian's ultimate authority.²¹ His many statements about the character, purpose, and "range"²² of divine revelation assume that the Reformed understanding of revelation as God sovereignly revealing his character and his will is consistent with Scripture's testimony about the nature and content of divine revelation.²³ Rather than offering his Reformed audience another systematic statement of the doctrine of revelation, he purposes to provide renewed clarity about the distinctions traditionally maintained within the doctrine of revelation, with the goal of "updating, rethinking, and reformulating" this critical element of the Reformed tradition as developed by Calvin, Bavinck, L. Berkhof, and Berkouwer.²⁴

Spykman strives to discern the proper relationship between the various forms of revelation, with a heightened interest in the role of human response as a correlate of divine revelation. He especially aims to establish a biblical perspective on the "relationship between creation and redemption,"²⁵ or, between creation and the revelation given in Scripture and in Christ. To reach this goal, he advocates a "renewed appreciation of the creation order as the abiding framework for all further divine revelation."²⁶ Spykman's interest in response as a component of revelation is evidenced by his desire to incorporate into his dogmatics the following insight from the field of biblical theology: "a

²⁰ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, ed. and trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 77, remarks, "Here we will concern ourselves with one theme that really lies at the bottom of everything else – the question of the living God, the reality of his revelation within our world Many of the questions of our time arise not in doxology but in doubt."

²¹ Gordon J. Spykman, "Religion and Revelation," *Banner*, October 2, 1964, 18.

²² Spykman, *RT*, 77, 88-90.

²³ Spykman, *RT*, 60, 75, 10, 6, 90-91; Spykman, *Spectacles*, 22. In Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 13-14, he says, "The Reformed faith views revelation as a sovereign act of God. . . . The core idea in revelation is the notion of 'unveiling'. . . . Revelation means making known something previously unknown and still unknowable apart from the revealing act."

²⁴ Spykman, "Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics," 2. See also *RT*, 3-8 (I.1., "Accounting for This Project") for more detail regarding Spykman's position in relation to his theological tradition.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 88.

²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 10.

keener sensitivity to revelation as existential confrontation with God's personal self-disclosure as Maker, Lord, and Redeemer of the cosmos."²⁷ In this, Spykman reflects Bavinck's concern to include the "believing subject"²⁸ within his overall doctrine of revelation. At least three aspects of the doctrine of revelation lend perspective to Spykman's and Bavinck's similarities and differences: (1) the forms of revelation, (2) human response as an element of revelation, and (3) methodological directions derived from revelation.

I.1. The Forms of Revelation

Bavinck expresses his broad view of revelation in this way: "[A]ll of the works of God, whether of word or deed, are constituent parts and elements of the one, great, comprehensive, and always continuing revelation of God."²⁹ He notes that Scripture uses a variety of verbs in its references to God's self-disclosure, and that divine self-disclosure "comes in various forms."³⁰ Bavinck summarizes the three "characteristics" of revelation as (1) having its origin in "*God Himself* acting in His freedom"; (2) consisting in a revelation of God's own self; and (3) being directed toward "God as its purpose."³¹ He further acknowledges that all revelation can be considered "a speaking," though special revelation more properly so than general revelation.³² Thus, without sacrificing the necessity and noetic priority of special revelation, particularly the Scriptures, Bavinck insists that God's self-disclosure occurs through various means, in the arenas of "nature and history, and in heart and conscience," as well as in and through the written Word.³³ This demonstrates Bavinck's commitment to the witness of Scripture as well as his appreciation of modern developments in the fields of history and science. Henk van den Belt connects Bavinck's use of the term "organic" "to the fact that all revelation occurs through means,"³⁴ based on Bavinck's assertion that "[in] a strict sense there is no immediate revelation either in nature or in grace. God always uses a means . . . by which he reveals himself to human beings."³⁵ Bavinck

²⁷ Spykman, "Foundations for a Renewed and Updated Reformed Dogmatics," 10.

²⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, I:564.

²⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. by Henry Zylstra from the Dutch edition *Magnalia Dei* (Grand Rapids: 1956), 34.

³⁰ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 34.

³¹ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 34-36.

³² Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 66.

³³ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 62: He is discussing here the necessity of special revelation for rightly knowing the revelation received through these other means.

³⁴ Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust*, Studies in Reformed Theology, Vol. 17 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 256, accessed September 21, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁵ Bavinck, *RD*, I:309.

consistently presents revelation in all its dimensions and forms as “an act of grace,” originating in, focused on, and finding its completion and fulfillment in God himself, even as in revelation God “condescends to meet his creature.”³⁶ So essential is the doctrine of revelation, according to Bavinck, that with its “reality . . . Christianity stands or falls.”³⁷

Bavinck’s inclusion of creation as a means of divine confrontation with the creature informs Spykman’s position. Indeed, this aspect of revelation – its communication through means, forms, modes – comprises the focal point of Spykman’s discussions. In his comments concerning general, or creational revelation, he echoes Bavinck in his assertion that creation is the starting point of God’s revelation, his “first Word for the world.”³⁸ Bavinck says, “For creation is itself an act of revelation, the beginning and first principle of all later revelation.”³⁹ He anchors revelation in creation as a demonstration of the unity of the Trinity’s work in the world and as a polemic against alternative worldviews that would unduly exalt creation or deny its significance as the “first principle” of “later revelation.” Spykman, conscious of the American evangelical tendency to undercut creation for the sake of emphasizing individual redemption, tries to reclaim the wholeness of the works of the Trinity – creation *and* redemption – as espoused by Bavinck.

I.2. Human Response to Divine Revelation

The significance of revelation as presented in Spykman’s work has to do with its intimate connection to response. To capture this idea, Spykman utilizes Kuyper’s formulation of two *relata* and one *relatio*.⁴⁰ Similarly, Bavinck distinguishes “three elements” of revelation, defined as the “communication of something that is still unknown”: “(1) The existence of a personal divine being who originates the announcement; (2) a truth, fact, or event that up until the time of its announcement was not yet known; (3) a human being to whom the announcement was made.”⁴¹ Though Bavinck’s description of the elements underscores the content of the announcement, it assumes a context of relationship and response between the one who announces and the one receiving the announcement. Kuyper insists that man, the one to whom God reveals, “must be taken into account,”⁴² a point also propounded by Bavinck in his emphasis on the believing subject. What does this mean for Spykman’s

³⁶ Bavinck, *RD*, I:310.

³⁷ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 16.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 87.

³⁹ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 38.

⁴⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 257.

⁴¹ Bavinck, *RD*, I:295.

⁴² See Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 257.

dogmatics? He trains his theological sights on the relation between Revealer and responder and the means by which this relation is made possible – creation, Scripture, and Jesus Christ.

For Spykman, the significance of divine self-revelation lies in its illuminating power for the structures of created life, not so much in the formulation of what he calls “abstract, isolated, ontological treatments of ‘the doctrine of God’ and ‘the doctrine of man,’ followed by ‘the doctrine of Christ’ as Mediator.”⁴³ His concern is reasonable, if somewhat reactionary: he desires to avoid what he perceives as a tendency in “[o]lder theologies” to “stress the two *relata*” – the revealing God and the responding man – “often at the expense of the mediating *relatio*.”⁴⁴ Spykman therefore seeks to establish the relationship between covenant partners – established and mediated by the Word – as the focal point of theological reflection. Alongside this, he intends to develop a “right understanding of the covenantal bond” in contrast to the “vaguely definable *relatio*” discernible in “[n]ewer theologies.”⁴⁵ Against those who would dispense with the biblical content that governs the divine-human relationship, Spykman holds fast to the biblical implications of covenant between a sovereign, initiating God and a God-imagining, yet sinful, humanity.

Bavinck’s God-centered characterization of revelation, attuned to the relational thrust of Scripture and to the rising importance of the self in modern times, deals extensively with the concept of man as the responding, or believing, subject. Cornelis van der Kooi traces this inclusion of the believing subject to an impetus evident in Calvin’s work: “H. Bavinck correctly and keenly formulates it that Christian theology takes the believing subject as its point of departure. That is already true for Calvin when he finally points to the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ Bavinck considers this to be a characteristic of Christian theology “from the very beginning,” referencing the saying, “‘through faith to understanding.’”⁴⁷ He denies that this is a subjective stance: subjectivism implies that the subject is the source or norm of knowledge. In Reformed theology, God’s objective revelation always functions as the norm, yet the inner illumination of a knowing subject by the Holy Spirit makes possible a subjective appropriation of objective revelation.⁴⁸ Apprehension of divine truth, though truly subjective in nature, is another aspect of divine self-revelation, because it is a work of God’s Spirit.⁴⁹ If, as Van den Belt

⁴³ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

⁴⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 92-93.

⁴⁶ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 99.

⁴⁷ Bavinck, *RD*, I:564.

⁴⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, I:564-565. See also *RD*, I:92-93 and 278-279.

⁴⁹ Bavinck, *RD*, I:505-506. Concerning Bavinck’s acknowledgement of “religious experience” as an aspect of revelation in *Philosophy of Revelation*, Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 84, remarks, “Above all, he

surmises, “the development of Neo-Calvinism” was influenced by Bavinck’s placement of the “subjective element . . . next to the objective revelation in Scripture” in his prolegomena,⁵⁰ then Spykman’s work as a neo-Calvinist theologian embodies the struggle to “deal with the relationship between objective truth and subjective certainty in a postmodern context.”⁵¹ The question of subjective response and certainty, which Bavinck felt the need to address, demands heightened attention in Spykman’s milieu.⁵²

Subjective response to the divine encounter occurs in the concrete realities of life. Like other neo-Calvinists, Spykman follows Bavinck’s pattern of relating revelation to all life-dimensions, resulting in a view of life as fundamentally religious. Given his late nineteenth-century context, wherein the field of religious studies had adopted an evolutionary view of the religious nature of man,⁵³ Bavinck devotes considerable space to arguing that revelation and religion are universally inseparable. Acknowledging that “[r]eligion is more deeply rooted in human nature than any other power,”⁵⁴ Bavinck maintains that all religion – even false religion – finds its basis in revelation. “Religion presupposes and demands the existence, self-revelation, and knowability of God.”⁵⁵

Spykman, too, recognizes the universality of religious impulses in the heart of man. He does so against the backdrop of atheism and secular humanism (philosophical positions present also in Bavinck’s

labored mightily to maintain the unity of Christian faith and human knowledge, refusing to yield to the modern impulse to reduce faith to human subjectivity.” Van den Belt, *Authority of Scripture*, 294, seems more reticent to affirm that Bavinck avoided subjectivism, suggesting that the “tension” created by the epistemological “correspondence between object and subject” in Bavinck’s work “leads to the theological question whether Bavinck was able to avoid subjectivism.”

⁵⁰ Van den Belt, *Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology*, 294.

⁵¹ Van den Belt, *Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology*, 294.

⁵² Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 150, confirms the importance of the question in the mid-twentieth century, appealing to Bavinck’s willingness to entertain the question as a sign of its significance: “Bavinck insisted that experiential theology did not mean to locate the origins of faith within man. It wanted, rather, to indicate how man himself was involved as he was confronted by revelation, and how he came to entrust himself to this revelation.”

⁵³ See Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 69, on the evolutionary view applied *generally* in the modern study of history: “It is silently presupposed that, in the last analysis, one and the same causality originates all events and causes them to succeed each other according to the law of progressive development. Monism and evolution are the *principia* of the modern view of history.” On the *specific* application of evolutionary thought to the development of religion throughout history, see Herman Bavinck, “Theology and Religious Studies,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 52-53: “All religions are seen as links in one chain, as different evolutions of the same process. The history of religions must lead into one history of religion that through all these stages reaches its highest form and purest shape.”

⁵⁴ Bavinck, *RD*, I:503.

⁵⁵ Bavinck, *RD*, I:505; see also Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 94-96, and *RD*, I:276-277, 286.

context⁵⁶), challenging the idea that the human heart can be irreligious.⁵⁷ “Being human means being religious,”⁵⁸ and the concomitant reality, that of the pervasive nature of religion, holds even greater interest for Spykman, who criticizes the twentieth-century fundamentalist withdrawal from cultural arenas.⁵⁹ The Christian Reformed Church’s struggles against modernism during the 1930s and 1940s left little interest in the worldly engagement espoused by Kuyperianism,⁶⁰ and the push toward Americanization, accelerated by the World Wars, further eroded the Kuyperian influence within Dutch Reformed communities.⁶¹ Against this backdrop, Spykman encourages the reclamation of Christian principles for every life sphere. In Bavinck’s words, “Revelation, while having its center in the Person of Christ, in its periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation.”⁶² This insight animates Spykman from beginning to end:

[A]ll of life, in all its dimensions, in its full scope, in all its interrelatedness – the whole man, in his total existence, throughout the whole world of his experience – answers to God’s claim upon us. This is the covenant – God’s promise, our response – everywhere, always, nothing excluded. This is religion. This is the life!⁶³

Spykman’s statement builds on Bavinck’s arguments for the necessity of revelation; even within the circle of Christian theology, revelation permeates all dimensions of life, shining the light on God’s constant search for men and women. The beginning of human understanding, though, must come through Scripture and through Christ, as Calvin, Bavinck, and Spykman, representing biblical thought across the centuries, insist.

⁵⁶ See Bavinck, *RD*, II:57, where he rejects the idea that a person can actually be an atheist but recognizes the reality of “practical atheism.” Though atheism and naturalism were part of Bavinck’s cultural milieu, Spykman worked in a context where those ideas had gained greater cultural traction and seeped more deeply into cultural consciousness.

⁵⁷ See Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 10, where he defines secularism as “a life detached from God” and suggests that “secular humanism” is “the prevailing religion in America.” He maintains that atheism is “pretended non-religion, supposed detachment from God.” In *RT*, 3-4, recognizing the influence of monistic thought (a favorite theme of Bavinck’s) on contemporary theology, he states, “Western Christianity is being literally swamped by the tidal wave of modern secularism These monisms of recent decades are out to dismantle the ‘upper room’ where the ‘sacred’ still survives. A ‘radical secularity’ is emerging in which the ‘sacred’ is reduced at best to a depth dimension of our ‘secular’ world of experience as its ‘Ground of Being.’”

⁵⁸ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 10-11. Referencing Calvin’s description of humanity as “incurably religious” in *Institutes* I.3, Spykman connects personhood and religiosity, centering that connection in the “heart.”

⁵⁹ Spykman, “Fundamentalism in the CRC,” 19.

⁶⁰ See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 136-137.

⁶¹ See Spykman, “Fundamentalism in the CRC,” 13-14.

⁶² Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 20.

⁶³ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 12.

I.3. Methodological Directions

Spykman believes that a doctrine of revelation described in terms of the threefold Word – taking creation into account as a form of God’s Word – calls for the development of a Christian philosophy and the restructuring of dogmatics. Regarding a Christian philosophy, he views Bavinck’s work as a forerunner for the Reformational philosophy that emerged a few decades after him, a philosophy that seeks to overcome the “dualism” inherent in the relationship between philosophy and theology. Regarding dogmatic structure, Spykman’s work has some consonance with Bavinck’s structure but diverges from it at a crucial juncture that reflects their differing emphases on the primary content of revelation.

I.3.1. A Christian Philosophy

Spykman detects in Bavinck’s work intimations of a Christian philosophy that constitute a “promising lead” toward the full-fledged Calvinist philosophy proposed by Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven.⁶⁴ Bavinck’s commitment to Scripture leads him to affirm the complete and total goodness of every dimension of God’s original creation (defined as “structure” within Calvinistic philosophy) and to recognize the deformation that extends to all created life as a consequence of the curse (the “direction” aspect of neo-Calvinistic philosophy). Spykman claims Bavinck as a source for the basic elements of the neo-Calvinist philosophy, expressed in this well-known Bavinck quotation: “Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin.”⁶⁵

The prominence of this affirmation in Bavinck’s work does not alleviate Spykman’s qualms with the philosophical categories Bavinck employs, such as nature/grace, matter/form, and quantitative/qualitative.⁶⁶ Spykman attributes these distinctions to the dualistic thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), following Berkouwer’s discussion, which outlines Dooyeweerd’s analysis of the “form/matter” problem.⁶⁷ Charging Aquinas with being the “chief architect” of a dichotomous view of

⁶⁴ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 1-2. Spykman says of Bavinck, “During the latter stages of his life he launched an exploration into the philosophical foundations of his seasoned Reformed dogmatics”; in footnote 2, he references the following works by Bavinck as examples of this exploration: *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1913); *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904); and *The Philosophy of Revelation* (reprint) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

⁶⁵ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 61.

⁶⁶ Spykman, “Christian Higher Education,” 19.

⁶⁷ Spykman, “Christian Higher Education,” 19; Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 218-223. The relationship of Bavinck’s work to the ‘classic Neo-Thomist tradition,’ of which Spykman says his language is “highly reminiscent” (“Christian Higher Education,” 19), is a

reality, Spykman claims that the battle for a more unified worldview characterizes a Reformed approach to Christian higher education.⁶⁸ Because Bavinck continually critiques Roman Catholicism's dualistic construal of nature and grace and acknowledges that "[e]very person and every movement" vacillates between the seemingly opposed elements of various dualisms,⁶⁹ Spykman ultimately offers a positive assessment of Bavinck's work. He observes that though Bavinck uses "traditional Thomist concepts" (Spykman references the "nature/grace" concept specifically), "[h]e defines and handles them. . . . in an untraditional, more reformational way."⁷⁰ Spykman honors Bavinck's approach as one that "corrects the persistent dilemmas arising out of Kant's impact on modern thought."⁷¹ Like Bavinck, Spykman devotes nearly one quarter of his dogmatic work to the discussion of prolegomenal issues,⁷² though he pursues a more reformational direction, in his viewpoint, by validating the usefulness of a revelationally-informed Christian philosophy for determining the structure and method of dogmatics.

Spykman identifies "dualistic thinking" as a root distortion in culture and in Christian theology. The danger of dualism lies in its destruction of "the holist worldview and life-vision which is given with creation and illumined by biblical revelation": it "grants sin a built-in ontological status" and it confuses "structure and direction."⁷³ Such a distortion of reality produces a perception of tension within the good structures of creation, leaving believers with the false alternatives of world-flight or world-embrace. Spykman's judgment of dualism is consistent with that expressed by Bavinck over half a century before, who says,

question that lies beyond the scope of this project. I simply note that other scholars have challenged the neo-Thomist designation as applied to Bavinck. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 17, 10, says of R. H. Bremmer's *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1961), "Bremmer has at least this much right: scholasticism is indeed a 'ground motif' or foundation of Bavinck's thought, but he has identified the wrong form of scholasticism (Neo-Thomism)." Arvin Vos, "Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas," *The Bavinck Review* 7 (2016): 62, accessed August 24, 2017, bavinckinstitute.org, concludes, "Bavinck's epistemology is certainly inspired by Thomas, but in surprising and significant ways he departs from his thirteenth-century mentor," particularly in the way he conceives of and argues for the "objectivity of knowledge."

⁶⁸ Spykman, "Christian Higher Education," 22-23. Whether or not Spykman has correctly identified Aquinas' role in relation to a dichotomous view of reality, Spykman's work toward building a "unified worldview" in the realm of Christian higher education addresses a legitimate need. Spykman, "Christian Higher Education," 17, appeals to Francis Schaeffer's (1912-1984) argument for "'a unified field of knowledge'" (quoting from Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977]).

⁶⁹ Bavinck, "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace,'" 60, 56.

⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 69. Spykman, *RT*, 99, lauds Bavinck as one who "reflects the Calvinist tradition more clearly than Kuyper," because Kuyper adopted "uncritically some of the dualist thinking so typical of scholastic thought" and "failed to bring the renewing impact of his reformational worldview to bear fully on his systematic theology."

⁷¹ Spykman, *RT*, 70.

⁷² Bolt, Editor's Introduction, *RD*, I:19.

⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 15, 67.

[H]umans should never be detached from the realm of nature; neither may any creature or any part of the universe ever be put on a par with, or in opposition to, God. Nothing exists outside of or apart from God. This truth, it must be said, has over and over been violated: Plato's dualism, Neo-platonism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism – they all put a limit to God's revelation and posited a material substance hostile to God over against him. And in all sorts of ways these dualisms have for centuries impacted theology.⁷⁴

Bavinck goes on to trace the work of the “dualistic principle . . . in modern times” and the resultant division between private piety and public engagement.⁷⁵ His basic conviction is that the gospel “condemns sin” at every point, but “cherishes marriage and the family, society and the state, nature and history, science and art,” serving to bless each of these good gifts of the Creator to humanity.⁷⁶ This position reflects Bavinck's desire to combat “dualism.” At the same time, he advocates a biblical “duality” that affirms creational tasks but maintains “a double calling for men in which the heavenly fellowship with God is a distinct and higher goal than the earthly task of subjugating creation.”⁷⁷ Spykman, too, distinguishes between dualism and duality.⁷⁸ However, he defines duality in terms of categorical realities such as Creator/creation rather than in terms of a tension between imitation of Christ and participation in the created spheres. His twentieth-century neo-Calvinist concern with imitating Christ by participating in the creational spheres constitutes a different emphasis than that of Bavinck; this difference will resurface in the section on eschatology.

1.3.2. Doctrinal Organization

Spykman's replacement of the traditional *loci* method of dogmatics with the historical flow of revelation captured in the biblical themes of covenant and kingdom⁷⁹ differs from Bavinck's choice of organizational structure. Spykman's attention to covenant and history reflects the twentieth-century

⁷⁴ Bavinck, *RD*, II:103.

⁷⁵ Bavinck, *RD*, II:103. Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 101, frames Bavinck's “opposition” to dualisms in terms of (1) his rejection of “the Kantian separation between the theoretical and practical reason, between philosophy (metaphysics) and theology” and (2) “his insistence upon the unity of all sciences and the fact that all science (knowledge) ultimately rests on faith.” Bolt, 175, 180, maintains that Bavinck is not “adverse to all forms of dualism” since the “reality of sin” means that, “until the consummation, *some* dualism remains inevitable.” Though this may serve as a corrective for Spykman's zeal to abolish dualistic thinking, the problem Spykman identifies is that the church itself has not drawn the distinctions aright; thus, there exists a need to emphasize the goodness of created structures against unbiblical distinctions that divide reality along dualistic lines.

⁷⁶ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 151.

⁷⁷ Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 115. Bolt, 180, goes on to say that Bavinck's “point is that some dualism is inevitable in this dispensation *for eschatological reasons*; we live ‘between the times.’” Hielema, “Herman Bavinck's Eschatological View of Redemption,” 80, clarifies that “duality” is not actually Bavinck's word, but rather Bolt's word to describe Bavinck's “relative dualism.”

⁷⁸ See Spykman, *RT*, 64-68.

⁷⁹ See Spykman, *RT*, 6, 11-12, 22.

Reformed response to the challenges of revivalism and dispensational premillennialism.⁸⁰ As mentioned, one consequence of Spykman's narrative approach is that his dogmatics does not begin with or include the "doctrine of God" as a subject in and of itself. Rather, after dealing with prolegomenal issues, it begins with creation, seeking to understand the person of God in and through God's works, primarily through the establishment of the divine covenant. "For methodologically it is a highly precarious, problematic, and even presumptuous venture to discuss the existence, being, knowability, attributes, and Person(s) of God in isolation from the realities of life in the creation as illumined by Scripture's confessional focus on God's covenantal dealings with his creatures under his kingly rule."⁸¹ This motivates him to construct a method that is a "consistent follow-through"⁸² on his prolegomenal thesis: Reformed dogmatics should be preceded by a conscious Christian philosophy that derives the presuppositions and principles for dogmatics from creational givens as revealed in Scripture.⁸³

Because of Bavinck's commitment to reclaim Calvinism, particularly as developed by Calvin's scholastic successors, his *Reformed Dogmatics* offers a well-developed doctrine of God based on God's revelation of himself through his words and works.⁸⁴ Though neither Luther nor Calvin utilized the *loci* method, Bavinck does so with an eye toward the unity of dogmatics, which he locates in its *principium* – the Trinity. He describes the relationship of the *principium* to the various truths or doctrines flowing from it in this way:

The only true principle of the dogmatic system is the one that appoints to every single truth its unique place within the organic whole, the one that places clearly in the light the relation of every truth with the *principium* and with all other particular truths, and in that manner unfolds organically on all sides in the multiplicity of truths in order again to be brought together organically into the truth itself.⁸⁵

Methodologically, Bavinck strives to maintain dogmatics as a science; dogmatically, he proceeds with a structure that recognizes God as the first principle of theology, the central character of the historical progression of revelation, and the telos of theology. Bavinck recognizes the theological importance of attentiveness to the historical pattern of revelation as given in Scripture,⁸⁶ but he insists on a discussion

⁸⁰ See Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 131-133.

⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 139.

⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 135.

⁸³ Spykman, *RT*, 133-134.

⁸⁴ See Bavinck, *RD*, Vol. II, Part II: "The Living, Acting God."

⁸⁵ Herman Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 96, accessed July 17, 2017, bavinckinstitute.org.

⁸⁶ James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 118, accepts that *RD* is characterized by the "overarching theme of creation, fall, redemption and consummation."

of the doctrine of God prior to a discussion of the divine works so that “God and his works are clearly distinguished.”⁸⁷ This “synthetic-genetic method,” as Bavinck calls it, honors Scripture as the source and norm for its doctrinal content but organizes the material so as to demonstrate the unity of Christian belief. Bavinck describes the flow of his method as follows: “But proceeding from God, it descends to his works, in order through them again to ascend to and end in him.”⁸⁸ In Bavinck’s description of the divine Being, we find not a remote, philosophical discussion of God in isolation from his work but rather an approach that connects God’s character to his activity. Bavinck’s structure follows a more traditional path, but it does not share the rationalism of the method critiqued by Spykman.

Citing “the abstract and rationalist way of dealing with Christian doctrines which is inherent in the older ‘loci’ method,”⁸⁹ Spykman’s dogmatic presentation focuses more on the nature of God’s works than on the nature of the divine Being. He assumes the attributes of God that are affirmed by classic Reformed doctrine, but he attempts to find dogmatic unity in the Word of God rather than in the divine Being as revealed *through* the Word of God.⁹⁰ As a method of reclaiming the Word of God as theological norm in a liberal theological context, and as a method of honoring the broader dimensions of divine revelation, Spykman’s approach has worth. In contrast, though, to Bavinck’s stated intention to “trace” the “unity” of God’s thoughts,⁹¹ summarized by James Eglinton as “relat[ing] every facet of the creation to its Creator,”⁹² Spykman’s approach represents a shift to an emphasis on the unity of God’s works, not because he opposes the unity of God’s thoughts, but because he desires to develop an understanding of God’s character through the unfolding of his works. From an historical perspective, Spykman expresses concern that the traditional *loci* method too easily divorces the being of God from the works of God and encourages unbiblical and unproductive speculation. From a contemporary perspective, Spykman’s theological organization stems from the shift in theological concern: the significance of the doctrine of revelation evident in Bavinck’s time has become even more pronounced.⁹³ The key question is no

⁸⁷ Herman Bavinck, *RD*, I:112.

⁸⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, I:112. See also *RD*, II:29, where Bavinck defends his position that “the knowledge of God is the only dogma, the exclusive content, of the entire field of dogmatics” by pointing out that “also in the remaining *loci*, when [dogmatics] turns its attention to creatures, it views them only in relation to God as they exist from him and through him and for him [Rom. 11:36].”

⁸⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 135.

⁹⁰ See Spykman, *RT*, 75, where he offers a visual representation of “a three-factor view of reality” that centers on the “normatively structured place” held by the Word of God.

⁹¹ Bavinck, *RD*, I:44.

⁹² Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 100.

⁹³ Avery Dulles, S. J., *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), ix, 6, remarks, “Revelation has been a major theme in twentieth-century Protestant theology,” and notes that “[t]he concept of revelation as a permanently valid body of truths communicated by God in biblical times . . . is still accepted by many Christians, but is widely questioned in the twentieth century.”

longer, “What is God like?” but rather, “Is there a God?” If so, “Does God communicate with humanity, and how?” In answering the question of God’s speaking to and in the world, Spykman hopes to communicate the biblical emphasis on God’s covenantal faithfulness.

According to Eglinton, “[F]or Bavinck, a theology of Trinity *ad intra* leads to a cosmology of organism *ad extra*.”⁹⁴ Spykman does not ignore those aspects of the *ad intra* character of God as revealed by Scripture, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, but he chooses to address them theologically through the lens of God’s works, rather than as a separate locus. Though this choice lends to Spykman’s work a dogmatic shape quite different from Bavinck’s, he identifies in Bavinck’s view of revelation a “relational dimension” that acknowledges the nature of “life as an ongoing series of responses to revelation.”⁹⁵ With a theological structure designed to avoid the effects of scholasticism and yet build on Bavinck’s insights, Spykman speaks to the theological question of his time regarding human participation and calling in a world shaped by the living God’s living Word.

Part II: A Reformational Perspective of Nature and Grace

Spykman’s acceptance of Jan Veenhof’s thesis – that “grace restores nature” comprises “*the central theme*”⁹⁶ of Bavinck’s theology – shapes his understanding of the extent of revelation and its purpose in the lives of believers. This Bavinckian theme influences (1) the prominence Spykman gives to the doctrine of creation in his theological structure and (2) his theological interpretation of the value of general revelation and the relevance of common grace. Those topics form the primary points of the following section.

II.1. The Significance of Divine Laws for Life in God’s World

A persistent theme of Spykman’s work, which appears in Bavinck as well as in later neo-Calvinist philosophers, is his appeal to divine law as the structural principle for life in God’s world. The divine laws function as “ordinances” defining the nature of creaturely life and as “norms” by which to assess the variety of situations encountered in a fallen world. Though knowledge of “divinely given”⁹⁷ ordinances seems more tentative in a post-Nietzsche and post-World War world, there is nevertheless an expectation for cooperative action on the part of individuals in a society increasingly marked by

⁹⁴ Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 205.

⁹⁵ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 3-4.

⁹⁶ Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, 7.

⁹⁷ Spykman uses this phrase in “‘Follow-up’ Project,” 1, to avoid a possible misinterpretation of the phrase “divine ordinances” to mean that the ordinances themselves are divine.

globalization. Thus, beyond the work of dogmatics, Spykman labors to discern the claims of creation, couched in the terms of “creation ordinances,” upon every academic discipline and life-sphere; he deems such discernment necessary to accomplish his goal of “seeking to work out a wholist world-view.”⁹⁸ This section will include analysis of the relationship between Spykman and Bavinck as it concerns (1) the idea of creation ordinances as an expression of divine law; (2) sphere-sovereignty as an implication of creation ordinances; and (3) the biblical doctrine of creation as a defense against deism and pantheism.

II.1.1. Creation Ordinances as an Expression of Divine Law

Citing Bavinck’s *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1913), Spykman contends that God, by his “Law-Word,” “binds himself” covenantally to his creation and establishes norms “for all created reality.”⁹⁹ He translates Bavinck’s words as follows:

The Christian worldview holds that man is always and everywhere bound by laws set forth by God as the rule for life. . . . They find a unity among themselves and find their origin and continuation in the Creator and Lawgiver of the universe. . . . It is God’s decree that these divine ideas and laws be foundations and norms, the interconnections and patterns for all creatures.¹⁰⁰

Spykman also references Bavinck’s elucidation of the unity and diversity of the creation order found in *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II.¹⁰¹ In this passage Bavinck recognizes the “distinctive natures”¹⁰² of all created things, which are, as Spykman translates, “distinct but not divided.”¹⁰³ Each creature is upheld by God so that its distinctiveness might be revealed “in its richness,”¹⁰⁴ but each is directed toward God and “connected with each other.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Spykman, “Christian Higher Education,” 20. See Spykman, *RT*, 8, where he labels his work using Arthur Holmes’s (1924-2011) phrase ‘world-viewish theology’ (Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 34-38).

⁹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 94-95.

¹⁰⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 94-95. Spykman also quotes from this passage in “Election and Reprobation,” 179, and in “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” 181-182. In the 1929 edition of Bavinck’s *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok), the passage is found on pages 102-103.

¹⁰¹ Spykman, *RT*, 188, citing Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II (Kampen: Kok, 1928), 399-400. In *RT*, 71, Spykman refers to God’s Word as the “key to understanding revelation in its unity and diversity.” In “Christian Higher Education,” 17, Spykman mentions the principle of unity-in-diversity as referring to “the integral unity which God has built into the richly diversified fabric of creation,” as well as an awareness of the “religious wholeness of our life in God’s world.”

¹⁰² Bavinck, *RD*, II:436.

¹⁰³ Spykman, *RT*, 188.

¹⁰⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Bavinck, *RD*, II:436. Bavinck says this referring to the “parts” of the world: “There is a wide range of connections between them; an organic, or if you will, an ethical bond holds them all together.”

Following Bavinck, Spykman stresses that conformity to the divine norms leads to conformity with God's design for being truly human. Bavinck acknowledges such conformity to be "the ideal and goal of man," recognizing that this ultimately relates to being "conformed to the image of God's Son."¹⁰⁶ Spykman, drawing on the broad dimensions of the creation order as an expression of God's "loving care for all creatures," proceeds to elaborate on the "framework" the divine order provides for "Nuclear Tasks," "Marriage," "State Life," and "Community."¹⁰⁷ He appeals to the Belgic Confession, Article 12, for confessional support concerning God's "orderly" design for the varied natures and tasks given to his creatures.¹⁰⁸ In an essay where he argues for a position on state life that corresponds to recognition of creation ordinances, he writes, "All communal tasks, including those of the state, must be measured against these creation ordinances, illumined by the Scriptures, as they continuously impinge upon us with an abiding authority."¹⁰⁹ The role of Scripture in providing clarity for creation ordinances is critical. Genuine knowledge of the creation order occurs only through a "life-renewing encounter" with God in Christ, who is revealed and interpreted by God's scriptural Word.¹¹⁰

Spykman develops the idea of fundamental divine laws in two ways. First, in keeping with the Reformed tradition, he honors the normative function of God's law for all people and all spheres, even after the entrance of sin. Second, he points to God's original and abiding Word given in and with creation as the source for these life-structuring norms. The divinely given laws, or ordinances, play an important role in Spykman's project: they lend significance to his emphasis on the creational Word as a Word given not just once, at creation, but as an "abiding" Word that forms the context for all subsequent revelation.¹¹¹

II.1.2. Sphere-Sovereignty

For Spykman, the Kuyperian concept of sphere-sovereignty provides insight into the practical effect of God's law functioning as the normative structure for life in creation.¹¹² Sphere-sovereignty grants to the distinct spheres of differentiated society the responsibility to discern the ordinances

¹⁰⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 94-95, translating from Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (1929), 102-103.

¹⁰⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 191.

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, "Thoughts on 'Creation Order,'" 37. See also *RT*, 182.

¹⁰⁹ Spykman, "Principled Pluralist Position," 83.

¹¹⁰ Spykman, "Thoughts on 'Creation Order,'" 38-39; *RT*, 76.

¹¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 10, 87-90.

¹¹² Kuyper elaborated upon this concept in his 1880 address at the Free University of Amsterdam, originally published as *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring: Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten October 1880 gehouden, in het Koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880). English translation available in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans): 461-490.

applicable to it and to uphold those ordinances without interference from other spheres. Spykman, tracing the development of sphere-sovereignty in the Reformed tradition, mentions Bavinck's positive construal of the concept, including substantial quotations from *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (4th ed, 1928), *Christelijke Beginselen en Maatschappelijke Verhoudingen* (1908), and *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (1904).¹¹³

In his efforts to apply the idea of sphere-sovereignty to state life, Spykman appeals ultimately to Calvin but also to Bavinck, alongside Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper, in defense of a position he terms "Principled Pluralism."¹¹⁴ This position, as defined by Spykman, "teaches that the primary task of the state is to promote justice in society,"¹¹⁵ a definition that finds precedent in the proposals delivered by Bavinck to the Christian Social Congress of 1891, particularly Proposal Six. According to that proposal, "Civil authority, as God's servant called to maintain justice in society, has an obligation, to test this justice and to base it on the eternal principles (*beginselen*) laid down in Scripture for the various spheres of society."¹¹⁶ Spykman interprets this to mean that the pursuit of "justice in society" constitutes the calling of civil authorities; this calling is rooted in the "conviction that the order of society points responsively to an ultimate normative order beyond itself as the source and criterion of its meaning."¹¹⁷ The reality of this "ultimate normative order" undergirds Spykman's theory of principled pluralism. But he diverges somewhat from Bavinck in defining the nature of civil justice. For Bavinck, the state's role in securing justice must be understood in light of "inequalities" among people that are "grounded in the Creation" and that "make possible humanity's earthly task."¹¹⁸ Spykman describes justice using the concept of "office" rather than "inequality": the state should maintain "the freedom, rights, and responsibilities of citizens in the exercise of their offices within their various life-

¹¹³ Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty," 179-182. The quotation from *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* is from the same passage quoted in *RT*, 94-95. Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 121, relates, "From the ontological Trinity Bavinck derives the two key principles of unity and diversity which lead . . . to his affirmation of the Kuyperian doctrine of sphere-sovereignty."

¹¹⁴ Spykman, "Principled Pluralist Position," 91.

¹¹⁵ Spykman, "Principled Pluralist Position," 86.

¹¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles and the Relevance of Concrete Mosaic Law for the Social Question Today (1891)," trans. John Bolt, *Journal of Markets and Morality* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 446, accessed June 19, 2017, <http://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/103/97>. John Bolt, "Herman Bavinck's Contribution to Christian Social Consciousness," *Journal of Markets and Morality*, 13, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 430, 422, accessed June 19, 2017, <http://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/102/96>, states that the "eternal principles" referenced by Bavinck "are givens of *creation*" that are "set forth" in the Old Testament, citing Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles," 443.

¹¹⁷ Spykman, "Principled Pluralist Position," 83.

¹¹⁸ Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles," 445.

spheres according to their respective religious convictions.”¹¹⁹ Due to the democratization of society in the twentieth century, the term “inequality” does not resonate with Spykman; he draws on the biblical idea of “office” to express distinctions between people in their various societal functions. Spykman’s historical context also manifests itself in his broadening of sphere-sovereignty to respect the distinct religious spheres inhabited by people of varying beliefs. Spykman’s inclusion of “confessional pluralism” as an historical but not normative reality alongside “structural pluralism” accounts for the advance of secularism during the twentieth century and the need to provide a theological response to it.¹²⁰

Spykman’s embrace of laws, ordinances, and norms rooted in the created order reflects the general direction and application characteristic of Bavinck’s thought. In his assertion of the complementarity of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality (the unity and cooperation of the various life-spheres), Spykman seeks to avoid “monotonous uniformity and tyranny,” as well as “fragmentation and polarization.”¹²¹ This comports with Bavinck’s foundational theme of unity-in-diversity and his desire to promote biblical truth over against the tendency of religious systems to emphasize unity or diversity to the exclusion of the other.¹²²

II.1.3. The Doctrine of Creation Versus Deism and Pantheism

Spykman justifies his emphasis on the doctrine of creation by demonstrating its implications for a Christian defense against deism and pantheism. This strategy echoes that of Bavinck, who returns to these two aberrations of the doctrine of creation time and again. Given the trend toward monism in late twentieth-century theology, Spykman gives special attention to the monistic endpoint of pantheistic thought, encapsulated in “contemporary process theology” which “dismantles the ‘upper room’ where the ‘sacred’ still survives.”¹²³ Like deism and pantheism, monism denies the Creator-creature relationship as defined by Scripture.

¹¹⁹ Spykman, “Principled Pluralist Position,” 92.

¹²⁰ Spykman, “Principled Pluralist Position,” 79, differentiates structural and confessional pluralism in this way: “*Structural pluralism* means that God has created the world with various structures *Confessional pluralism* refers to the right of various religious groups that make up a society to develop their own patterns of involvement in public life through their own associations . . . to promote their views.”

¹²¹ Spykman, “Principled Pluralist Position,” 96.

¹²² See John Bolt, *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 141-143.

¹²³ Spykman, *RT*, 4; see also *RT*, 37, where he links “the rise of . . . monist and process theologies” to the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945).

Spykman perceives that “distortions of the Creator-creature relationship”¹²⁴ arise from a misconstrual of the relationship between creation and providence.¹²⁵ As the antidote to deism, a view perpetuated by modern, mechanistic ideas of the universe, Spykman expounds the biblical doctrine of God’s ongoing care for his creation. He cites Bavinck, who defines providence as “that act of God whereby he from moment to moment upholds and governs all things,”¹²⁶ and the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 27, which speaks of the “fatherly hand” by which God, through his “almighty and everywhere present power . . . still upholds . . . and governs” every creature. The divine law, embedded in creation, is not, as in the case of deism, a set of laws that function independently of God.¹²⁷ Rather, as Bavinck says, God’s providence serves a “mediate” role: “God respects and develops . . . the things he called into being in creation,” while also upholding them in their “mutual relatedness.”¹²⁸ Through his providential work, God sustains the integrity of distinct natures and spheres as well as their mutuality.¹²⁹ Against pantheism and panentheism,¹³⁰ both of which stress divine immanence and erase the biblical boundary line between Creator and creature, Spykman leans on the Reformed confession of the reality of that boundary line and the mediated nature of God’s ongoing relationship to his world.¹³¹ Neither deism nor pantheism allows for the revelation and response that characterize God’s covenantal relation with his creatures. Spykman’s stress on mediation as a means for maintaining a proper distinction between God and the world forms part of the context for his development of the threefold Word.

Spykman argues that failure to recognize the mediating link, or norm, between the Creator and his creation inevitably results in theological error of a deistic or pantheistic variety, though he explains the link in somewhat different terms than Bavinck.¹³² Bavinck defines “the link that connects God and

¹²⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 272.

¹²⁵ See Spykman, *RT*, 270-277.

¹²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 271, quoting Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II, 556.

¹²⁷ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 9, claims that the need for revelation is altogether lost in a deistic framework: “All deistic thought tended towards making revelation superfluous, and all action of God in the world unnecessary.”

¹²⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, II:610-611.

¹²⁹ Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 111, describes Bavinck’s perception of pantheism’s effect on the structures of creation as follows: “When all reality is reduced to one world-process, the independence of the various life-spheres and the variety of laws in creation is lost.”

¹³⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 72-73. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 29, observes that, though panentheism “actually maintains a distinction between God and the world,” that distinction “is a relative or quantitative one (i.e., God is more than the world) rather than an absolute or qualitative one (i.e., the world is not God).” He judges that the difference between the contemporary understanding of “panentheism” and the classic understanding of pantheism would not be substantial enough “to impress Bavinck,” since both posit an unbiblical conception of divine immanence.

