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*Kees Van Til als Nederlandse-Amerikaanse,
Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan apologeticus:*

**An Analysis of Cornelius Van Til's Presupposition
of Reformed Dogmatics with special reference to
Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek***

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary
in candidacy for the degree of Master of Theology

Theological Division
Department of Systematic Theology

By Laurence R. O'Donnell III
Grand Rapids, MI, USA
May 2011



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THESIS APPROVAL

This thesis entitled

*"Kees Van Til als Nederlandse-Amerikaanse, Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan apologeticus:
An Analysis of Cornelius Van Til's Presupposition of Reformed Dogmatics
with special reference to Herman Bavinck's Gereformeerde Dogmatiek."*

written by

Laurence R. O'Donnell III

submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Theology

and successfully defended on April 1st., 2011

has been accepted by the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the following readers:

Dr. John Bolt, Supervisor

Dr. John W. Cooper, Reader



Prof. Mariano Avila, Th. M. Director

April 10, 2011
Date

To the precious *παιδίον* whom the Lord gave and then took yet unborn
during the preparation of this thesis

With tears, your loving father and mother
rest in King David's hope—יְלֵאָהּ יְלֵאָהּ—
and rejoice at Jesus' bidding:

Ἄφετε τὰ παιδιά ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά,
τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

(2 Samuel 12:23; Mark 10:14)

Now the basic structure of my thought is very simple. I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology. My business is to teach Apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine.

—Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 1955

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that Cornelius Van Til's (1895–1987) presupposition of Reformed dogmatics is largely a presupposition of Herman Bavinck's (1854–1921) *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. The argument proceeds in three steps. First, by situating Van Til's life and work in the neo-Calvinist intellectual milieu within which he operated throughout his career, the prevailing Copernican interpretation of Van Til's thought is challenged on the grounds of historical abstraction. Second, his formal, material, and polemical appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* are analyzed in order to show not only that Van Til appropriates Bavinck's thought pervasively, but also that his apologetics cannot be properly understood apart from Bavinck's dogmatics. Third, Van Til's criticisms of the alleged scholasticism in Bavinck's thought are analyzed in terms of their originality and their validity. Regarding the former, it is argued that Van Til tacitly appropriates Herman Dooyeweerd's (1894–1977) earlier criticisms of neo-Calvinist scholasticism. Regarding the latter, it is argued that Van Til's criticisms are methodologically unsound and historically untenable insofar as they proceed upon subjective premises and lead to a subjective conclusion. In sum, given both his pervasive appropriation of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* and his entrenchment in neo-Calvinist theology and philosophy, Van Til is more accurately interpreted as a neo-Calvinist rather than a Copernican revolutionary.

PREFACE

Kees Van Til als Nederlandse-Amerikaanse, Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan apologeticus—such an obtuse title surely calls for an explanation!

Taken together, these words sound two important bass notes that carry along the melody of my thesis, and since these notes ring out clearly in the relevant biographical literature,¹ I will simply summarize them briefly up front.

In the first place, Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) is Dutch through and through. He frankly admits that he was groomed on the Dutch neo-Calvinist theology of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). Further, throughout his entire teaching career Van Til interacted extensively with modern Dutch theologians and philosophers. Nevertheless, his neo-Calvinist heritage has been significantly underdeveloped in the predominantly American-Presbyterian-based Van Til scholarship. Hence the Dutch title is my attempt to foreground this important, yet neglected, contextual factor.

In the second place, Van Til is complex through and through. Due to his

1. For the most recent and most thorough biography of Van Til, see John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, American Reformed Biographies (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008). The biography by William White Jr., *Van Til, Defender of the Faith: An Authorized Biography* (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1979), although largely uncritical, provides useful insights into Van Til's life nevertheless. Also note the brief biographical sections within the following works: John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 19-47; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 7-20; Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 240-43.

multifarious immigrations (i.e., geographically—from The Netherlands to America at age 10; institutionally—from Calvin Seminary to Princeton Seminary to Westminster Seminary; and ecclesiastically—from the Christian Reformed Church in North America to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), nearly every aspect of Van Til’s life defies simple classification. Hence, a broad historical-theological perspective is necessary for understanding any of the individual aspects of his colorful thought, including the one that is analyzed in this thesis—Van Til’s presupposition of Reformed dogmatics.

Considered individually, each of the title words represent a particular component not only of Van Til’s thought and life, but also of my thesis’ *raison d’être*.

First, *apologeticus*. In 1976 my friend and former seminary professor, Dr. John M. Frame, wrote the following introduction to an essay on Van Til’s theology:

In 1961, Cornelius Van Til reviewed a book by R. H. Bremmer called *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus (Herman Bavinck the Theologian)*. Having run across this review in a recent perusal of the Van Til corpus, I asked myself whether someday there might be a book called *Cornelius Van Til als Dogmaticus*.²

In part, *apologeticus* is my humble response to Professor Frame’s rhetorical question. Based upon (1) Van Til’s expressly stated job description that he is an apologist and *not* a dogmatician, (2) his frequent and persistent claims to the effect that he is building upon the theology of his Reformed predecessors rather than starting *de novo*, (3) his extensive interaction with neo-Calvinist Dutch

2. John M. Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976), 295; also published as *Van Til: The Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Pilgrim Pub. Co., 1976). Cf. Cornelius Van Til, “Bavinck the Theologian: A Review Article,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48-64.

theology and philosophy, and (4) as Frame himself suggests³—and as I intend to demonstrate below—Van Til’s pervasive appropriations of Bavinck’s dogmatic formulations, were such a book to be written it would have to be entitled *Cornelius Van Til als apologeticus* (or perhaps even *als Nederlandse-Amerikaanse, Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan apologeticus!*) rather than *als dogmaticus*.

Second, *Nederlandse-Amerikaanse*. Much has happened in the field of Bavinck scholarship since Frame’s essay in 1976. Most notably, Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* has “immigrated” from *Nederland* to *Amerika* via a four-volume, unabridged English translation. Although it could be said that Bavinck’s dogmatic theology appeared in America much earlier by second-hand means (i.e., via B. B. Warfield’s, Geerhardus Vos’, Louis Berkhof’s, and even Van Til’s support for and appropriation of Bavinck’s thought) and by abridged translations, his *Dogmatiek* has been neither fully nor directly available to American readers until its recent “immigration.”

Additionally, as more scholars are reading Bavinck in English, international conferences on his theology have begun to appear on both sides of the Atlantic, such as, the 28–30 October 2004 “*Ontmoeting met Herman Bavinck*” conference at both the *Theologische Universiteit te Kampen (Oudestraat)* and *De Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam*;⁴ the 18–20 September 2008 “*Pearl and Leaven*” Bavinck Conference at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, USA;⁵ the 16–18 April 2009

3. Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295: “Even when Van Til’s theology sounds most strange to American ears (for example, his strong emphasis upon the ethical/metaphysical distinction), he is very often paraphrasing ideas from the Dutch tradition. (In the case of the ethical/metaphysical distinction, the source is Bavinck.)”

4. Papers from this conference were published in George Harinck and Gerrit Neven, eds., *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, Ad Chartas-reeks 9 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006).

5. Papers from this conference were published in *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010) and *The Bavinck Review*, no. 1 (2010), <http://bavinck.calvinseminary.edu/review/tbr-1->

conference sponsored by The Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ, USA, in celebration of the centenary of Bavinck's Stone Lectures; the 1–2 September 2010 Edinburgh Bavinck Conference at The New College School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, in Edinburgh, Scotland;⁶ and the upcoming 12–14 October 2011 Bavinck Conference at Calvin Seminary. Additionally, the first English-language biography of Herman Bavinck has been published just this past year.⁷ Van Til scholars, accordingly, have received the opportunity to analyze Van Til's *Amerikaanse* theology in light of the growing body of English-language scholarship regarding Bavinck's *Nederlandse* theology only recently.

Third, *Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan*. A deep irony pervades Van Til scholarship, one that is unavoidable due to the nature of his aforementioned immigrations, namely, whereas Van Til was reared in the Dutch Reformed tradition, he spent nearly his entire teaching career at a predominantly Presbyterian institution. Likewise, he spent nearly his entire ecclesiastical career

2010.

6. Papers from the plenary sessions of this conference will be published in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (Summer 2011), and student papers will be published in *The Bavinck Review*, no. 2 (April 2011), <http://bavinck.calvinseminary.edu/review>.

7. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010). Also note the several introductory articles on Bavinck's theology by Cornelis P. Venema: "Bavinck the Dogmatician (I)," *The Outlook* 58, no. 4 (April 2008): 6-9; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (II)," *The Outlook* 58, no. 5 (May 2008): 8-11; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (3)," *The Outlook* 58, no. 8 (September 2008): 8-11; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (4)," *The Outlook* 58, no. 11 (December 2008): 8-11; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (4)," *The Outlook* 59, no. 1 (2009): 29-31; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (5)," *The Outlook* 59, no. 2 (February 2009): 27-28; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (6)," *The Outlook* 59, no. 3 (March 2009): 22-25; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (7)," *The Outlook* 59, no. 5 (May 2009): 26-31; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician: The Names and Attributes of the Triune God," *The Outlook* 59, no. 7 (July 2009): 24-28; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician: The Doctrine of the Trinity," *The Outlook* 59, no. 8 (September 2009): 28-31; *idem*, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (10)," *The Outlook* 60, no. 2 (March 2010): 28-31; *idem*, "Herman Bavinck: His Life and Theology," *New Horizons*, October 2008, http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=576.

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Yet, as his corpus clearly reveals, Van Til continued to engage the Dutch Reformed tradition (i.e., both the actual Dutch tradition in The Netherlands and its American counterparts) from his new Presbyterian posts. Despite his indefatigably Dutch roots and writings, however, his foremost interpreters and biographers have been American Presbyterians. Therefore, the words, *Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan*, signify both this irony and the corresponding need for a thick reading of Van Til's complex historical context.

Fourth, *Kees Van Til*. I was five years old when Van Til died, thus I never had the opportunity to meet him in person. But I have read in biographies of his life and have been told by those who knew him personally that his friends addressed him by his Dutch nickname—*Kees*. Although I will not be able to be his personal friend until heaven, I can do now what good friends always seek to do, namely, to listen to what the other is saying within the context in which he or she is speaking. In this sense I aim to be a good friend of *Kees* even now in the presentation of the following thesis.

By way of acknowledgements, first and foremost, I wish to thank the triune Lord who not only has drawn me out of sin's darkness and shone his Son's saving light into my heart, but also has redirected the course of my life in ways I never would have expected, including lavishing upon me the gift of postgraduate theological study. Who am I to deserve such an opportunity?

Second, thank you to my beautiful, gracious, and selfless wife without whose

enduring patience and loving support I could have neither made it through the Th.M. program nor finished this thesis.

Third, thank you to my parents and to my in-laws, whose financial support, ceaseless prayers, and patience with their son's frenetic and domineering school schedule and whose visits to Grand Rapids have put fresh wind in my slacking sails more than a few times.

Fourth, thank you to Professor John Bolt, whose generosity in providing materials for me to read, whose insightful suggestions and criticisms in countless office conversations, whose Th.M. courses on Bavinck's theology, whose Ph.D. seminar on twentieth-century Dutch theology, and, above all, whose friendship and encouragement have been a great boon to my studies and to this project in particular.

Fifth, thank you to Calvin Theological Seminary not only for awarding me the Louis Berkhof Graduate Scholarship and hence enabling me to move my family to Grand Rapids in order to complete the Th.M. program, but also for providing—along with the Herman Bavinck Institute—funding to attend the 2010 Edinburgh Bavinck Conference. The paper I delivered at the conference was an immense help toward the completion of this thesis.

Sixth, thank you to Mark Hofman, a fellow Th.M. student who generously donated to me a large collection of Van Til books that he had received from the personal library of Van Til's brother-in-law, Dr. Fled Klooster. Having my own copies of these hard-to-find primary sources proved to be very useful throughout this project.

Last but not least, thank you to Kerry John Hollingsworth, Director of Paideia Press, who not only generously provided access to pre-published translations of two works by Herman Dooyeweerd, but also graciously shared warm personal recollections regarding his friendship with *Kees* and keen insights into the world of Reformational philosophy.

CHAPTER I.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN ABSTRACTO*: CORNELIUS AS COPERNICUS

The purpose of this essay is to analyze Cornelius Van Til's preeminent presupposition—a presupposition upon which the entire structure of his thought depends, yet a presupposition which has received surprisingly little attention in the related scholarship—his presupposition of Reformed dogmatics. He states this presupposition clearly and modestly in the introduction to the first chapter of *The Defense of the Faith*, a book that many consider to be his *magnum opus*: “I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology,” writes Van Til. “My business is to teach Apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine.”¹

Several critical questions arise from Van Til's frank presupposition of Reformed dogmatics, such as: What is the nature of this presupposition in Van Til's thought? Does he treat “the Reformed system of doctrine” as an eternal, static idea? Or does he view it as an historically-mediated and hence culturally-conditioned and dynamic presupposition? Further, what is the extent of “the Reformed system” in Van Til's view? Does it include Reformed confessional theology? If so, then which confessional traditions does it include? Does it include Reformed dogmatic theology? If so, then which dogmaticians does he

1. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 27.

include, and from which countries and which eras does he make his selections? Does it include Reformed catechetical theology, Reformed biblical interpretation, and Reformed preaching? If so, then again, which catechists, commentators, and preachers does Van Til view as comprising “the Reformed system”? Moreover, what is the function of this presupposition in Van Til’s thought? Does he use this presupposition as the *terminus a quo* from whence all of his polemics proceed? For example, since in Van Til’s view Reformed apologetics presupposes Reformed dogmatics, then does it follow necessarily that the Reformed apologist is always the student of the Reformed dogmatician? If so, then from whom did Van Til learn his dogmatics before he formulated his apologetics?

Despite the fact that answers to these questions regarding Van Til’s presupposition of “the Reformed system of doctrine” are vital not only for an accurate interpretation of his thought, but also for a valid assessment of his contribution to Reformed theology, this aspect of his thought has received scant analysis. One of the primary reasons for this want is that, within the current body of Van Til scholarship, the historical Cornelius has been transformed into an ahistorical Copernican revolutionary; hence, his presupposition of “the Reformed system” has been abstracted into an ahistorical Copernican world wherein Van Til is seen as not only a revolutionary apologist but also a revolutionary theologian the likes of which have not been seen since Aquinas or Calvin. Therefore, if we are going to make any progress toward an historically sound analysis of Van Til’s presupposition, then first we must evaluate the Copernican line of scholarship with its attempt to present Van Til’s presupposition *in*

abstracto.

A. The Problem: Cornelius as Copernicus

Cornelius Van Til is frequently hailed by his followers as the Copernicus of modern Christian apologetics.² He is attributed with the following Copernican résumé accordingly: (1) “He has done for apologetics,” insists Greg Bahnsen,

what Calvin did for theology. By aiming to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic has triggered the reformation of Christian apologetics.³

(2) “So, then,” Bahnsen alleges further,

the distinctive presuppositional method and outlook that Van Til promoted through his published writings have generated an intellectual revolution.⁴

(3) “Any historical survey of Christian apologetics,” K. Scott Oliphint brashly asserts, “would show that, since Aquinas, the church has done little to develop the discipline of apologetics until Van Til.”⁵ (4) John Frame lauds Van Til as “the

2. K. Scott Oliphint, “Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 280; originally published as “Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Die idee van reformasie: Gister en vandag*, ed. B. J. van der Walt (Potchefstroomse Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991); also cf. Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295; Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching the Word of the Lord: Cornelius Van Til, VDM,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1984): 242; Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 20-22. Though he is not a follower of Van Til but rather a stiff critic, John W. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986), 1-2, notes that Van Til’s followers have transformed Cornelius into a mythological Copernican figure.

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976), 239; also cf. *ibid.*, 233-34; *idem*, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 1n2; *idem*, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 7.

4. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 16.

5. Oliphint, “Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” 280. Incidentally, one standard history of apologetics textbook, Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 1st ed., Theological Resources (New York: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1971), contains no references to Van Til; furthermore, the revised edition includes only three passing references to

most important Christian thinker since John Calvin”⁶ and lavishes him with the following praise:

“[W]hen one considers the uniqueness of his apologetic position and then further considers the implications of that apologetic for theology, one searches for superlatives to describe the significance of Van Til’s overall approach.”⁷

(5) Frame further extols Van Til’s Copernican revolution in apologetics as equal to that of Kant’s in philosophy:

If (as may well be said) Van Til has done for Christian thought what Kant accomplished for non-Christian thought, giving it a revolutionary awareness of the uniqueness and comprehensiveness of its distinctive principles, then as with Kant the “Copernican” radicalism of his contribution must be appreciated in all areas of human thought and life.⁸

(6) Van Til’s “revolutionary” apologetic, exclaims Charles Dennison, was

“virtually turning the study of apologetics head over heels.”⁹ (7) “Van Tilian

him (*idem*, *A History of Apologetics*, 2nd ed., Modern Apologetics Library (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2002), 266, 322, 357). Oliphint’s brash overstatement is based upon his own Copernican-like “Van Tilian” revolution as recounted in K. Scott Oliphint, “Desert Bloom in Amarillo,” *New Horizons* (July 2010), http://opc.org/nh.html?article_id=666; and *idem*, “Forward,” in *The Defense of the Faith*, xi-xiii, rather than upon objective historical analysis. Also, note *idem*, “Van Til the Evangelist,” *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 54: “My initial introduction to him [i.e., Van Til] came through his many writings. I immersed myself in those writings, seeing, for the first time in my Christian life, a man whose method (based, as it, was on Reformed theology) was able to decimate all pretensions and permutations of unbelief, including those residing in my own heart.” Additionally, see *idem*, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), x, wherein Oliphint claims that he has imbibed Van Til’s teachings to such an extent that they are “between every line of the pages that follow” and that he “could not have written anything here had his [i.e., Van Til’s] influence not been profoundly present. . . .”

6. John M. Frame, “Backgrounds to My Thought,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 14; also cf. *idem*, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 352; *idem*, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 762.

7. Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295. *Idem*, *Cornelius Van Til*, 3, writes the following in a similar context: “I have been criticized for using such superlatives to describe Van Til, but I intend to use them again, and to defend that use, in the present volume.” At the same time, however, Frame admits that there is a need for a “sympathetic, comprehensive, critical analysis” of Van Til (p. 3).

8. Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 297.

9. Charles G. Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002), 120.

presuppositionalism” has provided, according to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s recommended curriculum for the training of ministers, “the most biblically faithful expression of Reformed apologetics,” and hence it is to be taught first and foremost before the presentation of a mere “survey of positions held by other Reformed apologists.”¹⁰

These gushing scholarly and ecclesiastical interpretations of Van Til’s significance give the impression that the entire history of Christian thought begins and ends with Van Til.¹¹ However, such ahistorical interpretations of Van Til’s work that transform Cornelius into a Copernican revolutionary appear oddly hyperbolic when contrasted against Van Til’s conspicuous modesty, his sonorous aversion to theological novelty, and his explicit appropriation of Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist vision.

1. Van Til’s Modest Self-Assessments

Van Til described his own work as intentionally *unoriginal* in the classic

10. The full statement in Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, rev. ed. (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 216, regarding the guideline for what should be taught with respect to apologetics is as follows: “Introduction to Apologetic Methodology and Practice including (1) the school of Van Tilian presuppositionalism as the most biblically faithful expression of Reformed apologetics, and (2) a survey of positions held by other Reformed apologists.” The language in the 2005 edition of the *Book of Church Order* is exactly the same. This statement is odd due to its idiosyncrasy: None of the other topics of study (e.g., systematic theology, church history, etc.) contain prescriptions for one person’s thought as the “most biblically faithful” expressions of that topic.

11. Regarding Van Til’s followers, Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 16, writes, “Some of them have made extravagant claims about Van Til and his legacy that would have embarrassed him. Disciples have lauded him as the most creative mind since Immanuel Kant and the greatest Christian thinker since John Calvin. The allegedly innovative features of his apologetic approach have been applauded for their proto-postmodernism and either credited or blamed for distancing both Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from their American Presbyterian past.” William Edgar, “Introduction,” in *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 14, likewise asserts: “Cornelius Van Til is not the last word on apologetics, nor would he ever have claimed to be.”

Protestant sense of the term—historical, orthodox, non-revolutionary.¹² Like the seventeenth-century Reformed polemicist, Francis Turretin (1623–1687), who ardently eschewed “novelty” as a descriptor of his *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*,¹³ and like Charles Hodge (1797–1878), the nineteenth-century Reformed theologian who famously asserted that during his tenure at Princeton no new doctrines had appeared either at Princeton Seminary or in the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*,¹⁴ Van Til intentionally describes himself as standing squarely on the shoulders of his Reformed predecessors.¹⁵ Regarding

12. For a classic statement of Protestant “unoriginality,” see John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 9-31. E.g., in response to the allegation of theological novelty leveled against the French Protestants, Calvin replies as follows: “First, by calling it ‘new’ they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred word does not deserve to be accused of novelty. Indeed, I do not at all doubt that it is new to them, since to them both Christ himself and his gospel are new. But he who knows that this preaching of Paul is ancient, that ‘Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification’ [Rom. 4:25 p.], will find nothing new among us” (pp. 15-16). Cf. William S. Barker, “The Historical Context of the Institutes as a Work in Theology,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 4-7.

13. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), I:xlii, writes: “Let other books, then, be commended by their novelty. I do not want this statement to justify mine. I avoided it most diligently lest it should contain anything new, a stranger from the word of God and from the public forms received in our churches, and nothing is built up there that is not confirmed by the vote of our most proven theologians of highest reputation.”

14. D. G. Hart, “Systematic Theology at Old Princeton Seminary: Unoriginal Calvinism,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 3-4.

15. E.g., referring to his book on Christian epistemology, Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 23, writes: “The greater part of what is presented here is due to the fact that the writer stands on the shoulders of the great Reformed thinkers mentioned above. He is merely gathering together the thoughts found over a widely diversified body of their writings in order to present briefly that which basically they have taught.” The theologians “mentioned above” include “the great Reformed dogmaticians of modern times, such as Charles Hodge, Thornwell, Dabney, Shedd, Kuyper and especially Herman Bavinck. Back of all of them stands that master theologian and exegete of Scripture, John Calvin, whose writings have been constantly consulted” (see “Introduction,” n.p.). “It is to this basic approach,” Van Til similarly remarks, “of Kuyper and Bavinck, of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos (ignoring or setting aside the remnants of the traditional method that is found in their works) that appeal is made in this work” (*ibid.*, 20). Additionally, cf. *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 57n4, 101, 107n33, 115; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 5-7, 13, 29n8, 70, 89, 89n1, 112n15, 320n4; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 2, 23, 27, 27n1, 103,

his own contributions to Reformed apologetics, for example, Van Til insists that he did not start *de novo*:

Seeing, therefore, the failure of even Reformed theologians and apologists in their efforts to defend consistently the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, it became clear to me that new ground work needed to be done. I did not, however, undertake this task *de novo*. I learned much from other men, just as I did in theology from Kuyper and Bavinck.¹⁶

In another work Van Til carefully emphasizes his continuity with “historic Calvinism” and downplays his differences with Warfield and Kuyper on apologetics:

In all this I think I am only presenting generic or historic Calvinism. If I have proposed variations, they are certainly not of basic import. Even the apologetic methodology I have proposed rests upon Calvin and upon the classical Reformed theologians. To the extent that these differ among one another I have been compelled to choose between them. Even so these differences have not been of such a basic nature that I could not appeal to a common view held by both parties. I have tried to use elements both of Kuyper’s and of Warfield’s thinking. If the construction that has resulted differs somewhat from both and is in that sense “original,” its soundness may be judged on its merits.¹⁷

In yet another place Van Til nuances his own apologetic formulations circumspectly. Referring to himself, he writes:

It is only in a subordinate way that he differs from the great theologians of the preceding generation. The greater part of what is presented here is due to the fact that the writer stands on the shoulders of the great Reformed thinkers mentioned above [i.e., Kuyper, Bavinck, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and Geerhardus Vos, p. 20]. He is merely gathering together the thoughts found over a widely diversified body of their writings in order to present briefly that which basically they have

113, 143n43, 237, 264, 276, 284, 382, 395; Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ,” 234; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34-36; Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56.

16. Cornelius Van Til, “My Credo,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 11.

17. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 23-24. In contradistinction to his “Copernican” assessment of Van Til noted above, Oliphint comments on this passage as follows: “This confession of Van Till’s should not be passed over lightly. He confesses here that the thrust of his approach to apologetics is the application of Reformed systematic theology to the Christian defense of the faith. He did not see himself as developing anything new in that sense” (23n101).

taught.¹⁸

Likewise, Van Til introduces his own contribution to the Reformed debate over the doctrine of common grace as follows:

We now make bold to submit a few remarks by way of suggesting the direction in which we may possibly hope for profitable discussion on the common grace question in the future. It is with hesitation and diffidence that we do so. And it is with the greatest of appreciation for the labors of such men as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Schilder, Hoeksema, Zwier, and others, that we say what we say.¹⁹

Van Til elsewhere admits his indebtedness to his Reformed predecessors as follows:

With grateful acknowledgment of indebtedness to both Kuyper and Warfield, to Herman Bavinck and other associates and followers of Kuyper, to the various associates and followers of Warfield, to J. Gresham Machen in particular, we would take their common basic contribution to the idea of the full Christian faith and the self-attesting Scripture and build as best as we can upon it.²⁰

In terms of his self-assessments, therefore, Van Til consistently viewed himself simply as “Cornelius,” a self-conscious inheritor of the classic Reformed tradition, not as “Copernicus,” a revolutionary seeking to begin his work *de novo*.

2. Van Til’s Polemics against Novelty

In addition to cautiously resisting the perception of novelty in his self-

18. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 23.

19. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1972), 33-34. “Of course,” writes Van Til in a similar passage, “it was with great diffidence and hesitation that I sought a solution for the apologetic problem and for the problem of common grace by the means of thus sorting out, rejecting the weaknesses in both positions, and building upon the solid foundation in both, derived from Calvin and ultimately from St. Paul” (p. 186); Also cf. Van Til’s analysis of the differences between Old Princeton and Old Amsterdam on the nature of Reformed apologetics (pp. 183-87). “It is, in short,” Van Til writes further, “because I hold the appeal to reason as autonomous to be both illegitimate and destructive from the point of view of Reformed faith that I am bound to reject Hepp’s position as well as that of Old Princeton apologetics. But happily I can do so in view of the theology that I have learned from Old Princeton and Amsterdam” (p. 194).

20. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 254.

assessments, Van Til also polemicizes vehemently against the heterodox “newness” that was appearing all around him. His self-named theological opponents include, for example: the “new theology” of the 1967 revision to the Presbyterian confessional standards;²¹ the “new modernism” at his Alma Mater, Princeton, and in the thought of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner;²² the “new hermeneutic” of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling;²³ the “new evangelicalism” and “new Protestantism” both of which rejected the infallibility of the Bible and asserted a “new Christ”;²⁴ and the “new synthesis theology” overtaking the *Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland*.²⁵ It is clearly evident, then, that rather than

21. Cornelius Van Til, *The Confession of 1967: Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1967), 1, declares the following: “Should the Confession of 1967 be adopted by that church [i.e., the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America], an entirely new phase in its life will be ushered in. This is true because this proposed Confession gives expression to and is based upon a new theology. Our concern in this booklet, therefore, is with the nature of this new theology which will be given creedal status if this proposed Confession is adopted by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.” Additionally, cf. *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 11-12.

22. In a characteristic statement regarding the rise of heterodoxy at his Alma Mater, Cornelius Van Til, “More New Modernism at Old Princeton,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 18, no. 9 (September 1949): 166, exclaims: “Charles Hodge was one of the greatest systematic theologians of modern times. The man about to occupy the chair named after him does not believe in systematic theology at all.” *Idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 181, moreover, describes Karl Barth’s theology as “the ‘new’ Protestantism rather than historic Protestantism.” See also *idem*, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972); *idem*, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); *idem*, “Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 16, no. 2 (1954): 135-181.

23. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974).

24. Cornelius Van Til, “The New Evangelicalism: Address of Welcome to Students Entering Westminster Seminary,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 26, no. 9 (October 1957): 131-132; *idem*, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Nutley, NJ and Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964); See the following addresses within the book entitled “The Pamphlets, Tracts, and Offprints of Cornelius Van Til” in Cornelius Van Til, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til (40 Vols.)* (Logos Bible Software, n.d.), <http://www.logos.com/products/details/3993>: “The New Protestantism—1962” and “The New Christ—1958.” NB: Hereafter, this electronic collection of Van Til’s works will be referenced as follows: *The Works of Cornelius Van Til (Software)*.

25. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), 10, describes this book as follows: “The thesis of this essay is that the change of direction in Holland is one which is marked by a turning away from the traditional Reformed Faith, and toward the reinterpretation (*Umdeutung*) of it in terms of the post-Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought, and, in particular, of neo-orthodox theology. We

promoting theological revolutions, Van Til frequently employs the adjective “new” in a pejorative sense in order to characterize his opponents’ views as heterodox.

In light of Van Til’s careful avoidance of novelty in his self-assessments and his voluminous polemics against “new” theologies, it is therefore doubly ironic that some of Van Til’s interpreters have been quick to extol their “Copernicus” in terms of the very critique he leveled against his theological opponents—novelty.

3. Van Til’s Neo-Calvinist Vision

Abraham Kuyper’s 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary²⁶ had a profound influence upon Van Til. He not only writes about Kuyper²⁷ and his Stone Lectures fondly,²⁸ but also views himself as carrying on the neo-Calvinist vision that Kuyper propounded. For example, speaking with autobiographical undertones, Van Til concludes a 1969 speech with a clarion call for others to take up Kuyper’s vision:

The wisdom of this world has been made foolishness with God. It is thus that Kuyper’s vision expanded and clarified by Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd may help us in our task in undertaking the cultural mandate for ourselves today. Would that more of those who have seen

shall be concerned chiefly with the new direction so far as it affects theology and, in particular, hermeneutics. But the new direction in theology and hermeneutics involves and presupposes the post-Kantian methodology of science and philosophy as well. Finally, the new direction in theology is, apparently, effecting a new direction in the ecclesiastical situation of the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.”

26. These lectures were published in Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered in the Theological Seminary at Princeton* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899).

27. Cornelius Van Til, “Reflections on Dr. A. Kuyper,” *The Banner* 72, no. 21 (December 16, 1937): 1187; *idem*, “Kuyper en Amerika,” *De Reformatie* 18, no. 14 (December 31, 1937): 150; also cf. the extensive analysis of Kuyper’s thought throughout *idem*, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974).