¹³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 274.

¹³² See Spykman, *RT*, 70-73.

the world” as the divine “counsel or decree,”¹³³ referring to the decrees as the Trinity’s work *ad intra*. He asserts, “These decrees establish a connection between the immanent works of the divine being and the external works of creation and recreation,” adding that the realization of the decrees is “implied in the idea of the decrees.”¹³⁴ Owing to the central role played by the doctrine of God in Bavinck’s dogmatic organization, his concept of the link between God and the world is derived from God’s intra-trinitarian decrees as an aspect of God’s being.

Spykman, on the other hand, discerns a Creator-creation link within the doctrine of revelation, at the point of God’s decisive speaking in creation and redemption. He considers this link “extrinsic to God himself”¹³⁵ in an attempt to maintain the “concrete terms of covenant fellowship,” though without falling prey to historicism.¹³⁶ In the wake of the Kantian divide, particularly as reflected in the dilemmas discernible in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, he perceives a need for a structured theological entity by which to hold together revelation and response.¹³⁷ He addresses this need by confirming the position of God’s Word – his coming out to his creatures – as that which both reveals God and defines the terms for creaturely response. It is Spykman’s hope that the Word of God understood in this expansive and covenantal way would guard against theological error within the doctrine of creation while upholding the ongoing legitimacy of the created order within which God’s people are called to obedient, participatory response.

II.1.4. Creation and Christ

To acknowledge the reality of a “mediating link” between God and creation leads again to the question of Christ’s position as Mediator within Spykman’s overall schema of a mediating threefold Word. As Bavinck attests, God has always related to his creatures through mediating means.¹³⁸ This is why Spykman insists on an understanding of Christ as the Mediator of creation as well as redemption, a Christological affirmation that is part of the legacy of Reformed theology.¹³⁹ A problem occurs, though, when positing a “mediating link” (such as threefold Word) that has an uncertain ontic status (is it part of

¹³³ Bolt, Editor’s Introduction, *RD*, II:20.

¹³⁴ Bavinck, *RD*, II:342-343.

¹³⁵ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 182.

¹³⁶ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 177-178.

¹³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 48-50.

¹³⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, I:309-310.

¹³⁹ Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 329-330, marks the fact that a few post-Bavinck Reformed scholars did not affirm the doctrine of Christ as Mediator of creation; in particular, Simon Gerrit de Graaf (1889-1955) “rejected any notion of the Son as Mediator of creation as ‘unbiblical.’” This is related to a concern of De Graaf and others about anchoring the doctrine of common grace in creation rather than in the redemptive work of Christ.

God? something outside of God? is it divine?) and attempting to determine Christ's precise relationship to that "link."

Syd Hielema credits Bavinck's reserve in describing Christ's role as Mediator of creation with keeping his work free of any questionable Christological elements, such as the impersonal, law-defined conception of Christ that he attributes to the theology of Spykman.¹⁴⁰ However, Hielema notes that Bavinck does occasionally, especially in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, use "the extra-Biblical language of 'ideas' and 'thoughts' to describe the character of this link," and that he does so for the purpose of demonstrating the "rational and orderly character of creation."¹⁴¹ Spykman, also seeking to demonstrate the orderly nature of creation as well as God's covenantal faithfulness to that order, employs the biblical term "Word" to describe the divine-human link. This terminology illumines the full range of God's speaking activity, positing an intimate link between Christ and creation. "Word" for Spykman does not imply a mere structure or idea; it conveys the forcefulness of God's ongoing, insistent accommodation of his presence to the world. By removing the "link" from the realm of the decrees, Spykman intends to capture the reality of required response that corresponds to God's active pursuit of humanity.

As reviewers have noted, questions remain about whether the Word for creation, as described in Spykman's paradigm, is an entity outside of Christ with an ontological character distinct from the Trinity. Two observations are in order: (1) As Kuyper stated, there are two *relata* and one *relatio*. Bavinck, like Calvin, seems to agree, since he attests the necessity of a mediator in all divine revelation and recognizes a "link" between God and creation. Spykman describes this "link" specifically in terms of the Word and gives it a central position in the structure of his theology. (2) Spykman's goal is not to press the concept of a mediating link into an ontological mold, but to present the link as a normative theological description of the way God makes himself present and the way humans respond to his presence. In other words, Spykman is not making ontological claims for the "Word"; rather, he is sketching the contours of revelation and response. This is not because he presumes an "inherent

¹⁴⁰ Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," 335, claims that "Bavinck's extensive descriptions of the person and work of Jesus Christ in both his dogmatics and his theological corpus as a whole rule out such an interpretation of metaphysical reductionism concerning the Son." Such "metaphysical reductionism" constitutes one of Hielema's primary charges against Spykman and other "later neo-Calvinists."

¹⁴¹ See Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," 334-336, who believes this terminology reflects a measure of neo-Platonic influence on Bavinck's thought, but cites R. H. Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 250 ff., to the effect that this neo-Platonic language gives way to the biblical concept of revelation in Bavinck's more mature thought as expressed in his Stone Lectures, *The Philosophy of Revelation*.

dualism”¹⁴² between God and creation, as Mattson suggests, but because he believes theology has need of a normative starting point that delineates both the boundaries and the possibilities inherent in the relationship between God and creation. The degree to which Spykman’s paradigm succeeds in this regard will become clearer as this project progresses.

II.2. Theological Ramifications of “Grace Restores Nature”

Though general revelation holds a positive position in classic Reformed theology, there is some debate about its value in the life of a Christian,¹⁴³ and, historically, there has been substantial disagreement within Reformed circles concerning the precise meaning and extent of common grace.¹⁴⁴ How does Spykman’s commitment to the “grace restores nature” theme influence his interpretation of these topics? What “updates” does he propose for them? Answering these questions will demonstrate to what extent he follows Bavinck’s lead on these theological topics.

II.2.1. General and Special Revelation

Spykman criticizes the vocabulary of “general” and “special” revelation as in itself transmitting a dualistic assumption: general revelation has little relevance for soteriology. Though he prefers the terms fundamental and redemptive revelation to better reflect the enduring content of general and special revelation, he concedes that it is advisable “to discuss revelation under the traditional headings of general and special revelation.”¹⁴⁵ Bavinck works within the traditional categories, but his arguments to establish the “supernatural” nature of all revelation resonate with Spykman’s critique of the traditional terminology.

Spykman asks, “What is so ‘general’ about general revelation?” and, of special revelation, he asks, “[I]s it not ‘general’ in the sense of being intended generally, universally, for all?”¹⁴⁶ Of both he asserts,

¹⁴² Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 150, footnote 180.

¹⁴³ Robert S. Covolo, “Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma: General Revelation, Bavinckian Consensus, and the Future of Reformed Theology,” *Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 30-37, accessed October 17, 2016. bavinckinstitute.org, while not arguing the point mentioned above, does make a case for a persistent dichotomy within the doctrine of general revelation in modern Reformed theology. He believes this dichotomy persists because of a reliance on either Schleiermacher or Barth, and he posits Bavinck’s approach as an antidote to this dichotomy.

¹⁴⁴ See Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 165, footnote 18, for a brief statement of the common grace issue within the Dutch Reformed tradition and recommendations for further reading.

¹⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 90-91.

¹⁴⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 90-91.

They have a common origin: it is the same God who reveals himself as Creator and Redeemer. Both revelations are thus fully divine, and therefore also fully authoritative and fully normative . . . Both are plenary revelations, covering the full range of all our life activities. In their interacting unity, they touch our world in its total extent and in all its parts. At no point can we say that here we are dealing with general apart from special revelation, or special apart from general revelation.¹⁴⁷

Bavinck, who traces the effect of “the ancient dualistic dichotomy between natural and supernatural revelation”¹⁴⁸ on the Reformers, recognizes that “Scripture . . . makes no distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ revelation.”¹⁴⁹ Bavinck stresses the “supernatural” nature of all divine self-disclosure. He states, “In its origin all revelation is supernatural”¹⁵⁰ and, giving concrete meaning to “supernatural,” notes that “[i]t is supernatural because it has welled up from God’s free, generous, and rich love.”¹⁵¹

Bavinck does recognize a legitimate distinction between the modes of revelation represented by the terms “general” and “special.” He defends the value of both general and special revelation when he warns that a “danger . . . has always existed in the Christian church” to “ignore” or “deny” either general or special revelation.¹⁵² He perceives the danger of his own context to be one of collapsing special revelation into general, which explains his promotion of the supernatural character of all revelation.¹⁵³ Spykman, nearly a century later, identifies a different danger. Though the tendency to devalue Scripture and Christ remains prevalent in the broader intellectual climate of Spykman’s era, he focuses on the tendency of those who uphold the traditional doctrines of Scripture and Christ to ignore or devalue God’s revelation in creation.¹⁵⁴ He does not mention Bavinck as the source of his thinking on this matter, but Bavinck’s testimony to the abiding validity of both general and special revelation surely shaped Spykman’s efforts to create a theological structure that gives proper weight to general revelation. To avoid dualistic associations with the traditional terminology, Spykman replaces “general” revelation with “creational” revelation. This conveys his conviction that the best way to capture the

¹⁴⁷ Spykman, “On General and Special Revelation,” 1.

¹⁴⁸ Bavinck, *RD*, I:305-306.

¹⁴⁹ Bavinck, *RD*, I:307.

¹⁵⁰ Bavinck, *RD*, I:307.

¹⁵¹ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 62.

¹⁵² Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 44. Covolo, “Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma,” 41, remarks, “Bavinck not only views general revelation as dependent on special, but also he believes that special revelation is dependent upon general. This is, again, because the two are part of an irreducible whole.”

¹⁵³ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 44.

¹⁵⁴ See Spykman’s assessment of this problem as it relates to the Christian Reformed Church in “Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique.”

“basic ideas of revelation” consists in his proposed framework of “the one Word of God in its threefold form.”¹⁵⁵

II.2.2. Common Grace

For Spykman, the topic of common grace constitutes another area of theology that is vulnerable to dualistic interpretation. His perspective advances the “prescriptive” purpose evident in Bavinck’s doctrine of common grace but gives less attention to the “preparatory” purpose present in Bavinck’s thought.¹⁵⁶ Bavinck explains the preparatory purpose in terms of the distinction between God’s covenant people and the rest of the world.¹⁵⁷ The prescriptive purpose is set in the context of Calvin’s distinction “between general and special grace”: “[God] had and, after the fall, continued to have a purpose for his creation; he interposed common grace between sin and the creation – a grace that, while it does not inwardly renew, nevertheless restrains and compels.”¹⁵⁸ Common grace holds humanity to God’s original purpose and, in so doing, lays the foundation for the revelation of special grace. Integral to this perspective is Bavinck’s assertion that common grace “is subservient to special or particular grace,” with the consequence that “God providentially permits the world to continue because of his higher purposes for the elect.”¹⁵⁹ God’s general care for the world he has made becomes focused in his commitment to preserving it for the sake of forming a people for himself – his Church.

In accord with the Reformed tradition, Spykman attributes the work of common grace primarily to the Holy Spirit,¹⁶⁰ and identifies the “universal gifts of the Spirit”¹⁶¹ and the Spirit’s restraining of sin as two key aspects of what is meant by “common grace,” though Spykman prefers the term “preserving grace.”¹⁶² He describes “preserving grace” as the “curbing” of sin and evil and the “upholding” of the creation order for the purpose of “allowing the historical drama of the antithesis to run its appointed course.”¹⁶³ Here there is a hint of the preparatory role of common grace, but this strain is largely undeveloped in Spykman’s work. Attempting to minimize the dualistic implications of the

¹⁵⁵ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 240.

¹⁵⁷ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 44: “For a time the *gratia specialis* dug a channel for itself in Israel, only to flow out into the deep, wide sea of humankind, which had been maintained and preserved for it by the *gratia communis* [common grace].”

¹⁵⁸ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 51.

¹⁵⁹ Bolt, Editor’s Introduction, *RD*, III:420.

¹⁶⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 424, references L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 426.

¹⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 425.

¹⁶² Spykman, *RT*, 320-321.

¹⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 321.

common/special grace distinction, he advocates “the single grace of the one God who through his Spirit works preservingly, restrainingly in the unbelieving world and redeemingly where the gospel is embraced.”¹⁶⁴ This addresses what Spykman perceives as a deficiency in Barth’s theology – his soteriological starting point – which is based on Berkouwer’s criticism that Barth’s theology underestimates the role of creation within Scripture’s historical narrative. While Spykman’s perspective has the advantage of highlighting the truth that all grace, like all revelation, flows from God as its source,¹⁶⁵ it takes little account of the preparatory aspect of common grace.¹⁶⁶ Thus, it captures the biblical light of covenantal grace as given throughout creation and redemption, but it overlooks the biblical testimony highlighted by Bavinck concerning the ecclesiological purpose of God’s ongoing care and restraint within the world.

Part III: Covenant and Eschatology

This section presents a comparison of Bavinck’s and Spykman’s use of the covenant theme and its impact on their respective methods of relating creation to eschatology.

III.1. Covenant Rooted in Creation

From the beginning of his project, Spykman situates his theological reflections within the covenant contours of classic Reformed theology, but he develops the covenant concept from a somewhat unique angle: he describes the “Word of God as the covenant bond which establishes a *definitive* partnership between” God and humankind.¹⁶⁷ Because the Word of God mediates God’s revelation in all its forms, Spykman stresses the unity of the covenant. He asserts that “[a]ll God’s dealings with creation are covenantal in character.”¹⁶⁸ In his section titled “The Everlasting Covenant,” Spykman offers “six theses” that explicate the contours of covenant theology in the Reformed tradition: (1) “All God’s dealings with creation are covenantal in character”; (2) “The covenant is rooted in God’s

¹⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 426.

¹⁶⁵ Spykman, “Common Grace,” *Banner*, March 5, 1965, 16, argues, “But does the grace and goodness and longsuffering of God also overflow to the unbelieving, unregenerate world? The Bible leads us to an affirmative answer: The whole world of nature and men is still our Father’s world. All creation lives by the grace of God.” The entire article forms the chapter “Common Grace” in *Christian Faith in Focus*, 59-63.

¹⁶⁶ Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 62, connects common grace with God’s favor given “for the creation as a whole.” This is only one dimension (the prescriptive, in Hielema’s terms) of Bavinck’s two-pronged purpose of common grace.

¹⁶⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

¹⁶⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 259. The influence of Klaas Schilder, though not mentioned by Spykman, is evident here. Spykman, “Fundamentalism in the CRC,” 17, paraphrases his interpretation of Schilder’s view: “For it is the gospel in its fulness which binds the alpha and the omega, creation and re-creation together.”

work of creation”; (3) “The covenant is one-sided (monopleuric, unilateral) in its origin, and two-sided (dipleuric, bilateral) in its continuation”; (4) “From beginning to end covenant history reveals a basic continuity”; (5) “All men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers”; (6) “Covenant is a full-bodied way of life which we are called to live before the face of God and in the midst of his world.”¹⁶⁹ Spykman devotes the most space to development of thesis (2) – “covenant rooted in creation” – which provides a clue as to his conclusions regarding certain theological matters related to covenant.

When Spykman asserts that “[t]he covenant is rooted in God’s work of creation,”¹⁷⁰ he is affirming that the original covenant of creation coheres with the covenant of redemption. The “newer view” of contemporary theology challenges this coherence, arguing that the formal elements of covenant were absent in God’s relationship with Adam and attributing covenant headship to “Noah and/or Abraham.”¹⁷¹ In addition, it tends “to undermine Paul’s teaching concerning the ‘two Adams’ in Romans 5. . . ., disrupts the close biblical connection between creation and redemption by reducing the idea of covenant to an exclusively salvific reality,” and introduces an unwarranted discontinuity into biblical revelation’s covenant-kingdom motif.¹⁷² Spykman, citing Scripture, Calvin, Bavinck, and others, contends that despite the lack of the word “covenant” in Genesis 1-3, “covenant” accurately describes God’s relationship to creation and to Adam.¹⁷³

Bavinck’s words support Spykman’s second thesis: “‘Even though the word ‘covenant’ may never appear in Scripture to describe the religious relationship of Adam to God . . . nevertheless the religious life of man before the fall still bears the marks of a covenant. . . . This characterizes religion before as well as after the fall.’”¹⁷⁴ Spykman emphasizes covenant as a reality that precedes the fall and continues throughout redemptive history. He understands that to render covenant as a post-fall reality only is to obscure the biblical relationship between creation and redemption. Even though Bavinck goes on in the above quoted passage to refer specifically to the “covenant of works” and the “covenant of grace,” noting their similarity (“their final goal”) and dissimilarity (“the way which leads to it”), Spykman replaces the works/grace distinction with the threefold Word, arguing that God’s covenantal Word-revelation is differentiated by its various modes: creation, Scripture, and Christ. He states, “In its threefold expression the Word carries a single message – unity in diversity. For there is one God, one

¹⁶⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 259-265.

¹⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 260.

¹⁷¹ Spykman, *RT*, 260.

¹⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 261.

¹⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 261-263.

¹⁷⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 263, quoting from Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II, 530-32.

world, one Mediator, one covenant, one will, one way of salvation, one coming kingdom.”¹⁷⁵ Though Spykman does not comment on the classic distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, his choice of another rubric by which to communicate the meaning of covenant serves as a subtle polemic against the tendency of the covenant of works to obscure the gracious character of God’s original covenant. Spykman incorporates the biblical and confessional insistence on grace as the basis for the divine-human relationship, showing the call to covenant faithfulness and the consequences for covenant unfaithfulness, but all within a divine “covenantal embrace of creation” that sets Adam and the Second Adam within the “blessing” of a fully faithful covenantal God.¹⁷⁶

III.2. To What is Nature Restored?: Eschatological Implications

Citing Veenhof, Spykman summarizes Bavinck’s conclusion to the question of the relationship between nature and grace, or creation and re-creation, as follows: “Grace is the *reparatio* of a fallen nature.”¹⁷⁷ Spykman extracts two points from this conclusion: (1) there is a dualism inherent in Roman Catholic theology, also found to a certain degree in Lutheran and Anabaptist thought, that prevents Christianity from becoming “an immanent and reforming principle”¹⁷⁸ in the ordinary spheres of human life; (2) if grace is opposed only to sin, then there is a close correspondence between being Christian and being human.¹⁷⁹ These two insights, reflective of Klaas Schilder’s call for conscious Christian culture-forming,¹⁸⁰ serve as the launch pad for Spykman’s attempt to provide a philosophical and theological foundation for neo-Calvinist engagement with the world and a creational framework for the believer’s sanctification. Following Bavinck’s core contention that grace restores rather than abolishes nature, Spykman works from the assumption that “precisely in its soteriological concentration, the gospel attains a universal range and scope and has a redemptive impact on the totality of human life,” a view that Bavinck discerns in Calvin’s work.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 86.

¹⁷⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 149.

¹⁷⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 70.

¹⁷⁸ Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 231, accessed August 4, 2017, ATLA (Bolt’s translation reads, “Christianity does not become an immanent, reforming reality”), quoted in Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, 11, and cited by Spykman, *RT*, 69.

¹⁷⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 69-70. On p. 70 Spykman quotes from Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, p. 31 in the 2006 edition, which differs from the pagination of the copy Spykman references.

¹⁸⁰ See Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, annotated by Jochem Douma, trans. William Helder and Albert H. Oosterhoff (Hamilton, Ontario: Lucerna, 2016), especially his Seven Consequences, pp. 129-175.

¹⁸¹ Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, 28; see footnote 80, where he cites Bavinck’s work *Evangelisatie* (Utrecht, 1913), 30, for the comment that Calvin viewed the Gospel as “good news for all creatures, including family, society, scholarship and art.”

Though Bavinck maintains a two-pronged restoration of creation, both a restoration from sin and an elevation to a “higher-than-earthly blessedness”¹⁸² originally purposed for creation, Spykman chooses not to appropriate the “elevation” emphasis. He accepts Bavinck’s statement that “[g]race . . . does not add to it [nature] any new and heterogeneous constituents.”¹⁸³ He focuses on the fact that grace is not opposed to nature but to sin, developing this theme in terms of its implications for a robust living out of Christianity in every “worldly” context imaginable and underscoring the continuity between the original and the restored creation. His application of Bavinck’s “grace restores nature” motif receives support from passages such as this one: “But the Reformation, in principle, knew no other antithesis than that of sin and grace. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit in his activities links up with the guidance of God in the natural life and attempts by his grace to restore the natural life, to free it from the power of sin and consecrate it to God.”¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Spykman’s utilization of the “grace restores nature” motif to the exclusion of Bavinck’s notion of grace perfecting nature signifies a difference in eschatological outlook between the two theologians.

Spykman’s focus falls on the “final goal” of the covenant, unchanged throughout covenant history, rather than on Bavinck’s distinction between restoration and elevation.¹⁸⁵ He defines the “eschatological hope” embedded in the “covenant promise” in terms of the “covenant fellowship which God originally ordained for the creation.”¹⁸⁶ He envisions an unfolding of creation potentials: though disturbed by sin, they are preserved by God’s common grace and taken up with vigor by God’s people, who look forward to pursuing the possibilities of creation in redeemed fashion in the new heavens and new earth – all within the context of divine-human “covenant fellowship.”¹⁸⁷ In the final section of *RT*, Spykman grounds the Reformed perspective of “consummation” on Bavinck’s rejection of re-creation

¹⁸² Bavinck, *RD*, II:572. See Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, 24-26; Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 106-111; Bavinck, *RD*, II:587-588, III:182, 577; Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 218-220. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 107, mentions that Bavinck, consonant with Reformed orthodoxy, assumed the validity of “a potential greater eschatological life” promised in the covenant of works.

¹⁸³ Bavinck, *RD*, III:577.

¹⁸⁴ Bavinck, *RD*, III:571.

¹⁸⁵ See Spykman, *RT*, 263, quoting from Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II:530-532.

¹⁸⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 264. See also *RT*, 358, where he declares, “I will be your God – you shall be my people.’ This two-in-one divine declaration is the very heartbeat of the covenant relationship.”

¹⁸⁷ See Spykman, *RT*, 182; in “Thoughts on ‘Creation Order,’” 40, he writes of the “built-in potentials of the cosmos,” adducing Bavinck’s article “Creation or Development” (published in *Methodist Review*, Nov. 1901). Linking the potentials of the creation order with eschatology, he says in *RT*, 255, “Does not Scripture represent the consummation of all things as the restoration of the full potentials of what God declared ‘very good’ in the beginning?” See also Spykman, *RT*, 558-560, for a summary statement of the renewal of the heavens and earth, a renewal with elements of both continuity and discontinuity between the present age and the age to come.

and destruction, a rejection that resonates with Calvin and is typical of the later neo-Calvinists.¹⁸⁸ Spykman appeals to Bavinck's emphasis on "continuity in the midst of discontinuity,"¹⁸⁹ acknowledging that "life on the renewed earth baffles our senses and exceeds our wildest expectations," but maintaining that "[t]he parousia . . . does not introduce a radical break with the past."¹⁹⁰ By insisting on a "creational base" for God's ultimate redemptive purposes, Spykman counters the "eschatological openness" typical of theological trends toward historicism.¹⁹¹

A brief consideration of Bavinck's and Spykman's respective theological contexts lends insight into their distinct perspectives regarding the covenant of works and the degree of continuity to be experienced in the transition to the renewed world. According to Mattson, Bavinck was responding to "German historicism's views of human progress, potential, and historical inevitability" by defining human destiny in terms of the original covenant given with creation and fulfilled in Christ,¹⁹² which he interprets as the covenant of works. On that basis, Bavinck argues for a disjunction between the "state of integrity" and the "state of glory."¹⁹³ Whereas Calvin emphasizes the issue of trust and belief that was at the core of Adam's disobedience¹⁹⁴ and which is reflected in the Belgic Confession's phrase "commandment of life," Bavinck refers to Adam's covenant-breaking in moral terms: if man had not sinned, the "state of glory" would have been gained by "keeping God's commandments."¹⁹⁵

Spykman, who was probably influenced by neo-Calvinist critiques of the covenant of works,¹⁹⁶ seeks to preserve the unity of covenant history in light of contemporary theological trends that downplay the covenantal significance of God's relationship with Adam.¹⁹⁷ He does so by invoking the

¹⁸⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 558.

¹⁸⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 560, citing Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1931), 644 (English translation: *Our Reasonable Faith*, 566).

¹⁹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 559.

¹⁹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 58-60.

¹⁹² Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 183.

¹⁹³ Bavinck, *RD*, II:576.

¹⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.1.4. Bruce L. McCormack, "Christology," *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, eds. Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Ferguson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 71-72, states that Calvin "had no covenant of works," and that where he does speak of merit in relation to Christ's work on the sinner's behalf, it is within the context of the unconditional nature of covenantal grace.

¹⁹⁵ Bavinck, *RD*, II:567.

¹⁹⁶ See John Bolt, "Herman Bavinck on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms: Some Further Reflections," *Bavinck Review* 4 (2013), 85, footnote 37, accessed December 2, 2017, bavinckinstitute.org, who notes that Berkouwer and De Graaf did not favor the covenant of works, but that Spykman differs from them in his recognition of a "'covenant of creation.'" Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 92-98, discusses Berkouwer's disapproval of the covenant of works.

¹⁹⁷ See Spykman, *RT*, 260-263.

classic Reformed doctrine of humanity's two states, but, in contrast to Bavinck, he does not interpret them in terms of the covenant of works.¹⁹⁸ He asserts the historical reality of humanity's state "in Adam," the subsequent state of condemnation, and the renewed state "in Christ" to reclaim the historical-redemptive movement downplayed by existentialist thought. His focus on humanity's status within the "covenant relationship"¹⁹⁹ – defined by God's covenantal faithfulness rather than works at both stages – may represent a step toward reorienting Reformed theology to the divine initiative and promise, as opposed to an emphasis on Adam's obligation. Spykman often refers to the original covenant as the "covenant of creation" and recasts it in terms of the revealing and mediating threefold Word of God.²⁰⁰ The net effect on his eschatology is an insistence on a significant degree of continuity between the present and the future age, along with his reluctance to consign creational realities to the realm of discontinuity, as Bavinck sometimes does.²⁰¹ For both contextual and theological reasons, Bavinck and Spykman fall on different sides of the "tension of human existence,"²⁰² the tension between heaven and earth: in Bavinck, the goal of heavenly blessedness takes priority, whereas in Spykman, creational tasks take priority in anticipation of the renewed creation.

Part IV: Evaluation

As Bavinck enjoins, "[I]t is the task of Christian theologians to present clearly the connectedness of God's revelation with, and its significance for, all of life."²⁰³ In terms of this task, Spykman succeeds. He does so via a doctrine of revelation that has a specific focus: the relationship between the divine Initiator and responding creatures, set within the framework of the enduring reality of revelation and response throughout the biblical movements of creation and redemption. These characteristics build upon Bavinck's emphases on the normativity of revelation, the foundational significance of creation (philosophically in the rejection of dualisms and theologically in the character of redemption), and

¹⁹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 317-319.

¹⁹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 319.

²⁰⁰ Bolt, "Herman Bavinck on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms," 85, footnote 37.

²⁰¹ See Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," 224ff. See also Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 219, and *RD*, IV:696-698, where Bavinck highlights discontinuity between day/night, work/rest, mortal body/glorified body. Compare Spykman, *RT*, 558-560, who says that "[t]he familiar contours of the created order . . . give shape and form to the life of a resurrected humanity in God's renewed world where everything will be thoroughly redeemed." It should be noted that Bavinck, *RD*, IV:720, works from the assumption that "Scripture consistently maintains the intimate connectedness of the spiritual and the natural"; he indicates that, when conceiving of the new heavens and new earth, extreme discontinuity poses as much danger as making "the material into the chief component of future blessedness."

²⁰² Heideman, *Relation of Revelation and Reason*, 179-180. Heideman demonstrates that these different reference points have implications for one's doctrine of the image of God.

²⁰³ Bavinck, *RD*, II:330.

concern for the believing subject. However, Spykman moves somewhat apart from Bavinck in describing the link between God and creation as primarily extrinsic (God coming out to creation in his Word and works) rather than intrinsic (in the form of an intratrinitarian decree).

If Spykman's model of the threefold Word as a representation of divine revelation and human response lacks the breadth, depth, and complexity of Bavinck's theology, does it contribute to the contemporary situation genuinely Reformed insights that build on Bavinck's work? Spykman perceives that his appropriation of the Reformational philosophy associated with Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, which is the subject of the following chapter, enables development of a method and structure even more consistent with biblical givens and Reformed tenets. He also aligns himself with an understanding of grace as the defining characteristic of the covenant in its pre-fall and post-fall realities, with implications for more significant continuity between creation and redemption. Even so, Spykman honors the great giant of Dutch Reformed theology and his keen insights, not least by renewing theology to address contemporary concerns.

Chapter 4
What Does Theology have to do with Philosophy?
Gordon J. Spykman's Appeal to Neo-Calvinist Philosophy

In *Pioneer Preacher*, a study of Rev. Albertus C. van Raalte's homiletics, Gordon Spykman provides a glimpse into his concern to promote neo-Calvinist philosophy. His historical analysis opens a window into the theological tensions of the North American Dutch Reformed community and to Spykman's position within that community. According to his interpretation, pietistic strains in the founding of the Dutch Reformed church in America contributed to persistent unease with neo-Calvinist ways of thinking.

Appreciative of Van Raalte's emphasis on piety and his motivation to form a pure church in the Michigan wilderness, Spykman calls Van Raalte a "typical representative of the Secessionist mind" and admits that "[i]n the aftermath of nearly two centuries of very serious spiritual decline in Christian living . . . within the Dutch Reformed communities, perhaps the need of the hour . . . was the call to personal repentance and faith."¹ Despite Van Raalte's exposure during the *Reveil* (1820s) and the *Afscheiding* (1834) to Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer's initial articulation of themes that would reach fuller development in Kuyper and the *Doleantie* movement (1886), Van Raalte's preaching gave little sign of cultural engagement.² Spykman concludes that Van Raalte's pastoral leadership cultivated among his constituency both an inability and an unwillingness to acculturate and to involve themselves in the concerns of their new nation.³ This "Secessionist mind" lingered in the Dutch circles of North America, fostering resistance to the Kuyperian developments in the Netherlands that were translated by other immigrants to the North American setting.⁴

¹ Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 69.

² Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, observes that Van Raalte's sermon notes, generally speaking, are "distantly related to actual life situations" (39); consistently stress the "need for personal conversion, personal sanctification, personal perseverance, and the development of the traits of personal piety" (41); give "no hint that the gospel calls for renewing the deformed structures and life-patterns of society" (46); reflect the scholasticizing tendency of the seventeenth and eighteenth century orthodox theologians (53-60), including "a sharp dichotomy between, for example, body and soul, church and world, law and gospel, reason and faith" (65).

³ Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 70: "His sermons evidence little concern or even awareness of the problems facing his community, whether in the Netherlands or in America. He seldom addresses God's Word directly to the problems of ecclesiastical tyranny, governmental oppression, the social order, immigration, church union and schism, or the Civil War."

⁴ Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 71.

Later immigrant groups (1890-1914)⁵ who came with a more Kuyperian outlook found the Dutch Reformed establishment suspicious of their cultural aspirations. By the 1950s, this Kuyperian outlook took on Dooyeweerdian tones, as H. Evan Runner sought to establish Reformational philosophy at Calvin College. This effort also issued in the formation of what was first the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (ARSS), then the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACCS), and eventually the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. Spykman involved himself in defending, on behalf of the AACCS, certain concepts – especially the Word of God in its threefold form – that met with resistance within Dutch Reformed circles. Reformational philosophy’s emphasis on the Word of God, translated to the North American context, furnished the material with which Spykman re-formulated dogmatics.⁶ His work defends Reformational ideas and their importance for theology, calling theologians and lay people to think, in Calvinist fashion, more centrally and expansively about the Word of God.

This historical background sets the stage for an examination of Gordon Spykman’s philosophical rootedness in the school of thought founded by Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd, which forms the basis for *Reformational Theology’s* prolegomena. The present challenge is to examine the extent to which Spykman makes use of the “Philosophy of Law-Idea” (*De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*⁷) without trying to evaluate the correctness of Vollenhoven’s and Dooyeweerd’s extensive work, which would be beyond the scope of the present research. A discussion of Klaas Schilder’s contributions and criticisms of neo-Calvinism are also included, since Schilder’s theological participation in the same renewal movement as *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* renders him of interest to Spykman.

It is important to recognize the relatively general nature of Spykman’s work. He attempts to distill for a North American audience the principles of Dutch Reformed theology and Reformational philosophy. Rather than offering detailed assessments of theological figures, he provides an overview of their positions to show their relationship to the worldview context he espouses. This approach has limitations, but it grants the reader footholds in the various streams of theology and philosophy that have converged to create the contemporary situation to which Spykman speaks.

⁵ Gordon J. Spykman, *Calvinism in America: Review and Reflections* (Potchefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1984), 14. See also Spykman, “Institutional Church in History,” 20-21.

⁶ C. T. McIntire, “Herman Dooyeweerd in North America,” in *Dutch Reformed Theology*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 64, connects this emphasis on the Word of God to Runner’s appropriation and transmission of Dooyeweerd’s key themes.

⁷ See Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1984), 1:93. Though Dooyeweerd suggests “cosmomic Idea” as the best English translation of *wetsidee*, Spykman, *RT*, 100, notes that Dooyeweerd’s and Vollenhoven’s “work has come to be known as “The Philosophy of Law-Idea” or “Cosmomic Philosophy.”

Part I: Tenets of Spykman's Neo-Calvinist Philosophy

Exploring Spykman's dependence on Reformational philosophy calls for awareness of the neo-Kantian and phenomenological background of some of Dooyeweerd's concepts and terminology. Dooyeweerd admits his early association with these schools of thought in the Foreword to the first edition of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* [hereafter *NCTT*].⁸ James K. A. Smith connects Dooyeweerd's idea of "critique" to the "delimiting of theoretical or philosophical thought" characteristic of Kant and neo-Kantianism.⁹ Albert Wolters points to Dooyeweerd's "transcendental method" as the most important neo-Kantian theme that characterizes Dooyeweerd's work, and he highlights the neo-Kantian origin of the "idea of philosophy as a kind of encyclopedic superscience."¹⁰ Within his philosophical construct, Dooyeweerd distinguishes between religion and theology. Positively, according to Smith, this distinction "opens a unique space for the development of an integral Christian philosophy which remains distinct from theology."¹¹ Problematically, Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique of theoretical thought applied to theology limits the object of theology's reflection, ultimately rendering it as reflection on faith-life. Spykman adopts Dooyeweerd's neo-Kantian redefinition of theology's object, and this problematic element of his paradigm is evaluated in Section I.2.4 below.

Though Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven have important differences,¹² adherents of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea subscribe to several basic themes: the sovereignty of God over creation, rejection of the autonomy of reason in theoretical thought, acknowledgment of the unity and diversity in the creation order, insistence on the reality of the antithesis, and the construction of a biblically-informed anthropology. For his prolegomenal assertions, Spykman depends on the concepts of structure and direction, the antithesis, and sphere-sovereignty. He locates these concepts in a framework characterized by a rejection of philosophical syntheses and a corresponding emphasis on the development of a genuinely Christian philosophy. As to Spykman's doctrinal assertions, considered in

⁸ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:v.

⁹ James K. A. Smith, introduction to *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought*, by Herman Dooyeweerd, ed. James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Paideia Press, 2012), 3, footnote 2. Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:118, states that his "transcendental critique of theoretic thought has an inner historical connection with KANT's critique of pure reason."

¹⁰ Albert M. Wolters, "The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd," in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd: Reflections on Critical Philosophy in the Christian Tradition*, ed. C. T. McIntire (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 11-12.

¹¹ Smith, introduction to *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, ix.

¹² For an extensive discussion of their differences, see J. Glenn Friesen, "Dooyeweerd Versus Vollenhoven: The Religious Dialectic Within Reformational Philosophy," *Philosophia Reformata* 70, no. 2 (2005): 102-132, accessed August 18, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24709586>.

the second half of this chapter, one perceives the influence of neo-Calvinist philosophy most directly in his statements about the relation of sin and grace, anthropology, the differentiation of society, and the church's mission.

I.1. Rejection of Syntheses

Dooyeweerd analyzes the history of theoretical thought in terms of four basic ground-motives: form/matter in the ancient Greek world, nature/grace in the medieval era, nature/freedom in the modern era, and creation/fall/redemption in the biblical framework.¹³ Creation/fall/redemption constitutes the "central motive of divine Word-revelation,"¹⁴ which confronts the idolatrous root inherent in the other three ground-motives. In his assessment, Christian philosophical thought has frequently sought a synthesis with various elements of the idolatrous ground-motives. This results in a dualistic view of reality because "[t]he religious dialectic of the ground-motive," which is dichotomous in its very structure, "tends to drive philosophical thought . . . toward a dualistic picture of the human person and the world."¹⁵ According to Dooyeweerd, such dichotomy-laden syntheses characterize much "theological scholarship" as well.¹⁶

Spykman works directly from Dooyeweerd's assumption that the dualistic nature of the apostate ground-motives has significantly affected the integrity of Christian philosophy and theology, and he employs the creation/fall/redemption ground-motive to "unmask"¹⁷ theological concepts that do not fully comport with the biblical view of reality. In doing so, he, like Dooyeweerd, questions theological formulations that have a long history in Christian theology and thus prove difficult to reform, such as general/special revelation and soul/body terminology.¹⁸ Motivated by the neo-Calvinist impetus toward the reformation of all theoretical thought, he recognizes that his re-formulations constitute an "outline" that needs "further elaboration,"¹⁹ but he considers that "[i]f such a venture should do no

¹³ Wolters, "Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd," 16, points out that Vollenhoven did not concur with Dooyeweerd's "ground motive analysis of Western culture."

¹⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, "Christian Philosophy: An Exploration," ed. T. Grady Spires and Natexa Verbrugge, trans. John Vriend, in *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1996), 25.

¹⁵ Dooyeweerd, "Christian Philosophy: An Exploration," 26.

¹⁶ Dooyeweerd, "Christian Philosophy: An Exploration," 25.

¹⁷ See Dooyeweerd, "Christian Philosophy: An Exploration," 25.

¹⁸ See Spykman, *RT*, 14-15, 25.

¹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 5.

more than relieve us of the dubious constructs of both scholastic ‘objectivism’ and existential ‘subjectivism,’ that alone would be a significant gain.”²⁰

1.1.1. Scholasticism as Accommodation to Apostate Ground-Motives

Dooyeweerd opposes scholasticism because of its accommodation to apostate ground-motives, or presuppositions.

Theologians failed to understand that the religious ground-motive, in which philosophical thought is rooted, controls one’s entire philosophic view of the *intrinsic structure* of temporal reality. Instead, they started by accepting philosophical conceptions of reality rooted in unscriptural, dualistic ground-motives; and they then sought, in a merely external *theological* fashion, to accommodate these conceptions to Christian doctrine.²¹

In Dooyeweerd’s ground-motive schema, scholasticism is attached to the nature/grace motive, a motive that “is always inclined to assimilate Greek or Humanist motives” in its accommodation “to Christian belief.”²² He finds evidence for this in the scholastic “influence on the terminology of certain confessional documents,”²³ an accommodation that grants authority to unbiblical conceptions and hinders a genuine reformation of philosophy.

Of central concern to Dooyeweerd is the scholastic rejection of “the idea of a Christian philosophy.”²⁴ Adoption of the nature/grace ground-motive in the post-Reformation period resulted in “a denial of the integral principle of the Reformation”²⁵ and thus a rejection of a Christian philosophical enterprise. Within the nature/grace framework, philosophy arises from nature, or the “‘light of reason,’” and thus cannot appeal to the “Divine Word revelation” that arises from grace.²⁶ Because “[t]he Reformation never succeeded in developing its own philosophy on the basis of its Reformational

²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 96.

²¹ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, vol. 2, *The Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea and the Scholastic Tradition in Christian Thought*, ed. Lyn Boliek, Ralph Vunderink, and Harry Van Dyke, trans. Magnus Verbrugge (Grand Rapids: Paideia Press, 2013), 46.

²² Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, III:74. He states definitively that this accommodation “is the final difference between Reformation and Scholasticism in philosophy.”

²³ Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 91-92. On p. 45 he mentions the Westminster Confession and the Helvetic Confession specifically; in a footnote on p. 346 he pinpoints “‘rational soul’ and a reference to soul and body as two ‘substances’” as examples of scholastic terminology.

²⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Philosophy of Science,” ed. John H. Kok, trans. D. F. M. Strauss, in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work and Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John H. Kok (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2013), 156.

²⁵ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 108.

²⁶ Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Philosophy of Science,” 156.

Christian basic conception,”²⁷ Dooyeweerd dedicated his life’s work to the construction of a Christian philosophy based on the Divine Word revelation.

Vollenhoven’s attempts to steer clear of scholasticism and its epistemological implications²⁸ are demonstrated by his “critical attitude towards any synthesis between biblically founded faith and the supposedly neutral thought patterns which stem from Greek-Hellenistic philosophy,”²⁹ in contrast with scholastic-minded colleagues such as Valentijn Hepp (1879-1950). Vollenhoven scholars John H. Kok (1948-2020) and Anthony Tol (1943-2014) contend that Vollenhoven’s forthright “appeal to the Scripture” served as an “antidote to the attitude of scholasticism” which could be found at the Free University at that time.³⁰ Schilder, eager to give the Word of God prominence in all things, criticized “the scholastic elements in Kuyperian theology, and . . . some Kuyperian ideas in the philosophy of Dooyeweerd.”³¹ Though Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Schilder criticize scholasticism from their own nuanced positions, even disagreeing to some extent, each attempts to bring correction through reasserting Scripture’s role as theological norm.

1.1.2. Persistent Challenges of Accommodation

The neo-Calvinist criticisms of scholasticism provide the rationale behind Spykman’s antipathy to scholasticism. He argues for a working Reformational philosophy that illuminates the structures of creation for other disciplines, and he defends Dooyeweerd’s argument against the remnants of scholastic thought. His resistance to the nature/grace dualism involves a criticism of the scholastic elements that continue to hinder the reformation of philosophy. Dualism, according to him, has shaped the way Reformed theologians think and write about important Christian doctrines such as “general and

²⁷ Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Philosophy of Science,” 156.