28. E.g., see Van Til’s address entitled, “Pro Rege”—a title based upon the three-volume work by Kuyper with the same name—which address Van Til delivered once in 1933 and twice in 1965; cf. Eric D. Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895–1987* (Chicago: Olive Tree Communications, 1995), s.vv., 1933.K, 1965.B.

something of Kuyper's vision as he set it forth in the chapel at Princeton Seminary, might be willing to follow through with Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. If they did, they would say, without hesitation, that it is only on the presupposition of the truth of what is taught in Scripture about man and his world, that it is possible for science to understand itself, for philosophy to attain a totality vision that is not mirage, and for theology to challenge the new Protestant synthesis between Christianity and existentialism and the still newer synthesis of the Aristotle-Christ-Kant axis now functioning in the International Council of Churches of Christ in the World.²⁹

Furthermore, since he names two Dutch neo-Calvinist philosophers, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) and Dirk Hendrik Theodoor Vollenhoven (1892–1987), as co-laborers, it is clear that Van Til did not consider himself to be a lone ranger in the fight to uphold Kuyper's banner in the twentieth century. Rather, he places himself side-by-side in the same trench with these fellow crusaders.

Additionally, as a self-styled champion of Kuyper's neo-Calvinist vision, Van Til took upon himself the role of guardian of Kuyper's antithesis in America. Thus, from his post in Philadelphia, he frequently looked across the Atlantic in order to survey the various permutations of "synthesis" thinking (i.e., the opposite of Kuyper's "antithesis" thinking³⁰) that were corrupting not only the theological landscape of his home country, but also the wider European theological landscape. Then, in order to stave off an infiltration of such heterodox synthesis thinking into American Reformed theology, Van Til vehemently polemicized against the work of the modern European theologian who was, according to Van Til, the paragon of synthesis thinking—Karl Barth (1886–1968).³¹

29. "Appendix 2" in White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 233; cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1968.I, 1979.B2.

30. As will be demonstrated in chapter 6 below, Van Til appropriated the concept of "synthesis thinking" from Herman Dooyeweerd.

31. Van Til's polemics against Barth's theology are as voluminous as they are vehement. His major polemic is *Christianity and Barthianism*. For a representative sample of his shorter polemics, see: *idem*, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism*; *idem*, "Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?" For a complete

Van Til was especially frustrated by the fact that Barth's synthesis theology took hold at his Alma Mater, Princeton Seminary. Likewise, he leveled polemics against the alleged synthesis thinking of several modern Dutch Reformed theologians, such as, Hendrik Kraemer (1888–1965),³² Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903–1996),³³ Hendrikus Berkhof (1914–1995),³⁴ and Harry Kuitert (1924–present).³⁵

Therefore, based upon the fact that Van Til (1) frankly appropriates Kuyper's neo-Calvinist vision as his own—especially the “antithesis” of Kuyper's Stone

catalog of Van Til's writings *contra* Barth, cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1931.A, 1932.D, 1934.D2, 1935.C, 1935.J, 1936.G, H, 1937.B1-B4, 1937.I, 1938.B, D-F, K, P, 1940.A, 1946.B, G, 1947.A, 1948.B1, D, 1950.A, 1954.A, B, L, 1955.B, 1958.A, D, 1959.A, D, E, F, J, 1960.B, 1961.I, 1962.D, G, H, N, 1964.A, B1, C, 1966.C, E, 1969.B, E, 1972.G, 1974.D, 1978.A.

32. Cornelius Van Til, “Review of Communication of the Christian Faith by Hendrik Kraemer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 19, no. 2 (May 1957): 208-212.

33. Van Til critically appreciated Berkouwer's earlier writings, but he vehemently polemicized against Berkouwer's later writings. His voluminous analyses include: Cornelius Van Til, “Review of *Karl Barth en de Kinderdoop* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1947) and *E. Smilde, Een Eeuw van Strijd over Verbond en Doop* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1946), by G. C. Berkouwer,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 11, no. 1 (1948): 77-80; *idem*, “Review of *Geloof en Rechtvaardiging, Dogmatische Studien* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1949) and *Geloof en Heiliging, Dogmatische Studien* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1949), by G. C. Berkouwer,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 12, no. 1 (1949): 74-76; *idem*, “Review of *De Triomf der Genade in de Theologie van Karl Barth* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, N.V, 1954), by G. C. Berkouwer,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (1955): 58-59; *idem*, *The Triumph of Grace: The Heidelberg Catechism, Vol. 1, Introduction, Syllabus*. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1958), esp. chs. 4, 6, 7, and 9; *idem*, “Westminster Professor Replies to Criticism of His Theological Views,” *The Banner* 96, no. 2 (January 13, 1961): 18; *idem*, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 117-71; *idem*, “Review of *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), by G. C. Berkouwer,” *Interpretation* 20, no. 4 (October 1966): 493-94; “Appendix II” in *idem*, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture, In Defense of Biblical Christianity 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967); *idem*, *The Sovereignty of Grace: An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer's View of Dort* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1969); “Appendix 5” in *idem*, *The New Modernism*; *idem*, “The Umkehr at Amsterdam,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974); *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 44-76; also see Van Til's response to Berkouwer in E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 197-204; cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1948.B1, 1949.A1 and A2, 1955.B, 1958.D, 1959.J, 1961.K, 1961.O, 1962.H, 1964.C, 1966.K, 1967.B, 1969.E, 1971.O, 1972.G, 1974.B1, 1974.G, 1975.B, 1975.E.

34. Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, 140-41; *idem*, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 64-76.

35. Van Til, *The New Hermeneutic*, 109-80; *idem*, “The Umkehr at Amsterdam”; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 10-12, 17-19, 77-99; also cf. the few passing references to Kuitert throughout *idem*, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*.

Lectures—and (2) levels “synthesis thinking” polemics against modern Dutch and European theologians accordingly, there is abundant warrant for classifying him as a neo-Calvinist theologian who was deeply engaged in modern Dutch Reformed thought.

B. The Question: “Van Tilian” or Neo-Calvinist?

Given the dissonance between Van Til’s modest self-identification as a “generic Calvinist,” his polemics against theological novelty, and his identification with Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist vision on the one hand, and the Copernican identity purported by several of his interpreters on the other hand, the following question arises: Did Van Til view himself as a “Van Tilian” (i.e., a Copernicus)?³⁶ Or, is it possible that some of his interpreters have abstracted Van Til from his self-styled historic, Reformed context—“Christianity as interpreted in the Reformed creeds, as championed by Kuyper, Bavinck, Hodge, Warfield and Machen”³⁷—and have created an adjective that Van Til himself never intended to exist?³⁸

36. Michael S. Horton, “Consistently Reformed: The Inheritance and Legacy of Van Til’s Apologetic,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 134, raises a similar question, though in a more narrow context regarding the *principia* of traditional Reformed scholastic theology: “Cartesian epistemologies have produced ‘rational apologetics,’ while Lockean versions have generated ‘evidential apologetics.’ Cornelius Van Til’s presuppositionalism was consequently regarded in its time as a *novum* in the history of apologetics, a conclusion that Van Til himself perhaps insufficiently challenged. But was it really new?”

37. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 276. Similar self-descriptions by which Van Til aligns himself behind the classic modern Reformed theologians abound in his writings. E.g., *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 103, asserts the following: “It is on the basis of the work of such men as Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, and B. B. Warfield, to mention no others, that we have formulated the broad outline of the Reformed life-and-world view. It is only by the help of such men that we have been enabled to attain to anything like a consistent Protestantism.”

38. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 17, highlights the fact that Van Til “referred to his system unpretentiously as ‘Reformed apologetics,’” and he notes that Van Til used the term “Van Tilian apologetics” only in private correspondence with confidants (cf. pp. 113-14; quote at p. 114). Nevertheless, Muether employs the adjective “Van Tilian” in a few places, e.g., pp. 15, 18, 268,

This essay seeks to answer one aspect of this question by analyzing Van Til's appropriation of Herman Bavinck's Dutch neo-Calvinist theology. I write *begin* circumspectly; for, as Van Til himself admits, a panoply of philosophical and theological tributaries flow into his thought,³⁹ and many of these streams remain uncharted waters in the scholarly literature.⁴⁰ Yet, notwithstanding this caveat, there are four reasons why it is worthwhile to focus on the Bavinck tributary within the larger neo-Calvinist stream clearly evident in Van Til's thought.

First, Van Til explicitly identifies two prominent neo-Calvinist theologians—Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck—as main theological influences. Reflecting upon his long academic career in a letter, for example, Van Til begins as follows: “In my days at Calvin College and Seminary I read Kuyper and Bavinck assiduously and followed them through thick and thin.”⁴¹ Further, in “My Credo,” Van Til's own non-technical summary of his thought, he writes:

277. NB: This neologism appears in the secondary literature in two forms, i.e., “Van Tilian” and “Van Tillian.” For simplicity's sake, the former will be used throughout this thesis.

39. E.g., in the “Introduction” to his *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, n.p., Van Til presents the following long list of theological and philosophical influences: Charles Hodge, James Henly Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney, William G. T. Shedd, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, Herman Dooyeweerd, and G. H. Stoker. Later on Van Til adds B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos to the list (p. 20). On Van Til's appropriation of Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's interpretation of the history of philosophy, see pp. 50-51. Also cf. *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 13.

40. William Edgar, e.g., in Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 57n4, makes the following editorial comment: “The full story of Van Til's relationship to the Amsterdam philosophy, and especially to Herman Dooyeweerd, has not yet been told.” (On Van Til's complicated relationship with Dooyeweerd, see Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 18-19, 48-52; John M. Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (Pilgrim Press, 1972), 37-39). Likewise, Charles G. Dennison notes that Van Til's relationship to Kuyper needs more study (*History for a Pilgrim People*, 136n54). Furthermore, as will become evident in the survey of scholarship below, few studies attempt to analyze Van Til's appropriation of his self-named Reformed predecessors at any length. Owen Anderson, however, devotes a chapter to Van Til's critiques of B. B. Warfield (see ch. 4 in *Benjamin B. Warfield and Right Reason: The Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005)), and Brian G. Mattson evaluates Van Til's critiques of Bavinck (“Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 111-127).

41. Cornelius Van Til, “The Development of My Thinking,” an unpublished letter to John Vander Stelt, 1968; Reproduced in Bristley, *Guide*, 14-17; quote at p. 14.

Wanting to follow the Reformers, it was natural that I read and appreciated the works of those who before me likewise attempted to do so. I first used the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. How basic and how broad was their view! The *idea* of Scripture, they said, must never be separated from its *message*. . . .

. . . As Bavinck truly said, the nature of the message of salvation and the nature of Scripture are always involved in one another.⁴²

Additionally, referring to his book, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Van Til admits that “what has been advocated in this work has in large measure been suggested by Kuyper’s thinking.”⁴³ Similarly, thinking of his own apologetic method, Van Til asks:

And have I, following such a method, departed radically from the tradition of Kuyper and Bavinck? On the contrary I have learned all this primarily from them. It is Kuyper’s *Encyclopedie* that has, more than any other work in modern times, brought out the fact of the difference between the approach of the believer and of the unbeliever. It is Bavinck’s monumental work which set a “natural theology” frankly oriented to Scripture squarely over against that of Romanism which is based on neutral reason. It is Bavinck who taught me that the proofs for God as usually formulated on the traditional method prove a finite god. I have indeed had the temerity to maintain that these great Reformed theologians have in some points not been quite true to their own principles. But when I have done so I have tried to point out that when they did so they had departed from Calvin.⁴⁴

At the beginning of *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, moreover, Van Til comments: “My indebtedness to such former Reformed theologians as Louis Berkhof and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout.”⁴⁵ *Contra* the theological subjectivism infiltrating Holland, furthermore, Van Til lauds Kuyper and Bavinck for instigating a “revival of

42. Van Til, “My Credo,” 8-9; also cf. *ibid.*, 11; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34-36.

43. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 233-34.

44. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 301; cf. *idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 155-56; *idem*, “Westminster Professor Replies to Criticism of His Theological Views.”

45. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 13.

genuine Reformed theology.”⁴⁶ *In terms of dogmatic influences*, therefore, the Dutch neo-Calvinist stream is the most prominent tributary flowing into Van Til’s thought.⁴⁷

Second, within this neo-Calvinist dogmatic stream Van Til considers Bavinck to be the greatest modern Reformed theologian. He lauds Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* accordingly as “the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times.”⁴⁸ Moreover, in the introduction to *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Van Til admits that he is “greatly indebted to

46. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 20. Throughout the book Van Til uses “Kuyper and Bavinck” as the representatives of orthodox Reformed orthodoxy *contra* the allegedly heterodox “new synthesis” Reformed theologians (e.g., pp. 29-30, 32-33, 35, 55, 59, 64, 69, 71, 87); See also the section entitled, “Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck: Orthodox Reaction to the Christ-Kant Synthesis of Nineteenth Century Theology” (pp. 28-43). Cf. Van Til’s use of Bavinck *contra* Barth in *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 135.

47. K. Scott Oliphint, “Forward,” in *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), ix-x, asserts the following: “To understand Van Til’s contribution to Reformed apologetics, one needs to see not simply his criticisms of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield, but, more importantly, the ways in which he was able to take the best of these Reformed theological giants and incorporate their theological insights into his own apologetic methodology.” *Idem*, “Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” 295n45, similarly asserts: “The Dutch influence of Van Til could arguably be the most significant influence that has contributed to his Reformed apologetic.” William Edgar, moreover, in editorial comments throughout Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, observes the following: Kuyper was Van Til’s “mentor” (320n4; cf. 17n7); Van Til pervasively appropriated Bavinck’s doctrine of God (5, 29n8, 89n1, 319n1, 323n8, 335n33, 341n53, 353nn12, 14, 354n20, 369n1).

48. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89; cf. *ibid.*, 29; *idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 44; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 37; *idem*, Appendix 2 in White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 225; *idem*, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 27; *idem*, *The Theology of James Daane* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 92; *idem*, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, 29; *idem*, “As I Think of Bavinck,” *International Reformed Bulletin* 9, no. 27 (1966): 19-26; *idem*, “Bavinck the Theologian,” 48-49. Commenting on Van Til’s statement, William Edgar notes, “Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) was a major influence on Van Til. He was perhaps the most significant force in evangelical Reformed theology in the twentieth century” (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89n1). For more on Van Til’s assessment of Bavinck, see Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck”; Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56, 115-16. Benjamin B. Warfield, who Van Til counts among his predecessors, provides a similar commendation: “He [i.e., Bavinck] has given us the most valuable treatise on *Dogmatics* written during the last quarter of a century—a thoroughly wrought out treatise which we never consult without the keenest satisfaction and abundant profit” (Benjamin B. Warfield, “Review of *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901), by Herman Bavinck,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1903): 148). James Hutton Mackay, *Religious Thought in Holland during the Nineteenth Century*, The Hastie Lectures 1909-1911 (London, New York, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), x-xi, similarly describes Bavinck as “the ablest living writer on *Dogmatics* in Holland.”

the great Reformed dogmaticians of modern times, such as Charles Hodge, Thornwell, Dabney, Shedd, Kuyper and especially Herman Bavinck.”⁴⁹ Finally, toward the end of his career Van Til contrasts Bavinck with Kuyper and insists that the former, not the latter, provides the paragon of modern Reformed dogmatics:

He [i.e., Bavinck] will give us great help in our construction of a truly Reformed theology along the lines of the Reformation principle and specifically along the lines of Calvin and of Dordt.⁵⁰

Van Til thus accords Bavinck the place of preeminence among his modern Reformed predecessors.⁵¹

Third, Van Til knows Bavinck’s works well, and he frequently references them. His introduction to the Dutch dogmatician came early on in his academic training, likely from two of Van Til’s most influential seminary professors—Louis Berkhof and Geerhardus Vos—both of whom, as will be noted below, had important theological and personal ties to Bavinck.⁵² Furthermore, his scholarly

49. See "Introduction" in Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, n.p.; emphasis added.

50. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:10.

51. "Back of them all," continues Van Til in reference to his preeminent pre-modern theological influence, "stands that master theologian and exegete of Scripture, John Calvin, whose writings have been constantly consulted" ("Introduction" in *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, n.p.). Thus, for Van Til, Calvin provides the classical paragon of Reformed theology. See also *idem*, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:17.

52. On the mutual scholarly affinities between Berkhof and Van Til, including an offer by Calvin Seminary for Van Til to succeed Berkhof as professor of dogmatics, see Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 44, 51, 99, 124, 153, 160; *idem*, "The Whole Counsel of God: Westminster and the OPC," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 227; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 38. On the similar scholarly affinities and strong personal relationship between Van Til and his favorite professor—Geerhardus Vos—see Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 51, 72; Clowney, "Preaching the Word of the Lord," 235, 246; *idem*, "Professor John Murray at Westminster Theological Seminary," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 38-39; William D. Dennison, "Analytic Philosophy and Van Til's Epistemology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 51-56; William Edgar, "Introduction," in *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 12; John M. Frame, "Systematic Theology and Apologetics at the Westminster Seminaries," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed.

interaction with Bavinck's thought began early on in Van Til's academic career and continued throughout;⁵³ accordingly, references to Bavinck's name pervade Van Til's publications.⁵⁴

Fourth, Bavinck's major dogmatic work has been recently translated into English. With the language barrier thus removed Van Til scholars have begun to re-read Van Til in light of his most profound dogmatic influence, and hence the most recent scholarship evinces an incipient reassessment of Van Til's thought *vis-à-vis* Bavinck.

David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 96; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 103; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 35-36, 45, 48; David VanDrunen, "A System of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 204; William D. Dennison, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics* (Lanham, MD, London: University Press of America, Inc., 1985), 92-94; cf. *idem*, "The Eschatological Implications of Genesis 2:15 for Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 203; Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," 319-20; *idem*, "Cornelius Van Til," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 157; Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People*, 73-77, 121n25, 217-18; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 228.

53. Van Til's second academic publication is the following: "Review of *Paedagogische Beginselen* and *De Nieuwe Opvoeding*, by Herman Bavinck," *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (Jan 1929): 135-36; cf. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 10; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 77-78.

54. In terms of raw tabulation (i.e., no differentiation between text and footnotes, etc.) Van Til refers to Bavinck ~1,193 times throughout his collected works, third only to Calvin (~3,413 references) and Kuyper (~1,685 references). His most frequent references to Bavinck occur in the following books: *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 109 references; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 105 references; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 103 references. In light of our thesis (see §D below) it is worth noting that Van Til references neo-Calvinist theologians (i.e., Kuyper and Bavinck) much more frequently than he does Presbyterian theologians, such as B. B. Warfield, ~652 references; J. Gresham Machen, ~354 references; the "Princeton Hodges" (i.e., C. W. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and Charles Hodge), ~312 references; John Murray, ~42 references; and William G. T. Shedd, ~40 references. (NB: All tabulations are based on searches performed within the electronic collection of Van Til's works (Van Til, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til (Software)*). Attempt was made to avoid duplicate entries by omitting references in the abridged edition of *The Defense of the Faith* when there were corresponding references in the unabridged edition. Likewise, all references in Eric Bristley's *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til* were omitted.)

C. The State of the Question: Van Til *vis-à-vis* Bavinck

Herman Bavinck's monumental *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was not available in an unabridged English translation until 2008.⁵⁵ Thus the full extent of Bavinck's neo-Calvinist influence upon subsequent European and American Reformed theology is just beginning to be properly assessed in English-speaking scholarship.⁵⁶ For example, although Louis Berkhof's (1873–1957) pervasive appropriation of Bavinck's thought was noted a quarter-century ago,⁵⁷ Karl Barth's appropriations of Bavinck's thought,⁵⁸ the mutually influencing relationship between Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949),⁵⁹ and Bavinck's

55. The unabridged English translation of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was completed between 2003 and 2008. For a brief history of abridged and unabridged English translations, see John Bolt, "Herman Bavinck Speaks English: A Bibliographic Essay," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 117n1.

56. That Bavinck's profound influence has been appreciated in European Reformed scholarship long before the English translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is evident, e.g., in G. C. Berkouwer's extensive references to Bavinck in *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, ed. Lewis B. Smedes, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), originally published as *Een halve eeuw theologie: motieven en stromingen van 1920 tot heden* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1974). "Bavinck died in 1920," notes Berkouwer, "but the theological issues he raised kept stirring the minds of others" (p. 11). (NB: Berkouwer's year is a typo; Bavinck died in 1921.) Regarding Bavinck's transatlantic influence, moreover, John Bolt remarks that "the history of twentieth century Dutch Reformed theology in The Netherlands and in North America is in significant measure a story of conflicting appeals to Bavinck" ("Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck's Reception and Influence in North America," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 270).

57. Henry Zwaanstra, "Louis Berkhof," in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), 135-156; originally published as part of a previous book with the same title (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985); cf. Richard A. Muller, "Preface to the New Edition of Louis Berkhof's Systematic Theology," in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), v-viii; Bolt, "Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam," 277; Oliphint, "Forward," 29n10; Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 49.

58. On Barth's critical appropriation of Bavinck's theology, see John Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 79-86; Cornelis Van der Kooi, "Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth on Christian Faith and Culture," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 75-76.

59. On the striking similarities between the lives and thought of Vos and Bavinck, see George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 18-31; cf. Bolt, "Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam," 273n50; Edgar, "Introduction," 3, 12; Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 2-3, 148-49, 173.

influence upon the treatment of various theological topics, such as, the negative reception of geological evidence for an old earth view in the Dutch-Reformed tradition,⁶⁰ have been studied only recently. For scholars operating on the Western shore of the Atlantic, therefore, the translation of Bavinck's *magnum opus* has provided a new vista for analyzing the Dutch dogmatician's transatlantic influence upon modern Reformed theology.

Van Til is one such American Reformed theologian whose work is being re-read in light of the Bavinck's newly-translated *Dogmatiek*. A chronological survey of Van Til scholarship before and after the translation reveals that, whereas prior to the translation many scholars made passing observations regarding Bavinck's influence upon Van Til's thought, only studies performed subsequent to the translation attempt to analyze Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought in any meaningful way.

1. Scholarship before the *Reformed Dogmatics* Translation (1950–2002)

Bernard Ramm's 1953 introduction to apologetics, *Types of Apologetic Systems*, devotes a chapter to Van Til's system.⁶¹ Regarding Van Til's theological predecessors, Ramm remarks:

Van Til has made a sustained effort to have an apologetic system that

60. D. A. Young, "The reception of geology in the Dutch Reformed tradition: the case of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)," in *Geology and Religion: A History of Harmony and Hostility*, ed. Martina Kölbl-Ebert, Geological Society Special Publication 310 (London: The Geological Society, 2009), 290, lists the English translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* as one of the motivating factors for his study.

61. See ch. 9 in Bernard Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems: An Introductory Study to the Christian Philosophy of Religion* (Wheaton, Ill: Van Kampen Press, 1953), 184–209. In the preface Ramm points out that Van Til himself critiqued the chapter (p. x). In the revised edition Ramm replaced the chapter on Van Til with one on Kuyper, arguing that the latter is more of a classic example than the former. See ch. 10 in *idem*, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1961), 179–195; Ramm's note regarding Van Til's replacement by Kuyper is found in the preface at p. 7.

grows naturally out of the Reformed system of theology. The god-father of his system is certainly John Calvin, although he admits that Augustine was the first Christian theologian to try to work out a Christian metaphysics and epistemology. His more immediate apologetic relatives are the great Dutch thinkers as Kuyper and Bavinck and such outstanding American Calvinists as Hodge and Warfield. He has great sympathy with the Calvinistic philosophy as recently developed at the Free University of Amsterdam by Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.⁶²

Ramm provides one example where “Van Til agrees heartily with Bavinck and Kuyper” against Warfield, namely, the priority of theology to apologetics.⁶³

Additionally, Ramm makes a few passing comments regarding Van Til’s appropriation of (1) Calvin’s thought on the proofs for God’s existence, (2) Vollenhoven’s thought on probability, and (3) Kuyper’s thought on miracle and prophecy.⁶⁴ Ramm’s analysis, therefore, clearly emphasizes Van Til’s neo-Calvinist heritage, yet without elaboration.

The first book-length treatment of Van Til’s thought is James Daane’s 1954 analysis of Van Til’s formulation of common grace in which Daane claims that Van Til’s view contradicts the traditional Reformed views found in “Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Warfield, Machen and Berkhof.”⁶⁵ Insofar as his work is a polemic, Daane does not attempt to show any similarities between Van Til and these classical Reformed theologians. Neither does Daane seek to show Van Til’s background in the Christian Reformed Church aside from a passing reference to his one-year teaching term at Calvin Seminary.⁶⁶ Thus Daane paints Van Til as an

62. Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems*, 184-85.

63. Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems*, 185.

64. Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems*, 202, 207, and 208, respectively.

65. James Daane, *A Theology of Grace: An Inquiry Into and Evaluation of Dr. C. Van Til’s Doctrine of Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 16 cf. 53-58, 91, 100.

66. Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, 16n1. In the same note Daane recalls that Van Til was actually offered a lifetime teaching appointment at the Seminary, which Van Til declined.

idiosyncratic outsider in relation to the Dutch Reformed tradition.

In 1959 and 1960 Rousas Rushdoony published the first book-length analyses of Van Til's apologetics.⁶⁷ Rushdoony describes Van Til as a formulator of "epistemologically self-conscious Calvinism,"⁶⁸ but he does not give much attention to Van Til's Calvinist theological precedents other than an occasional reference to Van Til's affinities with Dooyeweerd, the Westminster Standards, Augustine, and Calvin.⁶⁹ Rushdoony does make one significant comment, however, regarding the sources of Van Til's Calvinist apologetics. Speaking of the Princeton apologetic tradition, he writes:

Abraham Kuyper, however, challenged this traditional approach as faulty Calvinism in that it assumes that the natural man has the ability to reason his way to salvation, and that the presuppositions of the natural man can lead to God. Van Til's development of this Amsterdam tradition is regarded by many as his greatest contribution to the Reformed faith.⁷⁰

Rushdoony elaborates upon Van Til's critical appropriation of the so-called Amsterdam apologetic in an appendix,⁷¹ even briefly mentioning Bavinck in this regard.⁷² Rushdoony makes a second passing reference to Bavinck in the context of disputing Barth's alleged rejection of God's aseity. "With regard to the being of God," he writes, "we can speak, as Van Til, following Bavinck and Berkhof, points out, of the independence or aseity of God. . . ."⁷³ This brief reference is

67. Rousas John Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959); *Van Til*, International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Modern Thinkers Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960). These works are better seen as general introductions or popularizations rather than critical analyses.

68. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 6.

69. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 13, 15, 32-33, and 40-44, respectively.

70. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 100.

71. See appendix 2, "Van Til and Amsterdam," in Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 180-83.

72. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 181.

73. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 157-58. Compare Rushdoony's similar passing reference to Bavinck as "Kuyper's successor" in *Van Til*, 14. Note Rushdoony's comments that "not all

significant for our purposes since it occurs in a passage relating to Van Til's Neo-Calvinist roots. Yet, although Rushdoony is aware of Bavinck's influence upon Van Til, he links Van Til's "epistemologically self-conscious Calvinism" mostly to Kuyper.

In another appendix Rushdoony further describes Van Til's relation to Kuyper. "Van Til's great love and abiding interest in Kuyper and his works," writes Rushdoony, "are a notable aspect of the man and date back to his youth; he delights in reading him and warms to the mention of his name."⁷⁴ In his shorter work, moreover, Rushdoony describes Van Til as a "prominent and leading member of the Kuyperian school,"⁷⁵ a modern "son of Abraham"—Abraham Kuyper, that is.⁷⁶ Rushdoony, therefore, clearly interprets Van Til's "greatest contribution" as developing the Neo-Calvinist tradition *à la* Kuyper into a more "epistemologically self-conscious Calvinism" *vis-à-vis* both Princeton and Amsterdam.

Gordon Lewis' 1976 introduction to various views of Christian epistemology includes a chapter on Van Til.⁷⁷ Regarding Van Til's theological context, Lewis briefly recalls Van Til's educational history in Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian schools and his resolute agreement with B. B. Warfield on the evaluation of Calvinism as "Christianity come into its own."⁷⁸ "And he [i.e., Van Til] belittles,"

Kuyperian thinkers . . . are known to Americans" and that only the following three works by Bavinck are available in English translation (as of 1960): *The Philosophy of Revelation*, *The Doctrine of God*, and *Our Reasonable Faith* (Van Til, 14).

74. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 206.

75. Rushdoony, *Van Til*, 15.

76. Rushdoony, *Van Til*, 12.

77. See ch. 5 in Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 125-150.

78. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, 125.

Lewis writes later,

the Reformed brethren who adopt a less consistent Calvinism. Indeed, the primary purpose of his apologetic is to set forth a method of defending Christianity which is consistent with his theology.⁷⁹

Lewis provides only passing references, however, to Van Til's appropriations of various Reformed theologians, such as, Kuyper's thought on the antithesis between believers and non-believers, Charles Hodge's view on cognition vs. true knowledge, and Warfield's defense of Scripture's inspiration.⁸⁰

"It has been my experience," writes Jim Halsey in his 1978 introduction to Van Til's apologetics, "that some people who read Van Til seem to forget (or never realize) that his apologetic is a Reformed apologetic. It is based upon Reformed doctrine."⁸¹ Halsey notes, furthermore, that "apologetics and systematic theology are directly interrelated" and that, "systematics and apologetics cannot be divorced."⁸² Halsey asserts that "Van Til's apologetic is first and last a Reformed defense of the Christian faith."⁸³ Clearly, then, Halsey grounds Van Til's Reformed apologetics in Reformed dogmatics.

Halsey, however, provides little explanation of Van Til's dogmatic sources. The most direct, albeit brief, statement relating to Van Til's appropriation of Reformed theology appears at the end of the book. "Van Til's apologetic," writes Halsey, "calls the Christian back to Kuyper's stand—a stand involving an all-out battle between two absolutely incompatible world systems."⁸⁴ Halsey's sole

79. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, 146.

80. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, 127, 138, and 140, respectively.

81. Jim S. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This: An Introduction to the Reformed Apologetic of Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), xiv.

82. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 7.

83. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 13.

84. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 146.

mention of Bavinck appears in the epilogue,⁸⁵ but this brief reference relates only to Van Til's general lament over the decline of Reformed theology.

Other sources Van Til's Calvinism may be inferred from Halsey's research. For example, in his survey of Van Til's Calvinism⁸⁶ Halsey references Louis Berkhof four times⁸⁷ and B. B. Warfield once.⁸⁸ However, for the most part Halsey limits the scope of his survey to general statements, and throughout the remainder of the book he nowhere explicates Van Til's specific Neo-Calvinist heritage. Nevertheless, for our purposes it is noteworthy that Halsey mentions both Kuyper and Bavinck as Van Til's theological predecessors.

David Diehl makes a strong assertion regarding Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God: "The theologian who has probably influenced Van Til the most, next to John Calvin," he writes in his 1978 dissertation comparing Charles Hartshorne and Van Til, "is the prominent Dutch Reformed theologian of the turn of the century, Herman Bavinck."⁸⁹ Diehl further remarks that Van Til follows Calvin and Bavinck on the doctrines of revelation and analogical reasoning.⁹⁰ Diehl briefly mentions, moreover, Van Til's appropriation of Kuyper's archetype-ectype distinction.⁹¹ Therefore, even though Diehl does not elaborate on Van Til's appropriations from Calvin, Bavinck, or

85. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 156.