²⁸ Dirk H. T. Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. John H. Kok and Anthony Tol, trans. John H. Kok (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2005), 11-14, suggests that scholasticism involves “[e]quivocating Christian belief with science” and failing to recognize the legitimate nature of nonscientific knowing. John H. Kok, “Vollenhoven and Thinking in the Light of Scripture,” *Pro Rege* 21, no. 2 (Dec. 1992), 21, accessed August 18, 2018, http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol21/iss2/2, mentions Vollenhoven’s “emphatic rejection of synthesis with any thinking that does not subject itself to the direct sovereignty of God over creation, that does not acknowledge God’s law as defining creaturely existence and the relationship between creature and Creator, and that rejects the Kingship of Christ, also when it comes to science.”

²⁹ Anthony Tol, “In Memoriam: Dirk Hendrik Theodoor Vollenhoven,” *Philosophia Reformata* 43, no. 3/4 (1978): 94, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24707311>. William Young, “Herman Dooyeweerd,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), notes Hepp’s opposition to Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven as set forth in “a series of brochures entitled Dreigende Deformatie [Threatening Deformation – 1936-37].”

³⁰ John H. Kok and Anthony Tol, foreword to *Introduction to Philosophy*, by Vollenhoven, xiii-xiv.

³¹ J. Faber, “Klaas Schilder’s Life and Work,” in *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 12, 9.

special revelation, reason and faith, common and special grace . . . body and soul . . . philosophy and theology, and . . . the relationship of prolegomena to dogmatics.”³²

From a dualistic standpoint, philosophy operates from the sphere of nature or reason, implying a hierarchy in which theology, as an outworking of the supernatural realm of faith, stands above philosophy. In his historical outline of the spread of Calvinism in the New World, Spykman mentions the influence of the Scots-Irish Presbyterians through “Princeton University, which in the nineteenth century generated an illustrious, though controversial tradition of scholastic thought, both philosophically and theologically.”³³ He identifies the long-term effect of this tradition in North America in the Kuyper-Warfield debate concerning apologetics, where Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) argued for apologetics based on the principles of reason, while Kuyper argued for prolegomena grounded in faith commitments: “At bottom the dispute touches directly on the very nature of prolegomena.”³⁴ In other words, is a Christian philosophy necessary and justifiable, or can reason provide a sufficient introduction to revelation? Spykman criticizes scholasticism because he senses that it threatens the very heart of the neo-Calvinist project. It is important to note that, in rejecting a particular characterization of scholasticism, Spykman followed the critique of scholasticism typical of his mid-twentieth-century context.

According to Dooyeweerd, the nature/grace ground motive significantly influences the scholastic conception of anthropology. He regards the “traditional scholastic views regarding the dichotomy of soul and body” as one of two major areas of thought that hindered Kuyper from a more consistent elucidation of his distinctively biblical and Calvinistic insights as to the structure of creation.³⁵ Spykman includes the nature of the human person as a major point on his dogmatic agenda, attempting to frame the issue in a way that mirrors the biblical data, despite the uphill battle against long-standing mental concepts and ingrained terminology. He does not consider his word the last on the subject but intends to clear the path for dogmatic advancement by incorporating the philosophic insights probed by Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and others. The second section of this chapter includes a more detailed account of his approach.

³² Spykman, *RT*, 25.

³³ Spykman, *Calvinism in America*, 3.

³⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 38.

³⁵ Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Philosophy of Science,” 175.

I.2. Charting a Path for a Christian Philosophy

Since Spykman's intention is to present a Reformed dogmatics and not a full-fledged elaboration of a Reformed philosophy, he does not deal with the many details of Dooyeweerd's Philosophy of the Law-Idea. Generally, he works with the fundamental insights that resonate with most neo-Calvinists: the biblical truths and presuppositions used by Dooyeweerd to describe the structure of reality. He mentions Dooyeweerd's well-known "modal scale" only once in *RT*, noting that it is a "paradigm" by which Dooyeweerd sought "to formulate the norms which hold for these well-ordered dimensions of life."³⁶ However, he realizes its "tentative" nature, which is "always open to ongoing review and revision."³⁷

I.2.1. The Necessity of a Reformed Philosophy

Spykman values the Cosmonomic Philosophy for its manner of illuminating both the diversity and the "coherent interrelatedness"³⁸ of the various life dimensions. The diversity and interrelatedness of every distinct aspect of life within the temporal horizon are represented by the terms "sphere-sovereignty" and "sphere-universality." Spykman considers this to be one of the most valuable contributions of the Cosmonomic Philosophy to a Christian understanding of reality, tracing the seed of the concept all the way back to Calvin.³⁹ Within this framework, he affirms the need for a "biblically directed"⁴⁰ Christian philosophy to organize the data of reality in a totality view, so to speak, that forms the basic presuppositions about creation common to the work of every discipline.

Vollenhoven's definition of philosophy confirms Spykman's perspective. Regarding the question "what philosophy can investigate," Vollenhoven responds that the "field of investigation" for philosophy consists in "the entire domain of the cosmos."⁴¹ All that is "subject" to the law of God can rightfully be studied by the philosopher who recognizes the law of God as the boundary line between Creator and creature. In fact, "though its task is limited," this philosophy perceives the extensive variety and diversity of God's creation and "proceeds every time again from the presupposition that the wealth in that which is created will be much greater than has been ascertained up to that time."⁴² Demonstrating

³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 102. He refers to it also in "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," 22.

³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 102.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 102.

³⁹ See Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," 163-208.

⁴⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 102. In "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," 7, Spykman says, "The Cosmonomic Philosophy helps us situate our theological task within the wider horizons of our life together in God's world as well as within the spectrum of the many other sciences."

⁴¹ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 18.

⁴² Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 17.

the coherence of the many manifestations of the one creative and ordering Word of God constitutes the compelling vision of a Christian philosophy as Spykman interprets it.⁴³

The structure of *Reformational Theology* testifies to the weight Spykman gives to philosophical presuppositions formed by Scripture. “PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS” comprises nearly one quarter of the entire dogmatic work. The prolegomenal task Spykman undertakes includes discussions of prolegomenal issues, “contemporary dilemmas,” “clarification of basic categories,” and the theological implications of his neo-Calvinist construction of a prolegomenon.⁴⁴ The investment of space and reflection given to these topics communicates his conviction that an extensive “first word”⁴⁵ to dogmatics is crucial for forming biblically- and creationally-attuned thought-patterns.

The distinguishing trait of a truly Christian prolegomena, “rooted in a biblical worldview” and given theoretical “shape and form in a Christian philosophy,” consists in the fact that it, like the dogmatics it precedes, takes “a believing response to God’s Word as its ongoing starting point.”⁴⁶ Dooyeweerd asserts that a religiously-defined starting point characterizes all theoretical work.⁴⁷ In opposition to the starting point of faith in reason, which according to Dooyeweerd has been the downfall of Western theology even in its Reformation varieties,⁴⁸ a Reformational philosophy emphasizes the centrality of God’s Word for every theoretical endeavor – including dogmatics and philosophy. Spykman summarizes, “Christian philosophy serves to clarify the underlying presuppositions of dogmatics, its accepted paradigm of created reality, its theological method and hermeneutic, its normative reference points, and its basic concepts. This, I submit, is the most authentic, positive, and useful service which a prolegomena can render.”⁴⁹ In Dooyeweerd’s context, a genuinely Christian philosophy challenges historicism and existentialism.⁵⁰ In Spykman’s context, it provides an alternative to the theological tendency toward the absolutization of divine transcendence or immanence.⁵¹

⁴³ Spykman, *RT*, 100.

⁴⁴ See *RT*, v-vii, “Contents.”

⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 40, 134.

⁴⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 38-39.

⁴⁷ See, for example, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 17, 52; *NCTT*, I:20-21; *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 3-6, 21-42. This is the substance of Dooyeweerd’s critique of the “pretended autonomy of theoretical thought.”

⁴⁸ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 108.

⁴⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 39.

⁵⁰ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 4; see also James K. A. Smith’s comments in the Introduction, vii, ix.

⁵¹ Spykman, *RT*, 70-75.

1.2.2. Vollenhoven's Framework as a Pattern for Spykman

Vollenhoven offers a framework for understanding the scriptural perspectives that have foundational significance for the philosophical task. He identifies three questions that Scripture alone can answer truthfully, and which determine philosophy's limits and possibilities. (1) Who is the Creator? (2) What is the created in relation to him? (3) What is the limit that marks off that which is created from the Creator?⁵² Scripture directs us to answer (1) that God is sovereign and (2) that his creatures are "wholly subjected to his sovereign law, Word revelation, and guidance."⁵³ With regard to the third question, Vollenhoven points to the "circumscription" of the limit to be identified: "This limit marks off that which is created from God, but not God from that which is created."⁵⁴ If creation is related to God in a positive sense, and yet truly different from God, one must reject "*analogia entis*" and immanentist approaches,⁵⁵ as well as an approach that one-sidedly concentrates on the difference between God and the cosmos.⁵⁶

When describing the way in which God's law interacts with creation, Spykman echoes Vollenhoven's terminology: the Word of God, expressive of God's will, is "distinguishable from God himself" but "stands transcendentally above and holds for all creation."⁵⁷ Spykman explains the meaning of "holds for" in terms of the Word's effect on creation: "[A]ll created reality reveals the holding power of God's Word *reflexively*. . . . Creational revelation is . . . a *reflexive, responsive* concept."⁵⁸ In a memorable passage, Spykman elaborates on reflexive responsiveness:

⁵² Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 14.

⁵³ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 14.

⁵⁴ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 15. John H. Kok summarizes Vollenhoven's view in *Vollenhoven: His Early Development* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1992), 11-12: "Except for a few crucial but passing references to the differences eternal/temporal and infinite/finite . . . Vollenhoven most often discusses and emphasizes, in a way that is consonant with the thought of Calvin and Althusius, the distinctive nature of Creator and creature in terms of God as the *law-giver* or *norm-giver* and his creatures, particularly human-kind, as *subject to God's norms*. He rejects any pantheistic suggestion that God and the world coincide. God and the world are distinct, but closely related." Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:99-100, also writes of the "*lex . . . as the universal boundary (which cannot be transgressed) between the Being of God and the meaning of His creation.*" In the related footnote he addresses objections to the idea of law as boundary: "The term 'boundary' merely intends to indicate an essential distinction between God and the creature with respect to their relation to the *lex*." He expresses agreement with Calvin that God is not subject to the law, but that he does not rule arbitrarily or despotically.

⁵⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 65; Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 15; on p. 14 Vollenhoven contends that Scripture's answers to the questions lead us to "highlight the relationship of God and cosmos, not their similarity and difference."

⁵⁶ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 15.

⁵⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 79. Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 16.

⁵⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 80-81. See also 87 and 108. This language also reflects Dooyeweerd's conception of individuality structures. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 255, explain, "Individuality structures refer not to the structures of concrete things but to God's order or law for concrete things."

As a shaft of light, passing through a prism, gets refracted into a diversified spectrum of colours, so God's one Word addresses all his varied creatures.⁵⁹ It gets concretized, however, as the psalmists indicate, according to the very special structure and function of each creature and according to the various life-relationships of mankind as imagers of God in his world.⁶⁰

The law "holds for" creation in that it sets the boundaries for every creature and calls forth a response commensurate with each creature's God-given design, role, and responsibility within the created order. By his appropriation of the law as "holding for" creation, Spykman emphasizes God's active relationship with creation through his Law-Word.⁶¹ In this way he seeks to avoid giving ground to objectivism or subjectivism, a concern Vollenhoven also expressed.⁶² The law "impinges itself on us with full authority," and through it "God maintains his abiding claim on all creatures."⁶³ The law governs life in the world, witnessing to the fact that reality is defined by a God who exists outside of the grasp of man's unaided and fallen reason.

The law's authority over and claim upon God's creatures stems from their status as "subjects" of God and thus of his law. Vollenhoven calls this "being-subject" the "point of orientation" for the philosophic task.⁶⁴ Kok, tracing Vollenhoven's development regarding this "point of orientation," comments, "[A]long the way he [Vollenhoven] rejects as a legitimate point of orientation: knowledge, judgment, thinking, language, self-consciousness, the self, or anything differentiated, but also God. . . . Vollenhoven soon arrives . . . at that mode of being that cannot be denied of anything that is creaturely: *het subjèct zijn [being subject]*."⁶⁵ The creature is not merely a subject, an actor in response to God's Word, but one who is *subject* to that Word, which is Vollenhoven's point. Thus, God's Word functions as the "boundary line which circumscribes the range of our theoretical reflections," and human rationality, being "subject" to God's Word, is dependent upon God's Word: there is no freedom to define creation and self on terms of human making.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Here he probably borrows from Dooyeweerd, who uses a prism to illustrate that the various modes of reality find their source and coherence in a single Origin (see *NCTT*, I:101-102).

⁶⁰ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 24.

⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 92-95, insists that the law expresses God's will for his creatures and thus grants them life. God's Law-Word is relational in nature. Kok, *Vollenhoven*, 284, assesses Vollenhoven's outlook as similar: "God's laws for the cosmos, that is, his ordinances, like miracles, are included as relational activities in the relation between God and cosmos. The law is not a 'third thing' in the God-cosmos relationship."

⁶² Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 16.

⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 125.

⁶⁴ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 18.

⁶⁵ Kok, *Vollenhoven*, 283.

⁶⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 149-151.

1.2.3. The Role of the Word-Revelation in a Christian Philosophy

Vollenhoven asserts that both God and his works are knowable, with certain qualifications. In the appendix of his *Introduction to Philosophy*, where he elaborates on the topic of “Human Knowing,” he makes several points germane to Spykman’s concept of the threefold Word of God. First, Vollenhoven affirms the basic Calvinist conception that God reveals himself through his Word and his creatures, saying, “God, therefore, can be known through two means.”⁶⁷ He then mentions the knowability of the “law governing the cosmos” – dependent on “the light of the word of God” – along with the knowability of the cosmos.⁶⁸ Knowledge of the cosmos occurs “through two means,” divine revelation and human investigation, but both are limited by “the extent” of what God has revealed and human inability to investigate the cosmos fully.⁶⁹ This lays the groundwork for Spykman’s insistence on creation as a conduit through which God reveals himself and his will (or law, or ordinances) for the cosmos.⁷⁰ Vollenhoven, however, speaks of these means as “Scripture” and “nature,”⁷¹ without directly applying the term “Word of God” to the revelation given in creation. Spykman, incorporating the insight that God’s Word “holds” for creation, extends the concept of the Word of God to creation as a “reflexive, responsive” means of revelation.⁷²

Vollenhoven argues that those who reject human investigation of the cosmos as a means of genuine knowledge of it “deny the possibility of Christian science.”⁷³ Because the cosmos is governed by God’s law and is therefore subject to him, it is open for exploration. Science, in the sense of the Dutch *Wetenschap*, includes all theoretical endeavors⁷⁴ and is a legitimate Christian task because it seeks to uncover the various manifestations of God’s law within the cosmos. Accordingly, Spykman encourages Christian theoreticians of every sort to perform their vocational duties in a Christian way – by acknowledging that God’s sovereign Word holds for all reality and by remembering that no one part of

⁶⁷ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123.

⁶⁸ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123. Dooyeweerd, “The Dangers of the Intellectual Disarmament of Christianity in Science,” ed. T. Grady Spires, Natexa Verbrugge, and Magnus Verbrugge, trans. John Vriend, in *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History*, 102, attests that “God has revealed Himself throughout His entire creation, and centrally in the human heart,” and that “listening with a believing heart to God’s Word” is the requirement for receiving “clarity” concerning the revelation in creation.

⁶⁹ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123.

⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 79-80.

⁷¹ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123.

⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 81.

⁷³ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123.

⁷⁴ D. F. M. Strauss, general ed., “The Dangers of the Intellectual Disarmament of Christianity in Science,” 67, footnote 2, explains, “The Dutch term ‘wetenschap’ has a broader scope” than the English word “science.” “‘Wetenschap’ refers to all the academic disciplines, not merely to the natural sciences such as mathematics and physics.”

the cosmos is a law unto itself.⁷⁵ This directly counters the fragmentation resulting from scholastic distinctions between scientific and non-scientific knowing and the divide between pure and practical reason ingrained by Kant's work, a fragmentation that Vollenhoven eschews.⁷⁶

1.2.4. A More Modest Role for Theology

Spykman's dogmatics assigns to theology a task that is more limited in nature than that of classic Reformed theologies. This position bears a direct connection to that of Dooyeweerd, who in turn traces it to Kuyper. Dooyeweerd argues that the discipline of philosophy draws a totality picture, representing the coherence of the various domains of created reality. Theology, on the other hand, is "a special science . . . similar to the other disciplines, being delimited by a modal aspect of reality," which, in Dooyeweerd's thinking, is the "faith function."⁷⁷ Theology differs from other disciplines because its "field of investigation" has a "unique nature" and because "the Divine Word revelation occupies a central position within it."⁷⁸ According to Dooyeweerd, Kuyper rightly concludes that the object of theology is revelation rather than God himself, which is a legitimate implication of Calvin's insistence that human reason cannot "penetrate to the essence of God *per se*."⁷⁹ By accepting "the law-boundary for human thought," Kuyper affirms that theology must accept for its content only that which God chooses to reveal "within the boundaries of the cosmos."⁸⁰ This emphasis must be evaluated against the backdrop of the alternative perspectives that dominated the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century: (1) an Enlightenment-inspired overestimation of the powers of reason that results in speculation; (2) the Kantian-inspired divorce of reason from faith, which limits theological content to morality, ethics, or subjective experience. These perspectives enthrone reason at the expense of revelation.

For Spykman and John C. Vander Stelt (1934-2020), a biblical view of the interplay between revelation and reason justifies a redefinition of the object of theology.⁸¹ Theological study, as a temporal activity dependent upon revelation, must take place within the framework of man's "point of

⁷⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 178-182.

⁷⁶ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 14.

⁷⁷ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 177. See also Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 91-95.

⁷⁸ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 177.

⁷⁹ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 168.

⁸⁰ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 168.

⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 104-105; John C. Vander Stelt, "Theology or Pistology?" in *Building the House: Essays on Christian Education*, ed. James A. De Jong and Louis Y. Van Dyke (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1981), 115-135.

orientation”: subjection to God’s law. Spykman perceives a tendency to misunderstand the correlation of divine revelation and creaturely response within both God-oriented theologies (which he associates with Karl Barth) and human-oriented theologies (which he associates with Friedrich Schleiermacher).⁸² For this reason, he suggests, along with Vander Stelt, that the object of theology is the “pistical modality” – “the faith-knowledge/faith-life of the Christian.”⁸³ Craig Bartholomew criticizes Dooyeweerd’s, and thus Spykman’s, definition of theology as reflection on “the faith modality or aspect of human experience.”⁸⁴ Dooyeweerd’s perspective on theology garnered criticism from Schilder as well, who sensed that in Dooyeweerd’s system the Word was not given its “key position” in relation to faith.⁸⁵ Bartholomew, however, wonders whether Spykman’s dogmatic reflections are consistent with his Dooyeweerd-inspired definition of theology. He comments, “[I]f one looks at what Spykman actually does in his rich work, Scripture is constantly taken as the norm, and he reflects continually on it, just as do Kuyper and Bavinck.”⁸⁶ It would seem that Spykman’s structure (honoring the mediating Word) and method (a persistent call to use Scripture as one’s hermeneutic norm) undermine his Dooyeweerdian assertions concerning the object of theology. At the same time, his neo-Calvinist accent on the “heart” elevates faith response to a position of heightened significance.

1.3. Defining Themes: Structure/Direction, Antithesis, Sphere-Sovereignty

The works of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven emphasize three creation-delineating themes that continue to bear fruit among their neo-Calvinist heirs: structure and direction, the antithesis, and sphere-sovereignty. Each theme plays a role in the formulation of *Reformational Theology*.

1.3.1. Structure/Direction

Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven consider the principle of structure and direction necessary for combating the dualistic views of reality that have influenced philosophy and theology throughout the centuries. Their appeal to a good *structure* which God continues to maintain through his Word helps to avoid the unbiblical notions of de-formed matter and of a sphere of nature that exists independently of grace. *Direction* captures the possibility of varying responses to the creational givens of the God-

⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 44-48.

⁸³ Spykman, “Theology in Partnership,” 18-21, 26.

⁸⁴ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 286.

⁸⁵ Faber, “Klaas Schilder’s Life and Work,” 15.

⁸⁶ Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 286, footnote 80.

ordained structure: every response gives expression to one of two directions – either faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God and his Word.

The idea of structure and direction, which is important for Vollenhoven, means that “[g]ood and evil are not ‘essences’ but pertain to fundamental attitudes of obedience and disobedience.”⁸⁷

Vollenhoven conveys the idea of structure through his emphasis on the Law as the means and context for God’s sovereign relation to the cosmos, and he elaborates on this relation as covenantal in nature, even prior to the Fall.⁸⁸ His analysis of the structural modalities, emphasizing their connections and interrelationships,⁸⁹ and Dooyeweerd’s detailed presentation of structural modalities,⁹⁰ confirm for Spykman that the structural components of creation can be helpfully analyzed within the boundaries of a Reformational philosophy.

The persistent tendency to assume the rightness of dualisms in Western theology, combined with the unique varieties of dualism found in North American evangelicalism, spurs Spykman to clarify biblical distinctions and avoid the confusion of structure and direction.⁹¹ Considering the failures of major theological figures to distinguish between structure and direction, Spykman sets the stage for a philosophical orientation by constructing a theological prolegomenon defined by structural realities and the direction-setting movements of Scripture.⁹² In agreement with Dooyeweerd’s premise that dialectical synthesis, or dualism, lies at the core of Western worldviews and philosophies, Spykman reviews and updates the major historical moments of synthesis.⁹³ The form-matter motive of the Greeks, though foreign to Scripture, has nevertheless bequeathed theological categories that continue to obscure the radical nature of Scripture’s all-encompassing view of creation, sin, and grace. The nature-grace motive of medieval scholasticism and the nature-freedom motive of modern humanism borrow from the Christian ground-motive but ultimately posit two realms that, unlike the Christian ground motive, do not share a common root in creation, fall, and redemption. These alternative ground-motives, referred to by Dooyeweerd as “internally dualistic and fragmentary,”⁹⁴ confuse

⁸⁷ Tol, forward to *Introduction to Philosophy*, by Vollenhoven, xxviii-xxix.

⁸⁸ See Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 77-85.

⁸⁹ See Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 21-77.

⁹⁰ See Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, Vol. II.

⁹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 67.

⁹² See Spykman, *RT*, 133-34, where he defends the concept of theological prolegomena, particularly that which “reflects the biblical worldview and Christian philosophy developed within the Reformed movement over the past one hundred years.”

⁹³ Spykman, *RT*, 13-39.

⁹⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), 11.

structure and direction by limiting sin and grace, or reason and faith, to one factor of its motive. Such confusion results in a false conception of the antithesis.

1.3.2. Antithesis

Though creation and its structures exist in distinction from God, this is not an antithetical distinction, or distinction of opposition. “The true religious antithesis,” according to Dooyeweerd, “is established by the revelation found in God’s Word” as that Word opposes absolutely “every form of idolatry.”⁹⁵ Against natural theology and the autonomy of thought, Dooyeweerd argues that religious neutrality is an illusion and that the Word-revelation is the only authoritative source for human thought.⁹⁶ Against Kant’s update of the age-old dualism of faith and reason, Dooyeweerd posits faith and reason as functions, variously situated on the modal scale, that are both subject to the antithesis.

Spykman, too, recognizes the antithesis as a “spiritual conflict” that occurs within the structures of creation, between sin (which is “totally pervasive”) and grace (which “lays its claim on all reality”).⁹⁷ This differs from the dualistic way of thinking that “gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status by defining some parts . . . of life . . . as good and others . . . as less than good or even evil.”⁹⁸ For Dooyeweerd, rightly understanding the antithesis is a serious matter: “What is at stake in the issue of the antithesis is the relation between religion and temporal life.”⁹⁹ Spykman agrees, concentrating on the meaning of the antithesis for philosophy and theology, as well as for the believer’s grasp of the extent of sin and grace in daily living.¹⁰⁰

Dooyeweerd’s view of the antithesis had specific application to contemporary political issues in the Netherlands. Between the World Wars, Dooyeweerd “sounded the alarm” against “the rising tide of

⁹⁵ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 12-13. Wolters, “Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd,” 9, remarks that the idea of the “antithesis,” developed by Kuyper and “closely related to the fundamental theme that grace restores nature,” greatly affected Dooyeweerd’s life and work: “Not only did he dedicate himself to the ideal of Christian scholarship, but he understood his philosophizing as participation in a religious antithesis. . . . The antithesis, ultimately the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, is found right in our hearts.”

⁹⁶ Roy Clouser’s book *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) develops Dooyeweerd’s idea that religious presuppositions are inescapable.

⁹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 66.

⁹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 66-67.

⁹⁹ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 65-66, 68, 107-112, 320-321.

Fascism and National Socialism”¹⁰¹ by appealing to a uniquely Christian idea of the State.¹⁰² The post-World War II rebuilding efforts included a concerted effort by the Dutch National Movement to replace both the Christian antithesis and humanism with a synthesis of “the christian and humanistic views of life,” one that would promote “national unity.”¹⁰³ However, based on the fact that the “religious antithesis does not allow a higher synthesis,”¹⁰⁴ Dooyeweerd worked to re-establish the antithesis as “a fruitful principle . . . for the solution of contemporary societal problems.”¹⁰⁵ Noting several challenges to humanism, including the world wars, nationalist and socialist political movements, and “the spiritual crisis that set in long before the war,” Dooyeweerd identifies himself with those who seek to reclaim Reformation principles for the needs of the modern world.¹⁰⁶

In his dogmatic work and reflection on societal issues, Spykman underscores the consequences of the types of syntheses against which Dooyeweerd argued. These are displayed in the ideas of various groups and individuals: progressive theologians who were imbibing historicism and pulling God into history, thus making him less God; Barth, whose Christological focus seemed to undermine Scripture as the divine Word-revelation; the scholastic legacy in Reformed academic communities; and contingents within the North American Dutch community who rejected Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace and his call to societal engagement.¹⁰⁷ In each case, Spykman identifies either some degree of accommodation of Christian distinctives to apostate philosophical concepts, or some level of confusion of structure and direction. To move forward with a theological approach that captures more fully the centrality of God’s Word, Spykman appeals to the concept-clarifying philosophy offered by Dooyeweerd and his collaborators.

1.3.3. Sphere-Sovereignty

The Kuyperian distinctive of sphere-sovereignty, developed and applied in a more far-reaching way by Dooyeweerd, continues in Spykman’s work as a basic and indispensable tenet of a Christian philosophy. Remarking on the connection between the “theological insights of Kuyper and Bavinck” and the “philosophical work of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd,” Spykman highlights the significance of the

¹⁰¹ William D. Dennison, “Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 281, accessed July 26, 2017, ATLA.

¹⁰² Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State*, trans. John Kraay (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1968).

¹⁰³ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ See Spykman, *RT*, 26-29; 35; 24-25; and Spykman, “Calvinism in America,” 14-17.

creation order for these Dutch thinkers: “Like Reformed theology, this Christian philosophy grows out of disciplined reflection on the creation order understood in the light of Scripture.”¹⁰⁸ Taking creation seriously means accounting for “the coherent unity and the rich diversity of the creation order” found in the Genesis creation narratives.¹⁰⁹ For the interrelation of sphere-sovereignty and its correlate, sphere-universality, Spykman refers the reader to Dooyeweerd, who defines sphere-sovereignty as “mutual irreducibility” and acknowledges a “coherence of meaning” among all created things, insisting that creational unity and diversity is “bound to the religious root of mankind.”¹¹⁰ In other words, created reality, in the full range of its pluriformity and its interrelationships, derives meaning from its God-giveness.

These neo-Calvinist insights did not occur in a vacuum.¹¹¹ The modern differentiation of society that has come to be known as pluralism calls for philosophical and theological justification. What was begun with the Reformation, and Calvin in particular, in clarifying the proper roles of church and state, continued in Kuyper’s call for independence and reform “in the spheres of church, school, labour and politics.”¹¹² Dooyeweerd, in his elaboration of the idea of sphere-sovereignty, argues against the proponents of historicism that there are creational norms for the process of cultural differentiation in history, principles that “require *formation* by competent human authorities.”¹¹³ He also views sphere-

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 189.

¹⁰⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 186.

¹¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 189, references Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I, 1, 9, pp. 99-101. R. D. Henderson, *Illuminating Law: The Construction of Herman Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy, 1918-1928* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1994), 132, argues that Dooyeweerd “connects the notion of ‘sphere’ not so much with individual societal structures as with collective cosmic structures” and that “[h]e interpreted ‘sphere’ in an *epistemological* way” that Kuyper did not. Spykman generally works with “sphere-sovereignty” as related to individual societal structures, but in a way that seems to acknowledge Dooyeweerd’s epistemological reflections: sphere-sovereignty has its basis in law spheres that reflect divine ordinances representing God’s sovereignty.

¹¹¹ To illustrate his point about *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee’s* connectedness with the “historical development of philosophic and scientific thought,” Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:118, confirms that sphere-sovereignty “would not have been possible apart from the entire preceding development of modern philosophy and of the different branches of modern science.” Peter J. Steen, *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd’s Thought* (Toronto: Wedge, 1983), accessed August 15, 2018, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/TheStructureofHermanDooyeweerdsThought.pdf, 263-264, states that sphere-sovereignty was for Dooyeweerd a response to historicism and neo-Kantianism.

¹¹² Spykman, “Calvinism in America,” 13.

¹¹³ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 69; see also 65, where Dooyeweerd says, “Modern historicism . . . is dominated by the religious ground motive of humanism. . . . Historicism rejects the constant structure of the historical aspect which contains the divine decrees for historical development. As a result it has no reliable standard for distinguishing reactionary and progressive tendencies in historical development.”

sovereignty as a necessary alternative to totalitarianism, which has both historic and contemporary manifestations.¹¹⁴

Spykman adopts the general orientation of Dooyeweerd's philosophy of history, tracing the progress of historical differentiation in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in "church/state relations and the development of the university" in the Western world.¹¹⁵ As an example of the application of sphere-sovereignty to education, one can point to Kuyper's establishment of The Free University in Amsterdam and his influence on the establishment of relatively independent Christian educational institutions in North America.¹¹⁶ Spykman believes that "the fundamental principle of a differentiated community continues to confront us as an urgent call to societal reformation."¹¹⁷ Underlying the concept of sphere-sovereignty is that of the creation order, which Spykman roots "in the idea of the cultural mandate, given with creation," which "lays its claim on us both as a benediction and a command (*datum* and *mandatum*)."¹¹⁸ The benediction, or blessing, of the cultural mandate consists in the "reality to which it [the creation order] points"; the command of the cultural mandate consists in discernment of the creation order and obedience to it.¹¹⁹

Dooyeweerd's exposition of sphere-sovereignty, based upon Kuyper's earlier articulations, is not without its challengers. Schilder, who identifies with Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven in some respects, nevertheless rejects sphere-sovereignty as described by Kuyper.¹²⁰ Critical of the spheres and their supposed sovereigns, Schilder argues for Christian cultural activity on the basis of the cultural mandate, fulfilled by Christ as the second Adam.¹²¹ Schilder's description of the Christian's cultural task in his book

¹¹⁴ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 22, 48, 129. Also crucial in Dooyeweerd's view is sphere-sovereignty's opposition to the "new humanistic ideal of science" with its "faith in the theoretical creative power of mathematical thought" and "in the sovereignty of human reason" (Dooyeweerd, "The Dangers of the Intellectual Disarmament of Christianity in Science," 80).

¹¹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 285-287.

¹¹⁶ Spykman, "Calvinism in America," 16.

¹¹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 287.

¹¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 178.

¹¹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 179-180. Spykman concisely renders the relation between the reality of the creation order and human response to it: "Our calling is to bring the order of our life in God's world . . . into conformity with God's good order for our life in his world." Paul Marshall, "Dooyeweerd's Empirical Theory of Rights," in McIntire, *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*, 127, comments that Dooyeweerd views sphere-sovereignty as crucial for understanding the "is" of the creation order as well as the call to various creational tasks: "Sphere sovereignty is not just a moral imperative, but it is to some extent also a statement about *how things actually are* – it reveals the structure of cosmos and of society (NC 3:173)."

¹²⁰ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 16.

¹²¹ In *Christ and Culture*, 115, he seems to acknowledge the concepts of structure and direction: "Even when the cultural forms are the same [i.e., the forms shared between believers and unbelievers], they [believers] must recognize the difference in cultural direction."

Christ and Culture (*Christus en cultuur*, 4th ed., 1978) stresses the antithesis and points believers to Christ as the source of cultural authority. What Schilder contributes to Spykman's viewpoint is the cultural mandate¹²² as definitive of the ongoing task of God's people. In Schilder's view, unbelievers participate in the activities mandated by God at creation not as an act of true culture-building but as a testimony to the continuation of nature, through which their ungodly "use of nature" will lead to their judgment.¹²³ While Spykman may not follow Schilder in denying any role for unbelievers in true culture-building, he consistently refers to the cultural mandate, carried out through human office, as defining the cultural task of Christians.¹²⁴

Part II: The Influence of Neo-Calvinist Philosophy on Spykman's Dogmatics

What is the practical effect of Spykman's attention to prolegomenal issues, cast in terms of the Cosmogenic Philosophy, for his theological constructions? The neo-Calvinist philosophical themes influence both his theological structure and his interpretation of various doctrines. Structurally, giving priority to the Word-revelation issues in Spykman's three-factor view of reality and his concept of the threefold Word of God. Doctrinally, the neo-Calvinist perspective influences his discussions of creation, anthropology, the life of faith, common grace, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

II.1. Theological Structure

The Reformational philosophical orientation yields what Spykman refers to as a three-factor view of reality. In maintaining the necessary and central role of God's Word as the locus of revelation and response, Spykman understands himself to be consistent with the theological method that defines the Reformed tradition.¹²⁵ However, he questions the usefulness of the typical two-factor view of theology (God-humanity) for illuminating the proper function of the divine Word-revelation. The conundrums of contemporary theology make it imperative, in Spykman's view, to utilize a three-factor

¹²² N. H. Gootjes, "Schilder on Christ and Culture," in Geertsema, *Always Obedient*, 35, claims that "the expression *cultural mandate* . . . was in all probability coined by Schilder." Jochem Douma, "Summary," in *Algemene Genade: Uiteenzetting, vergelijking en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over 'algemene genade'* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1966), 362, points out that for Schilder, the cultural mandate consists in a requirement reaching back to the pre-Fall task given to Adam, but that this pre-Fall mandate is not the basis for common grace.

¹²³ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 93. Douma, *Algemene Genade*, 360-361, says that for Schilder, in distinction from Kuyper, the "continuation of the world and of mankind . . . is neither grace, nor judgment, but a substratum for the administration of blessing and curse."

¹²⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 109-110, 180-182, 229-233, 256-257.

¹²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 5-6.

rather than a two-factor theology. He cites the tensions apparent in Schleiermacher's pattern of "moving from man to God" and in Barth's pattern of "beginning with God and moving down to man."¹²⁶ Spykman's description of these tensions echoes Dooyeweerd's description of unbiblical ground-motives: two seemingly opposing poles are brought together in a dialectical synthesis that erases valid distinctions and distorts the actual relationship of the factors involved.

II.1.1. Three Factors: God-Word-World

In order to alleviate these tensions, Spykman posits "a normatively structured place"¹²⁷ for the Word of God in theological reflection, as the "mediating Word" between "God" and "the world."¹²⁸ He finds support in Vollenhoven's recognition of the "three basics of a biblical worldview": "God/his Word/the world."¹²⁹ In the wake of the Kantian shift, this anchoring of God's Word serves not only as a theological bridge but as a philosophical bridge between two factors (God and humanity) that in modern perspectives are independent of each other and unable to encounter each other except through a divorce of faith and reason or through a synthesis that robs each factor of its revelation-defined identity. Just as importantly, Spykman's concept positions God's Law-Word as a boundary between God and creation; this is consistent with Vollenhoven's insistence that the Law-Word demands a clear distinction between Creator and creation.¹³⁰

"The heart of the matter is, therefore, a three-factor theology. Its pivotal point is the mediating role of the Word of God."¹³¹ In its mediating function, the Word of God sets the conditions for human life in relation to God's character and work (revelation) and enables people to know and fulfill those conditions *coram Deo* (creaturely response). Spykman believes this three-factor construction, which honors an "intuitive awareness"¹³² exhibited by Calvin, Kuyper, and other Reformational thinkers, avoids pitting divine transcendence and divine immanence against each other.¹³³ Practically speaking, Spykman seeks to work out difficult questions pertaining to the relation between divine and human activity by

¹²⁶ Spykman, "A New Paradigm for Doing Reformed Dogmatics," 10.

¹²⁷ Spykman, "A New Paradigm for Doing Reformed Dogmatics," 10, and *RT*, 75.

¹²⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 75.

¹²⁹ Spykman, "A New Paradigm for Doing Reformed Dogmatics," 10.

¹³⁰ See Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 15-16. In Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven, "The Groundmotives of Biblical Philosophy," ed. Vollenhoven Foundation, from "De Grondmotieven der Schriftuurlijke Wijsbegeerte," in *Het Calvinistische en de Reformatie van de Wijsbegeerte*, (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933), 8, accessed May 4, 2018, <https://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/vollenhoven.htm>, Vollenhoven links "the principle motif of biblical philosophy" with "recognition of the boundary between God and cosmos."

¹³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 92.

¹³² Spykman, *RT*, 92.

¹³³ Spykman, *RT*, 59-60.

making divine revelation – the “*relatio*,” or covenantal relationship of revelation and response – the central point of discussion.¹³⁴

The three-factor structure embodies at least two key tenets of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea: affirmation of the Creator-creation distinction and rejection of the pretended autonomy of theoretical thought. The Word of God mediates God’s will (ordinances) for creation to creation, while the normatively structured position of the Word between God and creation renders all knowledge, whether scientific or not, dependent upon the Word-revelation.¹³⁵

II.1.2. Threefold Word of God

In what form does the divine Word address humanity? As mentioned in Chapter 1, Schilder’s account of the progressive revelation of the wise men in their journey to find Jesus guided Spykman “to an increasingly fuller recognition of the tri-unitary character of the Word of God.”¹³⁶ Spykman argues that God’s revelation through Scripture and his incarnate Son is preceded by creation, which in a qualified sense constitutes another form of God’s Word. To qualify the meaning of creation as a form of God’s Word, Spykman appeals to Vollenhoven’s pattern of speaking of God’s Word as “holding” for creation. He links the Word’s “holding for” creation with the response the Word calls forth from God’s creatures, as he explains in the following quotation:

Creation is not in any sense Word of God. . . . Thus, it is misleading to say without qualification: Creation is divine revelation, creation is Word of God. . . . It is better to say that the Word of God holds for the origins, structures, and functions of the created order. God’s Word is the transcendent norm which impinges authoritatively upon all creatures, calling for appropriate responses.¹³⁷

He directs this statement of clarification toward North American critics who interpret *sola Scriptura* as excluding all forms of revelation besides the Bible and who indict the Dooyeweerdian perspective for its role in promoting the three-form concept of God’s Word.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ See Spykman, *RT*, 60-63, for his brief discussion of three problematic issues: marriage, civil government, election; see *RT*, 92-95, for his discussion of the covenantal relationship.

¹³⁵ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, II:572, claims, “The whole of my book is intended to illustrate my fundamental thesis that the Christian Idea of truth [based on the “reliability of God’s Word,” 571-571] *can* and *should* permeate scientific thought from root to crown.” In “The Dangers of the Intellectual Disarmament of Christianity in Science,” 98, he says that part of Calvin’s “significance is that he radically carried through the Augustinian line of thinking, which required that natural knowledge must also be illuminated by God’s Word revelation.”

¹³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 91.

¹³⁷ Spykman, “‘Follow-up’ Project: An Exploration,” 5-8; see also *RT*, 81.

¹³⁸ See Frame and Coppes, *The Amsterdam Philosophy*, 32, who “feel that the philosophical premises of the Amsterdam school tend to undermine the authority of the Bible.” See also Mulder, “The Word, the Word, and the Word,” 13-14.

Though the Reformed tradition generally acknowledges a divine speaking in and through creation (expressed in dogmatic discussions of God's works¹³⁹ as well as in hymns such as Isaac Watts's "I Sing the Mighty Power of God"), there remains a reticence to consider the creational revelation as a form of the Word. Rather, the Word designation has been reserved for Scripture and for Christ.¹⁴⁰ In the North American context, this can be attributed at least partially to the emphases of Runner, who "stressed the religious character of everything" as did Dooyeweerd but "made the Bible the centerpiece" in terms of defining the Word of God.¹⁴¹ Spykman and others within the AACS support the Dooyeweerdian emphasis "on Creation-Order as a reality in the context of which the Scriptures were needed as a guide."¹⁴² Spykman adopts Runner's slogan "life is religion" but relates the Bible to the Creation-Order in a somewhat unique manner through his concept of the threefold Word of God.

Essentially, Spykman treats the Word in and for creation as another way to denote "creation ordinances."¹⁴³ What factors in the modern context may have contributed to Spykman's and the AACS's emphasis on the creational Word? At a time when questions of societal structure and the desperate need for societal transformation loom large, a philosophical outlook and a contemporary theology depend on the idea of creation norms and ordinances for guidance in framing the issues. Kuyper's doctrine of sphere-sovereignty was forged and developed in a setting of significant societal change, and an emphasis on the creational Word provides the rationale for the differentiation of societal spheres and for the Christian's discernment of each sphere's God-given purpose.

II.2. Doctrinal Considerations: New Starting Points

The three-factor philosophical view of reality and the threefold Word of God represent new starting points in at least three areas: creation, anthropology, and the centrality of the heart.

¹³⁹ For example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.1.5; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Chapters 3-6; and Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Part I, "The Works of God."

¹⁴⁰ See Bernard Zylstra's "Introduction" to L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, ed. Bernard and Josina Zylstra (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 32: "The specific focus of the controversy concerning dualism in Christian thought and practice in North America at present is the debate about the Word of God which, as supporters of this philosophy assert, cannot be limited to the Bible (and the realm of grace) since the Scriptures clearly reveal the Word of God to be His will and order for the whole of creation and its history."

¹⁴¹ McIntire, "Herman Dooyeweerd in North America," 64.

¹⁴² McIntire, "Herman Dooyeweerd in North America," 64.

¹⁴³ Spykman, draft of letter to *Calvinist Contact* Editor and Readers, 2.

II.2.1. Creation

Spykman prioritizes the doctrine of creation in several ways. First, he uses a dogmatic outline that begins, not with the doctrine of God, but with creation as the context for understanding God's character and way with the world. He perceives this to be a significant departure from a scholastic approach that abstracts the divine character and attributes from the concrete acts of creation and redemption. Second, he acknowledges that the presuppositions he brings to the study of creation are rooted in the philosophical exploration of biblically-attested creational givens. The Creator-creature distinction, the unity and diversity of creation, the privilege and responsibility accorded to humanity – all these philosophical assumptions provide the revelational groundwork for a theological development of specific creation realities, such as the divine-human covenant and humanity made in God's image. Spykman's dogmatic restructuring and his dependence on the philosophical distinctions uncovered in God's Word reveal his dependence on Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

Of his decision to begin with the doctrine of creation, particularly its goodness, Spykman says the following:

Our point of departure is accordingly the biblical teaching on creation, viewed not only as a series of divine acts in the beginning, but also as the ongoing, ever present creational reality which lends life its continuing meaning. . . . [I]t is religiously and theologically of utmost importance to allow our thinking to be normatively shaped by the biblical witness to a good creation, both as an original state of affairs and as an eschatological hope. Otherwise we will be hard-pressed to honor the biblical witness to the absolute goodness of God the Creator.¹⁴⁴

Spykman here affirms creation's divinely-given meaning, reflecting Dooyeweerd's idea that "[m]eaning is the *being* of all that has been *created* and the nature even of our selfhood."¹⁴⁵ He also connects creation with eschatology, following a Schilderian line of thought,¹⁴⁶ and he argues implicitly that believing in the "absolute goodness of God the Creator" has a direct correlation to believing the "biblical witness to a good creation."¹⁴⁷ In other words, Scripture reveals God's goodness and his identity as Creator precisely in the context of his creating work, not as a separate topic.

¹⁴⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 143.

¹⁴⁵ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:4.

¹⁴⁶ See Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 67-68, who elaborates on his understanding of the relation between "heaven," "earth," and "history" in *Heaven: What Is It?* trans. and condensed, Marian M. Schoolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 19-28.

¹⁴⁷ See *RT*, 163, where Spykman treats the goodness of God and the goodness of creation together as a single "principle": "The biblical doctrine of creation, by contrast, highlights the sovereign goodness of God and the uncompromised goodness of his creation as a principle of first-order importance."

Spykman ends the “Cosmology” section of *RT* with an extended discourse on “The Creation Order,”¹⁴⁸ defining that order in terms of what Schilder calls the “cultural mandate.”¹⁴⁹ Both the “benediction” and “command” aspects of the cultural mandate,¹⁵⁰ granted in and with the creation order, resonate with the Reformed tradition as a whole. Spykman appeals to the Belgic Confession’s mention of the “several offices” given by God “unto every creature”;¹⁵¹ to Calvin’s recognition in Scripture of the unity and diversity native to the creation order that “establish the normative framework for human community”;¹⁵² to the “theological insights of Kuyper and Bavinck” that “cleared the way for the philosophical work of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.”¹⁵³ He notes that even Hendrikus Berkhof, a contemporary dialectical thinker in the broader Reformed camp who frames God’s Word in terms of human experience, affirms the distinctively Reformed principles of creation mentioned above.¹⁵⁴ What is significant here is Spykman’s neo-Calvinist grounding of the human task in the created order, along with his stress on creation’s importance for both philosophy and theology: “Like Reformed theology, this Christian philosophy grows out of disciplined reflection on the creation order understood in the light of Scripture.”¹⁵⁵ The original creation continues to exhibit the revealed structure for creaturely life in God’s world and forms a vital basis from which to discern the meaning of re-creation.

II.2.2. Anthropological Reflections Centering on the “Heart”

In asking “What is man?” and exploring the “Identity Crisis” of Western civilization, Spykman presents a Dooyeweerd-tinted update of this most basic of questions. Like Dooyeweerd, and in consonance with Calvin, he identifies the anthropological starting point not in theology or other sciences, but in Scripture, with its address to the whole person that encompasses all the ways of being human: “Scripture, then, is indispensable in putting human self-knowledge back into proper perspective What Scripture does is expose us to the searching eye of God in the religious wholeness of our

¹⁴⁸ See *RT*, 178-191.

¹⁴⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 178, and Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 77-80; see also Gootjes, “Schilder on Christ and Culture,” 35.

¹⁵⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 178.

¹⁵¹ Spykman, *RT*, 182, referencing Article XII (Lord’s Day 12) of the Belgic Confession, which refers generally to creatures’ “offices” or “functions” for service. Douma, *Algemene Genade*, 366, notes that Schilder’s “foundation” for “the Christian’s vocation” lies “in the office according to Lord’s Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism,” which is a more specific reference to the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices fulfilled in and by Christ and in which Christians also are anointed to serve.

¹⁵² Spykman, *RT*, 187.

¹⁵³ Spykman, *RT*, 189.

¹⁵⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 190-191.

¹⁵⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 189.

existence.”¹⁵⁶ Dooyeweerd, addressing the question “What is man?” focuses on the failure of philosophical perspectives – whether the older nature-grace formulation or the newer existentialist formulations – to make “room” for the “religious center of our existence which in the Holy Scripture is called our heart, the spiritual root of all the temporal manifestations of our life.”¹⁵⁷ Only Scripture reveals all human functions – reason included – as created in service to God, radically fallen into sin, and needing radical restoration in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁸

On this basis, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven consider the anthropological perspectives that have dominated the history of Christian theology to be unbiblical at their very core. Spykman, following their lead, asserts that “[n]owhere have the deforming influences of Greek philosophy on the Christian religion and its theology taken their toll more heavily than in the area of anthropology.”¹⁵⁹ The scholastic perspective, derived from Thomas Aquinas, trades the “Biblical conception of the radical religious unity of human existence” for “a natural and supernatural aspect”¹⁶⁰ – namely, “a mortal, material body and . . . an immaterial, rational soul.”¹⁶¹ Dooyeweerd posits that the *anima rationalis* of Aristotelian and Thomist thought, conceived of “as a purely spiritual, immortal and independent entity,” has become “one of the most deeply rooted presuppositions in Christian scholastic thinking.”¹⁶² Spykman gives examples from historic and contemporary “Western Christianity” of the Hellenist “notion of the superiority of the spiritual over the physical, of mind over matter.”¹⁶³ Even Calvin “was unable to extricate himself completely from the stranglehold of prevailing medieval anthropologies,” though he did overcome the nature-grace motif in his application of sin and redemption to the whole person.¹⁶⁴

Central to the neo-Calvinist stress on the wholeness of the human person is the understanding of the “heart” as “the religious center of our existence . . . , the spiritual root of all the temporal

¹⁵⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 206.

¹⁵⁷ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 127.

¹⁵⁸ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 128-132.

¹⁵⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 233. Andre Troost, *What is Reformational Philosophy? An Introduction to the Cosmological Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd* ed. Harry Van Dyke, trans. Anthony Runia (Grand Rapids: Paideia Press, 2012), 43, footnote 23, criticizes Spykman’s use of the term “holist” to describe the unity of human nature. He contends that the term’s origination as a “biotic or organic viewpoint” that “leaves out of consideration the entire transcendent, supra-temporal, spiritual center” renders it unhelpful for referencing the views of Reformational philosophy.

¹⁶⁰ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT*, I:180-181.

¹⁶¹ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 127.

¹⁶² Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 410.

¹⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 234.

¹⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 234-235. Dooyeweerd, “The Dangers of the Intellectual Disarmament of Christianity in Science,” 98, remarks, “Calvin’s thought left no room for an autonomous natural reason, because he began once more to take the radical significance of the fall and of redemption in Jesus Christ seriously, also for this life.”

manifestations of our life.”¹⁶⁵ The heart serves as the point at which one transcends the self, exercising the basic religious impulse implanted by God; it is the point that unites the manifold diversities of human existence.¹⁶⁶ Without attempting to define the “heart” in terms of a philosophical supra-temporality as Dooyeweerd does,¹⁶⁷ Spykman asserts that in “the pages of biblical revelation the word ‘heart’ refers consistently to the whole man,” not to “some part of human response to revelation.”¹⁶⁸ Vollenhoven, commenting on Proverbs 4.23 in support of the term “heart,” says that when Proverbs links the heart with the “issues of life,” it refers “to the two religious directions in which the functions work in the case of humans.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, the heart is the “pre-functional” source of the “two religious directions” that human beings manifest in the full range of human functions.¹⁷⁰

Spykman believes this pre-theoretical understanding of “heart” as the religious center of human beings provides a biblical handle on humanity’s creational status and the present and future experience of redemption. A person’s God-imaging identity and office encompass the entire self as well as the entirety of God’s creation. This concurs with Dooyeweerd’s sense of the unbreakable connection between one’s religious direction and that of the creation entrusted to human care.¹⁷¹ Redemption also encompasses the entire life as the believer is called to reclaim the meaning of human office in and for creation and to hope for the full restoration of all human capacities in the resurrection.¹⁷² The crux of the matter is that the concept of “heart” prevents a reduction of religious orientation to one aspect of humanity (soul or spirit) with little or no meaning for bodily functions. A view of the person as

¹⁶⁵ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 127. Henderson, *Illuminating Law*, 115, assessing “The Epistemological Significance of ‘Heart,’” explains that Dooyeweerd’s idea of “heart” “allowed [him] to gradually break with the traditional Western idea of ‘reason’ and to approach knowledge as a finite creaturely function, limited and dependent, operating under particular conditions.”

¹⁶⁶ Smith, in his introduction to *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, ix, explains that when the self “transcends itself,” it “seeks meaning outside of itself in its Origin.” Dooyeweerd’s understanding of the self “seeks to honor both the multidimensionality of the self, as well as the religious nature of the self which drives it to find meaning in its Origin.”

¹⁶⁷ Steen, *Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd’s Thought*, 24f., finds Dooyeweerd’s idea of supra-temporality problematic at various levels and mentions Vollenhoven’s disagreement on this matter and on the related issue of cosmic time. Philip Blosser, “Reconnoitering Dooyeweerd’s Theory of Man,” *Philosophia Reformata* 58, no. 2 (1993): 204, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24708915>, suggests Dooyeweerd falls back on dualism with his division of man into temporal/supra-temporal. Spykman avoids this, seeking to account theologically – not philosophically – for the scriptural witness to both the unity and disunity experienced by man.

¹⁶⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 217.

¹⁶⁹ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 61.

¹⁷⁰ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 61.

¹⁷¹ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT II*: 52-53, argues that “in man the whole ‘earthly’ temporal cosmos finds its religious root, its creaturely fullness of meaning.” He concludes, “[T]his inorganic nature . . . has no existence apart from man, and man has been created as *the lord* of the creation.”

¹⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 552.

inescapably religious at the very core and in the entirety of functions and expressions brings clarity to humanity's original office in creation and to the nature and goal of redemption.

Denying any "biblical origin" for the scholastic view that prioritizes reason, Dooyeweerd challenges Christian accommodation that aids and abets reason's pretended autonomy. "If 'reason' indeed is to be seen as the essential core of human nature . . . then no room is left for the *radical* depravity of human nature as an effect of the fall."¹⁷³ Affirming the depravity of the whole person, including "natural reason," leads Dooyeweerd to reject the soul as the "substantial form" of human nature.¹⁷⁴ He also questions the traditional manner of speaking about death, since it promotes the idea that "the rational soul continues to exist as an independent substance after the separation from the body, i.e., after death."¹⁷⁵ Despite the charges of their critics, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven insist that their work does not advocate an unscriptural view of death.¹⁷⁶ Rather, their reflections demonstrate a desire to guard against all conceptions of the soul as an "independent substance."

Spykman joins this conversation by rethinking the meaning of biblical terms that have been interpreted as implying a strict division between body and soul. He asks, "Does a dichotomous model of man really do justice to the best in biblical hermeneutics within the Reformed tradition?"¹⁷⁷ Spykman's position is that Scripture presents a unified model of personhood that should frame reflection on the difficult questions about existence. He, like Dooyeweerd, believes the doctrine of the immortality of the soul "contradicts the biblical view of the whole man in his relationship to God, fellowmen, and the cosmos."¹⁷⁸ To argue for the immortality of the soul is, in Spykman's perspective, to argue for the reality of two separate substances comprising human nature. Rather, he refers to the fact that death is "an antinormative state of affairs" from which it is difficult "to draw normative conclusions."¹⁷⁹ In other words, a revelationally-defined doctrine of the person's unity should control theological reflections on death, rather than the mystery of death defining theological reflection on human nature. As to the

¹⁷³ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 157.

¹⁷⁴ Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 157. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 214, contends that when Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd use the word "heart," they do not intend a heart-body dichotomy similar to that of "body-soul," but "they mean rather by the term 'heart' to refer to the whole man as he functions in all his aspects in the midst of his created actuality."

¹⁷⁵ Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 127.

¹⁷⁶ William Young, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy: The Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought since the Time of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein, 1952), 139-143, outlines some of the criticism Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven received; he holds that though they did not believe in the immortality of the soul as traditionally conceived, that did not imply a rejection of the heart's existence after death.

¹⁷⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 237.

¹⁷⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 239.

¹⁷⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 244.

intermediate state, Spykman sets Scripture as the limit for theological knowledge, citing Paul's words that those who have died in Christ are "with Christ" (II Corinthians 5.8).¹⁸⁰

Spykman acknowledges that "death literally defies every attempt at a satisfying theoretical analysis."¹⁸¹ In keeping with his desired method to say no more nor less than Scripture, he appeals to Paul's "we" statements in Romans 14.7-9 as the outer limit of what can confidently be said about death and resurrection: it is we, ourselves, who live, die, and are raised again.¹⁸² Spykman attempts to move beyond the traditional questions that arise from the "deforming influences of Greek philosophy on the Christian religion"¹⁸³ to the implications of a radical redemption that has consequences for "[a]ll human behavior, in its profoundest depths as well as in the full range of its external manifestations."¹⁸⁴

II.3. Doctrinal Considerations: Covenant-Kingdom Realities

The Cosmological Philosophy leaves its stamp on Spykman's framing of topics such as the subjective experience of redemption, common grace, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Spykman seldom mentions the influence of Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Schilder, nor does he follow them at every point. Nevertheless, the covenant-kingdom paradigm that Spykman adopts is rooted in the correspondence between creation and redemption, an emphasis characteristic of his Dutch Reformed philosophical heritage.

II.3.1. The Experience of Redemption

Though Spykman discusses the believer's experience of redemption via regeneration, justification, sanctification, and prayer, he appeals in a more over-arching way to the believer's experience of discerning creation ordinances through the revelation of Scripture. This perspective, so key to understanding Spykman's connection to his tradition and his development of it, has been reviewed at many points already throughout this project. Essentially, "Scripture is the noetic key to a right understanding of the ontic order of created reality."¹⁸⁵ With Scripture, "we can begin to arrive at a renewed understanding of God's Word for creation"¹⁸⁶ and a "knowledge of the enduring norms of

¹⁸⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 550.

¹⁸¹ Spykman, *RT*, 244.

¹⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 245.

¹⁸³ Spykman, *RT*, 233.

¹⁸⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 238.

¹⁸⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 76. Steen, *Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, 303, as a representative of the tradition and echoing Klaas J. Popma (1903-1986), urges, "It should be stressed that man, put in his proper place by the redirecting, replacing Word of God gains knowledge of the world and of its lawfulness."

¹⁸⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 77.

God's creational Word."¹⁸⁷ Recognition of the interrelation of God's creating and redeeming works and the believer's knowledge of them through Scripture "unlocks the biblical idea of Christian freedom, of Christian witness, of Christian calling in the world."¹⁸⁸ For Spykman, the freedom, witness, and calling of Christians are realities to be lived out not only privately and internally but in the public arena, as instruments of God's kingdom work within the world's structures.

Spykman's exploration of "The Christian Life" evidences this kingdom focus and builds on his suppositions regarding Scripture's illumination of creation ordinances. Here he begins with Bavinck's insistence that to be a Christian is to be truly and fully human.¹⁸⁹ Dooyeweerd, attuned to the Bavinckian tradition, provides what might be called the philosophical premise for Spykman's theological statements. Dooyeweerd identifies "the horizon of human experience" as "our 'earthly' cosmos as it is given in the Divine order of the creation."¹⁹⁰ He goes on to say, "The fall into sin has obfuscated our experiential horizon by closing it to the light of Divine Truth. In the light of Divine Revelation the horizon of human experience is opened again and extricated from the prejudices of our obfuscated understanding."¹⁹¹ Salvation from sin, then, entails a renewal of one's mind to perceive the structural dimensions of creation, along with a renewal of one's ability to pursue the direction of obedience and faithfulness.

Vollenhoven and Schilder, too, each from his unique vantage point, assume the necessity of the inscripturated Word for discerning obedient movements within the larger context of creation. Vollenhoven states, "Holy Scripture is peculiar in that its words point toward created things as well as toward the Creator."¹⁹² In this statement, he is arguing for the real, ongoing, and dynamic relationship between the Creator and the created, characterized by the subjection of all creatures to His Law-Word. For human beings, who stand under God and over creation, God's "law governing the cosmos" becomes "knowable by the light of the word of God."¹⁹³ The possibility of science, not as the process of obtaining knowledge from an independent source within the cosmos but as the work of investigating the cosmos and God's laws as illumined by God's written Word, has true significance for the believer.

¹⁸⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 87.

¹⁸⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 90.

¹⁸⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 480.

¹⁹⁰ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT II*:548.

¹⁹¹ Dooyeweerd, *NCTT II*:549.

¹⁹² Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 14.

¹⁹³ Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 123.

Schilder is interested in recovering the norms of creation's original structure as part of the "office-consciousness"¹⁹⁴ of believers who have a positive, though limited, cultural task.¹⁹⁵ In keeping with the neo-Calvinist rejection of all shades of natural theology, Schilder contends, "'Nature,' enigmatic as it is, does not teach anything unless it is illumined by Scripture."¹⁹⁶ He illustrates this point by contrasting the Calvinist "resistance" to the political and "cultural chaos" of Europe in the mid-twentieth century with the capitulation by "Lutheran countries" to destructive political philosophies.¹⁹⁷ The difference, according to Schilder, is a reading of the norms based on Reformation principles rooted in Scripture versus a weighing of "values" that does not consider deeply enough the biblical view of history from first to last.¹⁹⁸ The process of "subject[ing] the whole of life to promises and norms" through the "administration of God's Word" rests with the institutional church, and thus God's people are entrusted with the outworking of those norms in particular times and places.¹⁹⁹ These are the "vestiges of the paradisaal gifts," known to believers "in accordance with the strength and acuity of their faith's understanding," though Schilder acknowledges this reservedly, referencing the Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4, in its qualification concerning the increased suppression of the "light of nature" within the world.²⁰⁰

Spykman writes of "[r]eillumined creation signposts," made visible by Scripture's light, that provide direction for the Christian's pilgrimage.²⁰¹ Whether for scientific pursuits, à la Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, or for application in the many vocations of life with the goal "*to draw out of the world . . . all that God has put into it*,"²⁰² as Schilder urges, the creational Word presents Christians with essential tasks that represent their participation in human office, renewed by Christ. This does not negate the "personal blessing" of the experience of "rebirth," but it requires that one also "work [the renewal] out in reborn marriages, reborn friendships, even reborn work habits and reborn politics."²⁰³ Though Spykman invests greater hope in the possibility of experiencing the effects of renewal in this "time

¹⁹⁴ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 170.

¹⁹⁵ It should be noted that Schilder does not encourage the discernment of norms in an abstract or culturally-defined sense; rather, in *Christ and Culture*, 80, he directs believers to listen to "*commandments-of-instruction from the mouth of their Father-Lawgiver*."

¹⁹⁶ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 170.

¹⁹⁷ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 101-102.

¹⁹⁸ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 102.

¹⁹⁹ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 158-159.

²⁰⁰ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 115.

²⁰¹ Spykman, *RT*, 485.

²⁰² Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 173.

²⁰³ Spykman, *RT*, 490.

between the times,” he agrees with Schilder’s premise that any enactment of kingdom life in the present age “is possible only in an obedience regained through the Spirit of Christ.”²⁰⁴

II.3.2. Ecclesiology, Common Grace, and Eschatology

Schilder links the believer’s kingdom engagement closely to ecclesiology, as the primary context for positive culture-building, and to eschatology, as the purpose of the church’s work in and for culture. Spykman works along similar lines but differs from Schilder in attributing greater cultural development to believers’ work as members of God’s kingdom than to their participation in the local church. Spykman’s ecclesiology utilizes Kuyper’s distinction between church as institute and Church as organism, a distinction that Schilder rejects.²⁰⁵ Though Schilder exhorts God’s people to kingdom work that has a broader scope than the institutional church, he contends that the work of God’s people beyond the bounds of the institutional church “is incorrectly called ‘the church as organism.’”²⁰⁶ He claims that the work done in and for the institutional church comprises the most significant cultural work of Christians.²⁰⁷

Spykman believes that “some such distinction” as that between church as institute and Church as organism “is inescapable,” remarking that even “[i]n the age of the Reformers the distinction . . . served . . . as a principle of differentiation,” though the Reformers did not use Kuyper’s terminology.²⁰⁸ He considers that the “gatherings of the institutional church,” centered on the proclamation of the gospel, serve “a vitally important instrumental role in the life of the Church.”²⁰⁹ Acknowledging the reality of the antithesis between church and world, Spykman nevertheless orients his discussion of the institutional church to its interaction with and influence upon the world.²¹⁰ As a “bridge” to his discussion of the characteristics of the Church as organism, Spykman highlights three roles by which the institutional church turns toward its responsibility to and in the world: as witness, as model, and as agent.²¹¹

²⁰⁴ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 101. Spykman, *RT*, 181, says, “Scripture refocuses our sights so that we can begin anew to sense the constant and dynamic holding and healing power of God’s Word as it calls us to an obedient response. By the light of Scripture, therefore, we are summoned to discern the abiding norms of the creation order.”

²⁰⁵ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 158.

²⁰⁶ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 158.

²⁰⁷ See his closing words of *Christ and Culture*, 174, describing the “wise ward elder” as a “cultural force.”

²⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 430-431.

²⁰⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 432.

²¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 435-438.

²¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 467-468.

The church's mission in the world depends upon the reality of the Holy Spirit's work in the world. Spykman, like many other advocates of the common grace tradition, references Calvin's positive and negative evaluation of the scientific and artistic gifts and accomplishments of unbelievers.²¹² Despite intense reflection on the issue of "common grace," the Reformed tradition continues to wrestle with how to categorize the virtues exhibited by unregenerate people as well as their contributions to society. Unlike Schilder²¹³ (and the Antitheticalist sector within the Christian Reformed Church that opposed the "common grace" position adopted by the 1924 Synod²¹⁴), Spykman does not hesitate to apply the term "grace" to God's preserving²¹⁵ and restraining²¹⁶ work in relation to man's lived experience. He does, however, urge upon his readers a less dualistic mindset concerning the questions involved in the problem by recognizing a single grace that preserves and restrains where unbelief holds sway but brings redemption to those who believe.²¹⁷

Spykman conceives of the *antithesis* as being closely interwoven with *radical depravity* and the "single grace" of God at work in the world. By presenting all three realities as "directional and orientational concepts" that "go hand in hand . . . throughout this present dispensation,"²¹⁸ he attempts to eradicate the opposition between the antithesis and so-called "common grace" that has engendered discord among Reformed groups in North America for nearly a century.

Some Christians claim: "I am a common grace man!" Others assert: "I am for the antithesis!" This is a false dilemma. We must maintain a biblical balance between the two. But in it all the central accent must fall on the *admiratio Dei* (admiration of God), as Calvin puts it, the adoration of God for what He is still able to accomplish in and through his fallen world.²¹⁹

Dooyeweerd also calls for unity on this issue "in Reformational-christian circles" and asserts that "'common grace' does not weaken or eliminate the antithesis."²²⁰ For Spykman, the cross of Jesus Christ, who is "cosmic Lord" and "also King of common grace," serves as the source of divine generosity in the interim between the kingdom's inbreaking and its consummation. He focuses on the cross as "the

²¹² Spykman, "Common Grace," 16, and *RT*, 424-425. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.12-17.

²¹³ Schilder's imprisonment by the Germans in 1940 and his deposition by the Synod of Utrecht in 1944 (related partly to his stance on common grace) surely contributed to his subdued attitude toward cultural achievement. Gootjes, "Schilder on Christ and Culture," 40, gives a brief overview of the darkening of cultural outlook that occurred between Kuyper's and Schilder's times. Douma, *Algemene Genade*, 363, describes him "as a prophetic preacher . . . in a situation of increasing worldliness."

²¹⁴ Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 103, 111-114

²¹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 320-321.

²¹⁶ Spykman, "Common Grace," 16-17.

²¹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 426.

²¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 320-321.

²¹⁹ Spykman, "Common Grace," 17.

²²⁰ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 38.

great divider among men,"²²¹ and thus, in a manner reminiscent of Schilder's emphasis, prevents common grace from overshadowing the reality of the antithesis. This "running encounter between two conflicting ways of life" is pervasive.²²² Participation by unbelievers in creational patterns and norms owes its reality to the curbing of sin and the restraint of God's judgment.²²³

Spykman disagrees with those who would attribute the good observed among the unregenerate as due to the "so-called 'remnants' or 'vestiges' of goodness which presumably survived the devastations of the fall."²²⁴ This addresses one of Schilder's concerns about those who interpret the "light of nature" too optimistically.²²⁵ Spykman also denies that "[r]estraining grace is . . . a halfway house to redeeming grace" or that common grace serves as "a 'common ground' between believers and unbelievers."²²⁶ In other words, common grace does not function as a peg in a natural theology that promotes a person's ability to reach God through reason or virtue. Only God's grace acting redeemingly upon the human heart brings salvation, and only God's grace acting conservingly "can restrain total depravity and soften the antithesis."²²⁷ What does this mean for the church and her tasks with respect to the world? Spykman concludes that holding total depravity, the antithesis, and the conserving/preserving aspect of God's grace together in biblical tension guards against the errors committed by the church when she withdraws from the world or when she pursues "easy accommodation and uncritical acceptance" of the world in its directional opposition to God.²²⁸

The significance of the antithesis emerges again in Spykman's discussion of eschatology. Considering both the "already" and the "not yet" dimensions of the coming Kingdom, Spykman notes, "The 'already' aspect does not relieve but intensifies the awesome reality of kingdoms in conflict in every sphere of life."²²⁹ This continuing antithesis, the effects of which are restrained throughout human history, will culminate in the antichrist just before "the dawning of the great 'day of the Lord.'"²³⁰ At that time "the restrainer and his restraints" will be withdrawn, perhaps heralding "the withdrawal of

²²¹ Spykman, "Common Grace," 16.

²²² Spykman, *RT*, 321.

²²³ Spykman thinks of divine restraint as an aspect of "preserving grace" (*RT*, 320-321), whereas, according to Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 89, "the fact that the gifts of creation blossom and expand is a matter not of grace but of nature."

²²⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 320.

²²⁵ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 115-117, 143.

²²⁶ Spykman, "Common Grace," 17.

²²⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 320.

²²⁸ Spykman, "Common Grace," 17. Though Schilder gives more weight to the antithesis, he sees that we should not "be stupefied by either cultural optimism or cultural contempt" (*Christ and Culture*, 169).

²²⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 526.

²³⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 547.

the restraining, preserving, conserving influences of God's 'common grace,'" which will "set the antithesis between good and evil in stark and untempered relief."²³¹ Here Spykman demonstrates his balancing of the antithesis and "common grace." God's restraining and conserving grace does not erase the antithesis, and the antithesis, despite the reality of the conflict it indicates, does not erase the generosity of God in permitting both regenerate and unregenerate to participate in cultural tasks. Though there is "no room for easy triumphalism in kingdom living,"²³² it is also true, according to Spykman, that "[t]he expectation of the future reinforces our present mandate."²³³ The creational norms revealed by God's Word and renewed by and in Christ continue to define God's present calling upon the lives of his people.²³⁴

Part III: Evaluation

Spykman's subscription to the basic tenets of the Cosmological Philosophy involves both risk and reward. Unsettled by the philosophical foundations of historic Reformed theology, he treks through the minefields of unbiblical and unserviceable concepts to more serviceable ones that are less yielding to an unbiblical dichotomy of reality. Though this puts him at odds with the theological heirs of Van Raalte, he believes it honors the Reformed tradition's commitment to continue reforming. It also represents an opportunity to shape the broader evangelical tradition in North America with the stimulating insights of neo-Calvinism. Taking creation, fall, redemption, and consummation seriously, Spykman strives for a biblical balance in his approach to formidable topics such as anthropology and common grace, without ignoring the prophetic voice and the reality of divine judgment. Moving forward to Spykman's dialogue with Barth and Berkouwer, it will be critical to assess the theological pressures and trends of the second half of the twentieth century as they bear upon his central conception of the mediating, threefold Word.

²³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 549.

²³² Spykman, *RT*, 542.

²³³ Spykman, *RT*, 529. Spykman upholds the validity of Schilder's concern with the pre-Fall mandate, as interpreted by Douma, *Christ and Culture*, 146, footnote 174: "And thus we must beware of a single-track theology that does speak about grace, but not about task and mandate."

²³⁴ If S. U. Zuidema is correct, Kuyper's influence on Spykman at this point is obvious. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," trans. Harry Van Dyke, in *Communication and Confrontation: A Philosophical Appraisal and Critique of Modern Society and Contemporary Thought* (Assen/Kampen: Royal VanGorcum/J. H. Kok, 1972), 97, says, "His [Kuyper's] *Pro Rege* call and his doctrine of the antithesis were always intrinsically connected with the acceptance and recognition of the creation ordinances and the creation structures This was the only way Kuyper knew of that avoided a contradiction between creation and redemption, between common grace and particular grace. Creation was to be anything but 'eliminated,' redemption was to be anything but 'perpendicular' to God's work of creation."

Chapter 5

Theological Methodology and Divine Revelation: Gordon J. Spykman in Conversation with Karl Barth

How does one best delineate the relationship between Gordon Spykman and Karl Barth? Spykman's primary dialogue with Barth revolves around the question of theological methodology and how it both shapes and is shaped by one's definition of divine revelation. Assessing the dialogue involves consideration of Spykman's arguments; relevant sections of Barth's work; criticisms issued by Barth's Reformed contemporaries (primarily Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, because Spykman attaches importance to Berkouwer's assessment); and select analyses of Barth's project in recent scholarship. This assessment is undertaken with appreciation for the complexity of Barth's work and the changes in his views over time.¹ Spykman made no claim to being a Barth scholar, nor did he analyze Barth's work in a detailed way. His main concern was to present the general implications of Barth's theological method and to propose a methodological paradigm that is truer to Scripture. The validity of his Barth analysis is secondary to the way in which he engaged and used what he understood to be true of Barth. This evaluation centers on whether Spykman's engagement with Barth enabled him to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing reformation of Reformed theology.

Part I: The Historical Context for Karl Barth's Theological Work

Barth's tremendous influence on twentieth century dogmatics necessitates evaluating theological statements in relation to his position.² The challenges he issues to liberalism³ as well as his re-casting of traditional Reformed doctrines⁴ demand thoughtful analysis and response. Due to Barth's influence, "The proclamation of the Church, her dogma, the authority of Scripture and its proper interpretation, election, the image of God, creation and redemption – all of these subjects have come to stand in the center of intense theological discussion."⁵ In light of this, Spykman's interest in theological

¹ Bruce L. McCormack, introduction to *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 17-18.

² Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 45.

³ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 15-16, mentions specifically Barth's defense of the virgin birth, the "historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and "traditional Christological dogma." See also pp. 386-388.

⁴ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 14-15, notes that Barth "acknowledges explicitly that on fundamental points he departs from the Reformers" in the interest of being "true to the fundamental principle of the Reformation, namely the normativity of the Word of God."

⁵ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 9-10.

method, the relationship of philosophy and theology, and especially creation and redemption require him to account for his conclusions against the background of Barth.

Spykman notes the theological-historical setting for Karl Barth's ground-breaking theology, which emerged around 1920: the Great War had exposed the spiritual bankruptcy of classic liberalism. Countering this spiritual bankruptcy, Barth introduced to the theological world "what he regarded as a twentieth-century reinterpretation of [John] Calvin's theology" that would function as an "alternative to both Thomism and liberalism."⁶ Against these "forms of anthropocentric theology,"⁷ Barth proclaims the centrality of the Word of God and divine sovereignty in revelation. Against the "quest for the historical Jesus," an extension of classic liberalism that defines "theology's task" as "one with that of science," Barth places theological weight on the kerygma, the preaching and proclamation of God's revelational encounters.⁸ Spykman ultimately assesses Barth's position as one of "kerygma detached from history."⁹ However, this does not imply that Barth refuses to acknowledge the real history of Jesus; indeed, he affirms orthodox Christian doctrines such as the virgin birth and the resurrection.¹⁰ In this way, Barth scored a victory for orthodoxy, giving fresh validity to a serious acceptance of Scripture and a theocentric dogmatics. In Spykman's judgment, though, this historical affirmation is secondary to Barth's emphasis on the historical "miracle" as a witness to the "mystery" of the Incarnation, with the accent falling on the transcendent Word of God.¹¹ The tension between history and kerygma that Spykman discerns in Barth's thought represents his general methodological problem: the transcendent accent overwhelms the historical immanence of revelation.

One cannot ignore the interplay between Barth's theological positions and the political events of his time. In the years prior to World War II, Barth's *von oben* (from above) approach to dogmatics, being "completely open to that which is beyond,"¹² contrasted starkly with the appeals of German National

⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 32.

⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 47, 52. Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 47, cautions, "We cannot get hold of Barth's deepest intentions unless we keep in view the sharp polemics that he was caught up in especially in the early period. . . . For Barth, the various theologies of the time were all forms of anthropocentric theology – theology in which not God, but man was the focus."

⁸ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 43. See also Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 117.

⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 386-388. David Guretzki, *An Explorer's Guide to Karl Barth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 78, advises, "[R]eaders must be aware primarily that Barth's concept of history is meant to address the 'historicists' of his day."

¹⁰ Unlike Emil Brunner, whose "attacks" on the virgin birth are well known; see Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 16.

¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 414-415. On pp. 293-294, Spykman writes that "Barth's distinction between miracle and mystery, interpreted as form and matter, betrays the marks of an existentially oriented reversion to the dualist tendencies of Protestant scholasticism."

¹² Spykman, *RT*, 34.

Socialism. This movement's ascendance to power and control relied on a theology *von unten* (from below) sourced from "events and powers, figures and truths . . . besides this one Word of God,"¹³ by which its proponents justified their radically anti-Christian program.¹⁴ Even during the 1920's Barth had distanced himself from other theologians who were also considered representatives of the so-called Dialectical Theology, such as Emil Brunner (1889-1966), Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1968), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). In his view they all tended toward a kind of "natural theology."¹⁵ The way in which Gogarten and others used the so-called "creation ordinances" to legitimize Nazi politics of "blood and soil" confirmed to Barth once more the correctness of his view.¹⁶ Barth's stance against the anti-biblical relationship of state and church in Nazi Germany proved costly, as he was forced from his teaching position at the University of Bonn in 1935. This stance was formalized in the Barmen Declaration, and "Barth's major role in drafting the Barmen Declaration (1934)"¹⁷ demonstrates his commitment to the Word of God as the transcendent source of theology.

Though Spykman does apply the descriptor "neo-orthodoxy" to the theological movement represented by Barth and some of his contemporaries, he expresses an understanding of Barth's program that extends beyond the typical use of the "neo-orthodoxy" label in North American circles of the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ Recounting Barth's break with liberalism, Spykman proceeds to analyze Barth's "radically new departure" from "rational apologetics, natural theology, religious phenomena, experiential reflection, philosophical groundwork, or any other kind of introductory approach to theology."¹⁹ He recognizes "healthy correctives" within Barth's theological approach, but he also

¹³ "The Theological Declaration of Barmen," in *Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (USA) (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1999), 249.

¹⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 34-35.

¹⁵ Gerard den Hertog, 'Barths „Nein“ zur „natürlichen Theologie“ im „Streit um den rechten Gehorsam in der Theologie“: Kampfparole und/oder Prinzipielle Absage?', *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 26, no. 1 (2010): 45-46.

¹⁶ See Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 53-54.

¹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 33.

¹⁸ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 24-25, accessed June 4, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central, observes that at the time of his writing the "'neo-orthodox' reading of Barth" remained "the predominant one in the English-speaking world." McCormack has tried to expose the "neo-orthodox" interpretation of Barth as a "misreading" by demonstrating Barth's long-term adherence to a dialectical method (18, 28). Carl F. H. Henry, preface to *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 7, 9, summarizes the ideas that mid-twentieth century evangelical theologians associated with "neo-orthodox" thought: "[i]ndebtedness to Kant and Kierkegaard . . . in formulating the divine-human encounter"; "injustice to the revelation-status of Scripture"; "disparagement of the general divine revelation in nature and conscience"; "reduction of Scripture to merely an instrumental framework for dynamic divine-human encounter."

¹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 31-32, 34.

questions the extent of Barth's break with "existential philosophy in the line of Kierkegaard" and with "the basic antinomies . . . of older grace/nature schemes."²⁰ His brief analysis offers insights related mainly to the methodology and structure of Barth's work. These insights resonate with more recent Barth scholarship that emphasizes a significant degree of continuity between Barth's mature work and his former context of dialectical theology funded by the assumptions of nineteenth century liberalism.²¹ It is to the position of Barth's theological methodology within the context of past and contemporary dogmatics that Spykman applies his criticism, with a view toward aiding Reformed theology to "learn from Barth and yet go a better way."²²

Part II: Theological Methodology

So radical was Barth's *von oben* method in contradistinction to that of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who relegated theology to the realm of religious experience and ethics,²³ that "[a]ll contemporary theologies are therefore obliged to define themselves structurally in relationship to the two great polar theologians of modernity"²⁴ – Barth and Schleiermacher. Because of their opposing starting points, Spykman names Barth and Schleiermacher the "two main contenders for dominance in contemporary disputes on prolegomena."²⁵ He describes their basic difference: "The Barthian tradition makes God the great Subject and man the object of divine activity; that of Schleiermacher sees man as the subject and God as the object and goal of human potentiality."²⁶ Barth traces the theological "turn to the subject" to sixteenth-century Protestant orthodoxy and attributes its later development to Schleiermacher, who sought "to interpret Christianity itself, in the form of a concrete historical analysis of human existence, within the framework of a general doctrine of man."²⁷ Barth concedes that the term "religious experience" in and of itself is not problematic, but Schleiermacher's method of connecting man's religious experience to an innate "religious capacity of man" or "potentiality . . . native to him as man"

²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 33, 35. Spykman, "Confessional Hermeneutic," 5-6, writes that the structure of neo-orthodoxy shares the same "dialectical problematic" of Liberalism and Fundamentalism, "only more dynamic under the influence of existential thought."

²¹ See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 27-28; Richard A. Muller, "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology into the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (Spr 1989): 39-40, accessed June 24, 2016, ATLA.

²² Spykman, *RT*, 35.

²³ Spykman, *RT*, 31.

²⁴ Spykman, "Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History," 8-9.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 49.

²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 49.

²⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter *CD*) I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd ed., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (London/New York: Continuum/T&T Clark International, 2004), 192.

transforms the revelational encounter into little more than a religious experience.²⁸ To this Barth must object.

Spykman also objects to Schleiermacher's subjectivism, but he considers both Barth's and Schleiermacher's theological methods to be lacking due to continued adherence to two-factor theologies that overload either God or humanity – either the divine initiative or human capability.²⁹ To overcome this dilemma, Spykman seeks to chart a normative mediating factor between God and humanity. Working to this end, he advocates a Christian philosophy. For Spykman, the normative mediating factor for theological reflection – God's Word – spans creation and redemption. This enables development of a Christian philosophy, conceived as an outworking of a Christian worldview based on revelational givens, which gives shape to the work of dogmatics.³⁰ Barth, on the other hand, regards such a task as illegitimate, dismissing the concepts of Christian worldview and Christian philosophy and defining the task of dogmatics in redemptive terms.³¹ Thus, Spykman's perspective on proper prolegomena for the dogmatic task differs markedly from that of Barth. His admonition to "learn from Barth and yet go a better way" includes four points:

(1) prolegomena is a completely integral part of theology as a whole; (2) faith is the common starting point for prolegomena as well as dogmatics; (3) creational revelation does not imply natural theology; and (4) the long-standing nature/grace and reason/faith dichotomies are not normative for defining the relationship between prolegomena and dogmatics.³²

Sections II.1 and II.2 explore Spykman's application of these points to theological methodology and the doctrine of revelation, in the context of his interpretation of Barth, while II.3 considers the impact of the subject/object dilemma on Barth's and Spykman's differing methodological approaches.

II.1. The Prolegomena Puzzle: How Do Prolegomena Fit with Dogmatics?

When defining the nature and content of prolegomena, Barth denies a positive position for either Christian philosophy or worldview. He judges that for "a scientific theology" operating "according to the criterion of the Church's own principle," "There never has actually been a *philosophia christiana*,

²⁸ Barth, *CD I/1*, 193.

²⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 49-50.

³⁰ Spykman considers the Kuyperian "worldview" concept a fruitful one for understanding pre-theoretical commitments and their impact on more critical thought-patterns such as philosophy and theology. See *RT*, 98-102.

³¹ Barth, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 109, says of Calvin that, though "the knowledge of God in Christ includes a real knowledge of the true God in creation," by this "Calvin does not mean that room should be made after all for a Christian philosophy of nature and history, a Christian anthropology and psychology . . ."

³² Spykman, *RT*, 35.

for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*.³³ Barth's distaste for the idea of *Weltanschauung* is related to its German origin and usage, which he categorizes as a "from below" concept – humanity reasoning from creation toward God.³⁴ Spykman finds room for a *Weltanschauung* and a Christian philosophy, not as a substitution of the creation for the Creator, but as an exercise of discerning principles – ordained and spoken by the Creator – that hold for created reality. He believes their basis lies in Scripture, which begins with God the Creator and the meaning he gives to creation. By acknowledging the Word in and for creation as the source for a Christian worldview and philosophy Spykman does not propose a rational basis or substructure for dogmatics but demonstrates the original significance of creation and its present relationship to redemption.