86. See ch. 1, "the theological basis of Van Til's apologetic," in Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 13-39.

87. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 16n3, 17n8, 25n15, 34n25.

88. Halsey, *For a Time Such As This*, 35n28.

89. David Waring Diehl, "Divine Omniscience in the Thought of Charles Hartshorne and Cornelius Van Til: A Systemic Comparative Study" (Ph.D. diss., Yorktown Heights, N. Y.: The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1978), 48. Regarding Van Til's background, Diehl names Calvin as Van Til's theological "mentor" (p. 69) and asserts that Van Til follows standard Protestant theological methodology (p. 63).

90. Diehl, "Divine Omniscience," 50.

91. Diehl, "Divine Omniscience," 52.

Kuyper, it is noteworthy for our purposes that he lists Bavinck among Van Til's preeminent theological influences.

"It was while he was a student at the Grand Rapids school [i.e., Calvin College], recalls White in his 1979 "authorized biography" of Van Til, "that Kees began to read extensively the writings of the great Abraham Kuyper. Cornelius Van Til freely admits," continues White, "that when it comes to the background for some of his formulations he stands on the shoulders of Abraham Kuyper."⁹² White briefly mentions several of Van Til's professors as influences: Louis Berkhof, Samuel Volbeda, William Heyns, Professor Ten Hoor, W. H. Jellema. Yet Van Til's most influential professor by far, according to White, is Geerhardus Vos. The two became such close friends at Princeton that Van Til was asked to officiate at Vos' funeral.⁹³ White makes a couple of passing references to Bavinck,⁹⁴ but, overall, White views Kuyper and Vos as the predominant influences in Van Til's thought.⁹⁵

John Robbins' scathing critique of Van Til, published in 1986, does not mention any of Van Til's theological predecessors.⁹⁶ Robbins intentionally paints Van Til as a wholly "distinctive" (i.e., heterodox) and concludes that Van Til's formulations "must be totally rejected by Christians," else Christianity's future will be in jeopardy.⁹⁷ Robbins is thus intentionally inattentive to Van Til's

92. White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34, 35, respectively.

93. White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 38-48.

94. White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 77-78, 190.

95. For more references to Kuyper's influence, see White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 60-62, 74. Additionally, as noted in §A, 3, above, the 1969 lecture by Van Til that is reproduced in "Appendix 2" of White's biography further reveals the permeating influence of Kuyper upon Van Til's thought (see especially pp. 213-225). Also cf. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 276.

96. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*.

97. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*, 38.

theological context.

Bradley Swygard's 1991 thesis on Van Til's debate with Gordon Clark briefly notes (1) Van Til's agreement with Bavinck on the relation between mystery and dogma and (2) Van Til's disagreement with Kuyper over the uselessness of reasoning with non-Christians;⁹⁸ yet, Swygard does not analyze Van Til's relation to these two neo-Calvinists.

In 1994 James Emery White published a chapter-length analysis of Van Til's apologetics. Although his assertion that Van Til was "the main exponent of Dutch Reformed theology in America" is an overstatement, White appropriately categorizes Van Til as "an Evangelical scholar in the Dutch Reformed tradition."⁹⁹ "Van Til's Princeton education," notes White, "was also strongly influenced by B. B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck."¹⁰⁰ White further comments that "Van Til has often been criticized for taking his systematic theology too uncritically from both Warfield and Bavinck."¹⁰¹ This latter assertion, however, is based merely on a passing comment in a secondary source.¹⁰² Nevertheless, for our purposes it is significant that White mentions

Bavinck and Kuyper as important influences on Van Til's thought despite the

98. Bradley J. Swygard, "The Basis for the Doctrine of the Incomprehensibility of God in Gordon Clark and Cornelius Van Til" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 63 and 55, respectively.

99. James Emery White, *What Is Truth? A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 36n1 and 36, respectively.

100. White, *What Is Truth?*, 38.

101. White, *What Is Truth?*, 38.

102. White refers to Clowney, "Preaching the Word of the Lord," 249, wherein Clowney writes the following: "Van Til has been accused of being too traditional in theology, of taking his systematic structure too uncritically from the Reformed confessions, and from Bavinck and Warfield. Certainly Van Til's labors have been directed to showing the implications of Reformed theology for the defense of the faith rather than to developing theological formulations. But Van Til's staunch defense of Reformed orthodoxy reveals his commitment to the coherence and harmony of God's revelation."

lack of explication on either score.

In 1995 John M. Frame, a former student of Van Til's, published the first major critical analysis of his teacher's apologetics.¹⁰³ Frame is clearly mindful of Van Til's "rich appreciation of the Dutch Reformed tradition," noting especially Van Til's esteem for Abraham Kuyper.¹⁰⁴ Frame offers only one sentence about Bavinck's direct influence upon Van Til, but this brief remark is significant for our thesis: "In systematic theology more narrowly understood, Van Til's chief resource was Herman Bavinck. . . ."¹⁰⁵ In his footnotes, moreover, Frame remarks that Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* has not yet been fully translated into

103. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*. This is not, however, Frame's earliest publication on Van Til. In 1976 Frame published an essay which summarized the theological contribution of his teacher (*idem*, "The Problem of Theological Paradox"; also published separately as a booklet entitled *Van Til: The Theologian*). In the essay Frame laments the lack of serious, critical interaction with Van Til's thought to date (297-98n10); yet, given that this comment follows Frame's three pages' worth of near hagiography (i.e., 295-97), it seems difficult to take both his lament and his concluding sentiment seriously—"If I am right, then I have furnished herein the best and only justification for further research into this extremely important thinker" (330).

104. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20. Similarly, Frame asserts elsewhere that Van Til "was steeped in the Dutch theological and philosophical literature" (*idem*, "Systematic Theology and Apologetics," 91). In his 1976 essay, moreover, Frame noted Van Til's appropriation of Dutch theology, including Bavinck's: "Where Van Til does discuss theological issues, furthermore, he includes little exegesis. . . . What exegesis he does present is usually borrowed from other sources. His dogmatic formulations, too, are often simple repetitions or paraphrases of the creeds and of the great Reformed theologians from Calvin onward. Even when Van Til's theology sounds most strange to American ears (for example, his strong emphasis upon the ethical/metaphysical distinction), he is very often paraphrasing ideas from the Dutch tradition. (In the case of the ethical/metaphysical distinction, the source is Bavinck)" (*idem*, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," 295; also cf. *ibid.*, 316). In the same essay Frame further notes that Van Til appropriated the "archetypal-ectypal" terminology from Kuyper (312n75).

105. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20. Additionally, Frame offers a related comment in his earlier dictionary article on Van Til: "During his years in the Dutch Reformed community, Van Til became very impressed with the great Dutch church leaders Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Kuyper was a Renaissance man: scholar, university founder, politician (briefly prime minister of the Netherlands), newspaper editor. With boundless energy and intellectual creativity, he sought to claim all areas of human life for the lordship of Christ. Bavinck, his colleague and follower, focused more narrowly on the discipline of systematic theology and produced a monumental four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. The work of Klaas Schilder, a more recent Dutch thinker, also commanded Van Til's deep respect and interest" (*idem*, "Cornelius Van Til," 156-57). However, Frame's later dictionary article on Van Til mentions only Kuyper as an influence: "Major influences on Van Til's thought were the Dutch Reformed theologians, particularly Abraham Kuyper. . ." (*idem*, "Cornelius Van Til," in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 739).

English,¹⁰⁶ and throughout his analysis Frame makes passing references to Van Til's reliance upon Bavinck for specific theological points.¹⁰⁷ Beyond stating a general caveat¹⁰⁸ regarding Van Til's critically-appreciative stance toward his theological predecessors, however, Frame does not attempt to analyze the relationship between Van Til and Van Til's "chief resource."¹⁰⁹

Philip Thorne's dissertation on the Evangelical reception of Karl Barth in North America, published in 1995, includes some important remarks concerning Van Til's neo-Calvinist context.¹¹⁰ After noting Van Til's general definition of Christianity as "the Reformed faith as revealed in Scripture and accurately interpreted by the Reformed creeds and classic Reformed theologians," Thorne comments more specifically that "Van Til, following Herman Bavinck, endeavors to acknowledge God as the *Principium Essendi* of knowledge."¹¹¹ Thorne further notes that Van Til's apologetic method "extends, in a particular direction, the 'principal' thinking of Abraham Kuyper."¹¹² In terms of theological prolegomena, therefore, Thorne finds significant appropriation of neo-Calvinist theology in Van Til's apologetics.

106. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20n5; cf. Frame, "Cornelius Van Til," 157n3.

107. See Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 54, 115, 124, 220.

108. Frame's caveat is as follows: "Influenced as he was by such Reformed theological giants as B. B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck, Van Til nevertheless sought to warn us against elements in their thinking that he deemed unscriptural" (Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 11).

109. Frame follows a similar approach in his 2007 essay, "Divine Aseity and Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 115-130, wherein he notes that Van Til quotes approvingly one of Bavinck's statements regarding aseity. Frame, however, fails to note that Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck is not limited to one statement regarding aseity; rather, Van Til's discussion of God's attributes is largely a summary of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. See chapter 3 below.

110. Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995).

111. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 34.

112. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 34.

In his 1997 theological-biographical essay on Van Til, Wesley A. Roberts describes Van Til as “a student of both the old Princeton school of theologians and the great Dutch Reformed thinkers,” and he names Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Francis L. Patton, William Brenton Greene Jr., J. Gresham Machen, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck as representatives of both traditions.¹¹³ Van Til’s “pioneering insight,” which, according to Roberts, was confirmed by his readings in Kuyper and Bavinck, is “that in apologetics the presuppositions and not merely attendant arguments have to be biblical.” “He [i.e., Van Til] admits,” continues Roberts, “his indebtedness to the classic Reformed theologians and quotes freely from them. He is willing to go beyond them, however, in areas where he thinks they are weak.”¹¹⁴ The sole example Roberts provides is that Van Til follows Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s insights regarding Holy Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum*.¹¹⁵ Therefore, despite the lack of elaboration, Roberts clearly notices the dual neo-Calvinist influence of Kuyper and Bavinck upon Van Til.

“He [i.e., Van Til] was Dutch through and through, from wearing wooden shoes (“klompen”) to being raised on the Heidelberg Catechism,” recalls a former student and protege of Van Til’s, Greg Bahnsen, in his systematic analysis

113. Wesley A. Roberts, “Cornelius Van Til,” in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 173. NB: The essays in this book were originally published in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985) and in the following three volumes published by Baker Book House (Grand Rapids, MI) in 1989: (1) *The Princeton Theology: Reformed Theology in America*; (2) *Dutch Reformed Theology: Reformed Theology in America*; (3) *Southern Reformed Theology: Reformed Theology in America*.

114. Roberts, “Cornelius Van Til,” 174.

115. Roberts, “Cornelius Van Til,” 178; Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2006), s.v., *principium cognoscendi externum*.

of Van Til's apologetics.¹¹⁶ Bahnsen notes that Van Til had become familiar with the works of Kuyper and Bavinck during college and that during his year at Calvin Seminary he studied theology under Louis Berkhof and philosophy under W. H. Jellema.¹¹⁷ Van Til's interest in Bavinck, comments Bahnsen, continued on into his academic career as evidenced by the fact that his second academic publication is a review of two works by Bavinck.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Bahnsen is well aware of Bavinck's influence on Van Til,¹¹⁹ but he sees Kuyper and Warfield as Van Til's predominant theological influences.¹²⁰ Much like Frame's analysis, moreover, Bahnsen's study provides only scant comments about Van Til's published criticisms of Bavinck without attempting to analyze Bavinck's influence upon Van Til's thought.¹²¹ Likewise, in his 2010 posthumous publication Bahnsen interprets Van Til's apologetic as a critical appropriation and marked advancement of both B. B. Warfield's and Abraham Kuyper's apologetics formulations.¹²²

Norman Geisler's 1999 analysis of Van Til's apologetics wholly ignores the

116. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 7.

117. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 8; cf. *idem*, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 264.

118. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 10; cf. *idem*, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC," 265.

119. Cf. Bahnsen, "Socrates or Christ," 234: "The incisive and decisive analysis of apologetics which was lacking in Warfield's day was being supplied a generation later by a young scholar who realized that he was standing on the shoulders of his Reformed fathers: Calvin, Hodge, Warfield, Kuyper, Bavinck."

120. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 596.

121. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 14-15; Van Til's primary critiques of Bavinck are listed at 14n42. Despite his lack of elaboration on Bavinck, Bahnsen analyzes Van Til's critiques of Warfield and Kuyper at length (pp. 596-600).

122. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA and Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision Press and Covenant Media Press, 2008), 21-22.

theological and ecclesiastical contexts of Van Til's thought.¹²³

A somewhat different story emerges when we turn to survey Van Til scholarship that has appeared since the inception of the Bavinck translation, namely, Bavinck's influence upon Van Til's thought is more apparent.

2. Scholarship after the *Reformed Dogmatics* Translation (2003–Present)

In his 2003 introduction to the second edition of Van Til's *Christian Apologetics* William Edgar presents Van Til's apologetics as "a third way" between Karl Barth and Abraham Kuyper.¹²⁴ Edgar further notes Van Til's general "Dutch and Presbyterian" theological context, but he mentions only one theological influence—Geerhardus Vos.¹²⁵ However, in an editorial note regarding Van Til's relation to Dutch neo-Calvinist philosophers, Edgar remarks, "The full story of Van Til's relationship to the Amsterdam philosophy, and especially to Herman Dooyeweerd, has not yet been told."¹²⁶ Moreover, in his 2007 introduction to Van Til's *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Edgar notes the following: (1) Van Til closely follows Bavinck's doctrine of God;¹²⁷ (2) Van Til

123. Norman L. Geisler, "Cornelius Van Til," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 751-758. Compare *idem*, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 56-58, wherein Geisler briefly describes Van Til as speaking "from a strong Reformed, Biblical perspective theologically and yet in an absolute revelational presuppositionalism apologetically," without any elaboration regarding Van Til's Reformed predecessors or theological context. Thus abstracting Van Til's methodology from his theology, Geisler classifies Van Til (along with Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth) as a "methodological fideist" (see ch. 3, pp. 47-64).

124. Edgar, "Introduction," 1-3.

125. Edgar, "Introduction," 3, 12.

126. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 57n4. Compare the earlier classification by Robert D. Knudsen, "Crosscurrents," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 3 (1973): 313: "My own interpretation of Van Til's position, as I have said, places him squarely within the camp of those who hold to this general philosophical position [i.e., 'the so-called Calvinistic philosophy']. There is a broad unity of the major proponents of this school, namely, Herman Dooyeweerd, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, C. Van Til, and Hendrik Stoker, in their attempt to erect a philosophy on the foundation of a Reformed world-and-life-view."

127. William Edgar, "Introduction," in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and*

considers Hepp's view of reason to be an improvement over Bavinck's alleged neutrality;¹²⁸ (3) Van Til insists on "subtle difference with Bavinck, whom he otherwise admires [to] no end"; and (4) on the doctrine of the Trinity Van Til builds his idiosyncratic insights upon Bavinck's Reformed orthodox presentation of the doctrine.¹²⁹ Therefore, whereas Edgar only hints at Van Til's neo-Calvinist heritage in *Christian Apologetics*, he clearly elucidates Bavinck's influence upon Van Til's thought in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*.¹³⁰

Lane Tipton's 2004 dissertation on Van Til's trinitarian formulations omits Van Til's neo-Calvinist predecessors altogether.¹³¹ Although Tipton mentions in passing that Van Til's robust view of the Trinity echoes Herman Bavinck's,¹³² Tipton limits his study to Van Til's appropriation of the trinitarian "categories given to him from earlier theologians, notably John Calvin, Charles and A. A. Hodge."¹³³ Whether or not this limited scope is appropriate for Tipton's purpose, such a limited purview truncates the full picture of Van Til's trinitarian theology. In his critique of James Daane's theology, for example, Van Til writes explicitly of his dependence upon Bavinck's trinitarian theology:

Actually there is nothing appreciably different in what I have said about the ontological trinity from what Berkhof and Bavinck have previously stated nor has Daane sought to prove that there is. In fact, I have not

the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 5.

128. Edgar, "Introduction," 6.

129. Edgar, "Introduction," 7.

130. See Edgar's editorial notes in Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 29n8, 89n1, 319n1, 323n8, 335n33, 341n53, 353nn12, 14, 354n20, 369n1. Edgar discusses Van Til's relation to Warfield and Kuyper in William Edgar, "Frame the Apologist," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 408-13.

131. Lane G. Tipton, "The Triune Personal God: Trinitarian Theology in the Thought of Cornelius Van Til" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004).

132. Tipton, "The Triune Personal God," 2.

133. Tipton, "The Triune Personal God," 7.

dealt with the subject other than to use what was already ascertained and established, especially by Bavinck, for apologetic purposes.¹³⁴

Elsewhere he writes:

No one has better than he [i.e., Bavinck] set forth the struggle in the early church to attain a truly biblical view of the immanent or ontological trinity as the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience. . . . Moreover, no one brought out more forcibly than did Bavinck that God as self-sufficient is not fully comprehensible to man, not even to regenerate man.¹³⁵

Furthermore, in the primary work in which he explicates his idiosyncratic trinitarian formulations, Van Til himself notes his neo-Calvinist theological heritage. “My indebtedness to such former Reformed theologians” writes Van Til, “as Louis Berkhof and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout [this work].”¹³⁶ Additionally, Van Til appeals to Bavinck for confirmation of his interpretation of The Nicene Council.¹³⁷ Therefore, by focusing primarily on Van Til’s American Presbyterian predecessors and excluding his neo-Calvinist predecessors, Tipton oddly omits perhaps the most significant influence upon Van Til’s trinitarian theology—Herman Bavinck.¹³⁸

A similar omission occurs in Tipton’s 2007 essay wherein he asserts that Van Til “relied on the exegesis of theologians such as Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Herman Bavinck, and John Murray.”¹³⁹ However, instead of substantiating this

134. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 33.

135. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:10.

136. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 13.

137. Van Til, “My Credo,” 11.

138. In a 2002 article Tipton makes one passing, enigmatic reference to Bavinck’s affirmation of God’s unity vis-à-vis allegedly similar affirmations by Hodge and Van Til (see Lane G. Tipton, “The Function of Perichoresis and the Divine Incomprehensibility,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (2002): 293n18).

139. Lane G. Tipton, “Paul’s Christological Interpretation of Creation and Presuppositional Apologetics,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 95, writes: “Van Til understood that his uniquely Reformed approach to apologetics lacked a full-fledged line of exegetical

point with references either to the exegetical work of these theologians¹⁴⁰ or to Van Til's citations of these theologians' exegetical works, Tipton instead provides a redemptive-historical reading of Colossians 1:15–2:8 à la Herman Ridderbos, M. G. Kline, and Geerhardus Vos.¹⁴¹ Thus, not only is the assertion unsubstantiated, but also, insofar as the essay does not substantiate Van Til's relation to any Reformed theologians, the generalized conclusion regarding "Reformed apologetics in the tradition of Van Til" is a *non sequitur*.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Tipton's essay provides a second passing reference to Bavinck as a theological predecessor of Van Til.

Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman's 2005 survey of apologetics provides an extensive historical analysis of Van Til's apologetic in relation to (1) the history of apologetics in general and (2) the history of Reformed apologetics in particular.¹⁴³ They summarize Van Til's relation to his Reformed predecessors as follows:

Van Til is by far the most controversial of the major Reformed apologists of the twentieth century. He combined the apologetic tradition of Old Princeton (which drew from both classical and evidentialist approaches) with the anti-apologetic theology of Kuyper. He used the concept of a transcendental argument, which was at the heart of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, but employed it as an overtly apologetic argument. The result is a theory of apologetics that has been both highly influential and severely disputed.¹⁴⁴

argumentation. Instead, his method developed along dogmatic and theological lines, and he relied on the exegesis of theologians such as Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Herman Bavinck, and John Murray."

140. E.g., with regard to Colossians 1:15–2:8, cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1873), 1:515-16.

141. Tipton, "Paul's Christological Interpretation," nn. 3-9, 12-16, 19, 23-27, 35, devotes the bulk of the essay to representing Ridderbos' exegetical views.

142. Tipton, "Paul's Christological Interpretation," 111.

143. On the former, see Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 23-32; on the latter, see *ibid.*, pp. 221-334.

144. Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 256. These various streams of influence upon Van Til are developed at length throughout the book. On the relation between Old Princeton, Van Til, and Van Til's successors, see pp. 26, 51-54, 68, 229-232, 241-42, 256, 264-65, 447-48; on the

Boa and Bowman's sole reference to Bavinck is a brief comment regarding Van Til's ambivalent appropriation of Bavinck's teaching on natural theology.¹⁴⁵ These writers, therefore, find in Van Til's apologetic a predominant neo-Calvinist influence (i.e., Kuyper and Dooyeweerd) nuanced by Van Til's sensibilities for the old Princeton tradition.

"... Van Til has represented a distinctive and specific theological-philosophical position," writes Juha Ahvio in his 2005 dissertation on contemporary Reformed apologetics in America, "which has endeavored to synthesize the best elements from the Old Princeton tradition and from Amsterdam Theology into a consistent and definitive Reformed thought."¹⁴⁶

Ahvio views Van Til as an inheritor of the theology of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Herman Dooyeweerd.¹⁴⁷ Further, he summarizes the theological influences of Van Til's graduate and post-graduate education as follows:

relation between "the father of the Reformed apologetic tradition" (i.e., Kuyper, p. 330) and Van Til, see pp. 25-26, 29, 232-43, 248, 251, 256, 264-65, 268-84, 457, 494, 528; On the relation between Dooyeweerd and Van Til, see pp. 25-26, 28-29, 238-40, 261-62, 251, 256-57, 261-62, 268, 299, 447, 494, 496. Regarding the controversial nature of Van Til's apologetic in the twentieth century, compare p. 240.

145. Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 302.

146. Juha Ahvio, *Theological Epistemology of Contemporary American Confessional Reformed Apologetics*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 59 (Helsinki, Finland: Luther-Agricola-Seura, 2005), 21.

147. Ahvio, *Theological Epistemology*, 19-22, 30-31n33. On Van Til as a member of the "Kuyperian neo-Calvinist tradition," see p. 236. Regarding Dooyeweerd, Ahvio remarks that although he was "the most significant representative of the so-called Amsterdam School of thought and its neo-Calvinist philosophical tradition in the twentieth century," Van Til developed his own "more confessionally theological form of presuppositionalism" at the same time as Dooyeweerd yet without being directly dependent upon Dooyeweerd's thought (30-31n33). Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 50-51, however, explicitly admits his reliance upon Dooyeweerd's interpretation of the history of philosophy. Van Til also briefly approbates Dooyeweerd's epistemology contra modern philosophy (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 340).

Both Calvin Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary were at that time committed to the Reformed confessional orthodoxy thereby making it possible for Van Til to familiarize himself thoroughly with the Kuyper-Bavinck Dutch tradition and the Hodge-Warfield Princeton tradition.¹⁴⁸

Throughout his extensive analysis of Van Til's apologetics, Ahvio twice mentions Van Til's critiques of Bavinck's alleged inconsistencies regarding the epistemological implications of theological *principia*.¹⁴⁹ Ahvio, however, does not attempt to analyze these criticisms. In sum, although Ahvio provides scant primary source substantiation of Van Til's neo-Calvinist dogmatic moorings, his analyses of secondary sources clearly show Van Til to be an inheritor of the Old Amsterdam and Old Princeton traditions.

Donald Macleod begins his 2006 essay on Bavinck's *Prolegomena* in light of the old-Amsterdam-vs.-old-Princeton apologetics debate by admitting that the new English translation of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* is the *raison d'être* for his study.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, he asserts that a direct theological link exists between Bavinck and Van Til:

There are two distinct questions concerning Amsterdam and Old Princeton. One is the relationship between Bavinck and his Princeton contemporaries, most notably B. B. Warfield. The other is the link between Bavinck and Cornelius Van Til, who, by taking his presuppositional theism into Westminster Seminary, effectively took Amsterdam into Old Princeton.¹⁵¹

After noting that Van Til frankly acknowledges his indebtedness to Bavinck and Kuyper, Macleod remarks further:

148. Ahvio, *Theological Epistemology*, 37. In a footnote Ahvio further lists James Orr as "an essential influence on Van Til" (37-38n52).

149. Ahvio, *Theological Epistemology*, 297, 322, 322-23n198.

150. Donald Macleod, "Bavinck's Prolegomena: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 2 (2006): 261.

151. Macleod, "Bavinck's Prolegomena," 263.

What Van Til learned from his Dutch mentors was, above all, the principle that the existence of God is not the conclusion of an elaborate argument, but the presupposition of all thought.¹⁵²

Moreover, Macleod acknowledges that Van Til emphasizes the need to assert the fact of God at the very outset of all epistemological discussion more forcefully than Bavinck; nevertheless, he interprets this point as a “difference in emphasis” that “is due mainly to their differing vocations [i.e., apologist and dogmatician]” rather than as a difference in principle.¹⁵³ He concludes therefore that Bavinck’s and Van Til’s formulations of presuppositional theism are basically the same.

Given the fact that Macleod omits any reference to Van Til’s criticisms of Bavinck’s thought—criticisms of the very points that Macleod lauds as similarities between the two, such as, Thomism, a proper response to Kant, and innate knowledge of God¹⁵⁴—his conclusion may require further nuancing. Nevertheless, his essay is a clear example of the fact that, thanks to the translation of Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek*, scholars are beginning to re-read Van Til in light of his neo-Calvinist predecessor.

Jeffrey Waddington, in a 2008 essay on Van Til and foundationalism, argues that Van Til appropriated and expanded the Reformed orthodox distinction between *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa* in his epistemological formulations.¹⁵⁵ “The tradition of the archetype/ectype distinction,” suggests

152. Macleod, “Bavinck’s Prolegomena,” 264.

153. Macleod, “Bavinck’s Prolegomena,” 264.

154. Macleod, “Bavinck’s Prolegomena,” 264-68.

155. Jeffrey C. Waddington, “Cornelius Van Til: ‘Principled’ Theologian or Foundationalist?,” in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2008), 154-165; cf. Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v., *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa*. A nearly identical thesis, namely, that Van Til (unknowingly?) appropriated the traditional Reformed orthodox distinction between *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa*, can be found in the following two essays: R. Scott Clark, “Janus, The Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” in *The Pattern of*

Waddington, “would most likely have come down to Van Til through Dutch Reformed theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.”¹⁵⁶

Waddington makes two more references to Bavinck’s discussion of theological *principia*, but he provides no substantiating argumentation regarding whether or not Van Til actually appropriated Bavinck’s formulations; thus, it is unclear whether Waddington attempts to adduce further evidence for a connection between the two.¹⁵⁷ His passing note, furthermore, regarding Van Til’s appropriation of Kuyper’s theological *principia* formulations adds further unclarity.¹⁵⁸ This ambiguity notwithstanding, we find in Waddington’s essay yet another reference to the twin neo-Calvinist theological influences upon Van Til’s thought—Kuyper and Bavinck.

K. Scott Oliphint, in his 2008 forward to Van Til’s *The Defense of the Faith*, echoes Greg Bahnsen’s earlier sentiment regarding the crux of Van Til’s thought. “To understand Van Til’s contribution to Reformed apologetics,” avers Oliphint,

one needs to see not simply his criticisms of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield, but, more importantly, the ways in which he was able to take the best of these Reformed theological giants and incorporate their theological insights into his own apologetic methodology.¹⁵⁹

Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 149-179; Horton, “Consistently Reformed.” Waddington notes the Clark essay (see 159-60n30) but omits the Horton essay; he further cites two books by Horton which provide no substantiation for his *archetypa-ectypa* thesis.

156. Waddington, “Cornelius Van Til: “Principled” Theologian or Foundationalist?,” 160.

157. Waddington, “Cornelius Van Til: “Principled” Theologian or Foundationalist?,” 162, 163n45.

158. Waddington, “Cornelius Van Til: “Principled” Theologian or Foundationalist?,” 163n44.

159. Oliphint, “Forward,” ix-x; cf. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 597: “A person who can explain the ways in which Van Til agreed and disagreed with both Warfield and Kuyper, is a person who understands presuppositional apologetics.” For Van Til’s own assessment of Warfield’s and Kuyper’s apologetic methodologies, see *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 229-54; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 345-82; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 11, 42-43. Oliphint’s historical assessment here seems to be in tension with his earlier revolutionary interpretation of Van Til noted above. Nevertheless, Oliphint continues to insist on the novelty of Van Til, remarking, “The need of the hour, it seems to me, is not to move beyond Van Til, but rather, perhaps for the first

In passing Oliphint further asserts that "'presupposition' for Van Til is just another way of saying what Kuyper, Bavinck, and behind them the Reformed scholastics had always said with regard to the *principia* of theology."¹⁶⁰ Other than providing brief editorial notes regarding Van Til's Dutch heritage in general¹⁶¹ and Van Til's critical appropriation of Bavinck's theology in particular,¹⁶² Oliphint nowhere explicates the relationship between Van Til and his Dutch neo-Calvinist predecessor at any length. The lack of elaboration notwithstanding, Oliphint clearly notes that "Van Til . . . himself claims Bavinck as one of his primary spiritual and intellectual influences."¹⁶³

In contradistinction to previous biographies and analyses, John Muether's 2008 biography of Van Til¹⁶⁴ evinces a marked attempt to interpret Van Til in light of Bavinck's recently translated *Reformed Dogmatics*. This nuance can be seen in two ways. First, Muether's study contains a deeper appreciation of Bavinck's profound influence on Van Til's thought. Muether writes, for example:

Although interpreters often portray him as a hybrid of Kuyper and Warfield, Van Til himself generally included Bavinck in his list of interlocutors. Indeed, Bavinck is arguably the greatest of all of these influences, the evidence for which grows as Bavinck's dogmatics is translated into English. As this survey of Van Til's seminary scholarship

time, to grasp the depth and breadth of his approach" (p. x). "Once Van Til's thought is grasped," insists Oliphint, "the implications for the work of the church are most profound" (xi).

160. Oliphint, "Forward," x-xi. Cf. Oliphint's editorial note in Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 348n17. Regarding Oliphint's equation of "presupposition" in Van Til's thought with the Reformed scholastic *principia* terminology, note the similarity with Waddington's thesis surveyed immediately above.

161. In an essay published in 2007 Oliphint, "Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 295n45, makes the following comment: "The Dutch influence of Van Til could arguably be the most significant influence that has contributed to his Reformed apologetic."