Spykman interprets Barth's rejection of theological prolegomena in the sense of a rational or subjective "substructure for Christian dogmatics"³⁵ to be a major departure from the traditional manner of theological reflection. He explains, "For in the past, almost universally, philosophical prolegomena functioned as an antecedent and independently grounded system of thought" for dogmatics.³⁶ Barth departs from traditional prolegomenal approaches because he discerns "some notion of a natural or general revelation" in the Thomist use of reason and in the modern use of subjective experience as the basis for prolegomena.³⁷ Spykman, though he agrees with Barth's "departure" from traditional prolegomena, refuses to accept the either/or apparent in Barth's substitution of "the otherness of God" for reason and experience. Against a limiting of prolegomena to that which is "located within the very bounds of dogmatics"³⁸ à la Barth but also against an uncritical adoption of prolegomena funded by non-Christian presuppositions, Spykman argues for a comprehensive prolegomenon that is "perspectively unified"³⁹ with the dogmatics it serves. Sympathizing with Barth's "negative judgment on philosophy" due to the typical use of philosophical prolegomena as "an antecedent and independently grounded system of thought," Spykman nevertheless defends its usefulness and necessity when it is "of one piece" with dogmatics.⁴⁰ "Such integration is possible only if philosophical prolegomena and dogmatic

³³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 6.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM, 2001), 52. Barth offers a very pointed statement concerning world-view in *CD III/3, The Doctrine of Creation*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 18: "For a world-view is an opinion, postulate and hypothesis even when it pretends to be Christian."

³⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 32.

³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 101.

³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 32-33.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 46.

³⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 101.

⁴⁰ Spykman, "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," 21-22.

theology are made to share a common confessional footing.”⁴¹ Spykman points out that every theology must “render account” for its underlying “philosophical perspective.”⁴² On this basis, Spykman commends a worldview for the “revelational pointers” it provides for prolegomena and for theology.⁴³

Barth appears to acknowledge the impossibility of excluding philosophy from dogmatics when he says, “In practice it is not in our power to check that incursion of philosophy into dogmatics.”⁴⁴ Even so, he will not allow philosophy, which in his view cannot be “Christian,” to usurp control over dogmatics, which exists “for the sake of” proclamation.⁴⁵ Barth establishes Christology as “the point . . . at which is fixed the relation between theology and philosophy,”⁴⁶ while Spykman grounds that point in the Word expressed in creation. Barth will not consider a Christian philosophy, because he will not admit the possibility of revelation apart from reconciliation in Jesus Christ. On the very basis of that reconciliation, Spykman believes that a Christian philosophy that interprets general occurrences in light of the unity of God’s creative and redemptive work is viable and valid.

Barth does use the term “prolegomena” as the “things that need to be said first,”⁴⁷ which he defines as follows: “the attempt to give an explicit account of the particular way of knowledge taken in dogmatics, or, as we might also say, of the particular point from which we are to look, think and judge in dogmatics.”⁴⁸ He asserts that the “complex of problems” stemming from the relation between reason and revelation has no place in dogmatic prolegomena, for its purpose is epistemological in nature; it assumes the priority of revelation and concerns itself with “What is true human knowledge of divine revelation?”⁴⁹ Spykman, in fact, would agree with Barth’s assessment of dogmatic prolegomena at this point. The dynamic of reason and revelation does not constitute the focus of his prolegomenon.

⁴¹ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 22.

⁴² Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 20-21.

⁴³ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 22.

⁴⁴ Barth, *CD I/1*, 84. McCormack, “Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective,” 35, calls Barth a “transfoundationalist,” meaning he intended “to transcend philosophical foundations without negating them.” McCormack believes that Barth “refused to allow his philosophical foundations to provide an ultimate ground for his theological truth-claims.”

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 84, 87. Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 20, writes of Barth’s position: “Philosophical elements, he holds, can be employed in the service of theological activity. . . . Only then, in his opinion, does a real danger come into being, when a certain philosophy is made the foundation of theology.”

⁴⁶ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 57.

⁴⁷ Translation of “*die zuerst zu sagenden Dinge*” by Gerard den Hertog, from *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1*, 41 (*CD I/1*, 42). Spykman offers a similar translation: “[I]t deals not with things which are to be said beforehand (*vorher*), but at the beginning (*zuerst*).”

⁴⁸ Barth, *CD I/1*, 25. On p. 287 Barth explains, “Evangelical dogmatics has to explain to itself why it thinks it should go its own distinctive way and what this way is. . . . [T]his is the task of the prolegomena to dogmatics.”

⁴⁹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 29. On p. 35 Barth claims, “As the first example of radically exhaustive prolegomena in our sense we shall have to claim the first ten chapters of the 1559 edition of Calvin’s *Institutio*.”

Cornelis van der Kooi points out that Barth, in his prolegomenon, “makes clear that he will not separate the way of knowing God from the content of the knowledge of God.”⁵⁰ Barth moves in a positive direction from the typical reason- and experience-based prolegomena to a prolegomenon that is explicitly dependent on divine revelation. This in and of itself is not so different from Spykman’s intention. What then is their difference? Barth’s prolegomenal basis consists of the soteriological forms of the Word, whereas Spykman envisions prolegomena grounded in the Word revealed in and through creation, illumined by Scripture.

Barth insists “that prolegomena to dogmatics are possible only as part of dogmatics itself.”⁵¹ In order to prohibit a basis for the dogmatic task rooted in “a prior anthropological possibility” (Modernism) or an “ecclesiastical reality” (Roman Catholicism), Barth remarks that “there can be no entering the self-enclosed circle of this concern from without.”⁵² To this, Spykman responds with a critical analogy: “Methodologically, [Barth] locked Christian theology up in its own house.”⁵³ By using this analogy, Spykman stresses that Barth’s theology so emphasizes the transcendent nature of revelation that, methodologically speaking, “[t]he only possible introduction to dogmatics is from within the enclosed circle of dogmatics itself.”⁵⁴ In Spykman’s view, it is impossible to avoid an appeal to some normative element in dogmatics; there must be an entryway into the house.

Barth, says Spykman, has rightly rejected “human religious experience”⁵⁵ as the entry point, but he has unsuccessfully closed the house, because his own definition of dogmatics relies on an historical process. He suggests that Barth depends on a subtle entry point: the “historical process of dogma formation.”⁵⁶ He bases this conclusion on his summary of Barth’s definition of dogmatics: “the church’s proclamation of the Christ of Scripture as expressed in the dogmas of Christian faith.”⁵⁷ Spykman interprets the central role of dogma formation in Barth’s model as inconsistent with Barth’s “original

⁵⁰ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 259.

⁵¹ Barth, *CD*, I/1, 42. See also Spykman, *RT*, 46.

⁵² Barth, *CD*, I/1, 41-42.

⁵³ Spykman, *RT*, 48. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 214, identifies the source of this analogy as Sperna Weiland’s characterization of Barth’s theology – “a house without doors.” Weiland’s words are as follows: “Duidelijk is, dat Karl Barth wel een grootse uiteenzetting van het christelijk geloof heeft gegeven, maar geen eigenlijke verantwoording. Zijn *Kirchliche Dogmatik* is een geweldig bouwwerk – zonder deur. Je kunt er om heen lopen, je kunt de architectuur bewonderen, en je afvragen waarom op de muur met grote letters Nein geschreven staat waar je de deur verwachtte.” (J. Sperna Weiland, ‘Er is iets aan het gebeuren’, *Wending. Maandblad voor evangelie en cultuur* 20 [1965-1966], 622.)

⁵⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 46.

⁵⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 48.

⁵⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 47-48.

⁵⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 47.

emphasis on discontinuity (revelation apart from historical reality).⁵⁸ However, it may be that Spykman has misunderstood Barth at this point. For Barth, dogma formation as a function of the Church reflects the outworking of God's sovereign election, which is a central theme for Barth and renders the Church the context for divine revelation's interface with the world.⁵⁹ From this angle, Spykman's suggestion that Barth's model gives prominence to "a horizontal factor which compromises, or at least tones down, his appeal to radical verticality"⁶⁰ cannot be supported. It may be fairer to Barth to accept the strength of Spykman's critique of his "radical verticality" while leaving behind Spykman's questionable suggestion that Barth's true prolegomena consist in an historical process.

II.2. Methodological Norm: The Word of God

The theological shockwaves caused by Barth's theology revolved around his aggressive re-centering of theology on the Word of God. Early works demonstrate this, such as "The Word of God as the Task of Theology" (1922) and "The Substance and Task of Reformed Doctrine" (1923).⁶¹ Volume I/1 of *Church Dogmatics* takes as its theme "The Doctrine of the Word of God," with the argument of Chapter I carried out on the assumption of "The Word of God as the Criterion of Dogmatics." This "reversal in theology" upended the starting points of reason and experience and the accepted currency of existentialism and historicism, aligning Barth with Reformation thought.⁶² However, Barth associated the Word of God with a personal act of self-revelation "realized exclusively and fully in Jesus Christ,"⁶³ which Spykman interprets to mean that the "divine 'breakthrough' must ever remain the one and only starting point for Christian theology."⁶⁴ Barth's transcendent method leaves human response untethered from a mediating norm and undercuts Scripture's witness to the manifold nature of revelation.

Barth's nearly exclusive identification of the Word of God with Jesus Christ has implications for his entire doctrine of revelation. Berkouwer distinguishes between theologizing "directly from the data

⁵⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 48.

⁵⁹ See Barth, *CD I/1*, 11-12; also Den Hertog, 'Barths „Nein“ zur „natürlichen Theologie“ im „Streit um den rechten Gehorsam in der Theologie“, 53-55.

⁶⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 48.

⁶¹ See Karl Barth, *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 171-198, 199-237.

⁶² Spykman, *RT*, 32; Barth, "The Substance and Task of Reformed Doctrine," in *Word of God and Theology*, 220-221.

⁶³ Spykman, *RT*, 35.

⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 34-35.

of Scripture” and theologizing “in terms of a specifically Christological conception.”⁶⁵ He contends that though Barth draws from Scripture for his source material, he makes of that material a principle by which he erects an entire structure, according to which every dogmatic conclusion must adhere. Failing to take account of Scripture as a whole, Barth’s “Christological conception” limits the Word of God to a redemptive Word within the covenant of grace, minimizing the significance of a “first Word” of creation.⁶⁶ Spykman consciously diverges from Barth at this point.

In terms of openness to the Word versus control of the Word,⁶⁷ one can appreciate Barth’s stress on the transcendent nature of revelation. He makes way for an event in which men and women can be encountered in new ways by a revelation beyond their own making or thinking. As Berkouwer reflects, “He did not want the gospel to become an echo of what was present in our heart before we came to it, a rewording of what we had already thought.”⁶⁸ For Barth, this meant a repudiation of creation principles that could become the basis for a so-called Christian worldview that would eventually re-open the door to natural theology. For Spykman, biblically-informed creation principles represent a means by which theologians can comprehend revelation, through the unifying lens of Scripture, in its diversity of forms.

Barth’s conviction regarding humanity’s inability to grasp revelation or to comprehend and relate to a God who is totally Other leads him to lean heavily on divine transcendence as the starting point for revelation. Whether or not the transcendence/immanence problem can be said to characterize Barth’s theology,⁶⁹ Spykman believes that Barth’s focus in addressing the divine-human relationship “fall[s] on the absolute transcendence of God.”⁷⁰ He, in contrast, trains the lens on the historical fall and the resultant shattering of human ability to desire and read aright God’s Word in all its forms. According to Milne, “Barth’s axiomatic belief in the total and irreducible otherness of God” renders “the possibility of direct and permanent revelation” untenable.⁷¹ Instead of “direct and permanent revelation,” such as that given in and through creation and in Scripture, Barth proposes

⁶⁵ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 310. Berkouwer is here comparing Herman Bavinck and Barth as to their approach in guarding “against an abstract power concept” in the doctrine of God.

⁶⁶ See Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 18, 247-255.

⁶⁷ See Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 71.

⁶⁸ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 73.

⁶⁹ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 51, recalls that an “accusation” of an excessive emphasis on transcendence followed Barth in the 1920s, but that Berkouwer himself, in his 1954 book on Barth, “did not use the issue of transcendence as the key to understanding him.”

⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 33.

⁷¹ Douglas J. W. Milne, “Barth and Calvin on the (Three-fold Form of the) Word of God,” *Reformed Theological Review* 68, no. 2 (Aug 2009): 94-95, accessed December 26, 2014, ATLA.

revelation as event and encounter, experienced primarily in Jesus Christ. Spykman links Barth's transcendent basis for revelation with the failure of Barth's program to move beyond the dualistic structures common to theological reflection on revelation.⁷²

Methodologically, therefore, Spykman identifies a serious weakness in Barth's "theology from above," a weakness resulting from adherence to a dualistic worldview. Though Barth desires to give proper attention to the person and sovereignty of God, has he pulled up the ladder, so to speak, so that humanity struggles to find a position of actual response in the world God made?⁷³ Spykman categorizes Barth's methodology as one of confrontation between God and the world, with the only point of contact being a vertical one – Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Van der Kooi, noting that Barth's *a priori* shifts to the concrete person and time of Jesus Christ as he develops his doctrine of election,⁷⁵ concludes that for Barth, "the final horizon for theological knowledge no longer coincides with the will of God, but is the person of God, His self-gift in Jesus Christ."⁷⁶ In Spykman's paradigm, the will of God, expressed in God's Word and works, comprises the "horizon for theological knowledge"; this places him in a line of continuity with John Calvin and Herman Bavinck. If the "person of God" comprises the "final horizon for theological knowledge," or the theological "norm," the theological question revolves around the means and reliability of accessing such knowledge. What is the entry point for Christian dogmatics?

From Spykman's perspective, Barth's theology has a different outcome than Barth himself intends. He asserts that Barth's work is characterized by anthropocentrism, though with a different basis than that of nineteenth-century liberalism.

For his theology implies giving priority to epistemology at the expense of ontology, to the possibilities of human knowledge rather than the actuality of God's creational work as revelation in the world. Despite Barth's heavy accent on 'objectivity,' it is human 'subjectivity' which ultimately serves as the norm for true knowledge. Decisive is not the ontic order of God's acts in creation (as in Calvin), but the noetic order of human receptivity.⁷⁷

⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 35-36. Milne, "Barth and Calvin," 94-95, contends that Barth's dogmatics "might be described as an orthodox superstructure with a Kantian foundation," an assessment that supports Spykman's analysis. Thus, in Milne's reckoning, the evangelical disagreement with Barth concerns "presuppositional commitment" and not merely a quarrel over the inspiration of Scripture. Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years*, 228, comments that the methodological problems related to Barth's divine starting point motivated others to seek, however failingly, "an alternative approach." Harry Kuitert (1924-2017) serves as an example in Berkhof's assessment, as well as in Spykman's (*RT*, 55-58).

⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 43.

⁷⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 43.

⁷⁵ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 372.

⁷⁶ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 383.

⁷⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 175-176.

Spykman's analysis assumes that Barth's methodology is bound to the subject/object dilemma characteristic of modern theology, with only two points of entry for dogmatics: either the "upstairs" or the "downstairs."⁷⁸

II.3. The Subject/Object Dilemma

Since Barth and Spykman are theologians of the modern period, it is understandable that the subject/object problem figures into their methodological reflections. Both subscribe to modern concern *for* the subject and its role as Knower (as conceived in the Kantian paradigm, referring to Immanuel Kant), but they seek to establish humanity's role as responder to revelation apart from "the turn to the subject." They propose different solutions, with different results.

Barth reapplies the subject/object terminology "to God and his self-revelation to humans,"⁷⁹ but bypasses the modern question of whether God is knowable by rejecting prolegomena as typically constructed and starting with faith, with the reality that confronts us, which is the reality of God in his revelation.⁸⁰ Divine revelation is then defined in terms of "saving grace."⁸¹ Spykman rejects the subject/object terminology as inappropriate for defining the divine-human relationship.⁸² He also attempts to bypass the modern question, but not by limiting prolegomena within the boundaries of dogmatics. Like Barth, his prolegomenal approach begins with revelation and faith, but because he situates prolegomena outside of dogmatics proper, he increases the circle of revelation, and so recalls Calvin's wider perspective of divine reality confronting humanity.⁸³

According to Van der Kooi, attention to divine revelation is a condition of modernity: "The disappearance of a metaphysical framework has its counterpart in the promotion of the theme of revelation."⁸⁴ Like Barth, and unlike Calvin, Spykman's work assumes the need to justify the doctrine of revelation in and of itself. However, unlike Barth's pendulum swing to divine transcendence as the fundamental reality for revelation, Spykman promotes the concept of revelation by appealing to the Word in its various forms as the pivot point for maintaining the transcendent and accommodating nature of God, as well as the legitimate responding activity of the creature. He applies the

⁷⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 59-60, 66-68.

⁷⁹ Guretzki, *Karl Barth*, 89.

⁸⁰ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 262-263.

⁸¹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 288.

⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 50, 54-55.

⁸³ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 299, notes that whereas Calvin made room for the "divine presence" within the world and man's perception of it, Barth is unwilling to do so.

⁸⁴ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 427.

subject/object distinction to intracosmic realities only, maintaining that because of God's otherness and the necessity of revelation, the subject/object terms that we apply to our own knowledge are insufficient for describing the revelation/response dynamic. Thus, he issues a challenge to modern theology's stark subject-object categories, striving to relieve the tension between transcendent and immanent starting points through his three-factor alternative: God, Word, world.

Part III: Divine Revelation

How does God reveal himself to humanity? How does humanity acquire true knowledge of God? This project has followed the thread of these questions through Calvin's Reformation breakthrough in a pre-modern context, Bavinck's articulation of the questions in a more modern context, and Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven's move toward a philosophical analysis of created reality – interspersed with Spykman's insights and reformulations. Barth, known for his radically God-centered doctrine of revelation, represents another theological movement which Spykman must consider. Barth's prolegomenon, as already discussed, gives full voice to revelation; it denies reason in the sense of a natural capacity for perceiving truth. For Barth, reason is essential to the theologian's task, but only within the boundary of revelation in Christ.⁸⁵ Spykman believes Barth's approach, which rightly subjects reason to revelation, wrongly discounts the possibility of revelation in nature and history. Spykman concludes that Barth's project concentrates on epistemology (how humans know in a fallen world – through Jesus Christ), while replacing a creational ontology (the structure of the world as originally given by God) with a Christological one.⁸⁶

Barth insists that one does not reason one's way to revelation; revelation enlightens reason. In this matter, Spykman fully agrees.⁸⁷ He, like Barth, criticizes the classic "proofs" for God's existence as well as the concept of *analogia entis* as a basis for establishing knowledge of God.⁸⁸ Both theologians acknowledge the necessity of revelation for all human knowledge of God. The difference between them

⁸⁵ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 15, confirms, "Christian faith is not irrational, not anti-rational, not supra-rational, but rational in the proper sense. . . . [R]ightly understood the act of faith is also an act of knowledge. Faith means knowledge."

⁸⁶ See Spykman, *RT*, 175.

⁸⁷ See Spykman, *RT*, 168-170, for his discussion of the "normativity" of revelation for both creation and redemption.

⁸⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 147-148, comments that the rational proofs "are embedded in a dualist view of the relationship between reason and revelation," with an "overestimation" of reason's potentials and an "underestimation" of man's need for revelation; on p. 65, Spykman asserts that in light of the Creator/creature distinction, "every notion of an *analogia entis* is fundamentally ruled out." See Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 28-29, for a brief critique of the classic proofs; see Guretzki, *Karl Barth*, 53, for a statement regarding Barth's rejection of *analogia entis*.

consists in Barth's manner of funneling all revelation through the person of Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ Limiting the normative means of revelation to Jesus Christ and a divinely initiated encounter creates the possibility of "injecting *uncertainty* into theology."⁹⁰ Spykman similarly judges that the weight Barth puts on transcendence renders knowledge of God unattainable, methodologically speaking.⁹¹ What are the normative means for revelation and response? These questions persist for Spykman as he wrestles with Barth's theology.

Where Barth would say that "[w]e have no alternative source of revelation" other than God "becoming man in Jesus Christ,"⁹² Spykman asserts that creation, biblically speaking, is a legitimate source of continuing revelation. The lack of clarity and forcefulness that we experience in relation to God's Word in and for creation demonstrates the power and depth of sin in the human heart rather than a negation of God's "first Word." This signals a fundamental difference between Barth and Reformed theology: Reformed theology subscribes to an historical narrative that begins with creation and moves through the fall to redemption; in Barth's program the historical movement from creation to redemption is marginalized due to the dominance of Christology.

The Christological focus has a bearing on Barth's idea of the nature of revelation. According to Van der Kooi's characterization, Barth defines revelation mainly as an event rather than as particular "articles of faith."⁹³ This event consists primarily of divine "self-revelation," which, as a focus on the "singularity" of revelation, contrasts with Calvin's inclusion of a "multiplicity" of sources within his concept of revelation.⁹⁴ The singularity of revelation espoused by Barth forms the basis for Spykman's assessment that Barth has "locked up" revelation on the transcendent side. Taking his cue from Calvin, Spykman recognizes revelation's various forms, each of which constitutes revelation to some degree.

⁸⁹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 18, says of Barth's view, "[A]ll knowledge of God is *exclusively* determined by and is dependent upon the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and . . . this is not simply a matter of our epistemology, but . . . is directly related to the *nature of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ* who is the dominant and all-controlling central factor in the doctrines of election, creation and reconciliation."

⁹⁰ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 44.

⁹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 49.

⁹² Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 43. Barth's argument here for rightly acknowledging creation in Jesus Christ commends itself as true to Scripture. The point Spykman makes is that Barth does not acknowledge the original and ongoing revelation in and through the created order.

⁹³ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 263-264, says, "Knowledge of God is not a static entity, and for Barth . . . it is not comprised primarily of articles of faith; it can best be characterised as a movement, an event that has its origin in God, and in which man is given a part." Word and concepts "play a role" but are secondary to the "vertical" dimension.

⁹⁴ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 329-331.

This difference with Barth results in a broader range of revelatory activity in the world than Barth allows as normative and trustworthy.⁹⁵

Given the anthropocentric concerns of modernity and the theological revolution initiated by Barth, Spykman incorporates the propositional truths related to revelation that are integral to Reformed theology with the reality of man's encounter with divine revelation. Spykman's definition of revelation takes seriously the encounter dimension of revelation, but, in distinction from Barth, affirms revelation's objective dimension as well: "Revelation is both fact and faith, event and meaning. It thrusts us into a living encounter with God, the world, and ourselves. . . . By deeds and words God imparts heart knowledge concerning his claim upon our lives and his plan for the world."⁹⁶ Over against Barth's stress on revelation as event and encounter,⁹⁷ Spykman maintains the objective character of revelation as "fact" and "meaning," correlating the ongoing objective reality of divine revelation through the threefold Word with faith's response to the Word.

Even though both Barth and Spykman refer to a "threefold form" of the Word of God, they differ in their identification of the three forms and the significance of each one. Barth equates revelation itself only with Jesus Christ, but he considers Scripture and proclamation to be forms of the Word in a witness capacity.⁹⁸ He does not identify the form of revelation with its content, with the result that the other means of revelation – Scripture and proclamation – are revelatory, but are not themselves revelation.⁹⁹ In Spykman's early analysis of the Word of God, he mentions five forms: the creative Word, the prophetic-apostolic Word, the inscripturated Word, the preached Word, and the incarnate Word.¹⁰⁰ His later formulations narrow the actual forms of the divine Word to three –

⁹⁵ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 438, cautions, "Anyone who interprets Barth's Christological concentration to mean that according to this concept God would not make himself known anywhere except in the proclamation of the Church, has an all too meagre understanding of this theology." At issue in this discussion of Barth in relation to Spykman is not the possibility of God's use of created means generally, but the question of methodology and norm. What is the reliable and trustworthy norm of revelation? Can created means, illuminated by Scripture, function in such a way that they provide a normative channel for divine revelation about the world and man's position within it and before God? See also Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 439.

⁹⁶ Spykman, "Religion and Revelation," 18.

⁹⁷ Brunner, *Natural Theology*, 49, both commends and criticizes Barth's position: "The whole strength of Barthian theology lies in the assertion of the actual. . . . But that is only one side of the biblical concept of revelation. The other side is its very opposite. It is the fact that God speaks to me here and now because he *has* spoken." Barth, *CD I/1*, 137-138, does not discount propositions altogether in his understanding of revelation: "God does reveal Himself in statements, through the medium of speech, and indeed of human speech. . . . The personal character of God's Word is not, then, to be played off against its verbal or spiritual character."

⁹⁸ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 9; *CD I/1*, 111-120.

⁹⁹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 277.

¹⁰⁰ Spykman, "Religion and Revelation," 19; Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 14-15.

creation, Scripture, and Jesus Christ, excluding the prophetic-apostolic Word, since these “oral revelations” are “preserved” in the inscripturated Word,¹⁰¹ and preaching, since it is not itself God’s Word but “carries authority when it echoes faithfully the written Word.”¹⁰²

Spykman refers to all three forms positively as revelation, though he affirms something similar to Barth’s “basic axiom” of Christological focus when he declares, “All God’s dealings with the world . . . are through Christ.”¹⁰³ The issue for Spykman is whether Jesus Christ is the only form of divine revelation or whether He mediates revelation through other forms besides himself. Barth so closely identifies revelation with “God Himself” that only the person of Jesus Christ receives the designation of “revelation” in his theology.¹⁰⁴ Spykman wants to avoid the problems inherent in equating revelation with God, an equivalency which determines the structure of Barth’s dogmatics.¹⁰⁵ For Spykman (and he believes his formulation is more biblically attuned, following Calvin), revelation is God’s Word defined more broadly, in ways consistent with Scripture’s exposition.

III.1. The Rejection of Natural Theology and Implications for the Doctrine of Revelation

Barth’s definition of revelation must be set in the context of his rejection of natural theology. Kant’s watershed philosophy, demarcating pure and practical reason and thus creating an inescapable dualism between reason and faith, was reinforced by Schleiermacher, the “father of modern Liberal theology.”¹⁰⁶ In their wake, theological arguments justifying Christian belief based on reason or subjective experience carried the day. Analyzing the historical rise of natural theology, Barth concludes that its appearance as “rational orthodoxy at the beginning of the eighteenth century” assumed that

¹⁰¹ Spykman, “Religion and Revelation,” 19, and *RT*, 86.

¹⁰² Spykman, *Christian Faith in Focus*, 15, and *RT*, 86-87; see also *RT*, 85-88, for Spykman’s basic delineation of the threefold Word.

¹⁰³ Spykman, *RT*, 84. See Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), accessed July 6, 2020, <https://archive.org>, 35, who judges that “for Barth *all God’s dealings with men are effected in and through the person of Jesus Christ*. This would seem to be the basic axiom underlying Barth’s entire exposition of the Word of God.”

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *CD I/1*, 136-138. Spykman, *RT*, 175, maintains that Barth’s legitimate reasons for limiting revelation to “God Himself” do not justify Barth’s “strictly second-article theology (redemption in Christ)” that allows the “biblical doctrine of an originally good creation” to fade “into the background.”

¹⁰⁵ Karl Barth, *CD I/2, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (London/New York: Continuum/T&T Clark International, 2004), 883: “And God’s Word is His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore in the most comprehensive sense of the term dogmatics can and must be understood as Christology.” A. D. R. Polman, *Barth*, trans. Calvin D. Freeman (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 33, 68, accessed December 22, 2017, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/ModernThinkersBarth.pdf, confirms Barth’s tendency to allow his Christocentric commitment to shape his reading of Scripture and understanding of doctrine.

¹⁰⁶ Spykman, “Confessional Hermeneutic,” 5.

revelation was “a historical confirmation of what man can know about himself and therefore about God even apart from revelation.”¹⁰⁷ Barth’s desire to eliminate all possibility of divine knowledge apart from divine revelation drives his own conception of revelation.

Countering the general trend of justifying faith by means of rational argument, Barth denies human reason an autonomous position in the quest to gain knowledge of God, and in so doing he succeeds in restoring the plausibility of divine initiative in revelation. Barth and Brunner, who famously debated the merits of natural theology, agree “that theology must grant divine initiative the priority in Christian doctrine.”¹⁰⁸ Barth recognizes, as does Spykman, that men and women do not willingly receive revelation: “In religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing which has to be given by God.”¹⁰⁹ The covenantal initiative of God, who addresses persons through his Word and grants the grace to receive revelation, forms a crucial point of resonance between Barth and Reformed theology.

The debate between Barth and Brunner centers on this point. Brunner, despite his insistence on divine initiative, allows for some measure of creaturely receptivity to God’s revelational overtures, a “point of contact.”¹¹⁰ To this, Barth issues a decisive “Nein!” Spykman supports Barth’s “No!” to natural theology but contends that Barth ultimately rejected “natural (general) revelation itself for the sake of rejecting natural theology.”¹¹¹ Barth regards natural theology to be the inevitable outcome of a positive stance toward general revelation and thus the root of the German Christians’ problematic position in relation to the Nazism of 1930’s Germany. He refers to it as “that theology of compromise which has shown itself as the cause of the present unhappy state of the Evangelical Church in Germany and which, if things continue in this way, will also bring the other Evangelical Churches to a similar path.”¹¹² His strong reply to Brunner’s argument for natural theology conveys disappointment that Brunner is, from Barth’s perspective, abetting natural theology in all its negative implications.¹¹³

Comparing Brunner and Calvin, Barth acknowledges that Calvin’s view of “the knowledge of God in Christ includes a real knowledge of the true God in creation,” with stress on “includes.”¹¹⁴ He contrasts this with Brunner’s idea that “the knowledge of God in Christ . . . bring[s] forth a second,

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD I/2*, 288, 289-290.

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *CD I/2*, 303.

¹¹⁰ Brunner, *Natural Theology*, 56-57.

¹¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 169.

¹¹² Barth, *Natural Theology*, 72.

¹¹³ Barth, *Natural Theology*, 94.

¹¹⁴ Barth, *Natural Theology*, 108.

relatively independent kind of knowledge . . . as if our reason, once it had been illumined, had of itself (*per se*) gained the power of sight.”¹¹⁵ While assigning the knowledge of God given in and with creation an ontic priority, Spykman refuses to perpetuate the dualist dilemma by limiting this knowledge to the realm of reason. He chooses instead to recognize creation as a form of revelation, implying that knowledge of God the Creator is a gift of revelation to be apprehended by faith.¹¹⁶ God’s Word for creation, while prior to and distinct from the written Word and incarnate Word, functions in conjunction with them.

Whereas Barth (in Spykman’s assessment) allows God’s revelation in Christ to overshadow creation as a legitimate form of God’s revelation, and whereas Brunner (in Barth’s assessment) returns to natural theology with its starting point in human reason, Spykman seeks to uphold the creational emphasis rooted in revelation, present in Calvin, and set forth by the Belgic Confession. Concerning the relation of so-called “general” and “special” revelation, Spykman observes, “In older traditional theologies it was a matter of general and special revelation – with that ambiguous ‘and’ often interpreted in dualist fashion. In Barth’s revision it becomes a matter of special revelation against general revelation – with the latter robbed of its revelatory status.”¹¹⁷ Spykman challenges the typical distinction between so-called natural knowledge (general revelation) and redemptive knowledge (special revelation), arguing that God’s Word for creation reveals knowledge of God’s will and works – though in a different manner and degree than the Word revealed in Scripture and Christ.

How does Barth relate knowledge of God the Creator to knowledge of God in Christ? According to Berkouwer, Barth believes that “[w]e can understand the first article of the [Apostles’] creed only in the light of the second.”¹¹⁸ This stance results from his sharp disagreement with any and every form of natural theology, which “posits an essential readiness, an openness for the knowledge of God”¹¹⁹ in man apart from revelation. Spykman agrees that in the post-fall context, this is the noetic reality: God the Creator can be known only by faith in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture.¹²⁰ Barth, however, seems to indicate that this Christologically-formed knowledge of God the Creator is both an ontic and noetic

¹¹⁵ Barth, *Natural Theology*, 108-109. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 313, states, “Barth’s argument with Brunner reveals the extent to which a starting point in creation theology had become impossible for Barth. Barth could only consider the use of concepts from creation theology as a cover for the autonomy of earthly powers and processes in opposition to God.”

¹¹⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 171, appeals to Calvin when he says, “This knowledge of God as Creator is a matter of revelation, not of rational achievement.”

¹¹⁷ Spykman, “On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation,” 15.

¹¹⁸ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 124.

¹¹⁹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 185.

¹²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 76-78.

reality.¹²¹ The application of this Christological lens to the first article of the creed reflects Barth's quest to leave no crevice for natural theology to gain a foothold.¹²²

Echoing Berkouwer's appraisal, Van der Kooi remarks on Barth's motive for refuting natural theology: "It is in this way, and no other, that Barth interpreted natural theology: as a denial of the fact that knowledge of God is a grace."¹²³ In determining God and his relation to the world in terms of cross and resurrection rather than "in terms of creation theology and pneumatology,"¹²⁴ Barth set a course for modern theology that deviates from the Reformed tradition. Spykman, convinced that "creational revelation does not imply natural theology," will not follow this course.¹²⁵ Without disparaging Barth's reasonable concerns for maintaining the integrity of sovereign grace, Spykman believes that the best way to safeguard sovereign grace is by heeding the scriptural pattern as a pathway for dogmatic reflection. Thus, God's work of creation, accomplished through his mediating Word, sets the terms for God's activity toward and in the world.

III.2. Creation, Christ, and Covenant in the Doctrine of Revelation

Barth's doctrine of creation does have points of rapport with that of Reformed theology. Of the interplay between God's Word and creation, he says, "The Word of God and creaturely occurrence seem to form an indissoluble unity. Everything that happens can be traced back to a Word of God."¹²⁶ His affirmation of the uniqueness and sovereignty of God and the creatureliness of the creature,¹²⁷ as well as his insistence on the divine/human distinction, challenges theological perspectives that either over- or under-estimate the person. Additionally, Barth's articulation of God's ruling as an active, divine ordering of reality conveys a biblical view of God's relation to the world.¹²⁸

Despite these positive elements of Barth's doctrine of creation, its secondary position within his structural framework determines Spykman's assessment of it. Spykman summarizes the legacy of Barth's doctrine of revelation and its consequences for his doctrine of creation:

¹²¹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 259, asserts, "Not only in the noetic but also in the *ontic* sense creation is founded in Jesus Christ, *in reconciliation*." Polman, *Barth*, 57, concurs.

¹²² Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 125-127.

¹²³ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 311.

¹²⁴ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 375.

¹²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 35.

¹²⁶ Barth, *CD III/3*, 143.

¹²⁷ Barth, *CD III/3*, 145, shows his concern for creatureliness, even as he affirms "divine lordship," saying that under God's rule "the rights and honour and dignity and freedom of the creature are not suppressed and extinguished but vindicated and revealed." See also 146, 148-149.

¹²⁸ See Barth, *CD III/3*, 164.

Barthians redefined revelation in exclusively soteriological terms. It is embodied solely in God's once-for-all personal act of reconciling grace in Jesus Christ. Creation is at most a witness and pointer to this Christomonist encounter of God with man. In the process the biblical testimony to God's handiwork in the creation is emptied of its revelational content.¹²⁹

As Spykman understands it, Barth is unable to allow for the possibility of normative revelation via the means of creation. "He [Barth] conceded that there are traces of a theology of creation in their [Calvin's and the Reformers'] writings. But this reflects only a failure on their part to draw out consistently the consequences of their unique position. This shortcoming comes to very unfortunate expression, he holds, in the second article of the Belgic Confession."¹³⁰ Spykman interprets the article in the context of its tradition: In declaring creation and redemption the two means by which God is known, Article II of the Belgic Confession (1561) does not advocate an ontic order of knowledge whereby one first learns of God through creation and then through Scripture. Rather, it indicates the noetic reality induced by the fall: though creation continues "like a beautiful book," it renders men and women convicted and without excuse until the light of Scripture reveals God's grace in Christ.

Spykman points out that "the 'we' spoken of . . . in Article II harks back to the 'we' of Article I,"¹³¹ which refers to the confessing community of Christians. Barth's attack on the article seems to lift the assertion of two means of revelation from its context as a Christian confession and to interpret it as an acknowledgement of an innate human ability to gain knowledge of the invisible God through that which is visible. Spykman sets Article II in its intended context, while recognizing that when natural theologies employ the Belgic Confession to support a reading which "divide[s] these two forms of revelation along the lines of two realms of being and two orders of knowing,"¹³² a challenge such as Barth's is necessary.

Although he believes that Christ is the center of the biblical storyline, the one in whom creation, redemption, and consummation find their fulfillment, Spykman cannot dispense with the historical outworking of the biblical storyline and its theological implications. Those implications include a distinction between creation and redemption, with creation being the presupposition for redemption

¹²⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 169.

¹³⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 174. Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 265-267, discusses Barth's antipathy to Belgic Confession, Article II, and in pp. 274-276 offers perspective on Article II as a "confession of faith." Gerrit C. Berkouwer, "General and Special Divine Revelation," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry, 18-19, mentions the historical context of Barth's concern about a two-source theory of revelation and the need to clarify "the doctrine of the general revelation of God" in such a way that it "poses no threat to the special revelation of God in Jesus Christ," which was at the core of Barth's concern.

¹³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 172.

¹³² Spykman, *RT*, 172.

rather than the other way round, which is Barth's contention.¹³³ In Barth's words, "the covenant is the internal basis of creation," and "creation is the external basis of the covenant."¹³⁴ Berkouwer and Spykman interpret Barth's use of covenant to refer to its redemptive dimension, which they believe he inserts into the original creation in a biblically unwarranted way, as already determined, initiated, and encompassing within its bounds the work of creation.¹³⁵ Following the Reformed tradition, Spykman considers the one covenant of grace to be distinguishable according to its pre-fall aspects and its post-fall remedy. The historical fall of God's imagers precipitated a change in God's administration of the singular covenant history of his dealings with his people.¹³⁶

Barth maintains, "The case is rather that the standpoint of creation history is lit up by that of salvation history."¹³⁷ Spykman would concur, but on a different basis: in his schema, salvation history illumines creation history because it is a true renewal of it.¹³⁸ Barth speaks persuasively of the "created world" as the "*theatrum gloriae Dei*," noting that the "order" of creation and the possibilities open to us for fulfilling our created purpose should inspire "joy and gratitude."¹³⁹ He seems unwilling, however, to speak of this as a purpose in and of itself apart from the "history of the covenant of grace."¹⁴⁰ From Spykman's perspective, Barth's theology demonstrates a conflation of creation and redemption, with redemption crowding out the biblical significance of creation.¹⁴¹

¹³³ Spykman, *RT*, 87-88. Creation as the presupposition for redemption is the idea behind Spykman's assertion that "the Word of redemption addresses us as a reaffirmation and republication of the Word of creation." See Barth, *CD III/3*, 4-5, for his opposing contention. Barth's focus here is on the eternal decree as the presupposition of creation, which primarily concerns election in Jesus Christ, or, redemption.

¹³⁴ Barth, *CD III/3*, 6-7.

¹³⁵ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 55, explains Barth's angle: "The history of the covenant is the foundation of the whole of the history of God's relationship to creation and to man." On p. 248 he states that in Barth's view, "The first word which God spoke was the word of His grace." A. van Egmond and C. van der Kooi, "The Appeal to Creation Ordinances: A Changing Tide," in *God's Order for Creation*, ed. Paul G. Schrottenboer (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994), 30, refer to Barth's portrayal of the creation/covenant relationship more positively, with covenant referring generally to the conditions of divine relationship with humanity.

¹³⁶ See Spykman, *RT*, 259-265 for his discussion of "The Everlasting Covenant."

¹³⁷ Barth, *CD III/3*, 40.

¹³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 69-70, 86-88. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 379, observes, "In Barth's thought creation is so regarded as provisional, as separated from God, as an overture to His covenant, that deliverance can by no means be conceived as a mending or restoration."

¹³⁹ Barth, *CD III/3*, 48.

¹⁴⁰ Barth, *CD III/3*, 48. See Berkouwer's assessment, *Triumph of Grace*, 54-56, compressed in the following statement: "It is clear, therefore, that already in Barth's doctrine of creation the triumph of grace is prominent."

¹⁴¹ Spykman, *RT*, 175-176. Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 370, clarifies Barth's perspective when he says that Barth does not identify creation and reconciliation; he does distinguish the two. However, the practical effect of Barth's view is an undervaluation of the historical fall and the movement from creation to reconciliation, because "the real *confrontation* took place between the chaos rejected at creation and the reconciliation which effected this rejection."

Working from the Genesis creation narratives, Spykman identifies creation rather than redemption as the ordered basis for God's history with the world.¹⁴² In Barth's work, creation and sin seem to get lost as distinct and discernible movements of the biblical narrative.¹⁴³ Though Barth and Spykman both insist on the noetic route of knowledge being "from the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all other occurrence,"¹⁴⁴ Barth construes the ontic reality in the same way, positing election as the ontic center of all God's work *ad extra*,¹⁴⁵ which is evident in the following passage: "But the grace of God in Jesus Christ is also the ontic basis of the knowledge of creation. The eternal decree of God which precedes creation and makes it possible and necessary is the gracious election of man in Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁶ Because of divine preservation's dependency upon "the idea of *redemption*" in Barth's theology, Berkouwer concludes, "For this reason the distinction between pre-fall and post-fall plays no role in his theology. The aspect of *redemption* is dominant from the beginning."¹⁴⁷ Spykman, in contrast, uses the biblical narrative to portray the ontic reality of a good creation subjected to sin through the fall and restored through Christ's work.

Is Spykman fair to Barth when he joins those who have characterized Barth's theology as "Christomonistic"?¹⁴⁸ Barth denies the legitimacy of this label, declaring his concern "to hold fast at all costs and at every point to the christological thread."¹⁴⁹ Reformed theology also professes a christological focus; those who use the term "Christomonist" to describe Barth share his desire to "finally remember 'Christ alone' at each and every point."¹⁵⁰ So what constitutes the difference between them? Berkouwer maintains that the term does not express disapproval of Barth's emphasis on Christ but rather of "the validity of the Christological foundation of Barth's dogmatics," along with "his criticism of general revelation and of Art. II of the Belgic Confession."¹⁵¹ Convinced that Scripture affirms the significance of general revelation without detracting from Christ and his redemptive work,

¹⁴² Spykman, *RT*, 178-180, argues that in creation God establishes meaning for the world and that "[t]his cosmic order is the very locus, context, and pattern for redemption."

¹⁴³ See Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 380-381.

¹⁴⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 84. Barth, *CD*, III/3, 54.

¹⁴⁵ See Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 54, 90.

¹⁴⁶ Karl Barth, *CD* III/4, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. Mackay, T. H. L. Parker, H. Knight, H. A. Kennedy, and J. Marks (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 39.

¹⁴⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 247. See also p. 250, where Berkouwer says of Barth's theology, "There is no question of a 'step-wise,' one after the other, of creation and redemption. The whole of creation fundamentally *rests in redemption*."

¹⁴⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 35, 175-176. Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 12, footnote 6, reviews the history of this term as applied to Barth.

¹⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* III/3, xi.

¹⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/3, xi.

¹⁵¹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 12, footnote 6.

Spykman cannot accept Barth's "Christological foundation." He also cannot accept the manner in which Barth's formulation "obscures the role of Christ as Mediator of creation, assimilating it into the doctrine of Christ as Reconciler."¹⁵² Though Spykman does not give sustained attention to this problem of Barth's theology, others have noted that Barth tends to downplay "the Logos asarkos (the pre-incarnate Word)"¹⁵³ in favor of "the centrality of the enfleshed Jesus Christ (Logos ensarkos) in our knowledge of God."¹⁵⁴ Spykman connects Barth's ambiguity concerning the second person of the Trinity to Barth's non-Reformed position on the relation between creation and redemption, which in turn contributes to (or perhaps is shaped by) his concentration of revelation in the person of Jesus Christ.

In his eagerness to guard against any intimation of natural theology or an "abstracting" of "creation from the gracious and reconciling work of God," Barth insists on the covenant of grace as the basis for creation.¹⁵⁵ Though he "posits the omnipotent and radical initiative of grace" in contrast to the historicizing tendencies of liberal theology, "[i]n doing so. . . the historical perspective is threatened with obscuration."¹⁵⁶ Consequently, his necessary and helpful reclamation of the doctrine of divine initiative and sovereign grace so emphasizes divine reconciliation that the "decisiveness of history"¹⁵⁷ characterizing Scripture's call to faith loses clarity and force. For Spykman, the antidote consists of renewed attention to the full scope of divine revelation and to the mediating Word that enables a genuine and decisive response to God's saving work.

III.3. Scripture

Spykman does not treat extensively of Barth's doctrine of Scripture. When he does mention it, it is to illumine the connection of Barth's doctrine of Scripture to his identification of revelation with the person of Jesus Christ, which is of greater concern to Spykman for its methodological consequences. Discussing revelation in general, Spykman notes that Barth's framing of revelation as a divine "personal

¹⁵² Spykman, *RT*, 175.

¹⁵³ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 250, 254.

¹⁵⁴ Guretzki, *Karl Barth*, 114-116.

¹⁵⁵ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 54-56.

¹⁵⁶ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 254. Berkouwer believes the "triumph of grace" motif characterizes Barth's theology. In *Half Century of Theology*, 67, Berkouwer indicates that Barth, when responding to his use of the phrase for his book title, "expressed concern that the title" might imply that "grace had to do with a new methodological principle." Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 197, makes an important observation: ". . . every theology of grace must be tested on the score of its scriptural legitimacy. Simply to *posit* the theme of the 'triumph of grace' does not *in itself* guarantee the purity of a theology."

¹⁵⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 254. On pp. 256-257 Berkouwer clarifies that "decisiveness" within history is the key to understanding Barth at this point. In contrast to idealism, Barth certainly takes history and time seriously as the place of God's revelational encounter with man. However, "[i]n Barth's theology the triumph of grace makes vague the seriousness of the human decision" (279).

act” means that “the creation order and the Book are not revelatory in any direct sense.”¹⁵⁸ Despite Barth’s differences with classic liberalism, the net effect of neo-orthodoxy, which Spykman associates with Barth in this context, is similar to that of liberalism: it “reduces the Word of God in its fulness to the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹ Spykman suggests that Barth’s doctrine of Scripture is an expected result of his theological methodology (transcendent starting point) and his definition of revelation (focused in Jesus Christ).

Barth makes many statements about Scripture, and one must take care not to draw unwarranted conclusions about his views. He refers to Scripture as God’s Word and also as witness to God’s Word.¹⁶⁰ Barth generally uses a qualifier when speaking of the written Word as God’s Word: the Bible is and becomes God’s Word as it addresses individuals and God stirs their hearts to faith.¹⁶¹ Barth’s language expresses his concern to maintain God’s Word in the Bible as that which “has grasped at man” rather than something which “man has grasped at.”¹⁶² His doctrine of Scripture avoids any indication of an abstract Word of God that can be “grasped” apart from faith, which is itself a gift of God. Using the terms “attestation” and “witnessing” to describe the Bible’s role in revelation, Barth makes a point which Spykman commends – the Bible is not an end in itself.¹⁶³ Spykman too notes, “Scripture by itself . . . when reduced to a set of propositions . . . cannot save us or our theology. Only the Christ of Scripture can.”¹⁶⁴ In light of the Nazi theologians’ claim of a new revelation that met with “feeble resistance” from Roman Catholic reliance on Church authority and Protestant reliance on its “paper pope,” Barth’s search for a new way to emphasize revelation’s divine origin becomes more understandable.¹⁶⁵

Regarding his designation of the Bible as witness to revelation, Barth mentions both the “limitation” of the Bible (“its distinctiveness from revelation, in so far as it is only a human word about it”) and “the positive element” (“revelation is the basis, object and content of this word”).¹⁶⁶ He likens its unity as both divine and human to the “unity of God and man in Jesus Christ,” and as such “a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation, and historically a very human literary document.”¹⁶⁷ He

¹⁵⁸ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 20.

¹⁵⁹ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 20. See also *RT*, 77-78.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 9.

¹⁶¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 109-110.

¹⁶² Barth, *CD I/1*, 110.

¹⁶³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 111.

¹⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 112.

¹⁶⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 173.

¹⁶⁶ Barth, *CD I/2*, 463.

¹⁶⁷ Barth, *CD I/2*, 501.

demonstrates his respect for the authority and necessity of Scripture when he affirms that the “priority of the Bible in the Church” is not “detrimental to the living God and a living faith.”¹⁶⁸ When he blames the doctrine of inspiration for “a freezing, as it were, of the relation between Scripture and revelation,”¹⁶⁹ one can interpret this as indicative of his insistence that revelation involves a dynamic encounter with the living God. Clearly, Barth shares some critical assertions with Reformed theology about the nature of Scripture, but his efforts to distinguish it from revelation itself, except in the “event” wherein “the biblical word becomes God’s Word,” seem to position him outside the orthodox doctrine of Scripture.¹⁷⁰

Indeed, “. . . Barth’s theology abandoned the direct identification of the Bible as text and the Word of God.”¹⁷¹ As a result, one may legitimately question whether Barth’s quest to protect God’s revelation from misguided bibliolatry and to maintain “the freedom of God’s Word”¹⁷² leads to a devaluation of Scripture and an unintended emphasis on the subjective aspect of revelation. If, as Spykman contends, Barth’s project represents “a new anthropocentric theology based on Article II [of the Apostles’ Creed – Jesus Christ],” his intention to safeguard the sovereign grace of divine revelation gives way to a subjective experience of “redemptive breakthroughs into history.”¹⁷³ If revelation is completely vertical in nature, the burning question is an epistemological one: how can men and women access revelation? The focus then moves to the horizontal plane, with humanity’s knowledge of God at the center.

Part IV: “First Things Determine Last Things”¹⁷⁴

If it is true that one’s starting point predicts one’s ending point, Barth’s work is an example of a misguided starting point (cosmology subsumed under soteriology¹⁷⁵) leading to a questionable portrayal of redemption and eschatology (in Barth’s case, his doctrine of election and his ideas regarding eternal

¹⁶⁸ Barth, *CD I/2*, 502.

¹⁶⁹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 124. Spykman, *RT*, 122-123, attributes the “polarized” views of inspiration – mechanical and dynamic – to “two-factor theologies.” He proposes that the “organic” theory of inspiration “points to the mediating Word as its normative focal point.”

¹⁷⁰ Barth, *CD I/1*, 112-114. On p. 117, Barth explains further, “According to all that has been said revelation is originally and directly what the Bible and Church proclamation are derivatively and indirectly, i.e., God’s Word. . . . [T]he Bible . . . must continually become God’s Word.” Later, on p. 120, he asserts, “[t]here is no distinction of degree or value between the three forms”: revelation (Jesus Christ), Bible, and proclamation.

¹⁷¹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 424.

¹⁷² Barth, *CD I/1*, 117.

¹⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 175-176, 388.

¹⁷⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 40.

¹⁷⁵ Polman, *Barth*, 59, remarks, “With Barth . . . the soteriological work of Christ swallows the cosmological.”

existence). Spykman identifies an unwarranted dualism in Barth's handling of prolegomena and revelation. At the beginning, the sacred and transcendent so completely overshadow the realm of creation that, according to Spykman, there is little creational basis for developing a thoroughly biblical cosmology or soteriology. Though Barth has biblical insights that are to be commended, Spykman considers his overall theology of creation, his reductionistic doctrine of revelation, and the effects of these on his soteriology to be a consistent outworking of his problematic prolegomenal position.

Barth's concern for the integrity of Christian proclamation and Christian living cannot be doubted. Despite his critique of Barth, Berkouwer expresses great appreciation for Barth's battle against "all manner of refined synergism,"¹⁷⁶ since natural theology leads to dangerous, unbiblical positions. But danger also arises when the Word incarnate is given ontic precedence over creation. Berkouwer's critique highlights Barth's inclination toward some of these theological dangers: a linking of creation with chaos,¹⁷⁷ the suffering of God (theopaschitism),¹⁷⁸ universalism,¹⁷⁹ and a "contrast between the 'eternalizing' of our finite life and its continuation."¹⁸⁰ Berkouwer also expresses misgivings about Barth's conclusions on other points of doctrinal importance, such as man's "transition from a 'status integritatis' to a 'status corruptionis,'"¹⁸¹ Jesus Christ's movement from humiliation to exaltation (with "inevitable consequences for the doctrine of the two natures of Christ,")¹⁸² and the resurrection of the body.¹⁸³ These question marks on Barth's theology seem to support Spykman's conviction that "first things determine last things."

Spykman does not deal directly with Barth's thought on these doctrinal issues. However, he does address two areas of contention between Barth and Reformed theology: (1) Barth's rejection of creation ordinances and (2) Barth's revision of the doctrine of election, both of which reflect his concentration of revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and his rejection of the historical movement from creation to redemption.

¹⁷⁶ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 348. Polman, *Barth*, 67, offers a generous assessment of Barth's battles against liberalism, his upholding of doctrinal orthodoxy, and his insistence on a shift from man as the subject to God as the object (or, from anthropocentrism to theocentrism).

¹⁷⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 380.

¹⁷⁸ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 374; Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 314.

¹⁷⁹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 290-296.

¹⁸⁰ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 333.

¹⁸¹ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 82-84.

¹⁸² Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 132-135.

¹⁸³ Barth, *CD III/3*, 229. When Barth refers to death as a "natural limitation" at the far end of life, willed and ruled by God, Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 339-340, 345, interprets him to mean that death is part of the created order.

IV.1. Creation Ordinances

Barth's negative assessment of natural theology and, by extension, the possibility of a positive function for general revelation, is intrinsically linked with his argument against creation ordinances. Brunner, in contrast, argues for the reality of creation ordinances on the basis of personal existence within a creation with "divinely appointed" limits and guides, noting the "invincible individualism" resulting from the "abandonment" of the idea of creation ordinances.¹⁸⁴ In his rejoinder, Barth questions whether human "instinct and reason" can be trusted to identify creation ordinances and to determine their application in society.¹⁸⁵ As previously noted, Barth challenged the misapplication of creation ordinances in Hitler's Germany. The Barmen Declaration's thesis that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death," expresses Barth's focus on Jesus Christ, the "one Word," and the rejection of other sources "apart from and beside this one Word of God."¹⁸⁶ Further, Barth's awareness of the continual threat of natural theology led him to reject any form of "law" that might be used for "self-justification."¹⁸⁷ Consequently, he defines law not in terms of creation but as a "command of [God's] *reconciling* grace."¹⁸⁸ The extreme distortion of Christian faith that Barth witnessed informed his opposition to creation ordinances and seems to have played a role in his construal of the relationship between creation and redemption.

While recognizing the gross distortions of creation ordinances to "undergird the pagan ideology" of Nazism, Spykman questions Barth's reaction, which was to deny "the very notion of a created order."¹⁸⁹ Though Barth's argument against ordinances should be taken seriously, Spykman says of

¹⁸⁴ Brunner, *Natural Theology*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ Barth, *Natural Theology*, 86. See also *CD III/4*, 38, where Barth argues that the "creation order" concept, particularly because of its supposed accessibility to all men, does not reflect the real nature of God's command and his encounter with man.

¹⁸⁶ "The Theological Declaration of Barmen," *Book of Confessions*, 249. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 391, observes, "As a matter of fairness in judgement, we must acknowledge that the concentration on Jesus Christ as the only Word in life and death (Barmen) has as its point the question about the criterion for knowledge of God, not its range."

¹⁸⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 323.

¹⁸⁸ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 324.

¹⁸⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 178. Another serious misapplication of "creation order" occurred in support of apartheid in South Africa. See Craig G. Bartholomew, "Response to Al Wolters' Paper," in *God's Order for Creation*, ed. Paul G. Schrottenboer (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994), 66-67. Ernst M. Conradie and J. Christoff Pauw, "The Ebb and Flow of Creation Theology at Stellenbosch University: A Story in Six Chapters," in *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek*, ed. E. Van der Borgh and P. van Geest (Boston: Brill, 2012), accessed August 8, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central, 741 and 743 remark, "According to apartheid theology, the differences of race, culture and civilization are embedded in the very orders of God's creation." They refer to a "lack of clarity on the relationship between . . . general and special revelation" that

reactions like Barth's, "[T]hese sentiments may not be granted normative status."¹⁹⁰ Do creation ordinances comprise a legitimate theological conception? This may be debated. Spykman upholds the legitimacy of the concept, motivated by a desire to guard against a "diminished appreciation" of the divine speaking in and through the creation order.¹⁹¹ Determination of specific ordinances, like the theological enterprise in general, has a tentative status; however, to deny their reality is to deny that God has placed his creatures "within the ordered surroundings of a stable (but not static) and unfolding (but not evolving) cosmos" that has been given a "predefined" meaning.¹⁹² Like any aspect of Christian faith, creation ordinances can be misunderstood and used for unbiblical purposes. Spykman believes the unacceptable alternative is to allow creation to be eclipsed, resulting in a reductionistic doctrine of divine revelation.

Barth distinguishes between Brunner (who speaks of orders in the sense of natural law) and those like Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who "learn from the Word of God what is to be done."¹⁹³ This is exactly what Spykman and many others in the neo-Calvinist tradition are attempting to do when they speak of the orders of creation – listen to Scripture in its fullness. They do not advocate a natural law that can be known, understood, and utilized by reason alone, but a divine revelation through creation that can be known by faith as informed by the full scope of God's Word. What Barth reminds the theological community of is that discussions about creation order and ordinances must revolve around the fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ. Spykman's accent falls in a different place than Barth's, which can be at least partially explained by their respective contexts. While Barth reacts to the equation of historical realities with creation ordinances accessed by reason, Spykman reacts to neglect of the comprehensiveness of creation in favor of a sacred/secular dualism that gives almost exclusive attention to salvation. Instead of a dualistic split between spheres of reason-based knowledge and revealed knowledge, Spykman, proposing that all knowledge depends on revelation, moves the creational sphere under the umbrella of revelational knowledge, showing the unity of creation and redemption without blurring their distinctive realities.

"proved to be disastrous." Interestingly, Spykman was involved in trying to correct this lack of clarity in the South African context. His monograph *Spectacles: Biblical Perspectives on Christian Scholarship* contains the lectures he delivered at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education in August-September 1983. He also wrote on the history of the problem within S. African Reformed churches: "Afrikanerdom and Apartheid: Churches in Turmoil," *Journal of Law and Religion* 5, no. 2 (1987): 275-283.

¹⁹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 178.

¹⁹¹ Spykman, "On the Inter-Relatedness of General and Special Revelation," 11.

¹⁹² Spykman, *RT*, 179.

¹⁹³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 23.

IV.2. Election

Like Barth, who “sharply opposes every theological construction which makes election the *obscure* and *hidden* background of the dispensation of grace revealed in history,”¹⁹⁴ Spykman pleads for an understanding of election as a more active and dynamic work of God. However, Barth’s treatment of election (*CD* II/2) prior to the doctrine of reconciliation (*CD* IV/1, 2, 3) signals a different emphasis than that of Spykman, who attempts to follow Calvin in this matter.¹⁹⁵ Barth reconfigures the Reformed doctrine of election, combining elements of the supralapsarian position, wherein God’s elective activity takes place prior to creation, with the concentration of election in Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁶ His approach places considerable weight on God’s rejection and election of the man Jesus rather than the election and rejection of individuals; the logical implication of this seems to be that of universal salvation, or *apokatastasis*, a conclusion which Barth himself, however, denies.¹⁹⁷ Concerning election, Spykman argues for the historical unfolding of redemptive history, drawing from the infralapsarian position, though without denying the reality of the decree. He identifies the focal point of election as each person’s response to Christ, who is God’s full and final self-revelation.¹⁹⁸ His discussion of election, centered on God’s Word, seeks to honor both God’s electing activity and the historical genuineness of human response.

Swimming against the current of theological subjectivity, Barth’s doctrine of election resists the overt tendency of modern theology to place human experience at the center. His location of the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God can be understood as a “conceptual model for breaking the centrality of the human subject.”¹⁹⁹ Connecting election with God’s “own being”²⁰⁰ designates God the central reference point of meaning, but without eliminating human participation. When Barth affirms that the divine and human “are not two co-existing and co-operating factors,” but that God, the “first and decisive” subject, preserves “the human subject” and its genuine activity, both Berkouwer and

¹⁹⁴ Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 90. On p. 96 Berkouwer describes Barth’s view in terms of rejecting election as “an independent decree of God.” Berkouwer and Spykman seek to avoid this conception of election as well, though they do not feel compelled to relate election “*exclusively*” to “*the incarnate Word*.”

¹⁹⁵ See Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 89.

¹⁹⁶ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 255, links Barth’s revision of election with his rejection of Nazi Germany, commenting that Barth’s “radical re-evaluation of the doctrine of election . . . can not be seen apart from the conviction that God is never a tyrant to whom mankind essentially does not matter, and who has overseen the destruction of a part of humanity.”

¹⁹⁷ See Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 111-112, and 116, where he remarks, “There is no alternative to concluding that Barth’s refusal to accept the *apokatastasis* cannot be harmonized with the fundamental structure of his doctrine of election.”

¹⁹⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 181-182.

¹⁹⁹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 363.

²⁰⁰ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 363.

Spykman can agree.²⁰¹ In Barth's conception, though, Jesus Christ the God-Man participates in election on behalf of humanity, and, therefore, an individual's response to revelation resembles more of an acknowledgment of salvation in Christ than a genuine response.²⁰²

Spykman tries to solve the problem of the "turn to the subject" with a model of election that rests on the mediating Word. Election resumes the location Calvin gave it as a reflection point for one who has responded to God's Word by placing faith in Jesus Christ.²⁰³ In Spykman's paradigm, God's Word initiates relationship and remains the center of gravity. While Barth moves away from the *decretum absolutum* typical of Reformed theology to a *decretum concretum* in Jesus,²⁰⁴ Spykman similarly distances himself from the concept of an absolute and hidden decree.²⁰⁵ Both theologians grapple with reprobation and the historical tendency to grant it equal ultimacy with election. Barth handles this by portraying Christ as suffering the No side of God's electing Yes.²⁰⁶ Spykman acknowledges reprobation as the "No" side of all God's covenantal dealings with mankind through his Word, without allowing reprobation to be a parallel track in his doctrine of election.²⁰⁷ Instead of anchoring the *decretum concretum* in Jesus alone, Spykman anchors it in the threefold Word of God, centered on Jesus, that calls each person to a decisive response. Spykman believes that in this way he holds together divine sovereignty with genuine response, a response enabled by God's own Spirit, while acknowledging the mystery of this divine-human interaction and the impossibility of penetrating it fully in the present age.

Is Spykman's concept of election a "refined form of synergism"²⁰⁸ such as Barth seeks to avoid? Does it match Van der Kooi's description of Barth's earlier view of election (which Barth later recognized to be synergistic) as one in which "election and rejection coincide with the moment of faith"?²⁰⁹ Spykman does not claim that God's action coincides with a person's response. Consistent with the Reformed tradition, Spykman rejects every form of synergism and attributes the entire work of salvation to God's grace. He admits that there is a mystery to God's action, and he honors the biblical witness to the *a priori* activity of God in electing.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, he pulls the theological focus to that moment

²⁰¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 94.

²⁰² Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 119-120.

²⁰³ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 175.

²⁰⁴ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 371.

²⁰⁵ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 182, 184, 186.

²⁰⁶ See Polman, *Barth*, 54.

²⁰⁷ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 187-190.

²⁰⁸ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 385.

²⁰⁹ Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 385.

²¹⁰ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 188-189.

where one's response reveals the direction of God's electing activity. He, like Calvin, continues to affirm the individual nature of election.

Part V: Evaluation

Colin Brown submits that "Barth is surely right in the way he binds knowledge of God to the Word of God. Only God can reveal God. If we want to know God, we must start where God starts. We must begin not with our preconceived ideas but with God's revelation of Himself in His Word."²¹¹ The question, of course, is, "What is God's starting point? Where does his Word begin?" Spykman's goal is to understand the meaning of Barth's work for determining the starting point of theological methodology. He appreciates Barth's effort to swing the pendulum away from liberalism's dominance and to restore emphasis on God's sovereignty in revelation. Though he critiques Barth's rejection of philosophy and prolegomena as untenable, his explicit incorporation of the reality of response bears some similarity to Barth's intention to establish a position for the human subject without being subjectivistic. Rather than overloading the divine side, though, Spykman posits the Word of God as a mediating factor already given with creation, which is not limited to an "event," as in Barth. Spykman does appeal to Jesus Christ as the "criterion" for knowledge of God, which, as Van der Kooi points out, can be done without making a "principle" out of a "comprehensive centralisation in Christology."²¹² Spykman's definition of revelation includes both the revealed truths that correspond to God's world and his relationship to it, as well as the relational component of divine encounter and human response.

Though Barth radically redefines revelation, he does not reject all modern questions and insights. In speaking of the loss of a true theology of revelation, he notes, "Of themselves, the modern view of things, the modern self-conception of man, etc., could not have done any harm. The real catastrophe was that theology lost its object, revelation in all its uniqueness."²¹³ To borrow from Bruce L. McCormack's title *Orthodox and Modern*, did Spykman perceive Barth as orthodox, modern, or both? Spykman's analysis shows that he perceives Barth as orthodox in his methodological assumption of divine sovereignty, initiative, and speaking. On the other hand, Spykman perceives Barth as modern in his subscription to the Kantian dualism of revelation and reason, which for Barth means less orthodox conclusions in methodology (a diminishment of creation) and, subsequently, in doctrine.

²¹¹ Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message*, 142.

²¹² Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 440-441.

²¹³ Barth, *CD I/2*, 294.

Spykman, too, remains open to the modern problem, but he does so with a broader view of revelation, unwilling to define revelation in ways that reduce Scripture's own conception of it. Thus, despite the gains made by Barth in respect to the doctrines of revelation and Christology, Spykman interprets Barth's methodological approach as one whereby Jesus Christ eclipses the other normative forms of revelation. The unintended outcome of this, from Spykman's vantage point, is a situation in which humanity has difficulty gaining certainty of access to and knowledge of God, despite an affirmation of genuine human participation and response. The next chapter explores Berkouwer's solution to the role of the subject, and Spykman's modification of his insights.

Chapter 6

Revelation and Response: Finding the Key for a New Paradigm Through Critical Reflection on the Work of Gerrit C. Berkouwer

When Gerrit C. Berkouwer assumed the Chair of Systematic Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1945, he set a different tone than that of his predecessor Valentijn Hepp. In contrast to the more closed and defensive posture that had come to characterize Reformed theology in the Netherlands since the end of Herman Bavinck's era, Berkouwer cultivated an openness to rethinking theological categories and engaging with theologians outside the Dutch Reformed tradition.¹ Spykman, reflecting on his initial encounter with Berkouwer's theology during his "post-war" [World War II] student years, says this:

[T]he early works of Berkouwer came across like a breath of fresh air. In his updating of the Calvin-Bavinck tradition we sensed the reality of an option as vibrant and contemporary as that of Barthian neo-orthodoxy. . . . Berkouwer's work offered a promising future to those among us who were seeking more indigenously Reformed ways of doing theology.²

Berkouwer's quest for theological renewal and his interpretations of contemporary theological movements deeply influenced Spykman, drawing him to the Free University to complete his doctoral work under Berkouwer's supervision. Berkouwer redirected Reformed theology to the Reformation concept of "correlation" between revelation and faith,³ and this *correlatie motief*, with modification, provides the basic structure for Spykman's three-factor theological paradigm.

Part I: The Significance of Berkouwer's Correlation Motif for Spykman's Theological Method

Spykman's theological paradigm is distinguished by its three-factor view of reality (God-Word-world) and its threefold concept of God's Word (creation-Scripture-Christ). The development of his paradigm stems primarily from his interpretation of John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, and the insights of Reformational philosophy. Though intimations of his three-factor view of reality are present in the work

¹ Johannes C. de Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theological Method: A Structural Analysis and a further Elaboration of Dr. G. C. Berkouwer's Hermeneutic-Dogmatic Method* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1980), 6, refers to "the detour from the anti-scholasticism stance at the Free University of Amsterdam . . . which occurred when Bavinck was succeeded in the chair of dogmatics by Valentine Hepp in 1922. Hepp returned again to a rationalistic, speculative-scholastic approach. . . . Berkouwer was to begin lecturing in modern theology at the Free University in 1940, and he was to succeed Hepp as professor of dogmatics there after the war years. He radically reaffirmed the anti-speculative approach again which had been initiated by Kuyper and Bavinck."

² Spykman, "Musings on a Ninetieth Birthday," 37.

³ For a specific statement on correlation as a Reformation concept, see Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, ed. and trans. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 120-121.

of Reformed and neo-Calvinist scholars, it is Berkouwer's model of correlation that most shapes Spykman's use of the three-factor view of reality for his overall structure and method. He seeks to go beyond Berkouwer in securing God's Word as the mediating link that binds God and the world in relationship, and this move reflects his rootedness in the Reformed tradition.

I.1. Theological Assessment

An analysis of references to Berkouwer in *Reformational Theology* demonstrates Spykman's doctrinal dependence on Berkouwer. Yet, despite his reliance on Berkouwer, Spykman finds it necessary to construct a more consistent methodological principle for dogmatic reflection. "For Berkouwer left us with an 'unsystematic systematics' – a stimulating series of monographs But there is no prolegomena, no justification of his chosen method."⁴ Instead of adopting Berkouwer's approach, Spykman casts a vision for a renewed theological method based on Berkouwer's insights concerning the correlative nature of revelation and faith.

Why does Berkouwer not utilize the correlation motif more effectively as a structured theological method? Spykman answers this question by citing "Berkouwer's aversion to philosophical reflection"⁵ and a corresponding unwillingness to reflect seriously on the "framework-of-reference which constitutes the foundation, context, and perspective for doing theology."⁶ Related to this is the fact that "[t]he given structures and meaning of created reality do not function significantly in his ongoing theological work."⁷ In Spykman's judgment, Berkouwer does not "take full advantage"⁸ of the doctrine of creation he sets forth in *General Revelation*. Though *Man: The Image of God* further develops Berkouwer's doctrine of creation and "reflects a large measure of philosophical orientation," as does *The Providence of God* (though Spykman does not explicitly acknowledge so), he assesses,

⁴ Spykman, "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," 4. Spykman observes that Berkouwer's *Faith and Justification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) includes some semblance of a prolegomenal position. In endnote 8 on p. 32 of the essay "Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena," Spykman references G. W. de Jong, *De Theologie van Dr. G. C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 1971) and De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theological Method*, commenting, "The general absence in Berkouwer's works of any prolegomenal account leaves those who study him with the task of 'second guessing' him on his theological method." De Moor, 7, confirms, "Berkouwer himself never wrote a systematic account of the method he actually employed. . . . He never wrote a prolegomena to begin with, but he chose the way of dogmatic studies in monograph." John Timmer, "G. C. Berkouwer: Theologian of Confrontation and Co-Relation," *Reformed Journal* 19, no. 10 (Dec. 1969): 18-20, accessed October 15, 2014, ATLA, links this unsystematic approach to dogmatics with Berkouwer's "functional" way of thinking, characterized by event and action rather than definitions, and concerned for the questions of the modern man.

⁵ Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 52.

⁶ Spykman, "Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History," 16.

⁷ Spykman, "Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History," 16.

⁸ Spykman, "Theology in Partnership with Philosophy and History," 16.

“While updating the spirit of Bavinck’s dogmatics, Berkouwer fails in general to follow Bavinck in his later shift of emphasis toward a Christian philosophy.”⁹ Berkouwer’s doctrine of creation significantly informs his response to Barth’s subsuming of creation under the doctrine of redemption, as discussed in Chapter 5. Spykman’s assessment of Berkouwer on this point has not to do with a lack of “creation” in Berkouwer’s thinking but with the absence of an acknowledged theological method rooted in the creational givens of a Christian philosophy. Spykman is concerned with the implications of Berkouwer’s lack of theological prolegomena, contending that it indicates a failure to convey an “overall religious vision, the totality picture, that binds all these thematic studies together.”¹⁰ As Spykman understands Berkouwer, his reluctance to define his theological method in terms of creational givens opens the door for a shift from Word-defined reality to faith as the nexus of the revelation/response correlation.

I.2. Historical Considerations

Berkouwer’s monographs display a thorough grasp of the difficult issues that dominated the playing field in twentieth-century theology. He argues his points in response to three major angles of thought: Roman Catholicism, with its new theological directions set by the Second Vatican Council; Karl Barth, whose influence upon twentieth-century theology cannot be overestimated; and the existential trend in theology, which strived to make room for the significance of human action in the present moment. Throughout his monographs, essays, and articles, Berkouwer regularly appeals to the work of Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Bavinck. With respect for their positions and awareness of their historical context, he places himself in the stream of Dutch Reformed thought that has them at its head.

Berkouwer identifies his own position as one consumed with “the question of the truth and credibility of the Christian faith in our modern world.”¹¹ This question, Berkouwer believed, was also implicit in Bavinck’s theology; its urgency increased through the first half of the twentieth century, which was full of war and human atrocities in spite of the humanistic claims of modernism.¹² Existential angst related to God’s presence in the world and the meaning of life affects the nature of questioning, according to Berkouwer: “Many of the questions of our time arise not in doxology but in doubt.”¹³ Commenting on the problem of faith and reason, he characterizes the period 1920-1970 as one in which

⁹ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 5.

¹⁰ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 4-6.

¹¹ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 23.

¹² Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 17; see also 180.

¹³ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 77.

“[w]e grope for connections between Christian faith and human experience.”¹⁴ Pressures from within and without the world of Christian theology forced Reformed theologians to grapple with the faith/reason relationship and with anthropocentric assumptions. Barth’s emphasis on transcendence left little room for pursuing the existential questions posited by secular philosophies and anthropocentric theologies.¹⁵ Into this context stepped Berkouwer, ready to affirm the legitimacy of certain existential questions regarding humanity’s exercise of faith but without capitulating to the rationalism he considered to be characteristic of much post-Calvin Reformed theology.¹⁶

The ambiguity of Berkouwer’s work has given rise to conflicting assessments of his doctrinal positions. Johannes C. de Moor in *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method* defends Berkouwer from Hendrikus Berkhof’s critique,¹⁷ surveying the conversation about Berkouwer within Dutch theological circles and concluding with a positive portrayal of Berkouwer’s renewal of Reformed theology. In North America, Berkouwer’s work has contributed to the fault line between those who advocate Scripture’s inerrancy and those who describe Scripture’s trustworthiness in terms of infallibility.¹⁸ Serious cautions about Berkouwer have been issued by scholars such as Cornelius Van Til,¹⁹ John Bolt,²⁰ and Carl W.

¹⁴ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 150; see also 35.

¹⁵ See Spykman, *RT*, 33-35.

¹⁶ See especially the first chapters of *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), *Man: The Image of God*, and *Faith and Perseverance*, trans. Robert D. Knudsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) for Berkouwer’s statements about the existential realities of the historical context to which he addresses himself. Concerning Berkouwer’s avoidance of rationalism, De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method*, 46, comments that “the revolutionary tendency of his methodology must in any case be attributed to his radically negative attitude towards speculative scholasticism, with its rationalistic abstractions, distinctions, and systematization. Almost all the participants in the discussion about Berkouwer’s theology hailed it as his chief accomplishment that he has liberated Reformed theology from its bondage to the tyranny of a speculative-scholastic kind of logic.” Lewis B. Smedes, “G. C. Berkouwer,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 92, says Berkouwer “has released theology from the tyranny of logic and set it within the freedom of faith.”

¹⁷ Hendrikus Berkhof, “De methode van Berkouwer’s theologie,” in *Ex auditu verbi: Theologische opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. G. C. Berkouwer ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftienvintigjarig ambtsjubileum als hoogleraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid van de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965), 37-55.

¹⁸ Jack Rogers has played a major role in this through his reliance on Berkouwer in his writings against inerrancy. See Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977); *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001); Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

¹⁹ See Cornelius Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace: An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer’s View of Dordt* ([Philadelphia]: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), 77-78, accessed March 30, 2019 at <http://www.archive.org/details/sovereigntyofgra00vant>.

²⁰ See John Bolt, “From Princeton to Wheaton: The Course of Neo-Calvinism in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42 (2007): 79-81, accessed May 17, 2014, ATLA, and “An Opportunity Lost and Regained: Herman Bavinck on Revelation and Religion,” 88-92.

Bogue²¹ (a Reformed teacher who completed his dissertation under Berkouwer's supervision). These men discern a significant degree of subjectivism in Berkouwer's positions and a consequent dismantling of objective biblical authority in his thinking, a trend with parallels in theological circles under Berkouwer's influence.

Alluding to three distinct "phases" in Berkouwer's work – early, middle, and later – Spykman aligns himself with the "middle" Berkouwer.

Given a strong emphasis on 'objectivity' in the early Berkouwer, and on 'subjectivity' in his later works, surely the 'master' will bear with a 'disciple' who continues to favor the 'middle' Berkouwer. This preference seems to be most in harmony with Berkouwer's uniquely enduring contribution to theological reflection – the 'correlation motif.'²²

To Van Til, this "middle way" appears to be a cover-up for positioning theology within a Kantian framework, rejecting logic for faith.²³ Spykman assesses Berkouwer's questions more affirmatively, detecting in them a legitimate challenge to a rationalism that gives undue precedence to logic and tends to overlook the role of human response as represented by Scripture.²⁴ He concludes, however, that despite Berkouwer's inclination to distance himself from a rationalistic approach by use of a more relational framework, he does not adequately apply his correlation method to the construction of a justifiable alternative. The correlation motif, which is a "key concept at the very center" of Berkouwer's theology, "continues to oscillate back and forth as though still caught in the bipolar tension of a two-factor theology," resulting in a shifting theological norm.²⁵ Spykman perceives that Berkouwer, despite his intuitive sense of a mediating factor grounded in relationality, failed to bring this intuition to development.²⁶ Through a consideration of the prolegomenal issues that are, in his view, at the root of dogmatic renewal, Spykman aims to accomplish what Berkouwer did not.²⁷

I.3. Revelation and Response

Both Berkouwer and Spykman recognize the imperative for all theological reflection: to begin with God's Word and an *a priori* commitment to its assumptions and principles. In his critique of

²¹ See Carl W. Bogue, *A Hole in the Dike: Critical Aspects of Berkouwer's Theology* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1977).

²² Spykman, "Musings," 37. H. Berkhof defines the phases in terms of Berkouwer's approach to scriptural authority. See Berkhof, "De methode van Berkouwers theologie," 40, 44, 48, for his reference to the three phases.

²³ Van Til, *Sovereignty of Grace*, 77-78.

²⁴ Spykman, "Musings," 36.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 51-52.

²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 51.

²⁷ Spykman, "Musings," 37.

theodicy, Berkouwer offers the following appraisal: “It is not sufficiently recognized that this world cannot be understood without the word of the living God, that it will, at the most crucial moment, be misunderstood when God’s revelation is not the determinative point of departure for analysis.”²⁸ He contends that true knowledge and understanding are contingent upon a revelational starting point.²⁹ This approach characterizes Spykman’s theological reflection, as well as the positions of other Dutch Reformed thinkers such as Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (as seen in Chapter 4). In a statement reminiscent of Dooyeweerd, Berkouwer warns of danger “[w]hen human thought is undisciplined by faith, when its pivot is not revelation . . . , when it does not recognize its rightful limits.”³⁰ Spykman extends this idea specifically to theological prolegomena, arguing that one must derive philosophical assumptions from Scripture which, in turn, give form and structure to one’s theological method and content.³¹

For Berkouwer, the heart of the revelation/response correlation lies in the relationality inherent to all divine interaction with the world. Scholasticism’s tendency to employ distinctions that portray God and humankind as independent from each other drives Berkouwer to a rejection of an approach that does not keep the divine-human relationship central. Berkouwer realizes that not all distinctions should be “dismissed as scholastic.”³² The problematic distinctions are those that obscure the divine-human relational context. For instance, in his discussion of the “Visio Dei,” Berkouwer contends that the Bible “does not suggest abstract, metaphysical properties [of God] imparted to us in isolation from His relationship to man and from the mode of His revelation.”³³ Rather, the biblical narrative, which reveals God’s covenantal faithfulness in upholding his creatures and forming a people for himself, provides the framework for the doctrine of God. Consequently, neither Berkouwer nor Spykman treat the doctrine of God as a separate topic. In Berkouwer’s case, this may have to do with his “aversion” to metaphysical explanations of reality. In Spykman’s case, it has to do with theologizing according to the contours of the Word and its covenantal context, which anchors metaphysical reflection.

²⁸ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 248.

²⁹ De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method*, 38-39, attributes to Berkouwer this “one and only concern: to exegete the Scriptures and to let them have the first and last word, also about the dogmatic method to be followed.” De Moor evaluates Berkouwer’s success in this matter more positively than does Spykman, though he acknowledges Berkouwer’s lack of “scientific explication” of his methodological inclinations (see points 1 and 3 on p. 369).

³⁰ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 273-274.

³¹ Spykman, *RT*, 101-102.

³² Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, ed. Marlin J. van Elderen, trans. James van Oosterom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 143.

³³ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 363.

Spykman defines Berkouwer's "correlation motif" in terms of the divine-human relationship, with particular reference to its soteriological dimension: "the intricate correlation between God's work and man's in the way of salvation."³⁴ This relational methodology resonates with Spykman's emphasis on knowing God *ad extra*, "as he comes out to us in his revelation," per Calvin.³⁵ By employing the biblical narrative as a way of ordering the doctrines, Spykman positions each doctrine within the basic scriptural theme of God's covenant relation to man. In the development of a three-factor worldview and the concept of a threefold Word of God, Spykman intends to anchor Reformed dogmatics in the relationality reclaimed by Berkouwer, which was present in Calvin but obscured by the "scholastic" methods that followed him.³⁶ The inescapable relationality between God and creation is mediated by God's Word, which reveals God's character and work to his creatures and elicits their response to him.

1.3.1. General and Special Revelation

How do Berkouwer's discussions describe the relationship between the various forms of divine disclosure? Regarding general revelation, Berkouwer presents a Reformed perspective that contrasts with "The Natural Theology of Rome" and "Karl Barth's Offensive Against Natural Theology."³⁷ He cautions against "an *independent* priority of the first article over against the second article of the creed" (the implication of Rome's natural theology) and a confusion of "revelation with the knowledge of the revelation"³⁸ (the problem Berkouwer identifies in Barth's reaction to natural theology). Spykman works within Berkouwer's grid: he argues for the priority of the first article (creation) but always in the context of its relatedness to the second article (redemption); he assumes the correctness of Berkouwer's conviction that revelation is a reality that is not abrogated by the sinner's inability and failure to perceive it.³⁹ Similar to Spykman's contention that the critical question for contemporary dogmatics is a right understanding of the relation between creation and redemption, Berkouwer asserts the following: "There is no more significant question in the whole of theology and in the whole of human life than that of the nature and reality of revelation."⁴⁰ Working in a historical context shaped by liberal theology's

³⁴ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 179.

³⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 139.

³⁶ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 177, mentions Calvin's "emphasis on relational theology."

³⁷ These are the titles of chapters 4 and 2 of Berkouwer, *General Revelation*.

³⁸ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 56-57.

³⁹ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 151-154, appeals to Romans 1, John Calvin, and the Reformed Confessions for an affirmation of the reality of revelation. The issue, from Berkouwer's perspective, is man's sinful response to that revelation: "All human life is estranged from the life and the glory of God, but that does not mean that man has escaped the revelation of God" (162).

⁴⁰ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 17.

doubts about the reality of special revelation⁴¹ and by Barth's criticisms of general revelation,⁴² Berkouwer and Spykman seek to uphold the biblical witness to God's self-manifestation in the works of his hands, in Scripture, and through incarnation, with a particular focus on the integrality of God's work in creation and redemption.

Does this focus correspond to Scripture and to the confessions? Berkouwer spends a chapter of *General Revelation* considering the "Nature Psalms" and their testimony to general revelation.⁴³ He also explains Acts 17 and Romans 1 in terms of the impact of revelation on idolatry and false religions. He concludes that the thrust of Paul's words to the Athenians is that their distorted knowledge comprises their problem, and the basic point of Romans 1 is a pronouncement of God's wrath.⁴⁴ He does not believe one is justified to fault revelation in either case; in his perspective, both passages insist on the reality of revelation.⁴⁵ With regard to the confessions, Berkouwer admits that the Belgic Confession, along with other accepted Reformed confessions, acknowledges divine disclosure in and through creation, but "none *enlarges* upon this revelation of God on the basis of Holy Scripture."⁴⁶ Though the confessions uphold the reality of revelation in God's works, the reality of God's revelation in Scripture and Christ forms the substance of their content.