162. See Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 2n6, 9-10n37, 29n10, 33n17, 374-78nn42-51.

163. K. Scott Oliphint, "The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 206.

164. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*.

indicates, he was less concerned with distinguishing himself from these antecedents than with applying their best insights with a rigorous consistency.¹⁶⁵

Muether argues, furthermore, that one reason Van Til received sharp criticism within Presbyterian circles was a lack of familiarity with Bavinck:

American Presbyterian disquiet over Van Til's employment of presuppositional reasoning owed, as previously noted, to its unfamiliarity with the Reformed tradition, and especially unfamiliarity with Bavinck. Van Til imported many of his ideas from Bavinck, whose four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was largely inaccessible to the English-speaking world.¹⁶⁶

Most notably, after citing two passages in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* which allegedly adumbrate Van Til's apologetic methodology, Muether avers: "Van Til did not so much create a new apologetic as he refined Bavinck's approach, applying it to modernism, old and new."¹⁶⁷

Second, Muether's study offers a more nuanced interpretation of Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck and Kuyper. Whereas Frame, Bahnsen, and Oliphint, for example, give brief, general statements regarding Van Til's unabashed criticisms of Bavinck and other Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologians, Muether argues for a more complex and positive relationship between Van Til and his theological predecessors. Referring to Van Til's criticisms of Warfield, Bavinck, and Kuyper, Muether remarks:

The Reformed epistemology that was latent in all three theologians ultimately permitted no zone of neutrality, no epistemological common ground. In bringing the Reformed tradition to more consistent epistemological expression, Van Til could state with truthfulness that with respect to the 'inimitable trio of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield,' he

165. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56.

166. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 115.

167. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 116.

stood on the shoulders of giants.¹⁶⁸

Therefore, compared to earlier studies, Muether's interpretation of Van Til's life and work is much more attuned to Bavinck's theological influence upon Van Til.

In a 2008 journal article Brian Mattson examines Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck "with the added advantage of having Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* in English."¹⁶⁹ After analyzing Van Til's allegations, Mattson concludes notably as follows:

Van Til's superficial and at-times uncharitable reading of Bavinck is unfortunate, but not nearly so unfortunate as the impression he gives that Bavinck has more in common with a "traditional" approach to epistemology and apologetics than he has in common with Van Til. If this article establishes anything it is the *deep affinity* in their theological instincts. Van Til never had an intellectual "friend" like Herman Bavinck. The fact that he sometimes failed to realize it is no reason for contemporary readers of Bavinck to do likewise. One hopes that those whose apologetic sympathies lie with Van Til, yet have new opportunity to study Herman Bavinck in English, might do so without Van Til's often needless and excessive reservations. . . .¹⁷⁰

Similar to Muether's interpretation of Bavinck's influence on Van Til, Mattson finds "*deep affinity* in their theological instincts." He likewise avers, moreover, that the new English translation of Bavinck's works provides English readers a fresh perspective on the dogmatic affinity between the two thinkers, Van Til's criticisms notwithstanding. The two studies from Muether and Mattson, therefore, provide the clearest examples of a nascent reassessment of Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought.

In his 2008 bibliographic guide to Herman Bavinck's writings, Eric D.

168. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56.

169. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck," 111. Although Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck were noted much earlier (e.g., Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 14n42), Mattson is the first scholar to analyze them.

170. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck," 127.

Bristley remarks in passing that Bavinck's philosophical and apologetical views exerted a formative influence on the reformational philosophy of D. H. Th. Vollenhoven (1891–1979), the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til (1895–1979), and the reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga.¹⁷¹

Not every recent analysis of Van Til, however, follows the lead of Muether and Mattson in noting Bavinck as Van Til's preeminent predecessor. For example, relying heavily on Thorne's 1995 study (noted above), John P. Lewis' 2009 publication on the reception of Karl Barth's theology in North America classifies Van Til in the genus of American fundamentalism¹⁷² and the species of "North American fundamentalist Calvinism."¹⁷³

Insofar as Lewis' main goal is to paint Van Til as a fundamentalist, he fails to see any connections to Van Til's theological predecessors outside of American Evangelical fundamentalism.

Additionally, in his 2010 publication on the history of the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine David VanDrunen devotes a chapter to Van Til in which he interprets him as a developer of "another stream in the Kuyperian tradition" in distinction from Herman Dooyeweerd.¹⁷⁴ Van Til offered "one of the most ambitious attempts to apply classic Reformed and Kuyperian theology in the twentieth century," claims VanDrunen.¹⁷⁵ The only reference to Bavinck appears

171. Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 24.

172. John P. Lewis, *Karl Barth in North America: The Influence of Karl Barth in the Making of a New North American Evangelicalism* (Resource Publications (OR), 2009), 33-49, 213

173. Lewis, *Karl Barth in North America*, 44.

174. See ch. 10, "The Kuyperian Legacy (II): Cornelius Van Til and the Van Tillians," in David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 386-422; quotation at p. 386.

175. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 387.

in a footnote which lists Van Til's Dutch Reformed interlocutors in his debates over the doctrine of common grace.¹⁷⁶ Thus VanDrunen's analysis of Van Til is mostly silent regarding Bavinck's influence.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it is significant to note that VanDrunen interprets Van Til primarily in terms of Neo-Calvinism, specifically in relation to Kuyper.¹⁷⁸

3. Summary

This survey of Van Til scholarship yields several salient insights into the scholarly perception of Van Til's theological heritage. First, scholars following the "Copernican" line of interpretation have tended to produce little by way of historically contextualized analysis. The largest and most robust analyses of Van Til's thought (i.e., the works by Bahnsen and Frame) are devoted primarily to exposition of Van Til's allegedly unique views. Hence these works provide little by way of historical contextualization. The Copernican line of Van Til scholarship tends to read the entire history of Christian thought in light of Van Til—as if he appeared *ex nihilo*—rather than reading Van Til in light of the history of Christian thought, especially in light of the neo-Calvinist context within which he lived, moved, and had his being. Nevertheless, despite the hyperbole and lack of historical criticism evident in this line of scholarship, several of the studies therein have noted, albeit briefly, Bavinck's profound influence upon their

176. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 397n55.

177. VanDrunen does reference Muether's biography and the two analyses by Frame and Bahnsen, all of which take note of Bavinck's influence (VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 386-387n1).

178. In an earlier essay, VanDrunen, "A System of Theology?," 213, remarks that "Van Til consciously grounded his understanding of apologetics in the broader truths of Reformed doctrine. . . ." The context of VanDrunen's citation at 213n26 refers to John Murray (1898–1975), who was professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary during Van Til's tenure. VanDrunen thus implicitly includes Murray as an influence upon Van Til's thought.

“Copernicus.”

Second, before the 2003–2008 translation of Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, many scholars noted Bavinck’s significant influence upon Van Til’s thought, but not a single study elaborated upon this relationship based on primary sources. As the four volumes of Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* began to appear in English translation, however, Van Til scholars started to notice more and more correlations between the two thinkers. By 2008 a nascent reassessment of Van Til *vis-à-vis* Bavinck is evident, most notably in the studies by Muether and Mattson and in the editorial notes by Edgar and Oliphint that accompany the new editions of Van Til’s works. Therefore, although we cannot draw a hard-and-fast rule, there does appear to be an incipient trend in Van Til scholarship—the more that Bavinck’s works are published in English, the more Van Til scholars are re-reading Van Til in light of the work that Van Til himself lauded as “the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times.”¹⁷⁹ However, even though a nascent reassessment of Van Til’s appropriation of Bavinck’s thought is evident in studies published subsequent to the translation of Bavinck’s *magnum opus*, a robust theological analysis of Van Til’s Reformed apologetics *vis-à-vis* Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* remains outstanding.

Third, in the scholarly literature Bavinck’s influence upon Van Til is largely overshadowed by Kuyper’s. Several Van Til biographers and interpreters highlight

“Father Abraham’s” influence while virtually neglecting Bavinck’s. Yet, oddly,

179. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89.

despite the scholarly hubbub over Kuyper, there are no extant historical or theological studies which elaborate this relationship in any depth using primary source materials. Therefore, similar to the scant treatment of Bavinck's influence in Van Til scholarship, Kuyper's dominant neo-Calvinist influence upon Van Til's thought remains underdeveloped.

D. The Thesis: Neo-Calvinist à la Bavinck

In light of the predominant Copernican interpretation of Van Til's thought, I raised the question as to whether such ahistorical, abstract, revolutionary readings of Van Til's work can be sustained *vis-à-vis* his modest self-assessments, his polemics against theological novelty, and his appropriation of Kuyper's neo-Calvinist vision. Then, focusing upon one aspect of this question—Van Til's appropriations of Bavinck's thought—I surveyed the current scholarship on Van Til and found that, although recent scholars have begun to notice Bavinck's pervasive influence upon Van Til's thought, a thorough analysis of Van Til's specific appropriations of Bavinck's theological formulations remains outstanding.

Therefore, in order to shed light upon this underdeveloped area in Van Til scholarship I will argue the following thesis in response to the aforementioned question: Considered *in concreto*, Van Til's theological formulations are neither revolutionary nor *de novo*; rather, his presupposition of "the Reformed system of doctrine" is largely an appropriation of Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. If it can be demonstrated that Van Til pervasively appropriates theological formulations from his preeminent Dutch neo-Calvinist predecessor,

then the use of the following two adjectives in Van Til scholarship will need to be reassessed accordingly: “Copernican” and “Van Tilian.”

E. The Argument: A *Précis*

My argument proceeds in three steps. Step one—which we have already completed in chapter 1—is to set our thesis within the context of Van Til scholarship. We have seen that, contrary to the Copernican interpretation of Van Til’s thought which abstracts his basic presupposition of “the Reformed system” out of his neo-Calvinist context, a more concrete, historically-contextualized analysis is needed in order to account for Van Til’s own interpretation of his work.

Accordingly, in step two I will examine three concrete aspects of Van Til’s presupposition. First, I will argue in chapter 2 that a major formal element of Van Til’s presupposition derives from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek*, namely, the priority of dogmatics over apologetics in theological encyclopedia. Second, based upon a survey of Van Til’s presentation of Reformed dogmatics in his book, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, I will demonstrate in chapter 3 that, considered materially, the bulk of Van Til’s presupposition comprises voluminous appropriations—both explicit and tacit—from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek*. Third, based on several of his polemical writings, I will demonstrate in chapter 4 that Van Til frequently employs Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy *contra* the work of several modern Reformed theologians whom Van Til repudiates as promulgators of heterodoxy. In sum, then, step two of my argument seeks to demonstrate that, formally, materially, and polemically, Van

Til's presupposition is not Copernican but neo-Calvinist à la Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

In step three I will confront what at first glance appears to be the Achilles' heel of my thesis, namely, the fact that Van Til levels totalizing critiques against the patent scholasticism in Bavinck's thought. After surveying his catalog of criticisms in chapter 5, I will then analyze Van Til's overall critique in two ways in chapter 6. First, concerning its source, I will demonstrate that Van Til's critique is an appropriation of Herman Dooyeweerd's prior criticisms of the scholasticism in neo-Calvinist theology. Second, concerning its validity, I will argue that, since Van Til's critique is based upon (1) an ahistorical, idiosyncratic definition of "scholasticism" that is imposed upon Bavinck's thought from without and (2) an unsound, bipolar, dialectical interpretation of Bavinck's thought, it is both methodologically unsound and historically untenable.

CHAPTER II.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN CONCRETO* (PART 1): FORMAL APPROPRIATIONS OF BAVINCK'S *DOGMATIEK*

The relationship between apologetics and dogmatics is a key structural aspect of Van Til's thought; for, the question inherent in this relationship is whether apologetics is grounded upon a foundation independent of theology's *principia*. If so, then apologetics takes on an autonomous nature, and its task is to provide philosophical foundations for theology independent of divine revelation. If not, then apologetics is a fully dogmatic in nature, and its task is to vindicate both theology's *principia* and the content of her dogmas, not autonomously but in full dependence upon dogmatics. Thus the relationship between the two is no mere theological nicety; rather, a host of implications follow upon how Van Til views the nature of this relationship.

As indicated by his basic presupposition, Van Til clearly takes the latter position, namely, that Reformed apologetics presupposes Reformed dogmatics rather than vice versa. Thus the question we are pursuing in this chapter is not concerning which position Van Til takes, but, given the claims of the Copernican line of scholarship, we will ask: Is Van Til's position regarding the relationship of dogmatics and apologetics revolutionary? Does he formulate this position *de novo*, or is he appropriating insights from his neo-Calvinist tradition, and, in particular, from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*?

I will argue that this formal feature of Van Til's thought is not a Copernican revolution but an appropriation of Herman Bavinck's formulation of the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics. At first glance this argument may seem unlikely since Van Til couches the debate on this point mostly in terms of "old Amsterdam" (i.e., Kuyper) vs. "old Princeton" (i.e., Warfield). Yet, a closer look will reveal that Van Til's position is closer to Bavinck's than to Kuyper's.

In order to make this case Bavinck's position will be presented first, then Van Til's view will be compared with Bavinck's.

A. Dogmatics and Apologetics in Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*

Apologetics makes its first appearance in the *Reformed Dogmatics* only tangentially, yet the context within which it appears is highly significant, namely, a discussion on the place of dogmatics in theological encyclopedia.¹ Following Kuyper's fourfold schema,² Bavinck lists apologetics as a member of the third group of theological sciences (i.e., the dogmatological group) which also includes

1. Two formal differences between the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* and the *Reformed Dogmatics* are important to note for the following discussion. First, in the *Dogmatiek* Bavinck's discussion of theological encyclopedia is its own paragraph (i.e., § 2, "Encyclopaedische Plaats der Dogmatiek," in *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 7th ed., 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 1:23-36), which includes subparagraphs #9-12. The English translation inserts many sub-headings not present in the Dutch, thus creating a more complex hierarchy than exists in the original. If we are to follow Bavinck's original organization, therefore, #9-12 should be read as its own paragraph rather than as the seventh sub-section of ch. 1 as it appears in the English translation. Second, in the *Dogmatiek* each of the paragraphs begins with a list of sources which Bavinck interacts with throughout the paragraph. This structural feature is absent from the English translation. Keeping this feature in mind helps make better structural sense of Bavinck's seemingly long excursus on Schleiermacher and Bavinck's interaction with Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* throughout #9-12.

2. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 630, classifies the theological sciences into four groups: (1) Bibliological, (2) Ecclesiological, (3) Dogmatological, and (4) Diaconiological. *Idem*, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1909), 3:365-66, organizes the dogmatological group into three sub-groups: (1) diathetic, (2) thetic, and (3) antithetic. Polemics, elenctics, and apologetics comprise the antithetic sub-group. Kuyper's two-tiered schema is therefore more elaborate than Bavinck's.

dogmatics, ethics, symbolics, and the history of dogma.³ He then turns abruptly to a lengthy critical analysis of Schleiermacher's singular deviation whereby dogmatics is classified as an historical rather than a dogmatological discipline.

Bavinck's critique of this seemingly pedantic point reveals the tip of what he takes to be a deadly iceberg for dogmatics—the rejection of the scientific nature of theology.⁴ Therefore, insofar as Bavinck considers both apologetics and dogmatics to be dogmatological sciences, before we can understand Bavinck's placement of apologetics within the theological encyclopedia we must first survey his view of the scientific nature of theology.

1. The Nature of Theology as a Science

Bavinck views theology as the science of the knowledge of God. In modern theology, however, man had replaced God as the proper object of theology, and dogmatics had been redefined as the science of faith, according to Bavinck. Positivism slowly swallowed metaphysics, he reasons, objectivity gave way to subjectivity, and theology *as knowledge* degenerated into theology *as faith*. Accordingly, dogmatics devolved from a normative, objective science into a systematic historical account of subjective religious belief; therefore, Bavinck remarks that theology's scientific nature came to be seen in merely formal terms.⁵

This monumental shift, argues Bavinck, began early in the history of

3. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 47; also cf. pp. 54, 54n57. At the head of § 2 in his *Dogmatiek* Bavinck references Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*, vol. 3, pp. 346–467.

4. Bavinck gives extended attention to Schleiermacher in #9 (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:47-50), but his discussion of the underlying issue relating to Schleiermacher's reinterpretation of the nature of dogmatics extends throughout #4–12 (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34-58).

5. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34-37; also cf. *idem*, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 49-51, 61-62.

dogmatics. He finds evidence for the shift already in the thought of Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Hugo St. Victor, and even in some Lutheran and Reformed theologians—all of these theologians made religion (i.e., man) instead of revelation (i.e., God) theology's object. "Thus, step by step, the subjective practical notion of theology began increasingly to find acceptance."⁶

The result of this shift, asserts Bavinck, was that, after Kant and Schleiermacher,

dogmatics became the account of the historic phenomenon that is called the Christian religion and manifests itself in a unique faith and doctrine. Now when dogmatics is understood in this sense, it ceases to be dogmatics and simply becomes the account of what in a certain specific circle is held to be true in the sphere of religion.⁷

Bavinck eschews this Kantian, subjective, positivistic revision of theology's scientific nature and insists upon the classical objective view with God, not man, as theology's object. "For God to be knowable," argues Bavinck,

he must have revealed himself not only in deeds but also in words. Contained in that revelation is the knowledge of God in the objective sense, and as such it is the object of theology, more specifically of dogmatics.⁸

Thus he avers the following ultimatum:

A choice has to be made: either there is room in science for metaphysics and then positivism is in principle false, or positivism is the true view of science and metaphysics must be radically banished from its entire domain. One who specifically devotes his energies to the restoration of metaphysics in the science of religion has in principle broken with the

6. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34-35; quote at p. 35.

7. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:36-37. Also note Bavinck's comment that the Higher Education Act of 1876 in Holland embodies this shift (p. 36).

8. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:42; also cf. pp. 53-54. Throughout his *Prolegomena* Bavinck follows standard Reformed scholastic distinctions regarding the *principia* of theology distinguished as follows: God is the *principium essendi*; Revelation is the *principium cognoscendi externum*; Faith is the *principium cognoscendi internum*; Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker Books, 2006), s.vv., *principium essendi*, *principium cognoscendi externum*, and *principium cognoscendi internum*; *idem*, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 430-50.

basic idea from which the science of religion took its rise and is, again in principle, returning to the old view of theology.⁹

Echoing his earlier citation of Thomas' classic definition,¹⁰ Bavinck defines dogmatics in unabashedly metaphysical terms as "the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him."¹¹ Thus he clearly supports the "old view."

For Bavinck dogmatics is a science because dogmatics deals with objective, revealed truth.¹² He insists that "if the revelation contains such a knowledge of God [i.e., an objective, revealed knowledge], it can also be thought through scientifically and gathered up in a system."¹³ Accordingly, he insists that "a theologian's sole responsibility is to think God's thoughts after him and to reproduce the unity that is objectively present in the thoughts of God and has been recorded for the eye of faith in Scripture."¹⁴ "Like every other departmental discipline," argues Bavinck, "theology too has its own object and principle, method and aim."¹⁵ According to Bavinck, the normative nature of dogmatics is therefore a concomitant of its metaphysical object. "[D]ogmatics is a normative science," he insists, "that prescribes what we must believe."¹⁶

Bavinck uses Julius Kaftan's position as a foil to defend the scientific nature

9. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:37. Bavinck frequently recapitulates this ultimatum (i.e., "a choice has to be made"); cf. pp. 75, 218, 231, 276, 340, 458.

10. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34, 36.

11. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:38. Cf. Bavinck's explication of the normative, ecclesial, and catholic dimensions of his definition of dogmatics at p. 46.

12. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:37.

13. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:42.

14. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:44; also cf. p. 588.

15. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:43.

16. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:46.

of dogmatics.¹⁷ Kaftan, according to Bavinck, accepted a faith-knowledge of God but rejected a scientific knowledge of God. Thus by denying the existence of an objective, scientific knowledge of God, argues Bavinck, Kaftan falls prey to the same problem as Schleiermacher—subjectivity—despite Kaftan’s own critiques of Schleiermacher’s subjectivity.¹⁸ Bavinck rejoins against Kaftan’s attempt to ground dogmatics in a quasi-objective faith-knowledge as follows:

This, however, is a dead-end road. For if strictly speaking there is no science of God, then neither can there be a faith-knowledge of God. Conversely, if indeed there exists a true and trustworthy knowledge of God, even though it is acquired in a special way that corresponds to the nature of its object, then one can certainly speak properly of a science of God. Correctly assuming a faith-knowledge of God, therefore, Kaftan should have pushed consistently forward along that line, broken with Kant’s dualism, reviewed the modern concept of science, and made a simple and decisive assertion: Precisely because a true faith-knowledge of God exists, dogmatics has the knowledge of God as part of its content and can rightly claim to be a science.¹⁹

To embrace the Kantian shift of theology’s object from revelation to religion, as evidenced in the views of Schleiermacher and Kaftan, requires the relegation of dogmatics to the realm of subjective faith, a move which Bavinck sees as self-contradictory; for, without an objective grounding in God’s revelation, dogmatics could not even produce true subjective knowledge of God. Such a shift would further create a dichotomy between knowledge and faith, a move which Bavinck also rejects. “Faith (religion, the knowledge of faith) and theology,” insists Bavinck, “are not related as *pistis* and *gnosis* but differ only in degrees.”²⁰

17. Bavinck treats Kaftan’s view of dogmatics in #6–8 (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:38–46). Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), 38, interprets Bavinck’s critique of Kaftan as an exemplar representing Bavinck’s larger critique of Kantian dualism in modern theology.

18. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:42.

19. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:43.

20. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:42.

The only path which maintains an organic unity between faith and knowledge in dogmatics, according to Bavinck, is the one paved with an objective, scientific revelation of God. Conversely, a non-scientific dogmatics is as impossible as a non-dogmatic science.²¹ The scientific nature of theology grounded upon a divinely given revelation is therefore an all-important controlling principle in Bavinck's thought; indeed, it is the only context for understanding Bavinck's assertion that theology is the veritable "queen of sciences" who selflessly serves all her subjects, blessing each one with her manifold gifts.²²

2. The Place of Dogmatics in Theological Encyclopedia

With Bavinck's view of dogmatics as a science (in the pre-Kantian, classical sense) in mind, we can now return to where we left off—Bavinck's critique of Schleiermacher's theological encyclopedia. Schleiermacher rejected theology as a science, argues Bavinck, and insisted instead upon a rigorous separation between dogmatics and apologetics: The former deals with the history of religious faith (i.e., religion), the latter with Christian truth (i.e., science). In principle, therefore, a dichotomy between faith and knowledge, theology and philosophy, subjectivity and objectivity, religion and science controls Schleiermacher's thought, reasons Bavinck.²³ The implication is that apologetics (a philosophical, objective science) deals with truth, whereas dogmatics (a non-scientific, subjective discipline) does not. *Contra* Schleiermacher's view, Bavinck insists that

21. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:43.

22. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:54; also cf. *idem*, "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace'," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 65.

23. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:47-48.

dogmatics, no less than apologetics, is a science which deals with objective truth.

“The Christian church cannot be satisfied,” insists Bavinck, “with an objective account of the content of its faith but wishes that its faith be unfolded and set forth also as truth.”²⁴

Bavinck observes that Schleiermacher could not practice his own principles; rather, Schleiermacher’s rigorous dichotomies actually resulted in a complete fusion of philosophy and theology.²⁵ Nevertheless, notes Bavinck, Schleiermacher’s influence prevailed in the so-called “mediating theology,”²⁶ a school of thought which advocated a dichotomy between the university and the church, the science of religion and ecclesiastical theology.²⁷ If theology does not deal with truth, reasoned the mediating theologians, then it does not belong in the university and should be relegated to the church instead.²⁸

“Against this division,” Bavinck rejoins ardently, “there are so many theoretical and practical objections that it should be viewed as profoundly inadvisable.”²⁹ The main thrust of his rejoinder is as follows:

The word of God has an objective content that was established before, and persists apart from, our faith, just as much as the world of colors and sounds exists independently of the blind and the deaf. In that case,

24. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:47.

25. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:48.

26. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:49, 49n49.

27. The separation between the university study of religion and the ecclesiastical study of theology was an issue that Bavinck fought vehemently throughout his own career, most notably in his role as mediator between the seminary at Kampen and the Free University of Amsterdam. Bavinck led several attempts to form a merger between these institutions, but ideological differences regarding the nature of theology prevented the merger time and again. Furthermore, Bavinck’s own life story, notably his own transition from Kampen to Amsterdam, reflects this very tension. Cf. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 225-315.

28. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:49-50.

29. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:50. For Bavinck’s detailed array of arguments against this dichotomy, see pp. 50-54.

however, knowledge of the objective content of revelation has significance of and for itself. This is true of all science.

. . . Truth as such has value. Knowledge as such is a good. To know God in the face of Christ—by faith here on earth, by sight in the hereafter—not only *results* in blessedness but *is* as such blessedness and eternal life. It is this knowledge dogmatics strives for in order that God may see his own image reflected and his own name recorded in the human consciousness. And for that reason theology and dogmatics do not belong, by the grace of a positivistic science, in a church seminary, but in the university of the sciences (*universitas scientiarum*).³⁰

Therefore, Bavinck insists that, since theology derives from God's objective revelation, the proper throne for the queen of sciences is the university, not the seminary.

3. The Place of Apologetics in Theological Encyclopedia

If theology is a science, and if dogmatics and apologetics both belong to the third division of theological sciences (i.e., the dogmatological group), then dogmatics must be distinguished from apologetics by some criterion, reasons Bavinck. All of the dogmatological sciences deal with dogma, he remarks, but the specific manner in which each one does so provides its distinguishing feature. He therefore distinguishes the two as follows: Dogma “set forth thetically and positively, and at the same scientifically, in a systematic form” is dogmatics; Dogma “defended and maintained in its truthfulness and legitimacy against its opponents” is apologetics.³¹

The place of apologetics among the theological sciences, however, has varied widely, notes Bavinck. Some have elevated apologetics as the philosophical presupposition of dogmatics, while others have denigrated apologetics as a mere

30. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:53-54.

31. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:54.

practical afterthought to theology. “There is no valid reason for either such overvaluation or such disdain,” retorts Bavinck.³² Those who, like Schleiermacher, elevate apologetics as the philosophical presupposition of dogmatics did so because they had rejected theology’s own *principia* and “were forced to look elsewhere for a foundation on which the building of theology could rest.”³³ Bavinck, however, rejects such attempts to ground theology upon philosophy, to separate the *principia* of dogmatics and apologetics:

If, however, theology is deduced from its own source, i.e., from revelation, it has its own certainty and does not need the corroboration of philosophical reasoning. Accordingly, apologetics cannot and may not precede dogmatics but presupposes dogma and now gets the modest but still splendid task of maintaining and defending this dogma against all opposition. It now attempts to do this, not in response to some specific challenge, but fundamentally in terms of the opposition that dogmas as the truth of God encounter at all times, be it in ever changing forms, from the side of the “natural man.”³⁴

The object of theology—revelation—is all-determining for the nature and task of apologetics, according to Bavinck. All theological sciences receive, rather than create, their *principia*. Even the name “apologetics,” notes Bavinck, indicates that it is not a heuristic science which searches out its own content independent of dogmatics.³⁵ Apologetics therefore cannot have a separate foundation than dogmatics:

Apologetics cannot precede faith and does not attempt a priori to argue the truth of revelation. It assumes the truth and belief in the truth. It does not, as the introductory part or as the foundational science, precede theology and dogmatics. It is itself a theological science through and through, which presupposes the faith and dogmatics and now maintains

32. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:55.

33. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:55.

34. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:55-56; also cf. pp. 515-17.

35. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:55.

and defends the dogma against the opposition to which it is exposed.³⁶ For Bavinck the science of apologetics is in no sense pre-dogmatic; rather, it presupposes dogmatics and is built upon the same *principia*. If theology is the “queen of sciences,” then apologetics is her steady and skillful handmaiden. Both belong to the dogmatological sciences, yet in terms of proper logical order the handmaiden serves the queen, not vice versa. Therefore, Bavinck’s view of the relation between apologetics and dogmatics follows the traditional Protestant scholastic view of the relationship between prolegomena and dogmatics, namely, that theological prolegomena (including the *principia* of theology) are not *vordogmatisch* but fully *dogmatisch*.³⁷

4. The Task of Apologetics

Bavinck assigns this handmaiden three specific tasks within her overall responsibility to defend and vindicate the truthfulness of dogma. First, apologetics forces theology to account for its *principia* and its content, its foundation and its superstructure. “It brings Christian theology out of the shadows of the mysticism of the human heart,” writes Bavinck, “into the full light of day. Apologetics, after all, was the first Christian science.”³⁸ Second, apologetics emboldens Christians and keeps them from embarrassed silence in the face of critics. Bavinck boldly asserts, “The Christian worldview alone is one

36. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:515; cf. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 90-91.

37. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:121, writes the following regarding the relation between prolegomena and dogmatics in Protestant scholasticism: “We note, again, that theological prolegomena are never *vordogmatisch*: they are an integral part of dogmatic system that develops in dialog with basic dogmatic conclusions after the system as a whole has been set forth.”

38. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:515.

that fits the reality of the world and of life.”³⁹ Third, apologetics is a mighty tool in God’s hands by which “will very definitely succeed in impressing opponents with the truth of Christian revelation, refuting and silencing them.” As such, “apologetics, like the ministry of the Word, can be a source of consummate blessing.”⁴⁰ In each of her tasks, therefore, the handmaiden willingly serves the queen.

B. Dogmatics and Apologetics in Van Til’s Thought

Van Til frequently repeated materials throughout his writings, and he often provides further explication in his later writings of points he made earlier. In order to get the full picture, therefore, we need to collate his various presentations of the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics in theological encyclopedia. We begin with his introductory syllabus on apologetics.

1. Theological Encyclopedia in *Christian Apologetics*

“Apologetics,” writes Van Til in the opening lines of *Christian Apologetics*, “is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”⁴¹ Just like Bavinck’s assertion that apologetics must vindicate both Christianity’s *principia* and its content, so Van Til asserts that vindication has two components: facts and philosophy of fact, Christianity and theism, history and philosophy. “It is impossible and useless,” he claims, “to seek to vindicate Christianity as a historical religion by a

39. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:515.

40. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:515.

41. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 17.

discussion of facts only.”⁴² “To interpret a fact of history,” reasons Van Til, “involves a philosophy of history.” Thus he concludes: “In short, there is a historical and there is a philosophical aspect to the defense of Christian theism.”⁴³

Van Til uses martial imagery to explain the nature of apologetics. The historical aspect of apologetics is like ground troops who march about doing the detailed work of war, and the philosophical aspect is like the big guns which clear the way for the ground troops. The troops and the guns are mutually interdependent, and they both are fighting the same war.⁴⁴

Van Til continues to use the martial metaphor in his explication of the place of apologetics in the theological encyclopedia. His argument had two parts. First, he divides up the theological disciplines into three groups: (1) Biblical studies, (2) systematic theology, and (3) church history. Second, he claims that each of the three disciplines must vindicate the truth in its own field. Yet, if each discipline must defend its own turf, reasons Van Til, it would appear that there is no place left for apologetics. However, in order to show that this is not the case, Van Til introduces another martial image—apologetics as “messenger boy.”⁴⁵

The messenger boy has two basic tasks, according to Van Til. First, he goes back and forth between divisions carrying messages from general to general. For example, Van Til describes the messenger boy bringing a map to someone on the front lines in order to remind that soldier of the big picture as an analogy of the

42. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 18.

43. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 19.

44. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 18.

45. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 20-21. William Edgar, at p. 21n1, notes the following: “Here, Van Til sets forth a comprehensive view of apologetics. It ought to function across the disciplines, showing in each field of knowledge, however specialized, that a defense and commendation of the whole of Christian faith should constantly be kept in view.”

exegetical scholar who needs to be reminded by the apologist of Christianity's big theological picture. Second, the messenger boy serves as a scout who stealthily detects the enemies advances and as a nightwatchman who guards the fort.⁴⁶ "The net result, then," remarks Van Til, "seems to be that in apologetics we have the whole field to cover."⁴⁷ Thus even though each discipline must perform its own apologetic task, apologetics finds an indispensable place as the messenger boy in Van Til's theological army.

Combining his various metaphors yields the following picture. Van Til explicates theological encyclopedia in terms of warfare. Each discipline must defend its own turf. The vindicatory task of apologetics therefore differs only in degree from that of biblical studies, systematic theology, and church history. More than the practitioners of the three main disciplines, the apologist stands guard, scouts, and moves in and out between disciplines, always defending and vindicating the whole in light of the parts and vice versa. The others do their own share of vindicating, but not to the extent of the apologist.⁴⁸

Unlike Bavinck, Van Til only explicitly describes the relationship between systematic theology and apologetics in passing:

It is apparent from our discussion so far that systematic theology is more closely related to apologetics than are any of the other disciplines. In it we have the system of truth that we are to defend.⁴⁹

Yet if we extend Van Til's martial imagery to include what is implicit in his statement, the relationship he describes is very similar to Bavinck's formulation:

46. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 21-23.

47. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 22.

48. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 22-23.

49. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 23.

Dogmatics, as chief commander, defines the battle field and draws up the battle plans. Apologetics, as messenger boy, receives his maps and his missions from the commander. The nature and task of apologetics is therefore governed by dogmatics.

2. Theological Encyclopedia in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*

In contrast to Bavinck's strong insistence that theology is the *scientia de Deo*, Van Til provides scant reflection on the scientific nature of theology. At one point he seems to dismiss the attempt to claim that theology is a science on the ground that such an attempt overvalues the use of reason, but he does not elaborate this point.⁵⁰ Whether or not he views theology as a science, Van Til clearly affirms the ground upon which Bavinck makes this claim, namely, that theology is grounded upon objective truth. Like Bavinck, Van Til notes that in modern theology "religion" has been redefined in subjective terms. "But since Christianity claims to be the true religion," objects Van Til, "it follows that for it the objective reference is of prime importance."⁵¹ He asserts accordingly that theology should no longer be defined as "the science of religion" due to this definition's subjective connotation in modern times.⁵² Apart from these two brief assertions, however, Van Til does not elaborate on whether theology is a science.

Van Til's explication of theological encyclopedia is brief. Similar to the threefold schema he presents in *Christian Apologetics*, Van Til arranges the theological disciplines into the following three groups: (1) exegesis and biblical

50. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 56-57.

51. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 16.

52. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 15-16.

theology, (2) systematic theology, (3) practical theology. The only major change he makes here is that practical theology has replaced church history in this arrangement. Van Til then relates systematic theology to apologetics as follows: Systematics arranges the fruits of exegesis and biblical theology “into a concatenated system,”⁵³ and apologetics defends and vindicates this system “against false philosophy and false science.”⁵⁴ Thus Van Til recapitulates the commander and messenger boy relationship between dogmatics and apologetics, albeit without the martial motif.

Like Bavinck, Van Til notes that the relationship of apologetics and systematics is a disputed point in the Reformed tradition. “The point of difference,” he asserts, “concerns chiefly the nature of apologetics.”⁵⁵ He summarizes the debate as follows: On the one hand, B. B. Warfield and the Princeton school of apologetics maintains that apologetics must establish the presuppositions of systematics; On the other hand, Kuyper, Bavinck, and the Amsterdam school of apologetics maintains that apologetics defends the system of theology it receives from systematics. According to Van Til, Warfield insists that the Amsterdam method begs the truth question, whereas Kuyper insists that the Princeton method inappropriately places the Christian position before a non-Christian bar of reason.⁵⁶

Reluctant to disagree with either, Van Til attempts to incorporate Warfield’s

53. Thanks to my student colleague Andrew M. McGinnis for noting that on this point Van Til has clearly appropriated B. B. Warfield’s formulation of the task of systematic theology in terms of a systematic “concatenation” of the knowledge of God. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), IX:51, 93.

54. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 17.

55. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 17.

56. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 17-18.

concerns within Kuyper's position.⁵⁷ He reasons that even on Kuyper's terms apologetics can come first *in practice*, provided it presupposes the truth of the Christian system. Along with Kuyper, however, Van Til rejects Warfield's insistence that apologetics must employ a different method than all of the other theological disciplines. "All the disciplines must presuppose God," argues Van Til, "but, at the same time, presupposition is the best proof. Apologetics takes particular pains to show that such is the case. This is its chief task." Van Til concludes accordingly, recapitulating his messenger boy metaphor in the following terms: Apologetics defends the outer edge of systematics' circle of truth.⁵⁸

3. Theological Encyclopedia in *The Defense of the Faith*

In *The Defense of the Faith* Van Til presents a similar picture of apologetics' place within the theological encyclopedia, yet he deals with the topic only implicitly. Before one can defend the faith, he argues, one must first know the faith that is to be defended. Therefore, with respect to theological encyclopedia, Van Til reasons that apologetics must receive its statement of faith from the other theological disciplines, especially systematic theology, before it can defend that faith.⁵⁹ He cites the work of his former professor, Louis Berkhof, as an example of the Reformed system of faith which apologetics first receives and then defends.

57. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 310, displays similar reticence toward disagreeing with either Warfield or Kuyper in the following statement: "Are we to be reprimanded in advance for not agreeing with Kuyper? Or for not agreeing with Warfield? Let us rather seek to listen to both Warfield and Kuyper and also to Calvin, and then do the best we can as we ask just what the genius of the Reformed Faith requires of us. Is there anything else that anyone today can do?"

58. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 18-19; quotes at p. 19.

59. Johannes Heinrich August Ebrard, *Apologetics; Or The Scientific Vindication of Christianity*, trans. William Stuart and John Macpherson, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), 2-3, presents a similar argument: Christian apologetics is not the science of defense *in abstracto*, but the defense of its concrete object, namely, Christianity.

Drawing out what is implicit in Van Til's view, therefore, insofar as faith must have content before it can be defended, the *what* of apologetics must precede the *how*, the commander must precede and govern the messenger boy.⁶⁰

Van Til takes up the Princeton-Amsterdam debate again, this time devoting the entirety of chapter 13 to the topic in contrast with his shorter treatment in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*.⁶¹ Van Til anticipates chapter 13 with the following rhetorical question in chapter 12:

Have not certain Reformed theologians been willing in some measure to cooperate with Romanists in defending theism and with evangelicals in defending evangelicalism, in order, after that, to defend the specific doctrines of Calvinism? Are they all wrong and are you alone right?⁶²

"The answer to this objection is not easy," answers Van Til. "It would require separate and extensive discussion to do it justice."⁶³ After noting that the nature and task of apologetics is a disputed point among Reformed theologians in general, he comments specifically, "The difference between Warfield and Kuyper on the question of apologetics is well known."⁶⁴ The "extensive discussion" in chapter 13, therefore, appears to be Van Til's attempt (1) to deal with the objection that he thinks his apologetic alone is true and (2) "to listen to both Warfield and Kuyper and also to Calvin. . . ."⁶⁵

Throughout chapter 13 Van Til analyzes the issues in the Princeton-

60. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 28-29.

61. Cf. ch. 13 in Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 345-382. At p. 345n1 Van Til notes that most of this chapter recapitulates material from ch. 8 in *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 221-54. In this latter work Van Til further remarks that his argument presupposes the material found in *idem*, "Nature and Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1967), 263-301.

62. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 309.

63. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 309.

64. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 310.

65. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 310.

Amsterdam debate, critiques representatives from both schools of thought (i.e., Warfield, Kuyper, William Brenton Greene Jr., Floyd E. Hamilton, and Bavinck), and presents his own view as a *via media* between Warfield and Kuyper which he sees as more faithful to Calvin and to Paul. We will limit our attention to the following two points apropos of theological encyclopedia specifically.⁶⁶

First, Van Til views the underlying issue between Warfield and Kuyper to be differing evaluations of natural theology. Using Kuyper's epistemological terminology of the "natural [i.e., non-Christian] principle" and the "special [i.e., Christian] principle," Van Til summarizes the debate as follows: Warfield insists that the natural principle can interpret general revelation correctly whereas Kuyper maintains the opposite.⁶⁷ Thus Van Til finds the two positions to be mutually exclusive. "It is impossible," he insists, "to hold with Kuyper that the Christian and the non-Christian principles are destructive of one another and to hold with Warfield that they differ only in degree."⁶⁸

Second, *contra* K. Scott Oliphint's assertion to the contrary,⁶⁹ Van Til intentionally sides with Kuyper's antithetical "natural principle" and "special principle" over against Warfield's view of "right reason," but he does so with a caveat on Kuyper's allegedly negative view of apologetics. He writes:

For myself I have chosen the position of Kuyper.⁷⁰ But I am unable to

66. For an analysis of Van Til's critiques of Bavinck in this chapter (i.e., *The Defense of the Faith*, 374-79), see Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 116-23; Also, we will examine Van Til's critiques further in chapters 5-6 below.

67. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 346-51.

68. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 351; also cf. p. 360.

69. Cf. K. Scott Oliphint's editorial note in Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 352n27: "To put the matter more succinctly, it is *not* the case that Van Til has chosen Kuyper over Warfield."

70. With respect to Van Til's choice of Kuyper's position over Warfield's, cf. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 284: "If Masselink wants to remain true to the basic commitment of Kuyper, he

follow him when from the fact of the mutually destructive character of the two principles he concludes to the uselessness of reasoning with the natural man.⁷¹

Van Til presents his caveat only indirectly; for, instead of arguing his point from Kuyper's works directly, he employs the analogy of Reformed vs. Arminian preaching. The unsubstantiated implication of Van Til's caveat is that Kuyper should have viewed apologetics to be as valuable and as necessary as preaching.⁷² However, despite this caveat, Van Til explicitly chooses Kuyper's view over Warfield's. Accordingly, in the following sections Van Til criticizes the views of Greene and Hamilton using Kuyper's view as his explicit criterion.⁷³

Therefore, it is evident that Van Til sought to appropriate Kuyper's epistemological antithesis while at the same time emphasizing rather than diminishing the value of apologetics. He attempted to incorporate the main encyclopedic concerns of both Warfield and Kuyper, notwithstanding his rejection of Warfield's epistemology.

4. The Task of Apologetics

Van Til's view of the task of apologetics may be deduced from his three presentations of the relationship between apologetics and systematics in theological encyclopedia. The task of apologetics is twofold: (1) Apologetics first

will need to admit that the Old Princeton apologetics, with its conception of natural theology and with its appeal to 'neutral' reason in apologetics, is untenable. Masselink will have to choose between Kuyper and Warfield." Also compare Van Til's explicit siding with Kuyper in *idem*, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974), 1:10: "Surely then we must follow Kuyper as over against Warfield at this point."

71. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 351; cf. Henk Van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck and Benjamin B. Warfield on Apologetics and the Autopistia of Scripture," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 32.

72. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 351-52.

73. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 360, 368.

receives its statement of faith primarily from systematic theology just as a messenger boy receives his commands from the general; (2) Apologetics then defends and vindicates this faith against the non-Christian philosophy of life in a similar manner that a night watchman patrols the edge of the fortress.

Additionally, apologetics assists the other theological disciplines in their own vindictory tasks just as a messenger boy relays messages between the command post and the front lines.⁷⁴

In Van Til's view the twofold task of apologetics derives from the fact that apologetics is fully *dogmatisch* rather than *vordogmatisch*. In this respect he clearly sides with Kuyper over against Warfield. Therefore, according to Van Til apologetics does not provide an independent foundation for theology; rather, apologetics is based on the same foundation as theology—divine revelation.

C. Analysis

Van Til's formulation of the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics is a composition of elements from both the Amsterdam (i.e., Kuyper and Bavinck) and the Princeton (i.e., Warfield) traditions. He not only expressly states that he is attempting to build upon how this relationship has been formulated within these two traditions, but also his formulations are obviously simplifications of Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Warfield's more detailed formulations, notwithstanding the fact that Van Til alleges that he is purifying

74. I am summarizing Van Til's own martial metaphors—the messenger boy, the scout, the big guns and little guns, etc.—which he uses to describe the relationship between apologetics and systematics. Cf. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 18-23; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 18-19.

the scholasticism inherent in these earlier formulations.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, Van Til clearly sides with the Amsterdam tradition over against the Princeton position insofar as he explicitly sides with Kuyper's formulation of the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics over against Warfield's. However, Van Til qualifies his preference for Kuyper's view by stating that apologetics should not be disdained as a useless tool but esteemed and applied in every theological discipline. Whether or not Van Til's interpretation of Kuyper's alleged undervaluation of apologetics is correct, his caveat places his view in very close proximity to Bavinck's formulation of the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics in the theological encyclopedia. For example, consider the following similarities between Bavinck's and Van Til's views:

In the first place, both note that the place of apologetics is disputed in Reformed theology, and both opt for a *via media* between extreme formulations. Bavinck explicitly rejects both the overvaluing and the undervaluing of apologetics. Similarly, Van Til rejects the alleged extremes of Kuyper's and Warfield's views while at the same time insisting upon Kuyper's emphasis upon the antithesis in over against Warfield's non-antithetical approach.

In the second place, both share the neo-Calvinist conviction that not only is Christianity an entire "worldview," but also that the task of apologetics is to vindicate the Christian worldview as the *only* worldview that can truly make sense of the world.

In the third place, both hold that apologetics, as defender of the entire

75. See chapters 5–6 below on Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck.

Christian worldview, must vindicate both the foundation and the content of Christianity. Bavinck describes this apologetic necessity in terms of *principia* and dogma, whereas Van Til describes it in terms of (1) philosophy and evidences or (2) philosophy of fact and facts themselves.

In the fourth place, both use Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* as a starting point for their own presentations of theological encyclopedia. Bavinck explicitly uses Kuyper's fourfold schema, though he does not employ Kuyper's second- or third-level sub-categories. Although Van Til does not employ Kuyper's fourfold schema, he does explicitly side with Kuyper's more general point in the *Encyclopedia* regarding the priority of dogmatics over apologetics.

In the fifth place, both assert that dogmatics precedes apologetics. Bavinck rejects Schleiermacher's separation of dogmatics and apologetics. He insists upon the metaphysical nature of theology and the objectivity of revelation as theology's foundation. Apologetics, therefore, neither grounds theology nor builds upon a separate foundation than theology; rather, apologetics is itself founded upon the same *principia* as theology. Hence apologetics serves the "queen of sciences" as a handmaiden. Likewise, Van Til rejects Warfield's alleged separation of apologetics and theology. Instead, he insists that apologetics receives its statement of faith from systematic theology, including its foundational principles. Therefore, Van Til asserts that apologetics serves its chief commander—systematic theology—as a "messenger boy."

In addition to these several significant similarities between Bavinck's and Van Til's formulations, the following nuanced discontinuities should be noted.

In the first place, Bavinck asserts that within theological encyclopedia dogmatics is most closely related to ethics,⁷⁶ whereas Van Til avers that apologetics is most similar to systematic theology.⁷⁷

In the second place, whereas Bavinck explicitly insists upon the scientific nature of dogmatics and the role of theology as the queen of sciences, Van Til does not comment on whether theology is a science. He does, however, share the same view as Bavinck regarding the objective nature of theology. Furthermore, based on Van Til's assertions (1) that the Bible speaks of everything in the universe either directly or indirectly⁷⁸ and (2) that Christianity provides the only valid presuppositions upon which science can operate,⁷⁹ it is valid to infer that, materially, Van Til held a similar view to Bavinck's regarding the nature of theology as the queen of the sciences.⁸⁰

In the third place, related to the nature of theology as the queen of sciences, Bavinck explicates theological encyclopedia in the context of a university,⁸¹ whereas Van Til defines theological encyclopedia in relation to a seminary curriculum.⁸²

D. Summary

In light of the several significant continuities and few nuanced discontinuities between the two, it is clear that Van Til's position is essentially the

76. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:56.

77. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 23.

78. See, e.g., Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 19-20.

79. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 57-58.

80. Cf. Van Til, "Nature and Scripture," 282-83.

81. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:47-54.

82. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 20.

same as Bavinck's with respect to the relationship between dogmatics and apologetics in theological encyclopedia. "According to Bavinck," writes Van Til, "apologetics cannot precede systematics. A true apologetics, he says, presupposes dogma."⁸³ Van Til's summation of Bavinck's formulation accurately summarizes his own view as well. Hence on this point Van Til undoubtedly follows Bavinck and the neo-Calvinist tradition.

Although at first glance the fact that Van Til takes the same position as Bavinck with respect to the relation between dogmatics and apologetics may appear to be banal, it is in fact highly significant for our thesis in two respects.

In the first place, the relationship between dogmatic and apologetics is a key formal aspect not only of Van Til's first presupposition, but also of the entire structure of his thought; for, when he asserts that he presupposes Reformed dogmatics for his Reformed apologetics, Van Til is intentionally placing his work in a neo-Calvinist theological context. Specifically, albeit not exclusively, his presupposition is an appropriation of the position articulated within Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. For this reason alone the Copernican approach to Van Til's thought is manifestly misdirected since it goes directly against Van Til's first presupposition—a presupposition that itself presupposes a neo-Calvinist dogmatic context for its own intelligibility—by insisting that Van Til is doing something revolutionary.

In the second place, Van Til's presupposition implies that his formulation of apologetics cannot exist without Reformed dogmatics; for, in his view the function of apologetics is directly dependent upon the material—the dogma—of dogmatics. This material aspect of Van Til's presupposition thus raises a further

83. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 90.

question that will be examined in the next chapter: If Van Til insists that he has never formulated a Reformed dogmatics and that he instead presupposes Reformed dogmatics, then from whom does Van Til receive his statement of “the Reformed system of doctrine” upon which he then builds his Reformed apologetics?

CHAPTER III.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN CONCRETO* (PART 2): MATERIAL APPROPRIATIONS OF BAVINCK'S *DOGMATIEK*

In the previous chapter we analyzed a primarily formal question regarding the relationship between apologetics and dogmatics in Van Til's thought. We found that Van Til's presupposition with respect to this relationship is an appropriation of the neo-Calvinist position clearly articulated in Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, namely, that dogmatics precedes apologetics and provides the dogmas that apologetics defends and vindicates. Hence, considered formally, Van Til's position on the relationship between dogmatic and apologetics is identical to Herman Bavinck's.

In the present chapter we now turn our attention to a concomitant material question regarding Van Til's presupposition: (1) Since in Van Til's thought dogmatics supplies apologetics its material content—its dogma—and (2) since Van Til explicitly asserts that he does not formulate his own dogmatics but insists instead that he presupposes “the Reformed system of doctrine,” then from whom does he appropriate the dogmatic system that undergirds his apologetics?

It would be incorrect to assert that the answer to this question could be limited to just one dogmatician; for, we have already noted in chapter 1 that Van Til considers himself to be standing on the shoulders of a host of classic Reformed theologians (e.g., Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Warfield, Machen, Berkhof,

Vos, et al.). Nevertheless, we also noted in chapter 1 that Van Til lauds Herman Bavinck as the greatest of the modern Reformed dogmatists. Given his preeminent esteem for Bavinck, it is fitting to suspect that Van Til frequently appropriates theological formulations from his most highly esteemed neo-Calvinist predecessor. Thus we will ask specifically in this chapter: Does Van Til appropriate his dogmatics from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*? And if so, then to what extent does he do so?

We will focus our investigation upon Van Til's most explicitly dogmatological work.

A. Appropriations in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*

In the preface to *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til makes a modest statement regarding his reliance upon earlier theologians. "My indebtedness," he writes, "to such former Reformed theologians as Louis Berkhof and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout."¹ Likewise, in the editorial introduction to this book, William Edgar writes unassumingly, "The last chapters on the doctrine of God follow Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* rather closely."²

However, a comparison of Van Til's book with Bavinck's and with Berkhof's writings reveals that both Van Til's and Edgar's passing remarks are too modest;

1. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 13. I am choosing to omit Kuyper in the following analysis since Van Til only references Kuyper and does not appropriate his writings to the same extent as he does Berkhof's and Bavinck's. For Van Til's explicit references to Kuyper, see pp. 17-18, 50-55, 349n3. Additionally, pp. 379-85 are possibly an implicit appropriation of Kuyper's thought; cf. William Edgar's editorial note at 379n36.

2. See William Edgar's Introduction in Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 5.

for, not just in the latter chapters, but throughout the entire book Van Til appropriates *extensive* amounts of material from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.³ Furthermore, Berkhof himself has pervasively appropriated extensive amounts of material from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*; thus, in the places where Van Til might appear to be indebted to Berkhof, Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* is the true source, albeit indirectly.⁴ Therefore, a less modest description of Van Til's explicit and tacit appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* is not only warranted, but also necessary according to a close comparison of select passages throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* with Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

1. Explicit Appropriations

In *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til explicitly appropriates large amounts of Bavinck's dogmatic formulations, hence Bavinck's name appears nearly 100 times throughout the book. In chapters two and three, for example, Van Til admits that his thoughts on Christian epistemology are a summary of Berkhof's and Bavinck's more detailed presentations of theological *principia*.⁵ In chapter five, Van Til cites approvingly Bavinck's formulations regarding theological *principia*, even translating two lengthy passages from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* into English before then turning around and alleging that "Bavinck has himself not been fully consistent in the application of the principle here laid before us."⁶ Similarly, Van Til begins chapter 6 by summarizing Bavinck's

3. Van Til's first explicit appropriation of Bavinck's thought, e.g., is found in ch. 2 (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 29ff.), which Edgar himself notes (pp. 29n8, 70n32).

4. On Berkhof's pervasive appropriation of Bavinck's thought, see chapter 1, §§A–B, above.

5. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 29-30, 70.

6. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89-91; quote at p. 91. For an analysis of Van Til's criticisms herein and elsewhere, see Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 111-127. Additionally, Van Til's criticisms of

historical analysis of conceptions of revelation.⁷ In chapter 15, moreover, Van Til's discussions of innate and acquired knowledge of God are prefaced with the assertion that if we begin with Bavinck's view then "we cannot go far wrong,"⁸ and his entire treatment of both topics comprises a critical discussion of Bavinck's formulations. Additionally, in chapters 16 and 18 Van Til's explications of God's incommunicable⁹ and communicable¹⁰ attributes are largely summaries of Bavinck's formulations.¹¹ Even in Van Til's discussion of the trinity in chapter 17,¹² which discussion incorporates a wider compendium of theologians than his other chapters,¹³ Van Til nevertheless gives Bavinck the predominant theological voice.¹⁴

2. Tacit Appropriations

In addition to these extensive explicit appropriations, Van Til tacitly appropriates vast amounts of Bavinck's thought, especially in his chapters on the doctrine of God.

Bavinck will be analyzed in chapters 5–6 below.

7. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 117-18, 118n4. Cf. William Edgar's editorial notes regarding Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought at 118nn4–6 and 119n10.

8. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 310, 314.

9. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 323-47. Van Til explicitly references Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* throughout this section at 323n8, 327nn15-16, 333n27, 334nn28-30, and 335n31. Cf. William Edgar's editorial notes regarding Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought at 335nn32-33 and 341n53.

10. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 369-97. Van Til explicitly references Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* throughout this section at 370n3; 371nn4-5, nn8-9, n11; 372nn12-13; 373n17; 377n29; 378n32; and 388n50. Cf. William Edgar's editorial notes at 369n1, 371n10, 374n19, 375n23, 377n28, 378n33, 379n36, 385n40, 386n43, 388n49, 390n54, 391n56, 392n57, 394n63, and 396n66.

11. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 110-37, 148-255.

12. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 348-68.

13. See Van Til's references to Kuyper (349n3), Berkhof (350n5), A. A. Hodge (351n7), W. G. T. Shedd (352n9), Calvin (352n10), B. B. Warfield (352n11, 360n34, 361nn35-38), Charles Hodge (355n23, 357n27).

14. See Van Til's references to Bavinck at 353n12, 354nn17-19, 355n21, 362n42, 363n43, 364n46. Cf. William Edgar's editorial notes at 348n1, 349n4, 353n12, n14, 354n20.

2.1. Extensive Appropriations in Chapter 10

In the first place, Van Til's presentation of "the names used to indicate special revelation" and "the modes of special revelation"—nearly 20 pages of material¹⁵—is a close synopsis of Bavinck's longer treatment of the exact same topics without citation.¹⁶ For example, *contra* William Edgar's suggestion that Van Til appropriates B. B. Warfield's formulation of the biblical terminology for divine revelation,¹⁷ Van Til's tabulation of three Hebrew verbs and six Greek verbs that represent the biblical names for special revelation—along with their corresponding biblical references—is *exactly* the same as Bavinck's non-tabular presentation.¹⁸ Edgar fails to note that Warfield himself lists the first volume of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* among the primary sources for his essay, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation,"¹⁹ hence he misses the fact that both Warfield and Van Til recapitulate Bavinck's list of biblical terms for divine revelation.

Additionally, Van Til's exposition of the meanings of the Greek verbs, ἀποκαλυπτειν and φανερον, is a near verbatim appropriation of Bavinck's presentation. To see this similarity, first consider Van Til's explanation:

Etymologically, *apokalyptō* indicates the removal of a covering under which something was hidden, while *phaneroō* signifies the making known of something that was unknown. The former takes away the hindrances that kept something from being manifest, while the latter manifests the matter itself. The former is always used with the objective aspect of the "special principle," while the latter applies to both the

15. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202-22.

16. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 324-39; cf. Louis Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 133-36.

17. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202n33.

18. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:324-25; with Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202-03.

19. Cf. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield*, 1:34.

objective and the subjective aspect. . . . It has, therefore, an objective and a subjective aspect.

. . . They speak both of the new light that must be given the sinner and also of the new power of sight that he needs. These two are constantly taken in conjunction with one another.²⁰

Then compare Bavinck's more detailed original:

Etymologically, however, ἀποκαλυπτειν indicates the removal of a cover by which a given object was hidden, and φανερουν denotes making known a matter that was hidden or unknown before. In the former, then, the stress is on the removal of a hindrance that prevented knowledge of what was hidden, on the mysterious nature of what up until then had not been understood, and on the divine deed that removed the cover and caused the mystery to be understood. The latter word generally indicates that something that was hidden and unknown before has now become manifest and public. Ἀποκαλυψις takes away the cause by which something was hidden; φανερωσις makes known the matter itself. Associated with this distinction is that φανερωσις is always used of objective revelation, while ἀποκαλυψις is used both of objective and subjective revelation. Also, φανερωσις repeatedly denotes both general and special revelation, but ἀποκαλυψις almost always refers to special and only rarely to general revelation. And these two words are in turn distinguished from γνωριζειν and δηλουν by the fact that the former two verbs bring things to light and the latter two, in consequence of this, now also make these things into the content of our thinking consciousness.²¹

This comparison clearly shows that Van Til has simply summarized Bavinck's more elaborate presentation of the names of special revelation, without citation.

A similar conclusion—though to a much lesser degree—may be drawn from B. B. Warfield's and Louis Berkhof's presentations of the same topic; for both of their presentations recapitulate aspects of Bavinck's formulation.²² However, *contra* William Edgar's various assertions that Van Til has appropriated his material regarding special revelation from Warfield and Berkhof,²³ Warfield

20. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 203.

21. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:325.

22. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1:32-34; Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology*, 133-36.

23. See Edgar's editorial notes in Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202n33, 204n35, 204n37, 205n39, 212n59, 216n69.

explicitly lists Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* among the sources for his presentation. Furthermore, neither Warfield nor Berkhof appropriate Bavinck's formulation to the near-verbatim extent as does Van Til. Without a doubt, therefore, Van Til has appropriated straight from Bavinck's formulation rather than from Warfield's or Berkhof's more generalized recapitulations of Bavinck's formulation.

Just as with his presentation of the names of revelation, so with his explication of its modes: Van Til tacitly appropriates his formulation from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. First consider Van Til's summary of the three modes of revelation:

In the main, we may speak of three modes of special revelation. In the first place, there is *theophany*. In paradise God walked and talked with man. Man needs God near to himself. Even in the state of sin man has realized something of the need of a god who is near him. In fact, the sinner has brought God too near to him; he has identified the creator with the creature. In idolatry we have an expression on the part of the sinner which points to his need of a god who is near.

In the second place, there is *prophecy*. In paradise man knew himself to be a re-interpreter of God's interpretation. When sin entered into the world man sought to be his own ultimate interpreter. Hence in special revelation God had to reappear to him as his ultimate interpreter and he himself has constantly felt that there is something lacking in all his interpretations of the universe. He has felt something of the need of an ultimate interpreter. Hence, we have false prophecy or *divination* as a caricature of true prophecy.

In the third place, if man had not sinned God would have maintained him in paradise and wrought out for him a future glory. When sin came in God no longer wrought for but against man. Hence if man was to be saved God had to reveal to man by way of miracle the fact that God was working in the universe for the salvation of the universe.²⁴

Then compare Bavinck's formulation of the three modes, noting especially his detailed references:

All the means of revelation can be reduced to three. In the first place, religious belief desires a God who is near and not far away (Acts 17:27);

24. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 204.

it was at all times convinced, therefore, that gods appeared in one form or another, under one sign or another, and at one place or another. In almost every religion there are holy places, holy times, and holy images. The gods are not like human beings and do not live with them on equal terms. The sphere of the sacred is separate from that of the profane. Still, the gods do live near and among human beings at certain places, in special objects, and impart their blessing at certain times. Idolatry, taken in its broadest sense, is born of the human need for a God who is near.²⁵ Integral to all religions, secondly, is the belief that the gods in some way make known their thoughts and will, either by human beings as their mediums, such as fortune-tellers, oracles, dreamers, necromancers, occult visionaries, etc., or, artificially and externally, by the stars, the flight of birds, the entrails of sacrificial animals, the play of flames, the lines of the hand, the chance opening of a book, etc., divination. "No man ever became great without some kind of divine inspiration."²⁶ Present in all religions, finally, is belief in the special intervention and assistance of the gods in times of distress. Widespread everywhere is magic: the art by which, using mysterious means, sacred words and formulas, amulets, liquors, etc., people make the divine power subservient to themselves and produce marvelous effects.²⁷ Theophany, mantic, and magic are the ways by which all revelation comes to human beings.²⁸

Once again it is clear that Van Til has directly appropriated Bavinck's presentation, albeit in a much simplified form and without any references to Bavinck's work or to the sources that Bavinck cites. Also, as in the previous example, Berkhof's formulation of this point in terms of "theophanies," "communications," and "miracles" is based on a general outline of Bavinck's

25. On this point Bavinck references P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1905), I, 54ff., 114ff. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:326n4.