Spykman interprets the soteriological concern of the confessions as attributable to the reclamation of essential soteriological truths that dominated the Protestant Reformation.⁴⁷ The central issue at stake for the Reformers was faith in Christ alone as the antidote to unbiblical interpretations of the means of salvation. Additionally, "no one had yet arisen to challenge the Biblical teachings on creatio ex nihilo."⁴⁸ The Reformers assumed the reality of revelation through the divine works, as

⁴¹ See Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 12-13; Spykman, *RT*, 29, mentions this as a symptom of the theological move from dualism to monism: "For the idea of the otherness of God and of revelation as a normative Word from beyond our world of experience is steadily being crowded out to make more room for immanentist theologies."

⁴² See Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 23, where he summarizes Barth: "Apart from the incarnation we cannot speak of revelation"; and 30, where he draws a contrast between Calvin and Barth: "An objective knowability of God through the created reality which, according to Calvin, already bears the traces of its Creator, is rejected by Barth." Spykman, *RT*, 168-170, provides a synopsis of the problem concerning general revelation and natural theology with special reference to Barth.

⁴³ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 117-134.

⁴⁴ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 143-144, 148-149.

⁴⁵ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 150, states, "There is contact with revelation, but a contact which fails to lead to a true knowledge and acknowledgement. . . . This does not and must not lead us to deny the revelation. For Paul is convinced of the significance of it." Against Barth's rejection of the reality of revelation in creation, Berkouwer argues on p. 164, "Barth has not seen that unbelief can have a correlation only with revelation and can be understood and explained only by way of the normativity of the revelation of God."

⁴⁶ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 267-268.

⁴⁷ Spykman, "Confessing the Reformed Faith Today," 86.

⁴⁸ Spykman, "Confessing the Reformed Faith Today," 86.

captured in the Belgic Confession, Article 2. The confessions reflect their preoccupation with the way and means of salvation as well as the pre-Kant/pre-Enlightenment supposition of creation as an expression of God's glory. Assessing the modern challenges to the reality of revelation, Berkouwer declares, "The problematic aspect of the *fallen world* may not be interpreted as a problematic situation of *revelation*."⁴⁹ From this vantage point, Spykman calls for a renewal of the biblical correspondence between creation and redemption as together expressing the fullness of divine revelation.⁵⁰

1.3.2. Scriptural Authority

At every point Berkouwer acknowledges the authority of Scripture. Indeed, he aims to rethink according to Scripture those Reformed doctrines and doctrinal elements that owe their formulation more to philosophy or logic than to Scripture. He also references the creeds and confessions regularly, upholding them as essential statements of the church that should direct the church's theology. Berkouwer disclaims all competition between divine and human activity, and this is no less important for the doctrine of Scripture than for other doctrines. He maintains that God's activity makes space for human activity.⁵¹

In *Holy Scripture*, Berkouwer weaves together the historic confession that Scripture is the Word of God and the emphasis on the human dimension of Scripture brought to light by historical criticism.⁵² In one place he offers a sound principle: "The discussion about Scripture, its God-breathed character and authority . . . can only take place in the perspective of that trustworthiness of Scripture which enables us to abandon ourselves in complete trust to its authority and to preach its message."⁵³ In other places, his formulations imply that he is drawing an unwarranted distinction between God's Word and its written expression as Scripture, particularly when he speaks of Scripture as a "witness" to the Word or to Christ, and when he appears to attribute to faith too great a role in confirming the authority of

⁴⁹ Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 256.

⁵⁰ One way Spykman attempts to achieve this renewal is through an "updated" confession, the "Contemporary Testimony," which "aims at bringing this historic article of faith [creation] into the 20th century, and, in doing so, spelling out some of its implications for our stewardship of creational resources" ("Confessing the Reformed Faith Today," 12).

⁵¹ See Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 145: "The fact that Scripture and the prophets are *from God* . . . does not rule out the human witness in a divine monergism, but includes this witness in a unique manner." Note that the English edition of *Holy Scripture* is abridged and includes material from Berkouwer's two volume Dutch work, *De Heilige Schrift* (Kampen: Kok, 1966 and 1967).

⁵² Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 9, 12-13.

⁵³ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 138.

Scripture.⁵⁴ Critics of Berkouwer's definition of the authority of Scripture charge that it has nuances unacceptable within Reformed theology. H. Berkhof characterizes Berkouwer's first methodological phase as emphasizing "*het volstrekte gezag der Schrift*," or the absolute authority of Scripture, and his third phase as emphasizing "*de existentielle strekking der Schrift*," or existential tendency of Scripture.⁵⁵ What Berkouwer has relinquished, according to Berkhof's designations, is Scripture's full authority. Van Til observes that Berkouwer's desire to avoid "formalism in relation to Scripture" leads him to give prominence to the purpose of Scripture in relation to Christ and salvation, thus reducing its objective authority as a form of God's Word.⁵⁶ Though not all theologians agree with this assessment of Berkouwer's methodological phases and his ultimate position on scriptural authority, Spykman accepts its validity when he chooses the "middle" Berkouwer as his model.⁵⁷

Berkouwer and Spykman differ in their way of describing Scripture's nature as both divine and human. Referring to Scripture as "this amazing human writing with its unique witness to the living God,"⁵⁸ Berkouwer varies from typical Reformed language regarding the priority of Scripture's divine nature. While the view he expresses may not be unorthodox, it reflects a subjective priority. Spykman, in contrast, uses the threefold Word concept to anchor the "mediating Word" as the "normative focal point" for determining the nature of Scripture.⁵⁹ He considers the "organic" view of inspiration to be "[i]mplicit" in a "three-factor theology," and he describes this view in terms that echo a more historically Reformed definition of Scripture: "The 'organic' view rests on the confession that in the Bible we hear the Word of God in the words of men."⁶⁰ Regarding inspiration, infallibility, and authority, Spykman concludes, "Every divine activity in producing the Scriptures is qualified by human engagement, but is not limited by it."⁶¹

Van Til questions whether Berkouwer's theological method of correlation could have led to any other position than that of rejecting, to some degree, the absolute authority of Scripture as advocated

⁵⁴ See, for example, Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 162-167, 262-266. Berkouwer emphasizes the believer's confrontation by Scripture and the Holy Spirit's work to arouse faith in its reliability, but his rejection of an objective sense of its reality as Word of God seems to put too much weight on the believer's faith-recognition of Scripture as God's Word.

⁵⁵ Berkhof, "De methode van Berkouwers theologie," 40, 48.

⁵⁶ Van Til, "Sovereignty of Grace," 77.

⁵⁷ Spykman, "Musings," 37.

⁵⁸ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 143.

⁵⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 123.

⁶⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 123. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.7.5, says that Scripture "has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I:435, states that "Scripture is totally the product of the Spirit of God, who speaks through the prophets and apostles, and at the same time totally the product of the activity of the authors."

⁶¹ Spykman, *RT*, 123.

by the Synod of Dort.⁶² Does a similar inevitability afflict Spykman, who claims to be granting the correlation of revelation and faith – embodied in the threefold Word of God and human response to it – a more normative position in theological reflection? Does his new paradigm allow enough distance from the more subjective endpoint that characterizes Berkouwer’s third phase?

Both Berkouwer and Spykman recognize that God’s Word is broader than Scripture, but whereas Berkouwer suggests that the divine-human correlation is the key that unlocks the reliability of Scripture,⁶³ Spykman sets the scriptural Word in the center of his threefold Word concept as the key by which God’s Word in its fullness can be known.⁶⁴ In so doing, he does not deny the human dimension of Scripture’s writing, which Berkouwer is eager to defend, but incorporates creaturely response as a necessary dimension of all revelatory forms, including Scripture. Faith constitutes the subjective correlate of divine revelation, but the reality of revelation does not depend upon it. Whereas for Berkouwer, the Bible’s authoritative witness comes fully into its own in the correlation with faith, for Spykman it is the key⁶⁵ in a more objective sense to God’s revelation in its complete, three-form reality.

Berkouwer expresses his intention to avoid relativism and historicism in his approach to Scripture by warning, “In every dealing we have with Scripture and in all our reflection on its God-breathed character, we are tested . . . concerning whether we have lapsed into the paradox of a relativized authority.”⁶⁶ However, he recognizes that “the development of theological thought . . . particularly since the Enlightenment, has been increasingly concerned with the relationships between revelation, faith, and history.”⁶⁷ Berkouwer’s emphasis on faith as the subjective correlate of the trustworthiness of Scripture and his inquiries into Scripture’s “reliability, clarity, [and] sufficiency”⁶⁸ take account of these revelation-faith-history relationships.

Spykman’s defense of what he calls a “confessional hermeneutic” discloses his interest in the issues raised by Berkouwer, as well as his effort to connect confession, theology, and faith in a manner that moves beyond “the ever present dualist-dialectical tensions between confession and theology.”⁶⁹

⁶² Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 66, 70, 72. H. Berkhof also offers a negative assessment of the consequences of Berkouwer’s method, and De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method*, 24, summarizes Berkhof’s criticism as follows: “His [Berkouwer’s] adoption of the correlation as a methodological criterion had caused him to recognize insufficiently those dimensions of revelation which supersede the receptive capacity of personal, existential faith.”

⁶³ See Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 348-349, 355-356, 366; *Half Century of Theology*, 136-143.

⁶⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 76-78.

⁶⁵ See the section title in *RT*, 87: “Scripture Is the Key.”

⁶⁶ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 138.

⁶⁷ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 245.

⁶⁸ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 239.

⁶⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 133.

Both history and message find room within a “confessional hermeneutic,” without leading either to historicism or to a timeless morality that ignores the historical context.⁷⁰ Spykman, like Berkouwer, does not advocate any form of bibliolatry that would attribute mystical, magical powers to a book. He appreciates Berkouwer’s questions, but he works to avoid the objective/subjective dilemma of Scripture and faith by granting Scripture the priority, not just in relation to faith,⁷¹ but also in relation to the other forms of God’s Word – creation and Jesus Christ. In the present age, Scripture constitutes the entry point to genuine knowledge of God. Spykman perceives his confessional hermeneutic to be a method by which “faith and theology can be kept together in an integrally unified and meaningful working relationship which honors and gives free play to the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God in the words of men.”⁷² His intention to *honor* the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God in the words of men expresses his commitment to remain faithful to the historic Reformed confessions; his intention to give free play to that conviction expresses his perspective that the various aspects present in Scripture (such as historical narrative)⁷³ can and should be pursued for deeper understanding, but only within the confines of the confession.

I.4. The Word in the Center

Berkouwer and Spykman work from the basic premise that some questions, given the limits set by divine revelation, have no place in a biblically-oriented dogmatics.⁷⁴ Rather than accepting the legitimacy of traditional theological questions, Spykman asks whether, on the basis of Scripture, those questions can and should be asked by a theologian committed to revelation as his starting point.⁷⁵ His goal is to articulate theological concepts so as to reflect Scripture’s own mode of presentation rather than the questions posed by scholasticism without reference to relationship (i.e., “Who is God in relation to us?” instead of “Who is God?”).⁷⁶ This explains his and Berkouwer’s shared aversion to the classic *loci* of systematic theology, as well as their willingness to allow for some mystery in questions related to the correspondence between divine and human activity.

⁷⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 133.

⁷¹ Gordon J. Spykman, “Biblical Authority (1),” *Banner*, January 5, 1973, 8-9, affirms the “full divine authority of Scripture,” which is the authority of God, its primary author. He distinguishes between Scripture’s authority and the believer’s confession of that authority, acknowledging that our “[c]onfession of biblical authority is . . . an act of faith rooted in the heart,” but he never makes Scripture’s authority dependent on faith.

⁷² Spykman, *RT*, 133.

⁷³ Spykman, *RT*, 129-133.

⁷⁴ De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method*, 46-55; Spykman, *RT*, 24-25.

⁷⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 60-63, 70-72, 73-75.

⁷⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 94.

What, though, functions as the correlating factor that links divine and human relationship and activity? Within his discussion of Berkouwer's weaknesses, Steven Bouma-Prediger argues that in Berkouwer's works a created dimension – faith – takes the mediating position rather than “the God/creation relation as a *distinct ontic given*.”⁷⁷ Rather than using faith or the correlation in and of itself as the mediating link between God and creation, Spykman casts this relation in terms of the Word – a Word that originates with God and draws forth human response.⁷⁸ Because of his decision to grant God's Word normative status, Spykman can supplant the traditional dilemmas with a stress on the “unity in the works of God.”⁷⁹ Spykman's three factor framework – God/Word/world – prevents God's work from being placed in opposition to or in competition with human work. God's work takes priority (this is indicated by the boundary line that separates humanity from God but without limiting God's activity), but God does not work independently of humanity, nor can humanity work independently of him. Simply put, this changes the focus of one's questions: rather than abstracting God and his image-bearers as entities working autonomously and independently of each other, the focus remains on their relationship as defined and mediated by God's Word.

Part II: The Correlation Motif at Work: Problems and Insights

Spykman's dogmatics displays significant dependence upon Berkouwer's thought in the areas of anthropology, providence, election, and eschatology. These themes have import primarily because of the structural and methodological dimensions they add to Spykman's “new paradigm.” One can discern the “correlation motif” at work especially in these areas, where it yields new angles of reflection.

II.1. Anthropology

In his review of Berkouwer's *Man: The Image of God*, Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988) lists five theological contributions of that work. Spykman prioritizes two of those contributions, making them

⁷⁷ Steven Bouma-Prediger, “Bonhoeffer and Berkouwer on the World, Humans, and Sin: Two Models of Ontology and Anthropology” (master's thesis, Institute for Christian Studies, June 1984), 166-167, accessed June 4, 2019, https://ir.icscanada.edu/bitstream/handle/10756/290708/BoumaPrediger_Steven_198406_MPhilF_Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y; he considers his argument to be aligned with that of Spykman. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 221, indicates the pivotal role of faith when describing the “interrelatedness between preservation and perseverance,” with *sola fide* as “the living center of the doctrine of perseverance.” However, on p. 235, he explains, “This priority of God's grace is the basic meaning of *sola fide*.” On p. 44, he distinguishes the Reformed meaning of “the correlation of faith and grace” from that of the Remonstrants, who viewed “faith as the subjective pole over against grace.”

⁷⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 76-88.

⁷⁹ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 292.

anchor points for his own dogmatics. Specifically, according to Hoekema, Berkouwer (1) “vigorously emphasizes the unity of man” and (2) “insists that we cannot really understand man apart from his relatedness to God and to his fellowmen.”⁸⁰ Employing what might be called Berkouwer’s “functional,” as opposed to ontological, way of thinking,⁸¹ Spykman defines the emphasis on relatedness to God in terms of an individual’s ongoing – faithful or unfaithful – response to God’s Word.⁸² This response to divine revelation involves the whole person, not merely the intellect or the will or a so-called spiritual aspect of life.⁸³

Scripture’s concern for the “whole man” leads Berkouwer and Spykman, encouraged by the Reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, to emphasize the integral nature of the person in the biblical perspective. Berkouwer does this briefly in “The Meaning of the Image” (Chapter 3 of *Man: The Image of God*) and at greater length in “The Whole Man” (Chapter 6 of *Man: The Image of God*), upholding the view that the body must be included in the biblical conception of how humans image God.⁸⁴ “Scripture never makes a distinction between man’s spiritual and bodily attributes in order to limit the image of God to the spiritual.”⁸⁵ Without implying that God himself has a body, this view affirms that God designed persons to image God with their entire being. Berkouwer, when he explores biblical anthropology more directly, sets at the forefront of the discussion Scripture’s way of speaking to the person (1) “in his relation to God” and (2) “in his totality.”⁸⁶ The intention to consider humanity always in relationship to and before God characterizes Berkouwer’s theology.⁸⁷ His commitment to regard the person “in his totality” finds expression in his use of the neo-Calvinist term “heart” to portray humanity’s religiously “concentrated unity.”⁸⁸

Berkouwer says that the relation between humanness, God’s gifts, and relative conformity to God’s law must never be abstracted from humanity’s actual relation to and with God. In the Reformation tradition, a person’s guilt stems precisely from the fact that as the human – made in God’s

⁸⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, “Berkouwer on the Image of God” [2], *Reformed Journal* 8, no. 6 (June 1958): 13-14, accessed June 6, 2019, ATLA.

⁸¹ Timmer, “G. C. Berkouwer,” 19-20.

⁸² Spykman, *RT*, 92-95, 178-180.

⁸³ Spykman, *RT*, 224-227. In this section, Spykman references both Bavinck and Berkouwer in his argument for the image of God as pertaining to the “whole man.”

⁸⁴ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 76-77: Berkouwer commends Bavinck’s agreement with his view but refers to Calvin’s rejection of the body as image of God as an “unscriptural opinion” (footnote 24).

⁸⁵ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 77. Spykman quotes this in *RT*, 225.

⁸⁶ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 199.

⁸⁷ See Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 31: “It is clear enough from Scripture that its concern is with the whole man, the full man, the actual man as he stands in God’s sight, in the religious bond between the totality of his being and God.”

⁸⁸ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 202.

image – he or she misuses the gifts of God, sinning by, in, and with them.⁸⁹ Like Berkouwer, Spykman bypasses questions arising from abstract views of humanness by grounding his anthropology in humanity’s inescapable relationship to and status before God. An analysis of sin’s effects upon human nature must take account of “primordial createdness.”⁹⁰ Thus, “the creation, fall, and redemption motifs loom large as normative considerations in shaping a biblically Reformed doctrine of man.”⁹¹ Spykman follows Berkouwer’s lead, which is rooted in their Reformed tradition, in re-framing theological questions about God, humanity, and the world in terms of the divine-human relationship assumed on every page of Scripture.

For this reason, neither Berkouwer nor Spykman gives much space to questions concerning divine or human essence, as if such concepts can be treated apart from the Revealer/responder relationship. Berkouwer reminds his readers of the Reformed theological principle derived from Calvin’s method: “[Calvin] speaks of man’s self-knowledge in his relation to God, from which man in his self-knowledge cannot abstract himself.”⁹² Any theological anthropology that seeks to understand man “apart from this relation” will be out of sync with biblical revelation that presents being in relation to God as “constitutive for man’s nature.”⁹³ Mindful of the “agnosticism and pessimism”⁹⁴ of the twentieth century, Spykman outlines various anthropocentric answers to the question, “What is man?”⁹⁵ He critiques the liberalist, humanist, existentialist, evolutionary, technological, revolutionary, Freudian, and behaviorist views, finding that all of them subscribe to the “bipolar dialectic” of “the Kantian dualism between the ironclad rationality of the scientific mind . . . and morality with its urge for freedom.”⁹⁶ Spykman returns to Calvin, who “shatters this false dilemma in the opening lines of *The Institutes*.”⁹⁷ One way to resist the Kantian dualism and reclaim Calvin’s insight that knowledge of God and self are interrelated is to evaluate modern anthropological viewpoints in light of humanity’s fundamental and defining relationship: creature of God who has rebelled and fallen. In opposition to the theological concept of *analogia entis*, in which “the essence of man is defined in terms of his ontic qualities,” Berkouwer argues for the scriptural perspective that emphasizes “his loss and his guilt” – one’s standing

⁸⁹ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 129, 151.

⁹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 197.

⁹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 197.

⁹² Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 21.

⁹³ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 23. On page 34, Berkouwer writes that “the relation to God” is what “Scripture presents as the essential and unique characteristic of man and man’s nature.”

⁹⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 198.

⁹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 203-204, 207-217.

⁹⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 216.

⁹⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 198.

before God.⁹⁸ Framing the matter more positively, Spykman describes the key to self-knowledge as dependence on “a Word from beyond,” confirming that Scripture lays claim to the person in the entirety of his or her being, “expos[ing] us to the searching eye of God in the religious wholeness of our existence.”⁹⁹

Having surveyed various attempts to “locate the ‘seat’ of the image of God in man” – including that of distinguishing between the image in its “‘narrower’ and ‘broader’ sense” – Spykman concludes that, biblically speaking, imaging God is “a relational, referential concept” with “a dynamic, active, functional meaning.”¹⁰⁰ Conceiving of the divine image in terms of status (not ontic qualities as such but living “before the face of God”) and task (“doing his will”),¹⁰¹ Spykman incorporates Berkouwer’s insights that humanness must be defined in terms of relationship to God and must include every aspect of personhood. This is because “all our ways of being human are thoroughly corporeal and at the same time thoroughly spiritual.”¹⁰² The mystery of this unity contrasts with the dichotomous and trichotomous anthropologies that have characterized dogmatics throughout history. Spykman borrows Berkouwer’s phrase “fictitious unity”¹⁰³ to describe L. Berkhof’s strivings toward “unity-in-duality.”¹⁰⁴ In Spykman’s estimation, “dualist starting points (body and soul) resist unified conclusions (human wholeness).”¹⁰⁵ The anthropological unity for which Berkouwer and Spykman argue has implications for issues related to the origin and cessation of life as well as for basic definitions of personhood and the divine image.

Though Spykman devotes less space than Berkouwer to surveying and constructing a biblical approach to the question, “What is man?” he applies their shared insights to crucial cultural issues. Regarding abortion, Spykman places blame on the “insuperable dilemmas” generated by “[d]ualist views of human nature.”¹⁰⁶ Questions about the beginning point of human life and the union of two separate substances – body and soul – give way to “rationalizations” that promote destruction of unborn persons. According to Spykman, the scriptural perspective on “human life in the integrally coherent unity of its bodily-spiritual wholeness” demands honor for the personhood of the unborn.¹⁰⁷ Though he does not

⁹⁸ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 62-64.

⁹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 204-206.

¹⁰⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 226-228.

¹⁰¹ Spykman, *RT*, 228.

¹⁰² Spykman, *RT*, 238.

¹⁰³ Spykman, *RT*, 236; Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 212.

¹⁰⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 236.

¹⁰⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 236.

¹⁰⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 242.

¹⁰⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 242-243.

mention euthanasia, which was a less pressing topic in his time, he criticizes descriptions of death that employ holist language but assume a dualist perspective. The “materialist” speaks of the end of a person at death, leaving no room for the spiritual dimension or the possibility of life beyond physical death. The “spiritualist” speaks of the continuation of the “real person” in a life beyond death, betraying an assumption that the body does not constitute the “real person.” Both positions deny the biblical integrality of the whole person in death and resurrection, and Spykman confronts their underlying dualistic assumptions with the unity portrayed in Scripture.¹⁰⁸

These practical stances on life and death reflect the ambiguity raised by centuries-long debates over the origin of life (creationism vs. traducianism) and the question of life beyond death (the doctrine of the immortality of the soul). Berkouwer discusses these at length, while Spykman provides a summary of their history and effect on dogmatics, each in quest for an alternative to the usual two-factor assumptions that drive theological deliberations of these problems. As Berkouwer navigates the creationism-traducianism debate, he determines that the body/soul dualism forms the foundational presupposition for both positions and asks the following question: “Is the dilemma so stated a real dilemma? Must we choose for one or the other standpoint, with no third possibility open before us?”¹⁰⁹ Defining and granting normative status to the “third possibility” is at the heart of Spykman’s project. Berkouwer’s suggestion for the “third possibility” consists of reasserting the authority of Scripture, particularly in terms of the limits it sets for theological reflection. Spykman also urges theological restraint concerning questions that require speculation beyond the revelation of God’s Word. He echoes Berkouwer’s frequent insistence on adhering to Calvin’s method of saying no more or less than Scripture,¹¹⁰ suggesting that passages traditionally interpreted in dualistic terms should be read with “unifocal” rather than “bifocal glasses.”¹¹¹ Reading the Scriptures with the presupposition of the unity of human nature yields an interpretation that may not satisfy every curiosity but that sets the whole person, in birth and death and all that lies between, before the face of God.

Berkouwer’s views regarding human nature also impact Spykman’s distinction between duality and dualism. According to Berkouwer, “Duality within created reality does not exclude harmony and unity, but is exactly oriented towards it. Duality between man and fellow man, man and world, becomes a dualism only when there is a polar tension, an inner separation, which destroys the unity

¹⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 244-245.

¹⁰⁹ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 305.

¹¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 6.

¹¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 243.

between the terms.”¹¹² Spykman’s desire to avoid dualistic thinking, taken from Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven as well as from Berkouwer, forms a basic motivation of his work. Dualities portray biblical distinctions within reality, encompassing both the Creator/creation distinction and the antithesis between the kingdoms of light and darkness. But dualism, which “gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status,” beleaguers Christian theology, portraying creation and the human person in terms of an inherently good part (spiritual) and an inherently bad part (physical).¹¹³ Berkouwer connects this misunderstanding to humanity’s alienation from God: “The problems of dualism and polar tensions can only arise when man is alienated from his created fullness and his relationship to God; these problems are themselves but a reflection of the break which sin and death brought into human actuality.”¹¹⁴ In short, dualisms constitute a manifestation of the antithesis: a confusion and distortion of reality which evidences sin’s devastation of human reason and perception. Spykman’s adoption of Berkouwer’s arguments against dualism within theological anthropology gives rise to a “new paradigm” within which questions can be considered according to more biblical assumptions.

II.2. The Christian Life

In Spykman’s overview of the Christian’s pilgrimage, he demonstrates the usefulness of Berkouwer’s correlation motif for understanding the life of faith that depends on God’s grace. These two elements – divine grace and the faith it engenders – “intersect fully and freely at every turn along the way.”¹¹⁵ Spykman writes that Berkouwer’s concept of correlation between grace and faith “lends impetus and direction to the pilgrimage.”¹¹⁶ What, though, is the link between grace and faith, or divine and human activity? In identifying the link, Spykman chooses a different way than Berkouwer. Berkouwer designates *sola fide* as the mediating factor between God and persons, though recognizing grace as its source and point of orientation.¹¹⁷ Spykman designates the Word of God as the mediating factor, thus stabilizing the priority of God’s activity and removing the temptation to view faith more subjectively or as an independent factor in the divine-human relationship. The doctrines of providence and election illustrate Berkouwer’s use of the correlation motif and Spykman’s development of the motif into a more structured methodological tool.

¹¹² Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 211-212.

¹¹³ Spykman, *RT*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 230.

¹¹⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 486.

¹¹⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 485-486.

¹¹⁷ Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 221. On p. 202, he refers to the “secret of the correlation” as the fact that the faith of perseverance “is oriented to Christ and feeds on the constancy of His faithfulness and grace.”

II.2.1. Providence

At the beginning of *The Providence of God*, Berkouwer acknowledges the existential questions that present themselves to the contemporary defender of the doctrine of providence, who cannot be ignorant of “the distance between this confession and modern thought.”¹¹⁸ In the wake of the world wars and the pessimism to which they contributed,¹¹⁹ nihilism, atheism, and existentialism dominated philosophy, producing skepticism about the possibility of God and meaning.¹²⁰ The chaos and destruction people experienced gave credence to doubts about God’s presence in the world; thus, “[t]he reality of God’s guiding hand and of His hearing of prayer became for countless persons the most existential question of their lives.”¹²¹ Spykman, too, realizes the challenge of defending biblical providence in the face of evidence that seems to point to the absence of God. He says, “Providence remains, perhaps as never before, a daring article of faith.”¹²² The doctrine of providence points to God’s faithful governance of his world, assuring believers of a purposeful life that is being guided by a loving and speaking God toward a meaningful *telos*,¹²³ but this assurance should be grounded in a biblical understanding of creation. For, as Spykman claims, “Providence presupposes creation.”¹²⁴

Berkouwer, in his discussion of providence, refers to “the stability of creation” resulting from God’s “perpetual attendance” upon the works of his hands.¹²⁵ Spykman reflects this language when he writes of “the enduring norms of God’s creational Word in its holding power for our life together in the world.”¹²⁶ As Berkouwer insists, this creational stability does not consist in a static “keeping of things in proper condition.”¹²⁷ In Spykman’s words, the human race and the reality it inhabits are “set within the ordered surroundings of a stable (but not static) and unfolding (but not evolving) cosmos.”¹²⁸ Both “stability” and “unfolding” imply ongoing activity by God and creatures.

¹¹⁸ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Berkouwer, “Calvinism and Humanism,” in *Calvinism in Times of Crisis: Addresses delivered at the Third American Calvinistic Conference* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1947), 64, maintains that “the world war did not create this pessimism, but only strengthened it.”

¹²⁰ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 7-14.

¹²¹ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 32.

¹²² Spykman, *RT*, 275.

¹²³ Spykman, *RT*, 276.

¹²⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 272.

¹²⁵ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 66.

¹²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 87.

¹²⁷ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 67.

¹²⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 179. See also Spykman, “Thoughts on ‘Creation Order,’” 39.

The perspective on the relationship between divine and human actions inherent to Spykman's doctrine of providence has implications for the genuineness of human actions in history. Berkouwer, who denies "a transcendental value to the principle of causality,"¹²⁹ attempts to safeguard the reality of human freedom within the sovereign and personal rule of God.¹³⁰ Affirming both God's rule and human responsibility subordinate to God's rule, Berkouwer concludes that history must be taken seriously, as opposed to viewing God as the only meaningful player in the divine-human story.¹³¹ Similarly, Spykman states, "The history-making forces which shape culture involve the ongoing interaction between divine revelation and human response. . . . Precisely because God is sovereign, we are the more responsible We remain responsive recipients of revelation and responsible agents in using the time God gives us in shaping history and forming culture."¹³² For Spykman, that aspect of providence commonly called concurrence consists of human response to the divinely revealed Word. However, while human response has authentic value, it should never be viewed as "fifty-fifty cooperation" with the work of God.¹³³ Through his revealing Word, God takes priority by initiating relationship and issuing an unavoidable call for response.

God's sustenance of creation, "always bound to the great work of God, Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer,"¹³⁴ serves as the basis for key distinctives of the Dutch Reformed tradition, such as common grace and the rejection of a natural/supernatural distinction. The post-fall preservation of creational structures implies that the laws and ordinances given in the original creation remain effective for the post-fall world. For Spykman, as for Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, and Berkouwer, creation laws and ordinances hold great significance for crafting a theological understanding of human functions and roles in the world. Divine preservation also implies restraint of sin and unwillingness on God's part to allow sin's corruption to reach its ultimate potential.

The ongoing role of creation ordinances, coupled with the restraint of sin, has led some Calvinist thinkers to the doctrine of common grace to explain the positive functions of human community in a fallen world as well as cultural contributions from non-Christians. Berkouwer refers to common grace as an "imperfect solution" in explaining the "problem of conformity in fallen man," but he lauds it for "center[ing] our attention on the gracious act of God in protecting man's corrupt and apostate nature

¹²⁹ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 155.

¹³⁰ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 140-141.

¹³¹ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 141.

¹³² Spykman, *RT*, 270.

¹³³ Spykman, *RT*, 276.

¹³⁴ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 68-69.

from total demonization.”¹³⁵ Spykman, in his defense of the doctrine, points to its complexity as illustrated by Calvin’s explication of human gifts and competencies in *Institutes* II.2.12-17. He concludes that an affirmation of common grace constitutes a “better answer” than the two alternatives: one regards men and women as “only partially depraved;” the other regards them as unable to “do anything which . . . can be called good.”¹³⁶ While the conformity of the unrighteous to God’s laws does not establish a foundation for their redemption, it does testify to God’s faithfulness to his creational Word concerning all creatures as well as a person’s responsibility for the direction of his or her life.

A discussion of miracles demonstrates the genius of the Reformed doctrine of divine providence. Berkouwer summarizes the nature of God’s work as follows: “His activity is not *contra naturam* but *contra peccatum*. The antithesis is not God and nature but God and sin.”¹³⁷ Miracles fall not into the category of supernatural activity but of divine involvement in restoring and redeeming nature according to God’s design. Spykman, drawing upon Berkouwer’s insight, maintains that “[a]ll creational possibilities are God’s servants” and reflect the “holding and healing power of God’s Word for creation.”¹³⁸ His perspective, which is an extension of the doctrine of providence, prohibits the elevation of human reason to the position of “operative principle” in the explanation of miracles, as well as the dualist assumption that miracles suspend or interrupt God’s “natural law.”¹³⁹ By insisting that God always acts through his mediating Word, using whatever agents he chooses (since none are his “competitors”¹⁴⁰), Spykman honors Berkouwer’s desire to communicate the dynamic nature of God’s interactions in and with his world. Instead of relying on natural/supernatural dualisms that imply that “natural causality functions independently of the Word of God,”¹⁴¹ Spykman urges Reformed thinkers to give full weight to the mediating role of God’s Word as the means and norm for all divine activity in the world.

II.2.2. Election

For Berkouwer and Spykman, the problem lurking within the doctrine of election as traditionally stated is a rationalism that, despite an intention to honor the scriptural boundary, nevertheless transgresses it, pressing the biblical data to its seemingly logical conclusion. The end result is a “decretal

¹³⁵ Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 169.

¹³⁶ Spykman, “Common Grace,” 16-17.

¹³⁷ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 209.

¹³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 290.

¹³⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 288-289.

¹⁴⁰ Berkouwer, *Providence*, 207; Spykman, *RT*, 289.

¹⁴¹ Spykman, *RT*, 294-295.

theology” that tends to abstract the decree from God’s covenantal Word and work and hints at arbitrariness as characteristic of divine sovereignty.¹⁴² Spykman senses within the Reformed community an implicit search for a mediating factor to relieve the tensions of “two-factor world views.”¹⁴³ From the Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin (1623-1687) to German dogmatician Heinrich Heppé (1820-1879) to twentieth-century theologians Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) and James Daane (1914-1983), Spykman traces intimations of “ambivalence” and various compensations for the lack of a normative mediating factor.¹⁴⁴

This ambivalence finds more solid expression in Berkouwer’s correlation motif, which most defines Spykman’s reframing of the doctrine of election along the lines of a three-factor worldview, with the threefold Word positioned normatively as the boundary and bridge between God and the world. He gravitates toward the inherent relationality of Berkouwer’s motif, as well as its way of granting legitimacy to God’s work and human response without making them independent factors related only in terms of cooperation or competition.¹⁴⁵ His main criticism of Berkouwer is that the “connecting-link concept . . . never gets firmly structured.”¹⁴⁶ Spykman attributes this to Berkouwer’s overall theological drift, from “a kind of objectivism . . . through a stress on correlation . . . to a kind of existentialist emphasis.”¹⁴⁷ Spykman corrects the “oscillating” nature of the mediating factor in Berkouwer’s theology by following the pointers of Scripture to the Word of God as the mediating factor between God and the world, thus keeping “God and man in interaction.”¹⁴⁸ The mediating role of God’s Word is an accepted tenet of Reformed theology; Spykman believes it deserves a more pivotal position in the outworking of doctrines, so that divine initiative and human response are bound together at every point by their meeting place in the Word. To move beyond the decretal view that prioritizes God’s eternal decision but has difficulty attributing genuine meaning to response, as well as the Arminian view that relativizes God’s sovereignty while exaggerating humanity’s responsive capabilities, Spykman applies Berkouwer’s insights to the doctrine of election. Noting its connection to one’s more general view of the divine-human relationship, Spykman holds that “[p]redestination/election/reprobation . . . is not an independent, isolated doctrine. It is part and parcel of an overall perspective on life.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 176; he uses the phrase “decretal theology” on p. 183.

¹⁴³ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 182.

¹⁴⁴ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 182-183.

¹⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, 51-52.

¹⁴⁶ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 179.

¹⁴⁷ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 179.

¹⁴⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 179.

¹⁴⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 509. Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 173.

Arguing for the necessity of revelation in handling the related issues of divine election and assurance of salvation, Berkouwer takes to task any “logical construction which stands outside of life and the tension of faith,”¹⁵⁰ as well as any violation of the Reformation “warning against abstracting God’s decree from Himself.”¹⁵¹ In the place of abstract logic, he promotes a correlation of faith with God’s electing, preserving work.¹⁵² He defines the “secret of correlation” as man’s response “oriented” to God’s activity, which always has priority.¹⁵³ The concept of correlation, as Berkouwer employs it, eliminates all possibility of viewing faith and the divine work as “equal components”¹⁵⁴ or “independent” of each other.¹⁵⁵ Alluding to sin’s power to render human reason opaque, Berkouwer condemns the “misrepresentations” and subsequent “vehement reaction[s]” concerning the intricacies of the doctrine of election as the result of the “estrangement of man’s thinking.”¹⁵⁶ Berkouwer dialogues with the extreme reactions represented by the Remonstrant view, which tilts the balance toward human freedom, and by the Roman view, which dualistically relates divine and human activity as cooperative. He criticizes Reformed reactions that interpret sovereignty in deterministic terms, and he also interacts extensively with Barth’s formulation of the doctrine of election.

Spykman’s commitment to relationality restrains him from leaning too heavily on absolute eternal decrees conceived of independently of God’s covenant pursuit of his people, but his commitment to the doctrine of radical depravity restrains him from the subjectivist tendencies that he believes characterize the later Berkouwer.¹⁵⁷ Instead, he chooses to emphasize the electing Word, to which the sinner responds in faith or disbelief. This Word speaks supremely in and through Christ, and as one responds to him, so one responds to God’s Word.¹⁵⁸ Integral to Spykman’s concept of the threefold Word, with relevance for his doctrine of election, is the recognition of divine revelation’s function as boundary and bridge between God and his world. With the Word as boundary and bridge, theological reflection on predestination shifts from a focus on the eternal decrees to a focus on God’s

¹⁵⁰ Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 32.

¹⁵¹ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 204. On p. 51 Berkouwer asserts, “Nowhere in Scripture does election take on the character of an abstraction”; see also p. 171.

¹⁵² Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 25.

¹⁵³ Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 202.

¹⁵⁴ Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 208.

¹⁵⁵ Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 106.

¹⁵⁶ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 329.

¹⁵⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 51-52. In “Election and Reprobation,” 179, he describes this subjectivism as an “existentialist emphasis (revelation filtered through human experience).”

¹⁵⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 181-182.

Word – a Word that defines God, humanity, and creation in covenant terms; effects judgment after the fall; and offers mercy in Christ.¹⁵⁹

According to Spykman, Berkouwer seeks to define the “*grensprobleem*,” or boundary-line, for the doctrine of election according to divine revelation rather than “logic, reason, tradition, or experience.”¹⁶⁰ This compels Spykman to formulate the “problem” of election in terms of what has been revealed through the mediating Word, especially through the incarnate Word, who, in Calvin’s terms, is the “mirror” of our election.¹⁶¹ In fact, Spykman traces his emphasis on the Word as boundary to Calvin’s hermeneutic principle of neither exceeding nor diminishing the divinely given revelation of Scripture, which parallels Berkouwer’s statement that “Calvin sets the deciding limits for all our reflections: the revelation of God.”¹⁶² Spykman mentions “that Calvin underscores this fundamental rule of interpretation precisely within the context of his discussion of election/reprobation,”¹⁶³ and he points to Berkouwer’s recognition of this principle “in his discussion of the *grensprobleem*.”¹⁶⁴ When a theologian respects God’s Word, especially Jesus, as the boundary line for “theological reflections on predestination,”¹⁶⁵ the anchor of the Word illuminates the role of the gospel, God’s teleological purposes, and the individual’s response to Christ.

The concept of God’s Word as both boundary and bridge¹⁶⁶ is inextricably bound to Christ and the problem of election in Spykman’s reflections. When fallen reason and the fallen imagination conspire to grant “logic, reason, tradition, or experience” prominence as “limiting concepts,”¹⁶⁷ the boundaries set by divine revelation are trampled or ignored. The question of election then tends to center on discerning the content of an eternal decree abstracted from God’s covenantal relationship with the world, an approach that may engender anxiety and lack of assurance in the lives of believers. Referencing Bavinck’s resistance to “portraying the decrees abstractly,”¹⁶⁸ Berkouwer admonishes his readers to consider that, biblically speaking, it is not the eternal decree that reveals God to us, but it is

¹⁵⁹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 180, 185. See also *RT*, 62-63.

¹⁶⁰ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 180.

¹⁶¹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 181. On the practical value of remaining within the boundary of the Word, Spykman comments on p. 188, “There is mystery enough on our side of God’s Word without seeking it in eternal decrees within the mind of God himself beyond the Word which he has given.”

¹⁶² Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 174-175; *RT*, 6. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 16.

¹⁶³ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 175.

¹⁶⁴ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 180. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 23, writes of “the urgency of the boundary problem,” commenting that “a formal agreement with respect to the authority of Scripture has not always led to an agreement regarding the doctrine of election.”

¹⁶⁵ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 180.

¹⁶⁶ See diagram in Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 181, and *RT*, 75.

¹⁶⁷ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 180.

¹⁶⁸ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 152.

divine revelation by which God's people, in faith, come to know the character and will of God.¹⁶⁹ This perspective does not deny the reality of the decree, but it insists that nothing of God's nature or will can be known apart from his Word as one responds to it by faith.

Motivated by a desire to avoid assigning arbitrariness to God or resorting to causality as an explanation for the results of God's electing/reprobating Word, Berkouwer and Spykman demonstrate restraint in their discussions of election. Though both scholars deny human autonomy, they seek to allow room in the doctrine of election for the existential reality of man's response to Christ. Berkouwer rejects either-or dilemmas based on "the schema of objectivity-subjectivity."¹⁷⁰ This includes the opposing "logical possibilities" of "universalism and the denial of a general offer of salvation,"¹⁷¹ the distinction between a hidden and revealed will of God that assumes "a certain duality in the will of God,"¹⁷² the infralapsarian/supralapsarian debate,¹⁷³ and a "symmetry between election and rejection."¹⁷⁴ In Berkouwer's assessment, "The New Testament teaches an 'either-or' only in connection with Christ and His salvation." Spykman understands this perspective to be the key to the doctrine of election perceived scripturally:

A more significant breakthrough toward such theological renewal could be achieved by taking seriously the analogy . . . which depicts Jesus Christ, God's Word incarnate, as 'the mirror of our election' He is the key to election/reprobation. Only a Christocentric theology of predestination will do. 'What think ye of the Christ?' is the final and decisive issue on the response side. This is the testimony of Scripture.¹⁷⁵

In Spykman's estimation, any theological representation of election/reprobation that does not center on this question is a path toward speculation.¹⁷⁶ If Christ, the incarnation of the Word of God, is both the boundary and bridge between the Father and the world, it is only in and by him, not in moving beyond him to the mind of God, that the biblical doctrine of election can be rightly discerned.¹⁷⁷

Berkouwer and Spykman's commitment to Calvin's hermeneutic principle – revelation as the boundary of theological reflection – accords them a certain contentment with the more mysterious elements of election and reprobation. They refrain from asking questions that would require an answer

¹⁶⁹ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 205.

¹⁷⁰ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 232.

¹⁷¹ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 234.

¹⁷² Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 238.

¹⁷³ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 254, judges that this seventeenth-century controversy "owes its existence to a trespassing of the boundaries set by revelation."

¹⁷⁴ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 250.

¹⁷⁵ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 181.

¹⁷⁶ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 182.