26. Bavinck's reference on this point is as follows: Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 66 [modern English edition, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. P. G. Walsh (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997)]; cf. concerning divination and oracles Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, 4 vols. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1879–82); de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch*, I, 93ff. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:326n5.

27. Bavinck's reference on this point is as follows: Joseph Ennemoser, *Geschichte der Magie*, 2d ed. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1844); in English translation as *The History of Magic*, trans. William Howitt (London and New York: George Bell & Sons, 1893); Alfred Wiedeman, *Magie und Zauberei im alten Ägypten* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905); A. G. L. Lehmann, *Aberglaube und Zauberei von den ältesten Zeiten an bis in die Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1898); de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch*, I; Zöckler, "Magier, Magie," PRE3, XII, 55–70. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:326n6.

28. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:326.

presentation; yet, he does not follow Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* to the same nearly-thought-for-thought extent as does Van Til.²⁹

For yet another example of Van Til's tacit appropriations from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, consider first Van Til's explanation of the role that angels play as means of revelation:

Besides revealing himself symbolically in inanimate things, God appeared to his people by way of self-conscious creatures. This is especially the case with angels. Angels have a definite function to perform in the economy of redemption. According to Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19, they "ordained the law." Especially after the exile they came forth as the media of revelation (Dan. 8:13; 9:11; 10:5; Zec. 1:7; 6:5). In the New Testament they function at nearly every critical point in the revelation of God to man. It is especially noteworthy that they perform an important function when Christ is about to become flesh, when the tabernacle of God is to dwell with men on earth in the person of Christ himself. Finally they shall also play an important role in connection with the second coming of Christ, that is, when the tabernacle of God shall permanently dwell with men.³⁰

Then compare Bavinck's earlier, more detailed formulation of this point:

God does not appear only in impersonal signs, however, but also visits his people in personal beings. Surrounded and served by many thousands of angels (Isa. 6:2, 6), he sends them to the earth in human form to make known his word and will. They already occur in Genesis 18; 19; 28:12; 32:1, 2; Deuteronomy 33:2; Job 33:23; 1 Kings 13:18; and, according to Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19, serve at the time of the giving of the law but function as mediators of revelation especially after the exile (Dan. 8:13; 9:21; 10:5; Zech. 1:7–6:5). They appear even more frequently in the NT. They are present at the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19; Luke 1:11; 2:9), repeatedly in his life (John 1:51; Matt. 4:6), at the time of his suffering (Matt. 26:53; Luke 22:43), and at the resurrection and ascension (Matt. 28:2, 5; Luke 24:23; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). In the history of the apostles, they repeatedly make appearances (Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3; 11:13; 12:7; 23:9; 27:23; Rev. 22:6, 16). Finally, at his return Christ will be accompanied by the angels (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 1 Thess. 3:13; etc.).³¹

29. Cf. Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology*, 134-36.

30. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 211.

31. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:328-29.

Once again Van Til's presentation of this point is simply a scaled down versions of Bavinck's formulation, without citation. He lists the same main points, and he even employs the same *dicta probantia* as does Bavinck. The appropriation is thus undeniable.

The same is true for some of Van Til's comments with respect to the special nature of the Angel of the Lord. First, consider this remark:

Among these angels there is one who differs from them all. It is the "angel of the Lord." He is not a creature. He is identified with God. This angel appeared unto Hagar: "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me" (Gen. 16:13)? Here Hagar speaks of the angel of the Lord and calls him God. Again when the angel of the Lord spake to Jacob he said, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar" (Gen. 31:13).³²

Then, compare Bavinck's earlier formulation:

Among all these envoys of God the Messenger of the Lord (מלאך יהוה) occupies a special place. He appears to Hagar (Gen. 16:6–13; 21:17–20); to Abraham (Gen. 18; 19; 22; 24:7; 40); to Jacob (Gen. 28:13–17; 31:11–13; 32:24–30; cf. Hos. 12:4; Gen. 48:15, 16); to, and at the time of, Moses (Exod. 3:2f.; 13:21; 14:19; 23:20–23; 32:34; 33:2f.; cf. Num. 20:16; Isa. 63:8, 9; and further also Josh. 5:13, 14; Judg. 6:11–24; 13:2–23). This *Malak* YHWH is not an independent symbol nor a created angel but a true personal revelation and appearance of God, distinct from him (Exod. 23:20–23; 33:14f.; Isa. 63:8, 9) and still one with him in name (Gen. 16:13; 31:13; 32:28, 30; 48:15, 16; Exod. 3:2f.; 23:20–23; Judg. 13:3), in power (Gen. 16:10, 11; 21:18; 18:14, 18; Exod. 14:19; Judg. 6:21), in redemption and blessing (Gen. 48:16; Exod. 3:8; 23:20; Isa. 63:8, 9), in adoration and honor (Gen. 18:3; 22:12; Exod. 23:21). . . .³³

Again, Van Til's appropriation of this point is nearly self-evident. Moreover, his further explication of this point is an additional appropriation of Bavinck's work.

First, consider Van Til's explication:

The Angel of Jehovah can, therefore, be none other than the second

32. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 211.

33. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:329.

person of the Trinity who will soon come into the flesh. Soon he in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col. 1:19; 2:9) will dwell with men on earth.

Of course the incarnation of Christ is the climax as far as the history of redemption in the form of theophany is concerned.³⁴

Then compare Bavinck's longer remark about the climax of biblical theophanies:

But theophany is incomplete. . . . The angel of the covenant again appears in prophecy (Zech. 1:8–12:3) and will come to his temple (Mal. 3:1). Theophany reaches its climax, however, in Christ who is the *ἄγγελος, δοξα, εἰκὼν, λογος, υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*, in whom God is fully revealed and fully given (Matt. 11:27; John 1:14; 14:9; Col. 1:15; 2:19; etc.). By him and by the Spirit whom he sends forth, the dwelling of God in and among his people even now becomes a true spiritual reality (John 14:23; Rom. 8:9, 11; 2 Cor. 6:16). The believing community is [now] the house of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:21). . . .³⁵

Once again Van Til's thought is a condensation, without citation, of Bavinck's longer and more nuanced presentation in his *Dogmatiek*.

Furthermore, Van Til's explanation of the various modes of prophecy is a near thought-for-thought synopsis of Bavinck's longer, more detailed formulations. First, consider Van Til's following summary statement:

In the Old Testament times there were several forms in which the revelation came. God sometimes let his will be known through the lot. Then again God spoke through the Urim and Thummim. Many times he spoke through dreams. God even spoke through dreams to some that did not belong to his people. . . .

A somewhat higher medium of revelation than those just mentioned was the *vision*. . . .³⁶

Then, compare the following summary statement by Bavinck:

In communicating his thoughts, however, God frequently adopted those lower forms by which also among pagans the gods were deemed to make known their will. . . . Especially to be mentioned in this connection are the lot, the Urim and Thummim, the dream, and the vision.

34. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 212.

35. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:329.

36. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 215.

Van Til follows Bavinck's order *exactly*: lot, Urim and Thummim, dreams, and visions. Yet Van Til not only follows Bavinck's order, but also appropriates Bavinck's explanations of these types of prophetic revelations. For example, with respect to prophetic dreams, first consider Van Til's explication:

God even spoke through dreams to some that did not belong to his people. In Genesis 20 we have the story of Abimelech who received a revelation from God through a dream. The baker and the butler of Pharaoh received true revelations from God through dreams (Gen. 40). When Gideon came into the camp of the Midianites he found that one man told another a dream about the destruction that was to come (Judg. 7:3).³⁷

Then compare Bavinck's earlier explication of dreams:

Also dreams occur in Scripture as means of revelation. . . . [T]hey occur among Israelites but also repeatedly among non-Israelites (Gen. 20; 31; 40; 41; Judg. 7; Dan. 2 and 4), and convey either a word, a communication from God (Gen. 20:3; 31:9, 24; Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 19, 22; 27:19), or a representation of the imagination, which then often requires explanation (Gen. 28; 37:5; 40:5; 41:15; Judg. 7:13; Dan. 2 and 4).³⁸

Van Til has clearly taken Bavinck's point regarding dreams occurring "repeatedly among non-Israelites" and has expanded briefly upon two of Bavinck's *dicta probantia* (i.e., Genesis 40 and Judges 7).

Likewise, Van Til's passing summary of prophetic visions not only follows Bavinck's order of topics, but also his content. First, consider Van Til's brief remark:

Many times these seers were in a high state of emotional excitement when they perceived their revelations. It became customary to think of a prophet as being in a high state of emotion, as the story with respect to Saul clearly indicates (1 Sam. 10:5ff).³⁹

Then compare Bavinck's lengthier explication of prophetic ecstasy:

37. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 215.

38. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:332.

39. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 215.

Visions were often accompanied by a kind of ecstatic experience. Music, dance, and ecstasy go together; prophecy and poetry are related (1 Sam. 10:5f.; 19:20–24; 2 Kings 3:15; 1 Chron. 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:30). When the hand of the Lord comes upon the prophets (Isa. 8:11; Ezek. 3:14; 11:5) or the Spirit comes upon them, they frequently enter a state of rapture (Num. 24:3; p 333 2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26) and fall to the earth (Num. 24:3, 15, 16; 1 Sam. 19:24; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; Dan. 10:8–10; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17; 11:16; 22:8). In that state they are given to see and hear the thoughts of God in symbolic form. In images and visions his counsel is revealed to them (Jer. 1:13f.; 24:1f.; Amos 7–9; Zech. 1–6; Rev.; etc.), especially with regard to the future (Num. 23f.; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Kings 5:26; 8:11f.; Jer. 4:23f.; 14:18; Ezek. 8; Amos 7; etc.). In that state they also hear a variety of voices and sounds (1 Kings 18:41; 2 Kings 6:32; Isa. 6:3, 8; Jer. 21:10; 49:14; Ezek. 1:24, 28; 2:2; 3:12; Rev. 7:4; 9:16; 14:2; 19:1; 21:3; 22:8; etc.) They are even taken up in the spirit and translocated (Ezek. 3:12f.; 8:3; 43:1; Dan. 8:2; Matt. 4:5, 8; Acts 9:10, 11; 22:17; 23:11; 27:23; 2 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 1:9; 12; 14:1; 21:10). After the reception of a vision, Daniel was sick for some days (7:28; 8:27).⁴⁰

Van Til, again, has truncated Bavinck's more detailed explication and has simply expanded briefly upon Bavinck's first *dicta probantia* (i.e., 1 Samuel 10:5).

Van Til continues to follow Bavinck's presentation with respect to the modes of prophetic revelation when he comments on the final mode—illumination. To see the similarity once again, first consider Van Til's remark:

A still higher mode of prophetic revelation was that of direct spiritual communication by the Spirit to the prophets. This communication must be clearly distinguished from the illumination that believers are given in order that they may be able to understand the revelation that comes to them. Believers today are not given a new revelation; they do not need a new revelation.⁴¹

Then, compare Bavinck's longer, more detailed, and more nuanced summary of the Spirit's role in illumination that begins as follows: "The last form of revelation to be mentioned is interior illumination. . . . The revelation then occurs inwardly by the Spirit as the Spirit of revelation. . . ." ⁴²

40. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:332-33.

41. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 215-16.

42. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:334-35.

Contra Edgar, who assumes that Van Til appropriates Warfield's position regarding illumination as a mode of prophetic revelation,⁴³ Van Til clearly follows Bavinck's formulation of this point; for, Van Til does not use Warfield's terminology for prophetic revelation (i.e., "internal suggestion"⁴⁴), but Bavinck's (i.e., "illumination"). It is possible, however, that Van Til's cessationist remark derives from Warfield's presentation.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that Van Til follows Bavinck *primarily* on this specific point (and pervasively throughout the entirety of chapter 10) is further evinced by Van Til's final comment regarding prophetic revelation, namely, that Christ is its unique climax; for, on this point he clearly follows Bavinck's order and appropriates Bavinck's material, the similarity between Warfield's and Bavinck's formulations notwithstanding.⁴⁶ First, consider Van Til's remark:

All these modes of prophecy were the beginnings of the work of the Great Prophet upon whom the Spirit would dwell without measure, who

43. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 216n69.

44. Warfield classifies the modes of revelation into a threefold schema within which prophetic revelation is classified under the second term: (1) "external manifestation," (2) "internal suggestion," and (3) "concursive operation." Cf. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield*, 1:15, 28.

45. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield*, 1:28: "Whatever truth men have been made partakers of by the Spirit of truth is His (for all things whatsoever the Father hath are His) and is taken by the Spirit of truth and declared to men that He may be glorified. Nevertheless, though all revelation is thus summed up in Him, we should not fail to note very carefully that it would also be all sealed up in Him—so little is revelation conveyed by fact alone, without the word—had it not been thus taken by the Spirit of truth and declared unto men. The entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and giving its effect to the fact of Christ. And when this fact was in all its meaning made the possession of men, revelation was completed and in that sense ceased. Jesus Christ is no less the end of revelation than He is the end of the law." But note also that Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:339, citing Augustine, takes a cessationist position with respect to the continuation of miracle-revelation; thus, it is inconclusive whether Van Til's remark regarding cessationism is an appropriation from Warfield, Bavinck, or both.

46. Regarding Warfield's assertion that Christ is the *sui generis* climax of prophetic revelation, a comparison of Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield*, 1:28, with Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:335, leads this writer to conclude that Warfield's formulation is a nuanced recapitulation of Bavinck's earlier formulation in the same way that, as was noted above, Warfield's list of biblical terms for special revelation is a recapitulation of Bavinck's list.

was himself the Word become flesh and who *declared* the Father unto us.⁴⁷

Then, compare Bavinck's formulation:

In the NT the supreme, the unique and true prophet makes his appearance. As Logos he is the full and complete revelation of God (John 1:1; 18; 14:9; 17:6; Col. 2:9). He does not receive a revelation from above or from outside of himself but is himself the source of prophecy. The Holy Spirit does not come upon him and does not fall upon him but indwells him without measure (John 3:34). . . .⁴⁸

The similarities are self-evident.

For all of these reasons it is beyond doubt that, regarding the modes of prophetic revelation, Van Til has tacitly appropriated not only Bavinck's exact order of topics but also several of his formulations, even to a thought-for-thought degree at points.

Additionally, Van Til's explication of the interrelationship between word and deed with respect to miracles likely derives from Bavinck's formulation. The similarity can be seen by first considering Van Til's remarks about (1) the necessity of an actual change in sinful man beyond a mere addition of information and (2) the intimate connection between God's redemptive words and deeds:

When man fell into sin, he not merely needed new information, but he needed to be changed. Things had to be done for him in the objective sphere, and things had to be done for him in the subjective sphere. . . .⁴⁹

Again and again the Lord shows his people that it is his miraculous saving power that is alone sufficient to save his people from destruction.

All of this at the same time that it displays the glory of the saving power of God also corroborates the truth of the salvation that he has sworn he would give to his people. When God speaks we must accept

47. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 216.

48. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:335.

49. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 219.

the truth at his word. When God acts, we must see the fact that he acts in these acts themselves. Yet the words corroborate the deeds and the deeds corroborate the words. Together they give forth such an eloquent testimony of the grace, the power and the truth of God, that men should marvel.⁵⁰

Then, compare Bavinck's formulation:

Just as human beings, aside from their appearance and words, also make themselves known by their deeds, so God not only reveals himself by his words but also by his works. Word and deed are intimately connected. God's Word is an act (Ps. 33:9), and his activity is speech (Ps. 19:2; 29:3; Isa. 28:26). Word and deed accompany each other, both in creation and re-creation. Usually the word comes first, as a promise and a threat, but in principle it already contains within itself a deed. God's Word does not return to him empty, but it accomplishes what he wants (Isa. 55:10, 11). The word demands the deed; miracle accomplishes prophecy; not only consciousness but being itself must be renewed.⁵¹

In this case it is highly likely that Van Til has simply expanded upon Bavinck's formulations regarding (1) the need for "being itself" to be renewed by God's miraculous activity and (2) the intimate connection between God's redemptive words and deeds.

2.2. Extensive Appropriations in Chapter 16

In the second place, Van Til's discussion of the names of God in chapter 16⁵² is a virtual reproduction of Bavinck's presentation of this topic, again without citation.⁵³ Also, it should be noted that, as we saw in chapter 10, Berkhof also appropriates Bavinck's general outline of this topic.⁵⁴ Unlike Van Til, however, Berkhof provides an explicit reference to Bavinck in order to indicate that he is

50. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 221.

51. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:336.

52. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 319-22; also cf. William Edgar's editorial notes regarding Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought at 319nn1-2.

53. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:137-47; cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 48-51.

54. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 47-51.

loosely following Bavinck's threefold classification of God's names.⁵⁵

The fact that Van Til appropriates Bavinck's formulation of God's names can be demonstrated in several ways. First, Van Til's opening assertions regarding (1) God's prerogative to name himself, (2) God's essence being revealed in his names, and (3) the analogical character of man's knowledge of God's names all derive from Bavinck's formulations. To see the appropriations, first consider Van Til's summary remark:

These names must, in the nature of the case, be given to us by God himself. It is not man's idea of God with which we deal, but it is God's idea of himself that stands before us in his names.

The names that God gives us of himself are not mere marks of denotation; there is none other beside himself from whom he need be distinguished. The names of God reveal to us something of the nature or essence of God. They cannot reveal this nature fully, but they nevertheless are expressive of something of that nature. If they were not, they would have no meaning at all.⁵⁶

Then, compare the following more detailed remarks by Bavinck. With regard to God's prerogative to name himself, Bavinck writes:

There is an intimate link between God and his name. According to Scripture, this link too is not accidental or arbitrary but forged by God himself. We do not name God; he names himself. In the foreground here is the name as a revelation on the part of God, in an active and objective sense, as revealed name. In this case God's name is identical with the attributes or perfections that he exhibits in and to the world: his glory (Ps. 8:1; 72:19), honor (Lev. 18:21; Ps. 86:10–11; 102:16), his redeeming power (Exod. 15:3; Isa. 47:4); his service (Isa. 56:6; Jer. 23:27); his holiness (1 Chron. 16:10; Ps. 105:3). The name is God himself as he reveals himself in one relationship or another (Lev. 24:11, 16; Deut. 28:58).⁵⁷

55. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 48: "Dr. Bavinck bases his division of the names of God on that broad conception of them, and distinguishes between *nomina propria* (proper names), *nomina essentialia* (essential names, or attributes) and *nomina personalia* (personal names, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In the present chapter we limit ourselves to the discussion of the first class."

56. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 319.

57. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:98.

With regard to God's essence being revealed in his names, Bavinck further writes:

The name of God in Scripture does not describe God as he exists within himself but God in his revelation and multiple relations to his creatures. This name, however, is not arbitrary: God reveals himself in the way he does because he is who he is. Summed up in his name, therefore, is his honor, his fame, his excellencies, his entire revelation, his very being. Upon those to whom it is revealed, therefore, the name confers special privileges and imposes unique obligations. The name of God implies that, having revealed himself in it, God expects to be called by it. The "divulged" name becomes the name "called upon." In Scripture, "to be" and "to be called" are two sides of the same thing. God is what he calls himself and calls himself what he is. What God reveals of himself is expressed and conveyed in specific names. To his creatures he grants the privilege of naming and addressing him on the basis of, and in keeping with, his revelation. The *one* name of God, which is inclusive of his entire revelation both in nature and in grace, is divisible for us in a great many names. Only in that way do we obtain a full view of the riches of his revelation and the profound meaning of his name. We call him and indeed may call him by all that has become known of his being in creation and re-creation. But all those names, as designations of God, impose on us the obligation to consecrate and glorify them. It is the one name, the full revelation and to that extent the very being of God himself, with which we are dealing in all those names. By his name God puts himself in a certain relation to us, and the relation we assume to him must be congruent with it.⁵⁸

With regard to the analogical character of man's knowledge of God's names,

Bavinck writes:

There is no fully adequate knowledge of God. We cannot name him as he is within himself. All his names are derived from the world of creatures. But this does not make them untrue, a product of human imagination. Just as there is resemblance between various parts of the world, making comparison between them a possibility, so also there is kinship between God and his creatures, a kinship that warrants the use of creaturely language in speaking of him. Furthermore, though temporally the natural is prior to the spiritual, logically and ideally the spiritual precedes the natural. The natural could never guide us to the spiritual if it had not itself proceeded from the spiritual. . . . It is God himself who made all things, including the material world, subservient to the manifestation of his perfections. . . . Hence, while it is true that we call

58. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:99.

God by names derived from the world of creatures, these names were first created in those creatures by God himself. It is true: we first apply to creatures the names by which we speak of God because we know them before we know God. But materially they first apply to God and then to creatures. All perfections are first in God, then in creatures. He possesses them because they belong to his essence; we possess them only by participation. . . .⁵⁹

Regarding this same point Bavinck further asserts:

One must, however, keep in mind that Scripture knows nothing of a divine essence that can be discovered and known by the powers of the human intellect apart from revelation. It posits no split, much less a contrast, between God's ontological existence and his "economic" self-revelation. As God reveals himself, so is he; in his names he himself becomes knowable to us. Though he is indeed infinitely superior to all his creatures—so that we can possess only an analogical knowledge of him not an exhaustive (adequated) knowledge—yet his several attributes, attributes that come through in his revelation, bring to our mind, each time from a special perspective, the fullness of his being.⁶⁰

Van Til's appropriations of these three points from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* are undeniable. Just like his tacit appropriations of Bavinck's thought in chapter 10, so also at the opening of chapter 16 Van Til simply appropriates and truncates Bavinck's more detailed formulations without citation.

Second, Van Til's use of the technical term, *nomina propria*,⁶¹ to classify the names of God derives from Bavinck's threefold classification.⁶²

59. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:106-07; also cf. the overall argument throughout pp. 104-110.

60. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:111.

61. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 320.

62. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 7th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 2:81; with *idem*, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:111. NB: The Latin technical term did not get carried over as a technical term in the English translation; rather, as in this case, it was translated as "proper names." We note this here to show that the term does not originate with Berkhof. In this regard, see also Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek van Dr. A. Kuyper: College-Dictaat van een der studenten; niet in den handel*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1910), 1:162. However, despite the fact that Berkhof is not the source of the term, it should be noted that in the specific place where Bavinck asserts his threefold classification of God's names, he does not use the Latin terms that Berkhof employs in his summary of Bavinck's threefold classification cited above; Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:135; with Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

Third, not only Van Til's selection of names, but also the order in which he treats the names (i.e., *El, Adonai, Shaddai, Jehovah, theos, Kyros, Father*) and the philological comments he makes regarding the derivation of the names are direct appropriations and truncations of Bavinck's more detailed formulations—all without citation. To display just one brief example among the many longer ones that could be demonstrated throughout this section, first, consider Van Til's description of the name *Adonai*:

Adonai indicates God as the Ruler to whom everything is subject and whom man is therefore bound to obey. In earlier times it was the usual name by which God was addressed.⁶³

Then, compare Bavinck's longer description of the same name:

ʿĒdōnāy (אֲדֹנָי), used alternately with *hā-ʿādōn* (אֲדֹנָיִךְ), which is further intensified in “Lord of lords” (אֲדֹנָיִךְ אֲדֹנָיִךְ) or “Lord of all the earth” (אֲדֹנָיִךְ אֲדֹנָיִךְ לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ), refers to God as the Ruler to whom all things are subject and to whom humans are related as servants (Gen. 18:27). In an earlier period the name Baʿal (בַּעַל) was used of God with the same meaning (Hos. 2:16 [18MT]), but later this use was discontinued because of its idolatrous connotations.⁶⁴ Now these names are not proper names in the restricted sense. They are used as well of idols, people (Gen. 33:10; Exod. 7:1; 4:16), and authorities (Exod. 12:12; 21:5–6; 22:7; Lev. 19:32; Num. 33:4; Judg. 5:8; 1 Sam. 2:25; Ps. 58:1 [2 MT]; 82:1) but are nevertheless the usual names by which God is called and addressed. They are, moreover, common Semitic names referring to God in his transcendence over all creatures. The Semites loved to call God “Lord” or “king.” They felt deeply dependent on him, and as his servants they humbly bowed before him. They did not use these names to give expression to philosophical theories about God's essence but to give prominence to his relation to his creatures, especially to human beings.⁶⁵

Once again Van Til has clearly appropriated Bavinck's formulation without

63. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 321.

64. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:139n144, inserts the following reference: “J. Robertson, *Israel's oude godsdienst* (Culemborg: Blom en Olivierse, 1896), 200ff.; ed. note: Eng. edition: *The Early Religion of Israel*, 2d ed. (New York: Westminster Press [Thomas Wittaker], 1903).”

65. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:139n145, inserts the following reference: “W. Robertson Smith, *Die Religion der Semiten* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1899), 48.”

citation of Bavinck's work or the several references that Bavinck himself cites. The same is true for Van Til's entire treatment of God's names.

Due to Van Til's high degree of appropriation of Bavinck's thought throughout this section, Edgar's generalized editorial notes regarding (1) Van Til's following the traditional order of Reformed theology and (2) Van Til's making a similar point as Bavinck regarding anthropomorphism⁶⁶ are insufficient at best and misleading at worst; for, there is nothing general to note about these points. Rather, Van Til has tacitly appropriated *all* of his formulations of God's names *directly* from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

Ironically, when Van Til turns next to explicate the attributes of God, he includes an explicit reference to Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*!⁶⁷ The oddity of this footnote, and the several other explicit references to Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* throughout the remainder of the chapter,⁶⁸ is stark considering how much material Van Til has appropriated from Bavinck already in the first sections of the chapter without citation. What is more, Van Til's explicit references to Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* drop off in the last section of the chapter, though his appropriation of Bavinck's thought does not. Thus the editor inserts a note in the last section to let the readers know that "Van Til continues to follow the order in Bavinck. . . ."⁶⁹ The pattern of appropriation in this chapter therefore may be summarized as follows: (1) extensive tacit appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* in the

66. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 319nn1-2, respectively.

67. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 323n8.

68. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 327nn15-16, 333n27, 334nn28-30, 335n31.

69. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 341n53. Additionally, in the same footnote Edgar incorrectly asserts that Bavinck labels God's oneness "as the last of his communicable attributes." Rather, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:170, writes: "The last of the *incommunicable* attributes is God's oneness, differentiated into the unity of singularity and the unity of simplicity" (emphasis added).

beginning section, (2) a extensive explicit appropriations in the middle section, and (3) more extensive tacit appropriations in the last section.

Whatever the reasons may be for Van Til's odd omission of references in the beginning and latter sections, it is nevertheless abundantly evident that the bulk of Van Til's presentation of God's names and incommunicable attributes is an appropriation of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

3. Appropriations of Various Motifs

Beyond explicit citations and tacit appropriations, several of the motifs that Van Til employs throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* derive from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. In the first place, Van Til's programmatic statement regarding humanity's epistemological duty to "think God's thoughts after him"⁷⁰ is rooted in Bavinck's assertion that

. . . a theologian's sole responsibility is to think God's thoughts after him and to reproduce the unity that is objectively present in the thoughts of God and has been recorded for the eye of faith in Scripture.⁷¹

In the second place, Van Til's programmatic insistence that the ontological trinity is the necessary presupposition of all predication⁷² is adumbrated—according to

70. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 292, 364, 376, 387; also cf. *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 16; *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 77, 131, 140, 172; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 124, 130, 151, 329.

71. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:44; also cf. p. 588. James Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 51-52, notes that Bavinck's dictum reflects the wider organic motif underlying his thought, a motif which posits Christ as the center of all history. The fact that Van Til praises Bavinck's dictum but criticizes Bavinck for being inconsistent with it provides further warrant for viewing Van Til's formulations as a recapitulation of Bavinck's. E.g., see Cornelius Van Til, "Review of *Paedagogische Beginselen*, Derde Druk (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1928) and *De Nieuwe Opvoeding*, Tweede Druk, (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1928), by Herman Bavinck" *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (1929): 135-36.

72. E.g. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 59, writes, "Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition." Compare pp. 13, 80-81, 124, etc.

Van Til's own statements elsewhere—in (1) Bavinck's critique of "the ethical theologians (*Tethischen*)" (which critique Van Til then levels against the followers of Berkouwer, whom he labels "the *Cahiers* men")⁷³ and in (2) Bavinck's survey of early trinitarian theology.⁷⁴

In the third place, given his praise of "the analogical system of Bavinck" in opposition to Aquinas,⁷⁵ it is highly likely that Van Til's incessant insistence that humans can only know God *analogically*⁷⁶ is a recapitulation of Bavinck's formulations regarding analogical knowledge of God.⁷⁷ Horton argues that Van Til inherited the Creator-creature distinction and its correlate—analogueal reasoning—"from the Amsterdam school."⁷⁸ However, he does not note that it is from Bavinck specifically that Van Til appropriates the phrase "thinking God's thoughts after him" nor that it is from Bavinck and Berkhof specifically that Van Til appropriates the language of theological *principia*.

In the fourth place, Van Til's seemingly odd statements regarding the

73. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), 94.

74. Cornelius Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974), 1:10: "No one has better than he [i.e. Bavinck] set forth the struggle in the early church to attain a truly biblical view of the immanent or ontological trinity as the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience."

75. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 37-40; quote at p. 40.

76. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 31-44, 63, 97, 116, 177-85, 274, 279, 292, 294, 298, 328, 373-75, 381, 384, 393.

77. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:47-52, 70, 107-111, 121, 130, 131, 134, 136, 137, 186; cf. David Waring Diehl, "Divine Omniscience in the Thought of Charles Hartshorne and Cornelius Van Til: A Systemic Comparative Study" (Ph.D. diss., Yorktown Heights, N. Y. The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1978), 50. Additionally, Michael S. Horton, "Consistently Reformed: The Inheritance and Legacy of Van Til's Apologetic," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 135, argues that Van Til inherited the Creator-creature distinction and its correlate, analogueal reasoning, "from the Amsterdam school"; however, he does not note that it is from Bavinck specifically that Van Til appropriates the phrase "thinking God's thoughts after him" nor that it is from Bavinck and Berkhof specifically that Van Til appropriates the language of theological *principia*.