¹⁷⁷ Spykman, "Election and Reprobation," 182.

based on logical conclusions that extend beyond the reach of Scripture. Spykman, for instance, distances himself from the type of “syllogism” typical of L. Berkhof, wherein Berkhof argues that the reality of election logically necessitates the reality of reprobation.¹⁷⁸ This line of logic leads to a supposed symmetry or parallelism between election and reprobation, treating them as equally ultimate decrees. Berkouwer and Spykman stress the asymmetry of election and reprobation, Berkouwer noting that the Canons of Dort do not promote a strict parallelism between the two decrees.¹⁷⁹ Spykman resists the eternalizing and historicizing tendencies implicit in a two-factor view. Instead, he affirms that election and mercy – corresponding to God’s “original intent for the world . . . , the ceaselessly ringing affirmation of the gospel . . . , and the final destiny of creation”¹⁸⁰ – have the upper hand over reprobation, election and reprobation being “the two sides of God’s single Word of love.”¹⁸¹

Do Berkouwer and Spykman handle the biblical references to God’s activity “before the foundation of the world” and similar phrases (Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 25:34, II Timothy 1:9, and others) in a manner that confirms their commitment to remain within the bounds of revelation? Berkouwer interprets the thrust of the phrase as making a clear statement against “all contingency and arbitrariness” on God’s part, affirming sovereign intentionality and purpose and pointing to the “impossibility” of defining divine election apart from Jesus Christ.¹⁸² Berkouwer includes election, the *cor ecclesiae*, as one of the prominent themes on the theological agenda in the half century from 1920-1970.¹⁸³ Defending his position against the criticism that he advocates a general rather than a particular election, he points toward the connection between “God’s elective actions” and “his grace in Christ toward actual people,” and he disavows both a “devaluation of divine sovereignty” and “respect for the autonomy of the free man.”¹⁸⁴ With respect to “the ‘beforehand’ statements of various New Testament texts,” Berkouwer finds fault with those who have fashioned from them “a system of God’s aprioristic eternal decrees.”¹⁸⁵ He interprets these texts as a means of contrasting God’s purposefulness with the arbitrariness sometimes associated with sovereign choice.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 172; *RT*, 508. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 86-89, especially the closing paragraph of the section (II.D.2.b.), titled “Proof for the doctrine of reprobation.”

¹⁷⁹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 190. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 175, 177, 182. On p. 201, Berkouwer cautions, “But he who seeks to avoid man’s autonomy will still have to be on his guard against causality. That is where the symmetry originates which obscures the gospel.”

¹⁸⁰ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 190.

¹⁸¹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 190.

¹⁸² Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 171.

¹⁸³ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 76-79.

¹⁸⁴ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 95.

¹⁸⁵ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 103.

¹⁸⁶ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 151, 171.

Likewise, Spykman asks, “But is a decretalist interpretation our only choice?”¹⁸⁷ In answer, he rejects a “positivistic” conclusion based on “an empirical study of the exegetical data” and calls for a reading of such passages that is oriented to “[l]arger issues,” explored “within the framework of a three-factor” world view.¹⁸⁸ On this basis, he agrees that the phrase “before the foundation of the world” provides a glimpse of God’s eternal activity, but he denies that the elective decree can be placed there as an *ad intra* component of God’s being, apart from the *ad extra* character of God’s revelation, his Word.¹⁸⁹ He boldly states, “God’s Word is his decree. We need not reach back any further than that.”¹⁹⁰ Theological reflection must begin and end with the Word, in which God has set forth his electing purposes, with the undertone of reprobation as an outworking of his justice in response to sin.¹⁹¹ Spykman believes the mystery of election and reprobation is honored by appealing to “God’s faithfulness to his abiding Word.”¹⁹² This appeal does not answer every question, but it helps to shape the questions, so that the questions themselves reflect greater consistency with God’s Word.

II.3. Eschatology

In his survey of crucial issues in twentieth-century theology, Berkouwer devotes a chapter to eschatology and its meaning for the interplay between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life.¹⁹³ In *The Return of Christ*, Berkouwer writes of the “correlation between promise and expectation.”¹⁹⁴ Contemplating his own historical context, he acknowledges a shift from evolution’s influence in the nineteenth century to a concern with “the eschatological, otherworldly, transcendent acts of God” in the twentieth century.¹⁹⁵ This translated into a conception of the Kingdom of God as “wholly other,” lacking genuine points of intersection with daily life.¹⁹⁶ Berkouwer calls for a theological attestation of the real future proclaimed by the Word and its genuine existential meaning for life today. His application of the correlation motif to the relationship between the “already” and the “not yet”¹⁹⁷ challenges the “new eschatology” that had emerged within Dialectical Theology, with its “vertical

¹⁸⁷ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 188.

¹⁸⁸ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 188-189.

¹⁸⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 507-508.

¹⁹⁰ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 189.

¹⁹¹ Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 190.

¹⁹² Spykman, “Election and Reprobation,” 184-185.

¹⁹³ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, “The Earthly Horizon,” 179-214.

¹⁹⁴ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 25.

¹⁹⁷ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 115.

relation” that “implied a total devaluation of history.”¹⁹⁸ Berkouwer labels this “*the* important problem in theology after 1920.”¹⁹⁹ Stressing the historical nature of God’s work and biblical revelation, Berkouwer maintains that future historical realities promised in Scripture must be linked to present historical moments, granting meaning and expectation to the present. In Spykman’s words, the insistence on the present and future history of God’s interactions with humanity counters neo-orthodoxy’s tendency to “stress the present reality of biblical eschatology at the expense of its historical extension,” as well as historicism’s tendency to reduce the divine-human relation to an historical process independent of divine initiative.²⁰⁰

If future redemption has implications for faithful living in God’s creation in the present, then redemption has a definite correlation to creation. Berkouwer contends that a right understanding of the relationship between individual and cosmic salvation is central, particularly in eschatology, where the creational/cosmic dimension tends to be lost. “[I]t is as if the creation-perspective is obliterated in eschatology and becomes superfluous on account of salvation. This leads directly to one of the many dichotomies in which man has tried to capture God’s work: the dilemma of the cosmic versus the soteriological.”²⁰¹ Berkouwer highlights the significance of redemption for “this present existence,”²⁰² just as Spykman argues for the interrelatedness of creation and redemption based on biblical expectations for the consummation of all things under God’s rule. Spykman states the matter poignantly: “Every moment is therefore eschatologically pregnant.”²⁰³ For him, the relatedness of an eschatological future to the “last days” of the present time reinforces a key Dooyeweerdian concept: “Nothing in life is religiously neutral.”²⁰⁴ The certainty of Christ’s reign and his future return invests every moment of the present with meaning.

The correlation motif also illuminates the challenge of universalism. Berkouwer views the “universal” passages of Scripture (such as “John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9”) as illustrative of the “correlative connection between salvation and faith” rather than as “announcements about a present or future state of affairs.”²⁰⁵ This allows him to shift the focus from the theological question concerning the eternal destiny of each individual to the historical call to repentance and conversion. In his effort to

¹⁹⁸ Berkouwer, “Calvinism and Humanism,” 65.

¹⁹⁹ Berkouwer, “Calvinism and Humanism,” 66.

²⁰⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 520.

²⁰¹ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 212.

²⁰² Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 234.

²⁰³ Spykman, *RT*, 525.

²⁰⁴ Spykman, *RT*, 525.

²⁰⁵ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 409.

avoid the trap of searching “outside the proclamation of the gospel” for “a deeper gnosis,”²⁰⁶ Berkouwer handles the doctrine of universal reconciliation, or *apocatastasis*, by directing attention to the gospel’s call for decisive response. His conclusions reflect the need to engage with the universalistic tendencies of modern theologians, and particularly with Barth, who rejects the traditional doctrine of *apocatastasis* but, by emphasizing the certainty of Christ’s election on behalf of all, brings the significance of the individual’s faith response into question.²⁰⁷ Spykman’s commitment to the definitive nature of the scriptural testimony leads him to confirm that judgment – which has a basis in the present – will result in “eternal misery” for those apart from Christ, though he speaks of hell “only with deep-seated reluctance.”²⁰⁸ “The blurred antithesis of the moment,” meaning, the fact that all people experience some degree of both judgment and grace in the present, “will be fully revealed as a fixed contradiction” when all stand before God at the final judgment.²⁰⁹

Berkouwer and Spykman agree that human response cannot be untethered from the confrontation ignited by the Word-revelation, and they emphasize the “now” of the correlation between revelation and faith. Spykman notes the “present urgency” of the gospel, citing Hebrews 4:1-10. Of Scripture itself, which sometimes “penetrates the future,” he maintains that “[i]ts center of gravity lies in the here and now.”²¹⁰ This existential approach to questions that are usually considered in an either-or framework places theologians like Berkouwer and Spykman under scrutiny by those who prefer a more objectivist concept of truth. Spykman’s intent, however, is not to deny divine initiative and divine history, but rather to turn the lights upon the present, historical interplay between Christ and humanity.

Part III: The Subject/Object Dilemma and Evaluation

One cannot read Berkouwer without being struck by his attentiveness to the Scriptures and his attitude of reverence toward the Word of God and Christ. He desires that God’s reign be understood aright and that the church would stand firm and be comforted. Spykman commends the “pastoral quality” of Berkouwer’s theology and his view of theology as a discipline which has as its primary purpose the “service of God’s people.”²¹¹ What, then, of the subjectivism which numerous scholars

²⁰⁶ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 423.

²⁰⁷ Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 396-403; Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 286-291.

²⁰⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 557.

²⁰⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 557.

²¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 517.

²¹¹ Spykman, “Musings,” 37.

discern in Berkouwer's work? Has Spykman avoided the problems of subjectivism in his adoption of the correlation motif?

Berkouwer often distances himself from a subjectivist stance. *Faith and Justification*, the earliest volume of his *Studies in Dogmatics*, contains this statement:

"The mistake of subjectivism was rather this, that it subjectivized the *norm* of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It gave the human subject a determinative, creative function and made revelation dependent upon the subjective creation. . . . The fruits of this subjectivism must not, however, close our eyes to the unique relation that does exist between faith and revelation. . . . As we shall see, this correlation between human faith and divine justification forms the pivot of our study."²¹²

This passage illustrates Berkouwer's initial commitment to avoid making revelation in any way dependent on faith. Mentioning the "correlation between faith and justification" in *The Work of Christ*, he reasserts that it "does not refer to a reciprocal dependence but to a believing acceptance of justification."²¹³ However, Spykman discerns that the practical, long-term effect of Berkouwer's emphasis on the correlation is that the relational dynamic itself becomes the pivot point, or "linking concept," between grace and faith.²¹⁴

Spykman understands Berkouwer's use of the correlation motif similarly to Dirk van Keulen, appreciating the motif's incorporation of the relational dynamic but sensing its need for modification. Van Keulen demonstrates that Berkouwer "rejects [Paul] Tillich's [1886-1965] principle of correlation," which is based on "mutual reciprocity or interdependency" and "can lead to subjectivism."²¹⁵ He argues that Berkouwer's correlation principle represents an attempt to "transcend the dilemma between objectivism and subjectivism."²¹⁶ Berkouwer himself denies using the term as Tillich does, noting the difference between the Reformation use of the term, with which he aligns his own use of it, and that of Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann.²¹⁷ As a point of critique, Van Keulen identifies a terminological issue, explaining that in both Dutch and English the word "correlation" implies "*mutual* dependency or reciprocity."²¹⁸ Since Berkouwer seeks to emphasize the divine priority in the divine-human relationship

²¹² Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 17-18.

²¹³ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, trans. Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 292.

²¹⁴ See Spykman, *RT*, 51-52, and Bouma-Prediger, "Bonhoeffer and Berkouwer," 166-167.

²¹⁵ Dirk van Keulen, "G. C. Berkouwer's Principle of Correlation: An Attempt to Comprehend," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 4 (2010): 107, accessed January 16, 2016, ATLA.

²¹⁶ Van Keulen, "G. C. Berkouwer's Principle of Correlation," 100

²¹⁷ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 120-121. For an extended discussion of the meaning Berkouwer gave to "correlation," see De Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method*, 61-66.

²¹⁸ Van Keulen, "G. C. Berkouwer's Principle of Correlation," 109.

of revelation and response, or calling and faith, Van Keulen suggests that his use of the term should be qualified.²¹⁹ Spykman replaces “correlation” with “God’s Word,” developing the Word’s threefold nature so as to demonstrate the conjunction of revelation and response at every point of divine interaction with creaturely reality. This observation is important for a concluding assessment of Spykman, and it will reappear in the next and final chapter.

Referencing H. Berkhof’s essay on Berkouwer’s methodology, Bolt suggests that the three “phases” of Berkouwer’s career as delineated by Berkhof might overlook early indications of Berkouwer’s turn toward subjectivism.²²⁰ In Bolt’s estimation, Berkouwer’s work represents a definite turn from the metaphysical foundation affirmed by Bavinck, which issues from the connection between Christian revelation and the existence of religion as a fundamental human reality. Bolt titles his critique of Berkouwer and related theologians, “The Turn to Revelation and Response (Subjectivity and Objectivity).”²²¹ Given Berkouwer’s “anti-metaphysical tendency,” his “faith-revelation correlation is already a concession to subjectivity.”²²² Of relevance for this examination of Spykman’s indebtedness to Berkouwer is the fact that Bolt also discusses Spykman under “The Turn to Revelation and Response,” assessing his theological method to be more consonant with Berkouwer than with Bavinck.

It is true that Spykman, like Berkouwer, resists metaphysical distinctions that he associates with a scholastic approach motivated more by logic than by Scripture. For this reason, Spykman arranges his dogmatic work without a separate doctrine of God, choosing instead to conceive of God primarily through his works as revealed in his Word. Unlike Berkouwer, Spykman does attempt to formulate a prolegomenon, but one that is oriented to the givens of Scripture and that admits of no basis for natural theology.²²³ He does so by implementing the basic realities of creation, derived from the scriptural Word, as a philosophical “first word” that shapes and directs his entire dogmatic project. He does not allow these creation principles to function independently of Scripture but insists on a starting-point consistent with Scripture that depends on revelation. Though Berkouwer writes extensively of creation and its function in relation to the doctrines of revelation, anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology, he does not make of it a “first word” that anchors his intuitive leaning toward a mediating link. Spykman,

²¹⁹ Van Keulen, “G. C. Berkouwer’s Principle of Correlation,” 111, 108-109.

²²⁰ Bolt, “From Princeton to Wheaton,” 80, footnote 64.

²²¹ See Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 88-92.

²²² Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 89.

²²³ For Bolt’s opinion on Spykman’s methodological tendencies, see “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 90-91. For Spykman’s statement of the motivations and assumptions behind his prolegomena, as well as his decision not to follow the traditional *loci* arrangement of dogmatic themes, see *RT*, 13, 38-39; 12, 134-136.

by connecting the first Word of creation with the other forms of the Word, centers dogmatics on the revealing Word rather than on God in and of himself, humanity, or faith.

Bolt contrasts Bavinck's and Berkouwer's respective views on the normativity of dogmatic theology: for Bavinck, "normativity is based on revelation," while for Berkouwer, normativity depends upon the subjective faith response.²²⁴ To what degree Bolt's assertion is correct is a matter to leave aside, but it is certain that the heart of Spykman's method lies closer to Bavinck on this point than to Berkouwer: despite the centrality of the revelation-response theme to his theological method based on a modified use of Berkouwer's correlation motif, he maintains the normativity of revelation.²²⁵ Indeed, in his survey of Reformed theology's search for a "mediating factor," Spykman criticizes Berkouwer for his early capitulations to objectivity and his later capitulations to subjectivity.²²⁶

Though cognizant of the objectivity-subjectivity problem, Spykman calls this a "dilemma" that is "inappropriate in understanding the God-man relationship."²²⁷ He explains this as follows: ". . . the very distinction itself between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' as applied to divine revelation and human response . . . holds only for intracosmic reality, not for the relationship between the Creator and his creation."²²⁸ In other words, one can distinguish between subjects and objects within the realm of creation, but God and humanity do not relate as Object and subject. Rather, between them, there exists a context of revelation and response. In terms of response, the subjection of believers is to God's Word.²²⁹ God is not an object that can be perceived or studied neutrally or outside the context of the divine-human relationship; he maintains priority as the Revealer who requires response. Humanity is not a subject in the sense of having independence or the power of determination over against an independent object; humans are subjects in that they are *subject to* divine revelation.²³⁰

This, in essence, forms the core of Spykman's "new paradigm": acknowledgement of the correlation motif, qualified by biblically and theologically orthodox assertions about divine initiative and the nature of human response *as* response. Like Berkouwer, his methodological and structural concerns

²²⁴ Bolt, "An Opportunity Lost and Regained," 84 and 89.

²²⁵ Spykman, "'Follow-up' Project: An Exploration," 3, states, "The cumulative thrust of this brief survey points to the idea of relationality – a revelation-response relationship. Within this perspective, revelation – in whatever mode – is fully normative. Creaturely response to revelation, however, is never normative. . . . Normativity belongs to revelation alone."

²²⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 51-52, 55-58. He criticizes Harry Kuitert, another subject of Bolt's essay, for his affinity to Schleiermacher's anthropologically-centered theological method.

²²⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 54-55.

²²⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 50; see also 486-487, where he connects this idea to Berkouwer's correlation motif.

²²⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 486.

²³⁰ See Vollenhoven, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 18.

revolve around finding a path through the seemingly unavoidable trap of objectivism and subjectivism as mutually exclusive options in contemporary theology. The concluding chapter of this project will seek to determine the success and viability of his “new paradigm.”

Chapter 7 Evaluation and Conclusion

Part I: Thesis Statement, Research Answer, Summary of Key Questions, and Original Contribution

Though Gordon Spykman's framework of God's Word as the unifying factor of creation and redemption motivated me to pursue this project, studying Spykman in relation to John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Reformational philosophy, Karl Barth, and Gerrit C. Berkouwer made it clear that the project's main concern is theological method. Spykman addressed what he considered to be a fundamental deficiency of typical Reformed theological method; he analyzed that in terms of movement toward a mediating factor in certain Reformed theologians; he accounted for the twentieth-century emphasis on response; and he maintained orthodox Reformed positions. His quest to establish a more biblical theological method led him to insist on the mediating Word as a point of religiously-defined relationship. This represents an important attempt to reorient Reformed theology to the reality of humanity's experiential confrontation with the Word, present in Calvin's theological model and elaborated to various degrees by other key figures in the tradition.

The thesis of this project is that Gordon Spykman's new paradigm contributes to theological methodology in the Reformed tradition by interpreting and developing that tradition's intuitions regarding the relational dynamic between divine revelation and human response. This thesis is supported by the research answer in the following ways: Spykman faithfully incorporated methodological and biblical insights of Calvin and Bavinck, embracing creation as a normative dimension of God's Word. He went beyond them by connecting their thought to certain tenets of neo-Calvinist philosophy and by updating it based on his engagement with the ideas of Barth and Berkouwer, especially concerning the doctrine of revelation. Spykman constructed a new paradigm that utilizes a methodological approach with three-factors (Revealer and responder with revelation as the normative link between them) rather than two-factors (Revealer and responder – or sacred and secular dimensions – in tension, with one or the other functioning as the normative starting point). The three-factor approach attempts to give the dynamic interplay of divine revelation and human response a definite position within its structure. However, the thesis lacks full support due to an important qualification: Though Spykman seeks the middle ground of a mediating factor, he positions it within the subject-object framework, limiting the usefulness of his model for overcoming the Kantian dilemma.

In Chapter One, I outlined questions that constitute the core research problem. Those questions can be condensed into two primary ones: (1) Does Spykman demonstrate continuity with his tradition as

he reconstructs the insights of key thinkers into a contemporary model of methodology and dogmatics? (2) Is Spykman's "new paradigm" effective enough to warrant renewed attention by the Reformed community? The first question can be elaborated by considering whether Spykman correctly interpreted his tradition, especially Calvin, and developed it in ways consistent with its insights. The second question involves an evaluation of his three-factor method in relation to biblical givens and Cosmological Philosophy, as well as an evaluation of the threefold Word in relation to the ongoing work of Reformed dogmatics and the illumination of Christian calling in the world.

This project contributes to the field of systematic theology by reintroducing Spykman to the theological discourse, analyzing his interactions with his tradition and highlighting the most significant and enduring directions he set forth in his "new paradigm." His critique of methodological problems, his efforts to engage those problems with scriptural presuppositions, and his attentiveness to creation as revelation are areas of his thought that continue to hold relevance for Reformed theology.

Part II: Evaluation of the Research Questions

II.1. Did Spykman correctly interpret his tradition, especially Calvin, and faithfully develop it?

Spykman demonstrates a great measure of faithfulness to his tradition. However, this analysis of Spykman's engagement with the ideas of Calvin, Bavinck, Cosmological Philosophy, Barth, and Berkouwer recognizes four areas of his work that call for specific evaluation: (1) his treatment of creation and creaturely response; (2) his insistence that Christian philosophy constitutes the appropriate prolegomenon for Reformed dogmatics; (3) his redefinition of theology and its task; and (4) his limited attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the believer's union with Christ.

II.1.1. How faithful is Spykman's model in its treatment of creation and creaturely response?

Spykman's affirmation of Calvin's basic assertion concerning the relationship between knowledge of God and self-knowledge manifests itself throughout *Reformational Theology*. His ability to incorporate this insight into a working method sets his dogmatics apart from the traditional *loci* approach, and his efforts to redirect Reformed theology to the divine-human relational dynamic has value for Reformed dogmatics. Even if Spykman's exhortation to restructure dogmatics according to the biblical narrative is not heeded, his Calvinist reclamation of the reality of divine revelation and creaturely response should lead Reformed theologians to consider how the *loci* structure might be re-ordered to better communicate this reality.

With his elevation of creation to an enduring, normative form of revelation, Spykman reminds modern theology of that which was a given in Calvin's context. The objective dimension of revelation that was taken for granted by Calvin must be reestablished for a context that questions the reality of revelation. To accomplish this, Spykman includes creation in his model of God's Word as part of the revelational situation wherein God and humanity meet. His return to Calvin at this juncture represents a faithful reconstruction of the tradition. Spykman interprets Calvin within the context established by Bavinck, which acknowledges the significance of the believing subject. His criticism of Barth and his modification of Berkouwer demonstrate Spykman's concern that the believing subject possess a means for certainty in receiving and responding to revelation. With just as much concern for the centrality of God's Word and the normativity of revelation, Spykman rejects any method that makes of response a normative factor in Christian theology, giving his work its Reformed character.

II.1.2. How valid is Spykman's insistence on Christian philosophy as the appropriate prolegomenon for Reformed dogmatics?

Calvin's pre-Kant insistence on the Word of God as the starting point and boundary for theological reflection has critical implications for theological prolegomena: Whatever assumptions are brought to the theological task should be assumptions derived from Scripture. Spykman extends this idea to advocate the development of a Christian philosophy – a philosophy based on scripturally-consistent descriptions of created reality – which he then employs as a prolegomenal framework for the theological task.¹ He recognizes that a "believing response to God's Word"² is necessary for the proper functioning of such a philosophy. With the "mediating Word" as "the major hinge on which a Christian philosophy turns,"³ he emphasizes the God-world relationship and thus reflects the interrelated knowledge of God and self with which Calvin opens the *Institutes* and within which he situates theological reflection.

For Calvin, "Christian philosophy" is closely aligned with God's Word and exhibits a direct relationship to faith and piety.⁴ The alignment between philosophy and God's Word is present in Spykman, but with a greater distinction between philosophy and theology as separate disciplines, a distinction that reflects the Kantian dichotomy between reason and faith. Also, Spykman's idea of "Christian philosophy" is of a more theoretical nature and less oriented to piety than Calvin's. Though

¹ See Spykman, *RT*, 38-39.

² Spykman, *RT*, 38.

³ Spykman, *RT*, 108.

⁴ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1. and III.20.1.

some of the “hallmarks”⁵ of Spykman’s Christian philosophy are rooted in Calvin’s thought, his insistence on its unique role in relation to dogmatics stems from his commitment to the neo-Calvinist tradition, particularly Herman Dooyeweerd’s conception of philosophy and theology. Spykman’s reading of Calvin through twentieth-century lenses becomes apparent on the issue of “Christian philosophy.” In this area, it may be the case that more recent insights of his tradition become normative for his arguments concerning prolegomena and the definition and task of theology. It may also be the case that his concern for establishing the principles of a Christian philosophy unintentionally crowds out the work of the Spirit in illumining creation, Scripture, and Christ. This problem is reflected in his emphasis on “Word” rather than “Word and Spirit” and could be seen to verify Barth’s concern about deriving principles from creation in a way that replaces a continual listening to the Word. To be fair, Spykman’s intended outcome was “greater openness to God’s Word.”⁶ But it is also true that insufficient attention to the Spirit’s role results in a lack of follow-through on his stated goal of creating a Trinitarian-patterned dogmatics.⁷

Why does Spykman insist on Christian philosophy as the prolegomena for Christian theology, since this was not the methodological approach of Luther and Calvin? Spykman does not charge Calvin’s theology with being deficient due to its lack of explicit prolegomena, but he does feel compelled to offer a revelationally-grounded prolegomenon in response to a new situation. With this prolegomenal “map,” he intends to set Reformed dogmatics within the landscape of biblical givens, pointing the way toward beneficial interaction with other areas of study and practice.⁸ Spykman’s philosophical development has greater consonance with Bavinck, who, as noted, devotes significant attention to prolegomena. To some degree Spykman acquiesced to the assumption that the modern situation requires prolegomena of some sort.⁹ Though he perceived a need to challenge the structure bequeathed by Kant, his development of a rationally plausible foundation for dogmatics shows his embeddedness within the contemporary context, perhaps to a greater extent than he realized. This

⁵ See Spykman, *RT*, 107-110.

⁶ Spykman, *RT*, 95-96. In “A Confessional Hermeneutic,” 8, he affirms, “The Christian theologian must . . . see his scholarship as rooted in a heart which seeks to lead every thought captive in obedience unto the Word of God in Jesus Christ.”

⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 134-136.

⁸ Spykman, “Christian Philosophy as Prolegomena,” 7-8. See also *RT*, 133-134.

⁹ See Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years*, 2, who claims, “. . . the appearance of Kant’s *Critique* meant – alongside all else it achieved – the birth of the new theology, or rather: the modern way of posing questions, and modern methodology, in theology.” Milne, “Barth and Calvin on the (Three-fold Form of the) Word of God,” 98, notes, “There is nothing equivalent in Calvin to volume I of the *Church Dogmatics*, since writing prolegomena to theology is a modern necessity resulting from the epistemological challenges of the Western Enlightenment.”

context demanded a more critical and scientific methodology than that of Luther and Calvin, which, in turn, meant that Spykman's method was unable to fully reflect the Reformers' more direct approach to theological method.

In his own application of Christian philosophy, Spykman focuses on those areas of theological reflection where commitment to unbiblical philosophical principles obstructs God's truth in its fullest dimensions. While a Christian philosophy in and of itself may not be necessary, the Reformed tradition supports its basic idea – that philosophical presuppositions must find their starting point in Scripture as the “noetic point of departure”¹⁰ that subsequently illumines God's Word for creation. Spykman's work provides needful direction for continuing the conversation about the relationship between philosophy and theology, and it demonstrates that philosophical inquiry can be funded by revelation rather than by “natural theology.”

II.1.3. How legitimate is Spykman's redefinition of theology and its task?

The more tentative nature of systematic theology, which Spykman defines as a “study of the faith-life of the Christian community as formulated in dogma(s),” yields a discipline that is perhaps more narrowly conceived than in centuries past.¹¹ It may be concluded that in differentiating between faith and theology in the way that he does, Spykman concedes the gap “between the act of knowing God on the one hand and confession and dogmatic reflection on the other” that is typical of the post-Kantian situation.¹² Though Spykman appeals to the entire world as the realm of God's revelatory activity, aligning his work with that of Calvin and Bavinck, his definition of theology, aligned more with Dooyeweerd, limits the scope of theological reflection. Though theology may have a more modest position than when it was hailed as queen of the sciences, Spykman's capitulation to theology as pistology feels somewhat foreign to his insistence on Scripture as norm. If this assessment is correct,¹³ Spykman's stated understanding of theology and its task is not supported by his actual method, which grants Scripture rather than the “faith-response” the normative position in dogmatic work.

¹⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 101.

¹¹ Spykman, *RT*, 102-107.

¹² Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 419.

¹³ See Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 286, footnote 80.

II.1.4. What effect does Spykman's relative inattention to the Holy Spirit and the believer's union with Christ have on his work?

Though Spykman's orthodox understanding of the Holy Spirit and the personal facets of redemption are not at stake,¹⁴ these are underdeveloped themes in *RT*. Consideration of Spykman's historical vantage point explains his lack of attention to personal piety, if not to the Holy Spirit. In *Calvinism in America*, Spykman refers to the conflict between the earlier Dutch immigrants to North America, influenced by Seceder impulses, and the immigrants who arrived between 1890-1914. He focuses that conflict in a question: "What is the heartbeat of Calvinist Christianity – doctrinal orthodoxy and personal piety or the Lordship of Christ in every sphere of life?"¹⁵ *Reformational Theology* is an apology for the second response: The Lordship of Christ in every sphere of life constitutes the heartbeat of Calvinist Christianity. Spykman believes this answer includes the first question but goes beyond it, offering a fuller explication of God's Word at work in the world.

Spykman's biblical and Kuyperian conviction that Christ is the "cosmic Savior and Lord"¹⁶ not only gives him a slant toward societal and cosmic redemption but provides the rationale for pursuing Christian philosophy – to assert the Lordship of Christ over this most fundamental area of scholarship from which theology takes cues. He thus views himself as carrying the mantle of the Doleantie to a Reformed community that has moved even further in the direction of personal piety¹⁷ and thus needs a corrective theology. His approach has its place, but it also risks encouraging a transformationalist perspective that grants too much significance to the "already" of redemption and cultivates too little personal Christian discipline in consideration of the "not yet."

II.2. Does a three-factor theology better honor the biblical givens? Is Spykman's use of Cosmonomic Philosophy justifiable?

At the center of Spykman's proposal for a renewed theological method stands a three-factor (God-Word-world) rather than two-factor (God-humanity) view of the world. Spykman grants revelation a normative position as the basis for restructuring theological method, in contrast to early Christian and medieval models that synthesized Christian thought with Greek philosophy; the post-Reformation scholastic model that reflected the "dualist-dialectical synthesis of Thomas"; modern models influenced by Schleiermacher's theology, which appeal to humanity as the norm; and Barth's appeal to the

¹⁴ Examples of Spykman's statements concerning these topics can be found in *RT*, 419-420 and 485-504.

¹⁵ Spykman, *Calvinism in America*, 14.

¹⁶ Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 71.

¹⁷ See Spykman's analysis in "Fundamentalism in the CRC."

transcendent “God and his revelation in Jesus Christ” as the norm.¹⁸ In Spykman’s view, Barth, despite his reorientation of the theological scene to the divine sovereignty and the significance of revelation, offers a revelation concept that is inadequate because it does not include the full range of God’s initiating and revelatory activity. Spykman gives a more positive assessment of Berkouwer’s attempt to correlate divine initiative and faith. But he ultimately judges Berkouwer’s approach lacking because his idea of “correlation” develops in such a way that it is defined more by faith than by revelation. The link that preserves divine initiation and stabilizes the terms for human response, important though it is, never becomes firmly rooted in his method.

In fact, Berkouwer fails to reflect significantly upon his method. This is where Spykman moves beyond Berkouwer, replacing “correlation” with “God’s Word”: “The Word of God is the final resting place in theology’s restless search for the ‘missing link.’”¹⁹ He constructs a theological method that considers God’s Word to be authoritative and normative but positions it within the subject-object framework that demands a “link.” Despite his reliance on Calvin, whose theology recognizes the Word’s mediating role with respect to creation and redemption, Spykman follows a more modern trajectory in pursuing a middle ground of certainty for faith. Like Berkouwer, he posits a “link” between divine revelation and human response. Whereas Berkouwer’s link alternates between the objective Word and subjective faith response, with the result that the relational dynamic itself functions as the link, Spykman identifies the link as the covenantal Word, given *ad extra* – “as [God] comes out to us in his revelation”²⁰ – in creation, Scripture, and Christ.

Spykman, because of his respect for Berkouwer as his teacher, may not have exercised enough critical reflection regarding his modified appropriation of the correlation motif. Though the early volumes of Berkouwer’s *Studies in Dogmatics* treat the correlation motif in a more objective way, his later work seems to indicate some mutual interdependence between revelation and faith. To Spykman’s credit, in following what he considers to be the “‘middle’ Berkouwer,”²¹ he maintains the authority and priority of Scripture, without ignoring the real concern for securing creaturely responding as a corollary of divine speaking. Replacing the correlation motif with the Word of God, he asserts the objective character of revelation but with a broader view of its role in constituting reality. As a result, he constructs a model that stands closer to Bavinck’s orientation than to Berkouwer’s, while capitalizing on Berkouwer’s initiative in positing a link whereby God’s outgoing work becomes the focal point for

¹⁸ Spykman, *RT*, 17-21, 24-25, 30-36, 44-45.

¹⁹ Spykman, *RT*, 72.

²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, 139.

²¹ Spykman, “Musings on a Ninetieth Birthday,” 37.

reflection on divine-human interaction. Establishing the Word as the norm which mediates divine revelation and human response helps to alleviate the tension felt in two-factor methods between locating the norm in the objective, transcendent dimension of revelation or in the subjective faith response of the creature. It may not, however, provide a workable solution for moving beyond the two-factor method, since it takes for granted the subjective-objective dimensions that require a third factor.

In correspondence with a fellow scholar concerning the claims of *RT*, Spykman admits that his equation of two-factor worldviews and dualisms might “call for a more carefully nuanced argument.” He goes on to ask, “Is a non-dualist two-factor worldview perhaps conceivable?”²² Though he argues forcefully for a three-factor worldview in *RT*, his words demonstrate a willingness to re-think his position. This is consistent with Spykman’s life-long commitment to measure everything by the Word of God in Scripture. At the same time, his desire to think and live beyond dualism flows from his conviction that the work of Dooyeweerd and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven captures a two-sided biblical truth that was somewhat lost in the development of Reformed theology following the Reformation: Scripture’s presentation of the unity between creation and redemption rules out dualism and renders all of life religious – nothing is neutral. In his philosophical outline, Spykman does not press the Cosmomic Philosophy in its details, but he values and incorporates its presuppositions. His use of these concepts is justifiable in so far as it aids in promoting “Biblical perspectives on the structures and functions of created reality.”²³ These perspectives open the way for comprehending the unity of creation and redemption.

II.3. Does Spykman’s model of the threefold Word offer a way forward in Reformed dogmatics, and does it illumine the calling of Christians in the world?

Doing dogmatics without explicit prolegomenal reflection takes one of two possible directions, according to Spykman’s analysis. The first is an implicit acceptance of unbiblical starting points generated by the rationalism of natural theology. Spykman considers this to be a trend that has plagued Christian theology since its beginnings, exacerbated by the Kantian cementing of the dualism between pure and practical reason. The second direction eschews natural theology but, as demonstrated by

²² Gordon J. Spykman to Michael Williams, Letter No. 1, August 12, 1992, p. 1, Folder 13, Box 19, Series 13, COLL/240, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

²³ Spykman, *Spectacles*, 95. Wolters, “Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd,” 16-17, expresses the opinion that “the significance of Dooyeweerd and his legacy resides more in the impact of the worldview component on his philosophy than in the systematic categories which depend on neo-Kantianism and phenomenology.”

Barth and Berkouwer in Spykman's assessment, has two potential and different endpoints. A narrow focus on God's Word, which limits the scope of the forms of God's Word, denies creation as starting point and considers transcendence to be the normative mediating factor. This represents Barth's endpoint. On the other hand, a focus on the Word that acknowledges creation's significance but does not allow the Word in its fullness a proper role in structuring theological method tends toward subjectivism. This, according to Spykman, prevented Berkouwer from fully recognizing God's Word as the mediating factor between revelation and response. Spykman argues for prolegomenal reflection based on revelation, and his threefold Word concept effectively creates space for the genuine, normed response of humanity to the full range of divine revelation.

II.3.1 A Model for Asking Different Dogmatic Questions

Spykman argues that revelation, the source of knowledge of God and self, should fuel philosophical reflection, so that philosophical assumptions undergirding the theological task have their starting point in revelation. This approach recasts many of the two-factor battles within theology, because the revelation-response dynamic controls and informs dogmatic formulations. In other words, the centrality of the Word creates a context of revelation and response which fosters different questions. As discussed in previous chapters, questions arising from more pervasively revelational starting points yield different ways to engage anthropological problems and the challenging issue of election. Spykman's commitment to Calvin leads him to a doctrine of covenant more clearly interpreted in terms of divine graciousness. The unity of God's covenantal graciousness throughout the world's history controls Spykman's structural use of the biblical narrative and his interpretive grid for creation and eschatology – the beginning and the end. His threefold model of God's Word opens new pathways for pursuing dogmatic problems, bringing the significance of creation to bear on the entirety of God's covenant work.

II.3.2. A Model for Cultivating Christian Engagement with God's World

The threefold Word concept can be put to the test in evaluating Spykman's emphasis on creation ordinances. Concerning creation ordinances, Spykman's insights prove most valuable when read in conjunction with others of his tradition such as Klaas Schilder, who curbs the transformationalist optimism sometimes associated with a positive assessment of creation ordinances. Spykman's view of creation ordinances reflects the convergence of a robust doctrine of creation that provides the structure for redemption and embraces all of life with the Reformed tradition's

longstanding affirmation of the legitimacy of all vocations in Kingdom service. It provides a tool for taking redemption more seriously in terms of its full-orbed, creation-directed consequences, admonitions, and Kingdom responsibilities. As others in the Reformed tradition have pointed out, there are dangers when fallen humans attempt to delineate creation structures and ordinances. Yet as Spykman argues – correctly, I believe – Christians have a biblical mandate to work towards discernment of creation structures and ordinances.²⁴

Spykman’s affirmation of creation as revelation and the validity of creation ordinances plays out in his approach to common grace as well as to general revelation. Considering the “common grace” debate, Spykman holds together the best of Reformed thinking by recognizing the historical trajectory of both grace and the antithesis. His remarks are unlikely to solve the “common grace” dispute, but they can set a different tone and help determine biblical and unbiblical distinctions. Considering general revelation, this is what Spykman’s work brings to the conversation: he challenges the static and dualistic language and thought categories typical of Reformed theology. He calls for a more biblical-theological method and content, reflecting the language and categories of Scripture. His doctrine of the threefold Word captures the living and active nature of God’s Word and of his providential work in the world. Using language that reflects God’s ever-present speaking and acting toward creation serves as a reminder that the Word continually elicits response from God’s creatures.

The centerpiece of Spykman’s model is the Word of God as the unifying factor of creation and redemption. This introduces some liability – other possible centering themes such as Jesus Christ or the Trinity seem sidelined. But Spykman strives to honor them by upholding the bi-unitary nature of revelation as God’s creating and redeeming initiative toward and within the creation he made and loves. If Scripture specifically and revelation more generally should inform one’s theological method, then Spykman is justified to discern Scripture’s emphasis on creation and redemption as distinct yet necessary facets of God’s unified work; to realize that modern theological interpretations of creation and redemption lack the unified nature assumed by Scripture; and to conceive of a theological paradigm that makes this unity the centerpiece by linking them together in the divine Word. His paradigm offers a distinctive means by which individual Christians and the Church can learn to inhabit God’s world with greater awareness of Christ as Mediator of creation *and* redemption.

²⁴ See Spykman, *RT*, 178-181.

Part III: Conclusion

To summarize, Spykman's prolegomenal and dogmatic reflections carry forward the insights of Calvin and Bavinck, drawing upon the relationality inherent to their theological outlook to provide Reformed theology with an orthodox means to engage the contemporary world. The problematic elements of his model do not hinder the viability of his central contention that Reformed theology requires a more biblical theological method, but they do prevent his method from solving the revelation "problem" as definitively as he hoped to do.

Contemporary Kuyperian scholar Craig Bartholomew says of Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Berkouwer's theologies that they are "exceptionally rich," deserving of being "retrieved and updated for today."²⁵ From his perspective, given the "fragile time" of contemporary existence, "the Kuyperian tradition holds resources for finding constructive ways forward that can defuse some of the major threats we face, renew the life of the church, and promote human flourishing."²⁶ Spykman's dogmatic reformulation according to the Kuyperian tradition, in which he has attempted to update the theological work of Calvin and Bavinck and to redirect Berkouwer's theological intuition, has been the sole theological effort of its kind for nearly thirty years. If the time is ripe for neo-Calvinist guidance for world engagement, Spykman has thoughtfully addressed many key issues, thus laying a foundation for future work.

It is possible that Spykman's work has received relatively little attention because of its forthright challenge to conventional theological methods and philosophical constructs. *RT* is as much – if not more – a polemic against traditional theological methods as it is a dogmatic work. Also, the unfamiliar and debatable philosophical grid of Reformational philosophy has not resonated widely in North American theological circles. Perhaps from an historical-theological context, Spykman's model seemed too close to Berkouwer, given the fundamentalist tendency to equate the Word almost exclusively with Scripture. Spykman's interaction with Berkouwer's correlation motif and his parallels with Berkouwer's doctrine of election may have appeared too subjectivist in nature, even though he replaces the correlation motif with the Word of God and maintains the essential points of the Reformed doctrine of election. Ultimately, these factors may be the consequence of a method that sought to make the Word of God normative but unwittingly made concessions to the Kantian divide between subject and object. His impulse to lift theology out of the divide toward a more biblical conception of revelation was Reformed and right. But his solution assumes the legitimacy of modernity's revelation "problem."

²⁵ Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 269.

²⁶ Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, x.

Spykman's importance lies mainly in his vision for renewing dogmatics and theological method in a manner consistent with the genius of the Reformed tradition, and in his creative effort to address contemporary concerns without resorting to the dualist-based methodologies of past and present. He moves the tradition forward in ways that reflect its commitment to enable God's people to respond faithfully to the Word in new situations. His methodological proposal exhibits consistency with Scripture but also appeals to modernistic elements within the Reformed tradition. His work does not completely achieve the "significant gain" he worked for of relief from "dubious constructs of both scholastic 'objectivism' and existential 'subjectivism.'"²⁷ Rather, it serves as a signpost, marking methodological pitfalls for the benefit of future Reformed theologians while offering needed correctives on problems created by traditional methodologies.

²⁷ Spykman, *RT*, 95-96.

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