78. Horton, "Consistently Reformed," 135.

epistemological necessity of circular reasoning⁷⁹ are recapitulations of Bavinck's formulations regarding the circularity inherent in theology's *principia*,⁸⁰ especially as these formulations are summarized by Berkhof. *Contra* Frame and Bahnsen, for example, both of whom attempt to analyze Van Til's assertions regarding circularity without comparing Berkhof's and Bavinck's formulations,⁸¹ Van Til virtually repeats Berkhof's formulation.⁸²

In the fifth place, Van Til's robust treatment of general revelation,⁸³ especially his insistence upon the clarity of general revelation, derives—according to his own admission—from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. For instance, first consider the following summary statement by Van Til regarding the clarity of general and special revelation:

. . . it is the objective clarity, or perspicuity of God's revelation, of whatever kind that revelation may be, natural or supernatural, general or special, that must be stressed at all costs.⁸⁴

Then, compare Van Til's remark elsewhere regarding Calvin and Bavinck as the sources of his formulations regarding the clarity of general and special revelation:

Calvin and Bavinck, following Paul, have, by teaching this [i.e., the clarity of both general and special revelation], led us away from Scholasticism toward a unified interpretation of all the facts of human experience in terms of the primacy of the grace of God in Christ.⁸⁵

79. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 242-44; *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, 130; *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 33; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 123, 314-26.

80. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:253, 455-59, 581-600.

81. John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 301-09; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 143n144, 170n42, 201-02, 214n116, 218n128, 284-85, 482-83, 518n122.

82. Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology*, 125-26.

83. Cf. chs. 6-9 in Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*.

84. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 188-89.

85. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:49.

Van Til thus explicitly links his formulations regarding the clarity of revelation to the Apostle Paul via Bavinck and Calvin.

B. Summary

The evidence adduced above is not intended to be a comprehensive tabulation, but a representative sampling. More places throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* could be adduced as further evidence to demonstrate that Van Til appropriates—both explicitly and tacitly—vast amounts of theological formulations from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek*. However, after a certain point it becomes pedantic to keep on listing example after example.

Nevertheless, when viewed as a cumulative case, these various lines of evidence clearly demonstrate that Van Til appropriates Bavinck’s thought not occasionally but *pervasively*. Based upon the high frequency and near thought-for-thought extent of Van Til’s appropriations, we can even go so far as to say that Van Til’s first presupposition should be reformulated as follows:

I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology. My business is to teach Apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine, *especially as it has been formulated in Herman Bavinck’s Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.⁸⁶

This reformulation more accurately describes Van Til’s reliance upon Bavinck’s theological formulations than either Van Til’s or Edgar’s understated remarks in the preface and editorial introduction to the book, respectively. Further, this reformulation is more accurate than the Copernican portrayals of Van Til’s thought; for, it is manifestly *not* the case that Van Til has produced original

86. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 27; emended and emphasis added.

dogmatic formulations throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Rather, he has clearly and pervasively appropriated Herman Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, and he has done so many times without citation.

Furthermore, this reformulation does not imply that Van Til appropriates Bavinck's thought exclusively. For, as we noted above, he clearly appropriates from others too, such as, Warfield and Berkhof. Additionally, he sometimes uses Bavinck's formulation as a launching point for his own nuanced refinements of a point. For example, Van Til does not follow Bavinck's order with respect to explicating the doctrine of the trinity after the divine essence and attributes.⁸⁷

However, despite these differences the evidence clearly shows that Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* is the preeminent dogmatic source from which Van Til appropriates "the Reformed system of doctrine" throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Therefore, considered materially, the answer to our question regarding Van Til's presupposition—From whom does Van Til appropriate "the Reformed system of doctrine" that undergirds his Reformed apologetics?—is undoubtedly Herman Bavinck.

87. Cf. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 348n1.

CHAPTER IV.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN CONCRETO* (PART 3): POLEMICAL APPROPRIATIONS OF BAVINCK'S *DOGMATIEK*

In the previous chapter we examined Van Til's presupposition materially through an analysis of his positive presentation of "the Reformed system of faith" in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. We found that, throughout this book, Van Til pervasively appropriates theological formulations from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. Hence, in terms of content, Van Til's presupposition should be described not only as "the Reformed system of faith," but also as "the Reformed system of faith, especially as it has been formulated in Herman Bavinck's Gereformeerde Dogmatiek."

In the present chapter we will continue to examine Van Til's presupposition materially, but instead of focusing upon his positive presentation of Reformed dogmatics, we will analyze how Van Til employs his presupposition for polemical purposes. In other words, when Van Til levels critiques against his theological opponents, what dogmatic source does he use as his criterion for determining whether a theologian is orthodox or heterodox?

Since we have already seen that Van Til pervasively appropriates Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* in his positive presentation of Reformed dogmatics, there is sufficient warrant for asking a more specific question with respect to his polemical presentations: Does Van Til use Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* in particular as the paragon

of Reformed orthodoxy by which he determines whether other Reformed theologians are orthodox or heterodox?

A. Appropriations in *The New Synthesis Theology of The Netherlands*

In *An introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til appropriates Bavinck's thought primarily through summarizing Bavinck's theological formulations in order to restate the Reformed system of faith with apologetic nuances. In *The New Synthesis Theology of The Netherlands*, however, Van Til exhibits another type of appropriation. In this work he wields Bavinck's theology as an orthodox sword by which to parry the allegedly heterodox theological thrusts arising in the Netherlands throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Van Til's argument is divided into two main sections: (1) the nineteenth century background to the problem and (2) the twentieth century development of the problem. He wields Bavinck's theology as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy in both sections, but especially in the first.

1. The Context: Synthesis Theologies vs. Pure Reformed Orthodoxy

Van Til begins with a sweeping summary of pre-Reformation Medieval theology as "a synthesis-theology" which "was an edifice composed of two 'stories,' the first being that of the natural theology of the Greeks, and the second being the 'supernatural' theology of the Bible."¹ Protestants in the Netherlands

1. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), 2. Van Til frequently employs the two-story house metaphor as a critique of alleged dualism in Roman Catholic theology. See, e.g., Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 141-42; *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 262; *idem*, *The*

who failed to depart from Roman Catholic natural theology became Remonstrants, according to Van Til, thus creating the need for the Synod of Dordt's proclamation of "historic Protestantism, pure and simple" *contra* the Remonstrants.²

Having stated the "pure and simple" starting point, Van Til proceeds to explain impure deviations largely following an interpretive schema appropriated from Herman Dooyeweerd's analysis of four religious motives undergirding the history of Western thought.³ The first is Roman Catholicism, which Van Til summarizes as an attempt to synthesize Socrates' autonomous man with Christianity's self-attesting Christ of Scripture. Likewise, Van Til summarizes modern theology as an attempt to synthesize Kant's autonomous man with Christianity's Christ à la Karl Barth's Neo-Orthodoxy. Next, Van Til argues that modern Reformed theologians in the Netherlands have attempted to synthesize Neo-Orthodoxy with historic Reformed theology, a move which he sees as

Defense of the Faith, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 131, 308-09, 316. Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1985), 123-160, has critiqued Protestant "two-story" interpretations of Aquinas' theology, including Van Til's and Herman Dooyeweerd's formulations, as insufficiently nuanced at best and as misrepresenting the actual interrelation of nature and grace in Aquinas' thought at worst. I am unaware of any studies which examine Van Til's interpretations of Aquinas's theology in particular or Roman Catholicism in general, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt such an analysis. Were one to be attempted, however, Van Til's appropriation of Herman Dooyeweerd's thought would need to be a major focus; for, Van Til explicitly appropriates Dooyeweerd's analysis of the four religious motives of Western thought as will be demonstrated in chapter 6 below.

2. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 2-3; quote at p. 3.

3. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought: An inquiry into the transcendental conditions of philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 59-77, presents the following four religious motifs: (1) matter and form; (2) creation, fall, and redemption; (3) nature and grace; (4) nature and freedom. Also see *idem*, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 7-39. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 4, 7, only mentions Dooyeweerd twice; nevertheless, it is clear that Van Til's fourfold analysis of the "Roman Catholic Synthesis" (pp. 3-7) is largely a summary of Dooyeweerd's thought. Compare Van Til's appropriation of Dooyeweerd's fourfold schema in Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 230-239.

a turning away from the traditional Reformed Faith, and toward the reinterpretation (*Umdeutung*) of it in terms of the post-Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought, and, in particular, of neo-orthodox theology.⁴

Van Til traces the origins of this allegedly impure deviation of Reformed theology in the thought of H. M. Kuitert, Robert Collingwood, Jean-Paul Sartre, and he traces the development of it in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, and J. H. Scholten, the latter receiving the longest analysis.⁵ All of this serves as the backdrop against which to introduce the modern champions of pure Reformed orthodoxy: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck were former students of Scholten, and both had the unique intellectual fortitude and giftedness required to critique their former teacher's attempted reinterpretation of Reformed theology, remarks Van Til. He interprets Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* and Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* in this light. Both men realized, asserts Van Til, that an entire restatement of the Reformed worldview was needed to meet the modern challenges issued by Scholten's attempted reinterpretation. "The call of the hour," he writes,

was thus to develop a self-consciously Reformed view of science and philosophy, consonant with the theology of the Reformed Confession and capable of challenging a position like Scholten's.⁶

Notably, in a passing remark, Van Til interprets his own work as a continuation of Kuyper's and Bavinck's theological projects:

Have I, in saying this, read my own views into Kuyper and Bavinck? Yes, I have, at least as to their verbal expression. But what I have said was, I

4. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 10.

5. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 10-28.

6. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 28-29; quote at p. 29.

believe, the basic intent of both men.⁷

Contra the Copernican interpretations of Van Til, he interprets his own apologetic work as formally distinct, yet materially the same as Kuyper and Bavinck's theology, his critiques of "remnants of Scholasticism" in the theology of both men notwithstanding.⁸ Within the context of this book, therefore, Van Til intentionally aligns his own thought with the champions of "pure" Reformed orthodoxy over against all attempts to synthesize Reformed theology according to modern theology's freedom-necessity dualism.

2. The Cruc: Modern Synthesis Theologies vs. Bavinck's Orthodoxy

Having stated the background of Reformed theology's impure deviations in the Netherlands and having held up Kuyper and Bavinck as defenders of the pure orthodoxy against Scholten's reinterpretation, Van Til proceeds to wield Bavinck's theology as a polemical sword against further attempts at modern Reformed syntheses.

2.1. Bavinck contra the "Ethical Theologians"

Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874) was the father of the so-called "ethical theologians," recalls Van Til. He notes that although Kuyper and Bavinck differed in their responses—the former wholly opposing, the latter being critically appreciative—Bavinck's analysis produced the same conclusion as Kuyper's: De la Saussaye's theology is out of accord with Reformed theology.⁹

7. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 30.

8. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 30. Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck will be analyzed in chapter 5 below.

9. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 31-33.

Van Til's entire assessment of De la Saussaye's thought turns upon his use of Kuyper's and Bavinck's theology as the criterion of orthodoxy. "For example," writes Van Til,

would it not seem obvious that the theology of men like Kuyper and Bavinck is based upon the idea of the Scriptures as the final source and standard of truth, whereas the theology of De la Saussaye is based upon the autonomous moral or ethical consciousness of man as the final source and standard of truth?¹⁰

Van Til considers J. H. Gunning (1829–1905) to be the second father of the "ethical theologians." Just as with his analysis of Gunning's predecessor, so with Gunning himself, Van Til uses Kuyper and Bavinck as the criterion of orthodoxy. Thus after surveying Gunning's doctrine of Scripture Van Til concludes:

It ought to be clear from what has been said that Gunning's final court of appeal was not the Scriptures, in the sense that this was true for Kuyper and Bavinck.¹¹

Van Til concludes part one with a separate sub-section entitled "The Authentic Bavinck" which is catena of quotations from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* arranged in such a way as to prove that, *contra* Veenhof's analysis, Bavinck unequivocally rejected the ethical theology arising in the Netherlands. According to Van Til, the essence of Bavinck's disagreement with the ethical theologians is his epistemological principle of analogical reasoning:

In short, underneath all his evaluations of ancient, medieval, and modern thinking, Bavinck did work with an idea of analogy based upon that of the self-sufficient triune God of Scripture and man as His creature, who has sinned against Him, and in all cases responded to His Word with either obedience or disobedience.¹²

10. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 32.

11. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 35.

12. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 37; also cf. *idem*, "The Significance of Dort for Today," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), 182.

This assertion is crucial to Van Til's argument; for, he argues that the twentieth-century followers of the nineteenth-century ethical theologians (i.e., Berkouwer and Kuitert) claimed that they were simply following Bavinck. In order for Van Til to be able to use Bavinck as his criterion of orthodoxy *contra* the twentieth-century ethical theologians, therefore, he must first establish that Bavinck indeed rejected the earlier ethical theologians.¹³

Not every point of Van Til's interpretation of "the authentic Bavinck" is tenable. His assertion, for example, that Bavinck held Roman Catholicism to be a "monstrosity" after the likes of "Frankenstein's creation" is an egregious hyperbole at best and a gross misrepresentation at worst.¹⁴ Bavinck's own statements run directly contrary to Van Til's "Frankenstein" interpretation. "In general," writes Bavinck in the preface to the first edition of his *Dogmatiek*, for example,

Protestants know far too little about what we have in common with Rome and what divides us. Thanks to the revival of Roman Catholic theology under the auspices of Thomas, it is now doubly incumbent on Protestants to provide a conscious and clear account of their relationship to Rome.¹⁵

He further asserts:

Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas do not belong exclusively to Rome; they are Fathers and Doctors to whom the whole Christian church has obligations.¹⁶

Furthermore, throughout his *Dogmatiek* Bavinck interacts extensively with all of these "Fathers," sometimes positively appropriating insights, sometimes deftly

13. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 42-43.

14. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 36-37.

15. Herman Bavinck, "Herman Bavinck, 'Forward' to the First Edition (Volume I) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 9.

16. Bavinck, "Forward," 9.

critiquing weakness, yet always reading them with respect and nuance.¹⁷ To give just one example, Bavinck's firm yet nuanced critique of Rome's so-called *Papa dixit* formulation is a far cry from Van Til's hyperbolic "Frankensteinian monstrosity" description of Bavinck's position.¹⁸

Moreover, Bavinck's very definition of theology is modeled after Thomas Aquinas' definition,¹⁹ a fact which by itself repudiates Van Til's polemical hyperbole. Additionally, Van Til himself acknowledges elsewhere that Bavinck was highly influenced by Thomas:

Everybody knows that even Herman Bavinck incorporated much of the thinking of Thomas Aquinas in his *magnus opus*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.²⁰

Furthermore, Van Til contradicts his own "Frankensteinian" assessment; for, elsewhere he describes Bavinck as "a true Protestant" who "learned much from Romanism."²¹ On this point, therefore, Van Til has lost sight of "the authentic Bavinck" and instead has been carried away by polemical hyperbole.

Nevertheless, despite his misinterpretation of Bavinck's stance toward Roman Catholicism, the fact remains that Van Til uses Bavinck's theology as his paragon of Reformed orthodoxy *contra* the ethical theologians.

17. See, e.g., Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 113-204.

18. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:81-82 [#21].

19. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:34, 36, references Thomas' definition twice before formulating his own definition (p. 38), which definition clearly echoes Thomas' formulation.

20. Cornelius Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974), n.p.; cf. Eric D. Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895-1987* (Chicago: Olive Tree Communications, 1995), s.v., 1974.G.

21. Cornelius Van Til, "Bavinck the Theologian: A Review Article," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48.

2.2. *Bavinck contra G. C. Berkouwer*

In chapter 2 Van Til introduces Bavinck straightway as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy; for, according to Van Til, the current state of theology in the Netherlands is a devolution from Bavinck's pristine Reformed orthodoxy to Barth's heterodoxy via Berkouwer's attempted synthesis of Bavinck's orthodoxy and Barth's heterodoxy:

The synod of Assen (1926) of the Reformed Churches symbolized the high-water mark of traditional Reformed theology. That of Amsterdam (1966), involving the same churches, symbolized the victory of neo-orthodoxy. This change of direction from Bavinck to Barth mirrors perfectly the *voltefact* in the theology of Dr. G. C. Berkouwer in the same period.²²

Van Til divides the chapter into two main sections, and in both he employs Bavinck as the criterion of orthodoxy, *contra* Berkouwer and Berkouwer's followers (i.e., the so-called "*Cahiers men*"), respectively.

Van Til's lengthy treatment of Berkouwer is divided into two sub-sections representing Berkouwer's earlier and a later views of Scripture. He claims that the early Berkouwer presented a view of Scripture similar to that of Kuyper's and Bavinck's; for, just like Kuyper and Bavinck, so Berkouwer critiqued the attempts of the ethical theologians to synthesize revelation and reason according to a criterion independent of revelation. "This posits, according to Berkouwer, the problem of Scripture-criticism," writes Van Til. "And he who seeks to 'solve' this problem, specifically in the manner in which [Wilhelm] Herrmann does will end with chaos," he concludes.²³

Furthermore, Van Til recalls that the early Berkouwer begins his discussion

22. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 44.

23. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 47.

of the problems in the Netherlands regarding historical criticism of Scripture by recalling Kuyper's and Bavinck's positions, and with respect to this point Van Til reasserts that Bavinck's view is opposite of the view proposed by the ethical theologians.²⁴ He argues, moreover, that the early Berkouwer defended Kuyper's and Bavinck's view regarding the mystery of Scripture.²⁵ Van Til notes that Berkouwer contrasts Barth's position with Kuyper's and that he also affirms "Bavinck's warning to the effect that the problem of Scripture criticism is not merely intellectual, but also ethical. The natural man takes offense at 'the Christ of the Scripture' and 'the Scripture of Christ.'" ²⁶ Satisfied that the early Berkouwer has championed the pure orthodoxy of Kuyper and Bavinck, Van Til therefore lauds his first book as "remarkable."²⁷

However, Berkouwer's second book on Scripture is a different story, according to Van Til. He laments Berkouwer's fall from Kuyper's and Bavinck's orthodox high ground to Barth's heterodox low ground:

In 1936, Berkouwer had professed that Barth offered a merely "formal sovereignty" of God. More recently, however, it is the orthodox view, that of Kuyper and Bavinck, which is supposed to be formal and static.²⁸

Moreover, Van Til is particularly perturbed that Berkouwer is using Van Til's own paragon of Reformed orthodoxy—Bavinck—to argue *against* the Reformed orthodox view of Scripture; specifically, Berkouwer employs Bavinck's warning

24. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 55; also cf. pp. 58-59. This is an example of why Van Til needed to substantiate Bavinck's critique of the ethical theologians in ch. 1; for, he employs Bavinck's formulation as a polemic against the followers of the ethical theologians.

25. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 57. However, Van Til provides no substantiating evidence for either (1) his summary of Kuyper's formulation of a "principle of absolute antithesis between the natural man and the redeemed man" (pp. 56-57) or (2) his concomitant assertion that Bavinck followed Kuyper's view of this absolute antithesis.

26. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 61-62; quote at p. 62.

27. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 62.

28. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 64.

to avoid viewing Scripture as a “code-book of articles” for this purpose, admits Van Til.²⁹ Therefore, Van Til’s high regard for Berkouwer’s first book turns to astonishment at his fall away from Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s positions in his second book:

We may well think of him as having undergone an “agonizing reappraisal” in his thinking, between his first and second work on Scripture, not as to suggest for a moment that he has personally rejected the Christ of Kuyper and Bavinck, but only that his second work, as it stands, is unintelligible except it be thought of as a reinterpretation of these men in terms of the activist principle of neo-orthodoxy, which is based on the activist philosophy of Kant.³⁰

Highlighting Bavinck once again as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy, Van Til recalls that in his first book Berkouwer had followed “in the footsteps of Calvin, Kuyper, and especially Bavinck. . . .”³¹ “Now everything has changed,” however, in Berkouwer’s second book.³²

Also, it is quite clear that everything has changed with respect to Van Til’s interpretation of Berkouwer’s work: Once Van Til sees that Berkouwer departs from Bavinck orthodoxy, Van Til repudiates Berkouwer’s theology. Hence despite his earlier remark that Berkouwer has not “personally rejected the Christ of Kuyper and Bavinck,” a few pages later Van Til levels the following totalizing repudiation against Berkouwer’s thought:

Only the traditional Reformed view, therefore, gives adequate expression to the exhaustively personal, i.e., covenantal, character between every human being in his relationship to every fact of the universe, and the triune God of Scripture. Thus, when Berkouwer thought that he had exchanged the “causal” framework of Dordt for the “personalist”

29. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 65.

30. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 69; also note the similar assessment at p. 71. Additionally, cf. *idem*, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 32.

31. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 73; emphasis added.

32. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 73.

framework of neo-orthodoxy, what he had actually done was to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage.”³³

This is an unseemly metaphor. For, read in a literal sense, this metaphor would imply that Berkouwer is either hated by God or rejected by God without hope for repentance. The only way to harmonize this hyperbolic *ad hominem* polemic with Van Til’s earlier assessment of Berkouwer’s faith in Christ is to consider the stronger statement a gross exaggeration. Surely, on this point Van Til has drifted again into rhetorical excess.

2.3. *Bavinck contra Berkouwer’s Followers*

Van Til labels Berkouwer’s followers “the *Cahiers* Men” since they published a series of pamphlets entitled, *Cahiers voor de Gemeente*. Throughout his analysis of this movement Van Til continues to use Kuyper, and especially Bavinck, as the criterion of Reformed orthodoxy. He critiques T. J. Baarda’s theology, for example, as having traded Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s formulations for “the Kantian scheme of the primacy of the practical reason.”³⁴ Van Til further critiques the *Cahiers* thinkers for rejecting the formal authority of Scripture. This position, according to Van Til, was repudiated long ago by Bavinck, and by resurrecting this view “these men have, to all intents and purposes, repudiated the position of Bavinck.”³⁵ Likewise, Van Til employs Bavinck’s theology as the criterion by which to reject the *Cahiers* theologians’ reinterpretation of the “human factor” of Scripture.³⁶ Notably, Van Til summarizes his entire polemic against the “*Cahiers*

33. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 83.

34. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 87.

35. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 90-91; quote at p. 91.

36. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 91.

Men” in terms of Bavinck’s theology:

Bavinck argued at length against the reduction of the idea of sin from the notion of enmity against God to the Roman Catholic notion of ontological poverty of being. Men hate Scripture as the Word of Christ, said Bavinck, because they hate Christ’s call to repentance heard in it.

In other words, Bavinck defended the notion of truth as being ethical because, with it, he defended the triune God of Scripture as the final reference point in all human predication. The ethical theologians (*Tethischen*) [*sic*] defended the notion that truth was ethical because they opposed the God-centered theology of Bavinck and were influenced by the man-centered philosophy of Kant.³⁷

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that throughout the book Van Til appropriates Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s theology as his paragons of Reformed orthodoxy. He uses Bavinck’s thought especially as his criterion for determining orthodoxy; for he considers only those theologians who agree with Bavinck’s formulations to be orthodox, and he condemns those who do not as heterodox.

2.4. Excursus: Bavinck contra Berkouwer in Van Til’s Other Writings

In addition to his critiques of Berkouwer and the “*Cahiers Men*” noted in the previous sections, Van Til polemicizes voluminously against Berkouwer’s theology in several additional writings.³⁸ While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze Van Til’s entire treatment of Berkouwer, it is fitting to adduce briefly two additional examples wherein Van Til uses Bavinck’s theology as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy and hence the criterion by which he judges Berkouwer’s later theology to be heterodox.

In the first place, within *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* Van Til polemicizes against Vatican II as follows: First, he states Bavinck’s interpretation as the

37. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 94.

38. See the references to Van Til’s voluminous polemics *contra* Berkouwer in chapter 1, §A, 3, above.

orthodox Reformed position;³⁹ Second, he presents Berkouwer's interpretation as a heterodox Reformed synthesis between neo-orthodox Protestantism and Roman Catholicism;⁴⁰ Third, he argues his own critiques against the documents of Vatican II.⁴¹ By sandwiching Berkouwer's view in between Bavinck's and his own, Van Til implicitly (1) contrasts Bavinck's orthodoxy with Berkouwer's heterodoxy and (2) bolsters his own view by presenting it as being in accord with Bavinck's pristine orthodoxy.

In the second place, throughout *The Sovereignty of Grace* Van Til's critique of the reappraisal of Dort along neo-orthodox lines in Berkouwer's later writings presupposes that Bavinck's theology is the criterion of Reformed orthodoxy. Van Til's critique has two parts: First, he demonstrates that the early Berkouwer admitted to following Bavinck's orthodox lead;⁴² Second, he rejects the later Berkouwer's reappraisal of Dort and argues that his later theology is not an organic development of Bavinck's thought but a heterodox departure from it.

Hence Van Til avers a Bavinck-or-Barth ultimatum:

The reader will note that at this stage of his thinking Berkouwer defends the neo-orthodox teleology of the Confession of 1967 and at the same time commends the orthodox teleology of Bavinck. Berkouwer's thinking passes back and forth between these two mutually exclusive teleologies as though they were friends, together opposing the formal view of some reactionary form of fundamentalism. Whoever says that Scripture must be related to Christ seems to speak the truth whether this Christ be the Christ of Scripture, whom Bavinck serves or the Christ-Event of Barth whom the neo-orthodox theologians serve.

It becomes increasingly clear, however, that Berkouwer, though seeking continuity with Bavinck and Calvin, in practice employs the teleology of neo-orthodoxy in order to escape synergism theology and

39. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 175-77.

40. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 177-86.

41. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 186-93.

42. Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 33, 37, 41, 45.

formalism in relation to Scripture.⁴³

Since the later Berkouwer appropriates Barth's neo-orthodoxy, Van Til asserts: "We shall therefore go back to Calvin, to Bavinck and to the earlier Berkouwer for help."⁴⁴

Furthermore, Van Til himself summarizes his main critique in this book in terms of Berkouwer's devolution from Bavinck's orthodoxy to Barth's heterodoxy:

I have been interested from the beginning in the new approach to theology in the Netherlands. In his day, Masselink criticized me for departing on relative points from Kuyper, Bavinck, and in particular Dr. Hepp. Now Berkouwer has departed further from these men than I have ever thought of doing, but no one in the Christian Reformed Church criticizes Berkouwer. . . . Of course, Berkouwer does not admit for one moment that he is involving himself in the approach of modern existentialism. However, even his friends are beginning to realize that he is seeking now to combine Barth and Bavinck, and that Barth is gaining on Bavinck.⁴⁵

In both of these books, therefore, Van Til consistently uses Bavinck's theology as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy by which he judges Berkouwer's thought to be heterodox.

3. Summary

Van Til's entire polemic throughout *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* turns upon the hinge of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. According to Van Til, the story of modern Reformed theology in the Netherlands is a story of devolution from Kuyper and Bavinck's orthodoxy to Barth's heterodox neo-

43. Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 77.

44. Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 55-56.

45. Van Til, "The Development of My Thinking," an unpublished letter to John Vander Stelt, 1968; Reproduced in Bristley, *Guide*, 14-17; quote at p. 16.

orthodoxy by means of G. C. Berkouwer's attempt to synthesize Bavinck's theology with Barth's. This attempted synthesis is an utter failure, according to Van Til; hence his vehement polemic.

This story is particularly perturbing to Van Til since, as we noted in chapter 1 above, (1) Van Til viewed his own life's work as that of carrying on Kuyper's antithetical vision and (2) Van Til's Alma Mater—Princeton Seminary—had already fallen prey to Barth's neo-orthodox theology. Van Til sees that the same devolution that happened at Princeton is now happening at *De Vrije Universiteit* in the chair of dogmatic theology—the very chair in which both Kuyper and Bavinck had sat! This chair is now occupied by G. C. Berkouwer, who, according to Van Til, is allowing Barth's theology to infiltrate *De Vrije Universiteit*. Therefore, in Van Til's view Berkouwer has become the mortal enemy not only of Kuyper's neo-Calvinist vision, but also of Bavinck's Reformed *Dogmatiek*.

Additionally, although throughout the book Van Til mentions Kuyper along with Bavinck, the majority of his polemical arguments are based upon Bavinck's theological formulations rather than Kuyper's. Thus, Van Til, acting as a self-styled guardian of Kuyper's antithesis, employs Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as his chief polemical sword against the novel "synthesis theology" that is invading the country of his birth.

B. Appropriations in *The Theology of James Daane*

In 1954 James Daane—who studied for his Th.D. under the supervision of G. C. Berkouwer at *De Vrije Universiteit*—published a polemic against Van Til's doctrine of common grace. "It is a peculiar circumstance," remarks Daane, "that

few, if indeed any, of the proponents of Van Til's thought claim to understand it."⁴⁶ Against this peculiarity Daane attempts in particular to demonstrate that Van Til's view of common grace is out of accord with the traditional view as found in the thought of Kuyper and Bavinck and in the Three Points of the 1924 Kalamazoo Synod of the Christian Reformed Church.⁴⁷

In 1959 Van Til published a reply to Daane's critique.⁴⁸ Van Til describes his reply as follows:

James Daane wrote a book in criticism of my views. I answered by a little book about his evidences. . . . My purpose in doing so was not so much to answer Daane as to point out to the Christian Reformed Church that to flirt with neo-orthodoxy is to play with fire.⁴⁹

Thus, rather than vindicating his own views directly, Van Til offers only an indirect vindication by means of a polemic against "the drift and direction" of Daane's entire theology.⁵⁰ The following analysis is limited to the several salient points of Van Til's counter-polemic in this book which evince appropriations of Bavinck's thought.⁵¹

In the first place, Van Til sets up his critique of Daane's "dynamic" view of Scripture by first asserting Bavinck's view as the criterion of a truly "dynamic" view, even translating a quotation from Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*:

So far from being static this view of Scripture is alone truly dynamic.

46. "Preface" in Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, n.p.

47. Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, 15-17.

48. Cf. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*.

49. Van Til, "The Development of My Thinking" in Bristley, *Guide*, 15.

50. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 21.

51. For Van Til's additional polemics against Daane's theology, cf. *The Defense of the Faith*, 6-7, 20-22, 43n49, 43-44n52, 58n16, 77n3, 89n41, 204-215, 395-408; *idem*, "Letter to James Daane," *The Reformed Journal* 6, no. 11 (December 1956): 20-21; James Daane, "Reply to Cornelius Van Til," *The Reformed Journal* 6, no. 11 (December 1956): 21-23; Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 363-365n25.

“Scripture is not a dry tale of an old chronicle, but it is the ever living youthful word which God at the present time and always sends out to his people. It is the ever continuing speech of God to us.... It is the *viva vox Dei epistola omnipotentis ad suam creaturam*” (Bavinck *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* I, p. 405). It is they who work on any other foundation than that of this Word who will ultimately end up with staticism.⁵²

He then implies that Daane’s view of Scripture is a devolution from Bavinck’s view, the lack of any references to Daane’s works notwithstanding.⁵³

In the second place, “following Kuyper and Bavinck” regarding the Bible’s self-authenticating authority,⁵⁴ Van Til alleges that Daane has deviated from the orthodox Reformed doctrine of God’s decree, a doctrine which Van Til views as a necessary correlate of Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture. “In other words,” alleges Van Til, “he rejects what Calvin, Hodge, Bavinck and Berkhof taught in plain terms on this point.”⁵⁵

In the third place, Van Til begins his response to Daane’s critique regarding the doctrine of the ontological trinity as an epistemological principle⁵⁶ by asserting that he has simply reiterated Bavinck’s doctrine of the trinity:

Actually there is nothing appreciably different in what I have said about the ontological trinity from what Berkhof and Bavinck have previously stated nor has Daane sought to prove that there is. In fact, I have not dealt with the subject other than to use what was already ascertained and established, especially by Bavinck, for apologetic purposes.⁵⁷

Van Til then levels a counter polemic against Daane’s position by adducing a series of quotations from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* in order “to indicate that Daane

52. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 22.

53. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 23.

54. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 23.

55. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 26.

56. Even though Van Til does not reference it explicitly, Daane’s critique comprises ch. 7 in Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, 100-111.

57. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 33.

would find no support in Bavinck for his contrast between the idea of the ontological trinity and his christological approach.”⁵⁸ He concludes his counter polemic by further adducing quotations from B. B. Warfield’s writings in order to show that “[Warfield] as well as Bavinck points out that only those who have deviated from sound theology have objected to the idea of the ontological trinity as being the basis of all theology.”⁵⁹ Van Til’s rejoinder on this point, therefore, is grounded predominantly upon Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy.

In the fourth place, Van Til accuses Daane’s view of election and reprobation to be Arminian rather than Reformed according to the criterion of Bavinck’s and Calvin’s orthodoxy. “It would clarify the air,” writes Van Til, “if Daane would tilt directly at Bavinck and Calvin. Is Daane with Pighius or is he with Calvin?”⁶⁰

In the fifth place, Van Til begins his chapter on supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism with this remark: “We turn to Herman Bavinck in order to note his analysis of the subject.”⁶¹ The entirety of the chapter is a synopsis of Bavinck’s formulations interspersed with criticisms against Daane’s alleged deviations from Bavinck’s orthodoxy. For example, after praising Bavinck’s “all-important”

58. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 34-35; quote at p. 35.

59. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 35-38; quote at pp. 35-36.

60. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 66.

61. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 81. *Idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 227, asserts (1) that within *The Theology of James Daane* he follows Bavinck’s formulation regarding double predestination and (2) that he is “following the lead of Bavinck” in asserting that the supralapsarian-infralapsarian distinction should not be carried on in modern theology. Regarding the latter assertion, however, Van Til misinterprets Bavinck’s nuanced discussion of the topic in two ways: (1) Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:180, 361-392, never asserts that the supralapsarian-infralapsarian distinction should be dropped from Reformed dogmatics; rather, he claims that neither the supra position nor the infra position *alone* can accurately present the richness of God’s decree; (2) Bavinck himself continues to employ this distinction throughout his dogmatics (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:180; *idem*, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:278, 564; *idem*, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 182, 278).

point regarding the unity of the infralapsarian and supralapsarian positions on the matter of God's sovereign control over all events, Van Til avers: "It is this basic Reformed position, common to the supra and the infra position, which Daane finds so objectionable."⁶² Similarly, regarding the question of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation, Van Til uses Bavinck's thought as his criterion of orthodoxy. "When Bavinck says that the first sin was in any case due to the sovereign will of God," writes Van Til, "Daane, in complete contradiction of this, says that Adam could have decided not to sin."⁶³

Moreover, three of Van Til's four rejoinders against Daane's view of election in Christ are restatements of Bavinck's theology.⁶⁴ For example, his second rejoinder is an explicit judgment against Daane's alleged deviation from Bavinck's historic Reformed orthodoxy:

(2) Bavinck himself, throughout his truly great work on dogmatics, constantly speaks of the object of election as being the *Christus mysticus*, Christ with his body the church.

We may therefore await the production of evidence on the part of Daane to prove that Berkhof, the adherents of 1924, or others have, in this respect, departed from Bavinck and the Reformed tradition.⁶⁵

In the sixth place, having presented a synopsis of Bavinck's orthodox view of election in chapter 6, Van Til then summarizes Karl Barth's heterodox view in chapter 7, the longest chapter in the book. The contrast of Barth's view with Bavinck's by means of juxtaposition is intentional; for, Van Til's purpose is to show that the source of Daane's theological aberrations is Barth's theology, and he seeks to call Daane back to the historic Reformed position as maintained by

62. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 86.

63. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 91.

64. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 92-94.

65. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 92; For all four points see pp. 92-94.

Bavinck:

Can he [i.e., Daane] show us how to be of service to modern theology in any other way than by following in the footsteps of Calvin, Dort, Bavinck and Berkhof; and telling men that there is no truly biblical view of the grace of God, unless it is based upon the sovereign God of Scripture who doeth among the armies of heaven and earth as he will?⁶⁶

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that throughout the book Van Til frequently appropriates Bavinck's theology as the orthodox criterion by which he judges Daane's views to be heterodox. The most obvious and extensive appropriations appear in the chapter on the trinity and in the chapter on lapsarianism.

C. Appropriations *contra* Karl Barth

Van Til's polemic against Karl Barth's alleged "new modernism" is as vehement as it is voluminous.⁶⁷ His categorical rejection of Barth's thought is well known in scholarship regarding the reception of Barth's theology in America.⁶⁸ What is not well known, however, is the fact that Van Til employs a Bavinck-vs.-Barth motif as one of his primary polemics against Barth's views.

66. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, 117. Even though herein Van Til mentions Calvin, Dort, and Berkhof in addition to Bavinck, the juxtaposition of this chapter and the previous chapter is a clear contrast between Barth's and Bavinck's views. Furthermore, throughout the entire book Van Til does not adduce any evidence from Berkhof's writings to support his polemic against Daane, nor does Van Til explicate the canons of Dort. He does, however, explicate Calvin's views in multiple places throughout the book.

67. See the references to Van Til's polemics *contra* Barth in chapter 1, §A, 3, above.

68. For older scholarship, see, e.g., T. F. Torrance, "Review of *The New Modernism* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1946), by Cornelius Van Til" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 19 (1947): 144-149; also cf. Alister E. McGrath, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Justification from an Evangelical Perspective," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 172n1. For recent scholarship, see Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 33-41; George Harinck, "'Give Us an American Abraham Kuyper': Dutch Calvinist Reformed Responses to the Founding of the Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (1998): 299-319; Gavin Ortlund, "Wholly Other or Wholly Given Over? What Van Til Missed in His Criticism of Barth," *Presbyterian* 35, no. 1 (2009): 35-52; Lewis, *Karl Barth in North America*, 33-67; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 28-30.

Although he does not appropriate Bavinck's thought to the same pervasive extent as is evident in the polemical writings examined above, Van Til nevertheless uses Bavinck's theology in the same manner, namely, as the criterion of Reformed orthodoxy by which to judge Barth's formulations as heterodox.

Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's theology *contra* Barth's can be seen in his two book-length rejoinders.

1. Appropriations in *The New Modernism*

In *The New Modernism*⁶⁹ Van Til uses Bavinck's thought only a few times, but always as a paragon of orthodoxy. In the first place, he begins the book with a passing reference to Bavinck as the paragon of traditional Reformed orthodoxy, an orthodoxy which, according to Van Til, is being attacked by Barth and Brunner more vociferously than by Roman Catholicism or modern Protestantism.⁷⁰ "Traditional orthodoxy," he writes,

and especially traditional Reformed theology [i.e., the theology represented by Herman Bavinck], seems to be, in the eyes of Barth and Brunner alike, the worst offender of the three.

In view of these facts, we naturally ask whether Barth and Brunner will not eventually join the forces of modern Protestantism in an all-out final offensive against the Reformed Faith.⁷¹

Van Til thus describes the inciting incident for his polemic as an attack on Reformed orthodoxy as represented by the modern paragon of Reformed orthodoxy—Herman Bavinck.

69. *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* is Van Til's first major publication. Published originally in 1946, Van Til released two subsequent editions in 1947 and 1972 respectively, both of which contained expanded material on Barth's theology. Cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1946.G, 1947.A, 1972.G.

70. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 1-2.

71. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 2.

In the second place, in reference to Barth's formulation of the doctrine of God's aseity, Van Til remarks that "it might even seem as though Barth's position on the aseity of God were identical with that of outstanding Reformed theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck."⁷² According to Van Til, however, the appearance is only formal:

Yet even the brief exposition of Barth's conception of the freedom of God that we have given so far, ought to be sufficient to convince us that Barth's view and that of these men are as divergent as they could possibly be.⁷³

Van Til's polemic here goes well beyond a single point regarding Barth's formulation of God's aseity; for, he further insists that the foundation of Kuyper's and Bavinck's entire theology (i.e., the distinction between the Creator and the creature) "would be," in Barth's view, "to hold to all that is evil in theology."⁷⁴ Van Til's critique, therefore, is intended to totally undermine Barth's entire doctrine of God vis-à-vis Kuyper's and Bavinck's orthodoxy.

In the third place, Van Til deems Barth's view of Holy Scripture to be a degradation of the classic Reformed view championed by Bavinck, among others:

And Barth wants, by all means, to interpret Christ in terms of the Bible. But what he means by the Bible is not what Luther and Calvin, Hodge and Warfield, Kuyper and Bavinck meant by the Bible.⁷⁵

Even though there are only three brief appropriations in this book, each one of them is an important part of Van Til's polemic. Most notably, Van Til uses Bavinck as his paragon of orthodoxy at the beginning of the book in order to

72. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 217.

73. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 217.

74. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 218.

75. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 483.

insinuate a that Barth's thought is a direct contradiction of Reformed orthodoxy as represented by Bavinck. Therefore, we find here, albeit only in seed form, the polemic that Van Til later expands and levels against Berkouwer in *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* as noted above—Barth's neo-orthodoxy is the antipode of Bavinck's Reformed orthodoxy.

2. Appropriations in *Christianity and Barthianism*

After spending six chapters within *Christianity and Barthianism* on summarizing aspects of Barth's thought, Van Til turns in the seventh toward adducing evidence from orthodox Reformed theologians that proves Barth's theology to be heterodox. The first theologian Van Til uses in this polemical manner is Herman Bavinck. He argues that the orthodox view of Holy Scripture (i.e., the view represented by Bavinck) understands "Scripture as directly identical with the Word of God."⁷⁶ According to Van Til, Barth's "activist view of revelation" is out of accord with the orthodox view, and thus, by implication, Bavinck's view.

"That the Reformed view of Scripture," continues Van Til, "is itself imbedded in and is an expression of Reformed theology as a whole was well expressed by Herman Bavinck and by Abraham Kuyper."⁷⁷ He then adduces five quotes from Bavinck (and an affirmation that Kuyper's view is the same as Bavinck's) as sufficient warrant for interpreting Barth's view of Scripture as undoubtedly heterodox despite its *prima facie* resemblance to orthodoxy.⁷⁸ "Try as they would,"

76. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 117.

77. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 118.

78. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 118-20.

concludes Van Til,

Reformed theologians could not limit the dispute between themselves and Barth to a question of exegesis. Barth might well have the correct exegesis on certain passages of Scripture, and Reformed theologians may well have given a wrong exegesis of certain passages of Scripture. Even so, between historic Reformed theology and Barth there lies a basically different approach to the whole idea of Scripture. And with it there is a basically different idea of the Christ of the Scripture.⁷⁹

Van Til therefore presents the orthodox Reformed response to Barth's theology as primarily a contrast between Bavinck's and Barth's views, and he understands this contrast to be categorically antithetical.

Van Til employs this Bavinck-vs.-Barth motif consistently throughout the remainder of the book, giving the impression that there is no agreement between the two thinkers on any subject whatsoever. This antithetical motif is evident in the following examples.

2.1. Bavinck contra Barth's View of Scripture

Van Til argues that Berkouwer's assessment of Barth's view of Scripture is parallel to his own antithetical assessment. Van Til's synopsis of Berkouwer's criticism proceeds in three steps: First, Berkouwer alleges that Barth's view of Scripture is subjectivist.⁸⁰ Second, Berkouwer judges that the several attempts to escape subjectivism made by modern theologians, such as, Ritschl, Hermann, Haering, Stephan, Frank, Wobbermin, and Ihmels also fall prey to the same

79. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 120. The "Reformed theologians" Van Til has in mind are the three theologians whose critiques of Barth's theology he summarizes throughout the remainder of the chapter: G. C. Berkouwer (pp. 120–135), Klaas Runia (pp. 136–138), and Klaas Schilder (pp. 139–145). On Van Til's personal relationship with Schilder and his reliance upon Schilder's critical assessment of Barth's theology, see Harinck, "'Give Us an American Abraham Kuyper'"; *idem*, "'How can an elephant understand a whale and vice versa?': About the Dutch Origins of Cornelius Van Til's Appraisal of Karl Barth," n.d. (publication forthcoming (Eerdmans)).

80. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 120–121.

subjectivism found in Barth's view, despite *prima facie* similarities with Reformed orthodoxy.⁸¹ "Berkouwer soon makes plain," asserts Van Til, recapitulating his own antithetical view, "that for all the striking similarity of words between Bavinck and the theologians of which he speaks, there is a basic difference of meaning between them."⁸² Third, Berkouwer confirms his allegation that Barth's view is subjectivist via a detailed analysis of Barth's view.⁸³

2.2. *Bavinck as The Criterion of Reformed Orthodoxy*

Van Til's synopsis of Berkouwer's criticism against Barth's view of Scripture explicitly presupposes Kuyper's and Bavinck's formulations as the criterion of orthodoxy. After showing that Berkouwer quotes F. W. Grosheirde regarding the ultimate question of final authorities—whether God or man will have the last word—he avers the following ultimatum:

Thus it is that Berkouwer, with Grosheide, holds to a view of Scripture similar to that of Kuyper and Bavinck. Only if one holds to this view of Scripture does one have the true Christ. Only if one holds to this view of Scripture does one have a truly objective revelation. Only if one holds to this view of Scripture can one escape subjectivism, projectionism, and therefore illusionism.⁸⁴

This ultimatum reappears later on in Van Til's synopsis. After summarizing Berkouwer's contrast between Barth's view of Scripture and Kuyper's and

81. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 121-23.

82. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 123.

83. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 125-38.

84. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 124. Compare Van Til's later expansion of G. C. Berkouwer's criticisms of Barth's theology at p. 135: "It is therefore in line with Berkouwer's criticism to say that two mutually exclusive views of Scripture involve two mutually exclusive views of Christ, and therewith of God and of man. And only the Christ of the Scriptures rather than the Christ of Barth can save us from subjectivism and illusionism. With all due credit to the influence of the Scriptures and of the Christ of the Scriptures upon Barth's work, it must still be set diametrically over against the Scriptures and the Christ of Reformed theology and of historic Christianity."

Bavinck's views,⁸⁵ Van Til concludes:

It appears then that according to the arguments of the three books discussed, Barth's rejection of the traditional Reformed doctrine of Scripture entails his reinterpretation along activist lines of all the articles of the Christian faith.⁸⁶

Thus he reasons that to disagree with Kuyper and Bavinck is to depart from Reformed orthodoxy.

The polemical benefit Van Til receives from mentioning that Berkouwer interprets Barth's view to be a departure from Kuyper's and Bavinck's theology is that he demonstrates that he is not the only one who is using these two theologians as criteria of Reformed orthodoxy. This benefit likely explains why Van Til mentions their names again, albeit only in passing, in a similar passage wherein he summarizes Berkouwer's critique of Barth's doctrine of providence.⁸⁷ His insinuation is that Barth's view is a heterodox degradation from Kuyper's and Bavinck's orthodoxy. Furthermore, Van Til mentions Bavinck in passing in another passage wherein he summarizes Berkouwer's criticism of Barth's view of election.⁸⁸ In this passage too Van Til's intent is clearly implied, namely, to demonstrate that Barth's heterodox theology is out of accord with Bavinck's pristine orthodoxy.

This implicit Bavinck-vs.-Barth polemic is drawn out explicitly in another passage wherein Van Til summarizes Berkouwer's critique of Barth's formulation of humanity's fall into sin. "In the present work," writes Van Til,

Berkouwer shows that, according to Barth, the belief in the historical fall

85. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 133-34.

86. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 134.

87. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 153.

88. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 167.

also constitutes an attack on the true idea of grace in Christ. The difference between Calvin and Bavinck, on the one hand, and Barth, on the other hand, is again shown to be one as deep as is possible. These are two mutually exclusive views of grace competing with one another. And this difference rests upon a basic difference in the view of God implied in both of these positions.⁸⁹

According to Van Til, therefore, Berkouwer alleges that a categorical antithesis exists between Bavinck's and Barth's positions not only on the Christological and anthropological implications arising from humanity's fall into sin, but also on the doctrine of God.

In another chapter, moreover, Van Til explicitly employs Bavinck's theology (along with Berkouwer's), albeit only in passing, as a criterion of Reformed orthodoxy against the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Against Balthasar's description of Barth's dialectical formulation of the principle of theology, Van Til rejoins: "If we apply *the criterion of Bavinck or of Berkouwer*, we shall have to say that here two forms of subjectivism are to be compared with one another."⁹⁰ He thus rejects both the theology of Barth and the theology of Balthasar on the grounds that their views of revelation are subjective when measured against Bavinck's and Berkouwer's objective formulations.

2.3. *Bavinck contra Barth's View of Christ*

"Barth's view of Christ," asserts Van Til boldly, "does not seem to be anything like the Reformation view of Christ."⁹¹ He defends this assertion in the following manner: First, Van Til summarizes several basic Christological points

89. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 159.

90. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 324; emphasis added.

91. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 216.

from Bavinck's thought, referencing Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* four times.⁹² Second, he avers, "On Barth's view, this simple picture of the biblical view of sin and its origin as presented by Bavinck falls away."⁹³ Third, he cites Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* three more times in an effort to summarize the Reformed view of sin's origin and nature.⁹⁴ Fourth, he cites several extensive passages from the Canons of the Synod of Dort regarding predestination.⁹⁵

Fifth, he returns to Bavinck's theology and provides a lengthy synopsis of Bavinck's views regarding the eternal trinitarian ground of redemption in the *pactum salutis* and the temporal outworking of the *pactum* through the covenant of grace.⁹⁶ Van Til particularly highlights the fact that, in Bavinck's view, Christ is central to the story of redemption both in God's eternal decree and in the temporal outworking of that decree. He thus notes, "It is all important, says Bavinck, to hold that neither in the counsel of peace nor in the covenant of grace must Christ even for a moment be thought of as separate from his own. In both it is the *Christus mysticus*."⁹⁷ Nearly his entire presentation of the Reformed doctrine of Christ, therefore, is a synopsis of Bavinck's theology. Throughout this fifth section alone Van Til references Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* eighteen times, and he even translates several brief passages from the *Dogmatiek* into English.⁹⁸

Van Til's rhetoric against Barth's theology is calculated to maintain a stiff antithesis between Barth' and Bavinck's views. At one point in this fifth section,

92. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 216-17, 217nn10-13.

93. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 217.

94. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 217, 217nn14-16.

95. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 218-20.

96. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 220-21.

97. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 222.

98. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 220-24, 220-23nn29-46.

for example, Van Til pauses his synopsis of Bavinck's presentation of the *pactum salutis* in order to contrast Barth's views:

It is in this manner that we can see something of the nature of the triumph of grace as Reformed theologians, following Calvin, have seen it. This grace is free or sovereign. The three persons of the trinity are from all eternity equally involved in its conception and in its execution. The triune God creates freely. There is therefore no power of any sort that stands over against him to resist his work. . . . There is no power of evil which is original. There is no non-being that stands over against being as a reactionary force. . . . There is no *Nihil* that has independent power over against God.⁹⁹

Several polemical insinuations are embedded herein: (1) Van Til levels this critique immediately after summarizing Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis*. Oddly, however, Van Til makes no reference to Barth's vehement rejection of the *pactum*.¹⁰⁰ His insinuation, therefore, is that, *contra* Barth's rejection of the *pactum* along with its underlying trinitarian distinction between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra*, the triumph of grace is only possible in Protestant theology by following Bavinck's formulation wherein (a) the *consilium Dei* regarding redemption is understood as an *opus Dei ad intra* in the form of the *pactum salutis*, and (b) the execution of this *consilium* in time is viewed as an *opus Dei ad extra* in the form of the *foedus gratiae*.¹⁰¹ (2) His "triumph of grace" language is likely a veiled reference to the title of G. C. Berkouwer's book, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*,¹⁰² which Van Til references extensively in order to support

99. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 221-22.

100. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), IV/1:65.

101. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker Books, 2006), s.vv., *consilium Dei*, *foedus gratiae*, *opera Dei ad extra*, *opera Dei ad intra*, *pactum salutis*.

102. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956); a translation of *idem*, *De triomf der genade in de theologie van Karl Barth* (Kampen: Kok, 1954).

his own polemic against Barth's views.¹⁰³ Thus a double entendre appears herein connoting both (a) the failure of Barth's theology to produce an actual triumph of grace (in contrast with Bavinck's successful formulation of the triumph of grace via the *pactum salutis* and *foedus gratiae*) and (b) a polemical double whammy from not one but two rejoinders—Berkouwer's and Van Til's. (3) Van Til's remark, "as Reformed theologians, following Calvin, have seen it," implies that Barth does *not* follow Calvin and thus is not in accord with historic Reformed orthodoxy. (4) Van Til's language about there existing no ultimate power of evil, no ultimate non-being, and especially no *Nihil*, is a direct polemic against Barth's formulations regarding "nothingness" (i.e., *das Nichtige*) within the doctrine of creation, despite his lack of references to Barth's writings.¹⁰⁴

In light of these several polemical insinuations and explicit allusions it is evident that Van Til's rhetoric is calculated toward achieving his underlying aim, namely, presenting Barth's theology as wholly heterodox, especially when it is viewed in contrast with Bavinck's orthodoxy. Thus, notwithstanding his own admissions that his synopses of Bavinck's and Dort's formulations of the person and work of Christ are the "barest outline" and a "brief sketch" of "a Protestant view of Christianity,"¹⁰⁵ Van Til categorically rejects Barth's theology as out of accord with Protestant orthodoxy. "Barth's views of the person and work of Christ," he concludes, "are, at every point, the antipodes of this historic

103. E.g., Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 363-65n25; *idem*, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 33, 42, 111-13, 134-35, 169-71.

104. See §50, "God and Nothingness," in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3:289-368; cf. Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 100-102.

105. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 224.

Protestant view.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, Barth’s views are at every point the antipodes of Bavinck’s.

2.4. Excursus: Barth pro Bavinck

Although a full analysis of Van Til’s various polemics against Barth’s theology is beyond the scope of this thesis, his repeated insistence that Barth’s thought is “at every point” antithetical to Bavinck’s theology creates a problem for his own polemic which ought to be mentioned briefly; for, Van Til’s Bavinck-vs.-Barth motif presupposes that Barth’s theology reciprocates an antithetical posture toward Bavinck’s thought. In actuality, however, rather than viewing Bavinck’s theology as the categorical antipode of his own, Barth positively appropriates several insights from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek*. John Vissers has recently analyzed Barth’s appropriations of Bavinck’s thought,¹⁰⁷ and he presents the following salient observations.

In the first place, Barth viewed Bavinck and Kuyper as “theologians who had style or class,”¹⁰⁸ and he read Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* during his preparations for his first lectures in dogmatics.¹⁰⁹ “Despite the fact that some Dutch Neo-Calvinists sought to use Bavinck against Barth to bolster their critique,” writes Vissers *contra* Van Til’s *Christianity and Barthianism*, “I argue that Barth himself never quite saw Bavinck in that light. Bavinck represented, for Barth, a deep and rich

106. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 224.

107. John Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 79-86.

108. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 79.

109. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 79-80.

expression of Reformed theology.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, according to Vissers, Barth’s general attitude toward Bavinck’s theology is appreciative rather than antithetical.

In the second place, Barth appropriates Bavinck’s thought seven times in the first volume of his *Göttingen Dogmatics*.¹¹¹ Barth’s definition of dogmatics and his rejection of the anthropocentric interpretation of Reformed theology, for example, derive from Bavinck’s thought.¹¹² The most notable of these seven appropriations is Barth’s quip regarding the ground of theology—*Deus dixit*; for, even though “Barth does not share Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture,” writes Vissers, “he does share Bavinck’s fundamental affirmation concerning revelation and the knowledge of God . . . namely, that in revelation God shares God’s self-knowledge with us.”¹¹³ Accordingly, Barth’s hallmark phrase—*Deus dixit*—is an appropriation of Bavinck’s earlier formulation.¹¹⁴

In the third place, within the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth both lauds Bavinck’s formulation of the doctrine of the trinity and seeks to go beyond it by giving even more prominence to the trinity.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, in both works Barth repositions the doctrine within the locus on prolegomena rather than following Bavinck’s classical arrangement of the doctrine under the *locus de Deo*.¹¹⁶ According to Vissers, Barth saw his rearrangement as more

110. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 80.

111. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 80n7.

112. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 80-81.

113. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 81.

114. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 81-82.

115. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” 82-84.

116. E.g., Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1:295-304, presents five reasons for considering the trinity within prolegomena (i.e., in Barth’s terms, within “The Revelation of God”), and he cites Bavinck approvingly at p. 302. Contrast Bavinck’s view: Although not referring to exactly the

befitting the ontological priority of the trinity in relation to humanity's response to divine revelation—just as ontology precedes epistemology, so the trinity should precede all other dogmatic *loci*.¹¹⁷

There is an intriguing irony in Barth's expansion upon Bavinck's position on this point *vis-à-vis* Van Til's polemics against Barth's theology; for, Van Til himself reverses Bavinck's order and presents the doctrine of the trinity *before* the doctrine of God's communicable attributes.¹¹⁸ Given our earlier observations that within *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til closely follows Bavinck's dogmatic formulations, it is surprising that he deviates from Bavinck's position. Although Van Til does not provide any reasons for this reorganization himself, William Edgar suggests that Van Til's rearrangement is designed to give preeminence to the ontological trinity viewed as the epistemological presupposition of all predication.¹¹⁹ Therefore, it is ironic that Van Til makes the same theological move *mutatis mutandis* as does his *bête noire*: Whereas Barth rearranges Bavinck's placement of the trinity in order to emphasize its ontological priority, Van Til rearranges Bavinck's placement in order to emphasize the trinity's epistemological priority.¹²⁰

same reasons presented by Barth for explicating the trinity within prolegomena, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:109-10, rejects the trinitarian schema as an organizing principle for dogmatics. Furthermore, Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 149-150, argues that in dogmatics it is preferable for the doctrines of God's essence and attributes to be treated before the doctrine of the trinity.

117. Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," 82-83.

118. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 348-397. Compare the arrangement in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:178-334, and note Bavinck's argument that the divine essence and attributes ought to be treated before the trinity (pp. 149-150).

119. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 348n1.

120. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung

In the fourth place, Barth extols Bavinck's presentation of the incomprehensibility of God. According to Vissers, Barth particularly appreciates the fact that, in Bavinck's view, incomprehensibility plays a fundamental role in the entire epistemological relationship between God and man.¹²¹ Ironically, Van Til's own insistence upon the incomprehensibility of God is also rooted in Bavinck's formulation, as we noted above with respect to Van Til's book, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*.

In light of these four examples it is evident that Van Til's Bavinck-vs.-Barth motif is one-sided polemical rhetoric. Vissers demonstrates that, regardless of the significant dogmatic differences between Barth and Bavinck, Barth appropriates Bavinck's thought positively in several places throughout the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the *Church Dogmatics*.¹²² Van Til simply omits this fact. "In short, and at least on the basis of reading Barth," Vissers concludes, "it is difficult to see the stark divide between Barth and Bavinck that is represented by someone such as Cornelius Van Til who sets Bavinck's orthodoxy over against Barth's modernism."¹²³

D. Appropriation in *Jerusalem and Athens*

"I use Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* as my source of information," begins Van Til in part one of his two-part rejoinder to John

Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 30, notes several unwitting similarities between Van Til's and Barth's formulations of key doctrinal themes, including the following: "both made the doctrine of the Trinity their key presupposition."

121. Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," 84-85.

122. Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," 86.

123. Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," 86.

Warwick Montgomery's criticisms of his apologetic method.¹²⁴ Specifically, Van Til relies upon Bavinck's explication of the Reformed maxim, *finitum non est capax infiniti*, in order to confute Montgomery's allegedly Lutheran interpretation of it following Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*. Though Van Til does not provide any specific references to Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, it is likely that he has in mind both Bavinck's epistemological¹²⁵ and his Christological¹²⁶ uses of this maxim; for, he levels both epistemological and Christological critiques against Montgomery's position.¹²⁷ Therefore, within this brief rejoinder Van Til explicitly appropriates Bavinck's theology as the criterion of orthodoxy upon the basis of which he judges Montgomery's thought to be heterodox.

E. Summary

Although in some places throughout these polemics Van Til mentions not only Bavinck's thought but also Kuyper's and Berkouwer's theology as criteria of Reformed orthodoxy, his primary paragon is Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. For, as we have seen, the entire structure of Van Til's lengthy polemic throughout *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* presupposes Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy. Likewise, in *The Theology of James Daane* Van Til frequently pits Daane's allegedly heterodox views against Bavinck's orthodox positions. Furthermore, throughout his voluminous polemics against Karl Barth's

124. Cornelius Van Til, "Reply to Once Upon an A Priori . . .," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 397.

125. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:309-310.

126. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

127. Van Til, "Reply to Once Upon an A Priori . . .," 397-398, 402-403.

neo-orthodox theology, Van Til explicitly employs a Bavinck-vs.-Barth motif, and at one point he even expressly admits to using Bavinck's (and Berkouwer's) theology as the criterion by which to judge Barth's theology as heterodox. Moreover, in his response to Montgomery in *Jerusalem and Athens*, Van Til expressly states that he uses Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as the source of his polemic against Montgomery's position.

For all of these reasons the answer to the question with which we began this chapter—whether Van Til uses Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy by which he determines whether other Reformed theologians are orthodox or heterodox—is therefore a patent affirmative.

CHAPTER V.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN DEFECTU ET IN EXCESSU* (PART 1): DIALECTICAL APPROPRIATIONS OF BAVINCK'S *DOGMATIEK*

Thus far we have surveyed Van Til's positive appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*. We have examined these appropriations from three perspectives—formally (or structurally), materially, and polemically—and from all three viewpoints we have seen that Van Til appropriates from Bavinck's thought not occasionally but pervasively. We suggested accordingly that Van Til's first presupposition be emended to clarify the fact that when Van Til asserts that he presupposes Reformed dogmatics for his Reformed apologetics, it specifically Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* that he primarily presupposes. In other words, Van Til's Reformed apologetics presupposes Bavinck's Reformed dogmatics to such an extent that his apologetics is nearly unintelligible without Bavinck's dogmatics.

For this reason the final aspect of Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought which we will examine in this essay—his totalizing critiques of the patent "scholasticism" in Bavinck's theological formulations—leads us to a perplexing, twofold dialectical tension with respect to Van Til's presupposition.

In the first place, since he blatantly and pervasively appropriates from Bavinck's theological formulations, Van Til's totalizing critiques against Bavinck's "scholasticism" are not only odd, but also formally self-contradictory.

To borrow one of Van Til's favorite metaphors,¹ for him to level totalizing critiques against Bavinck's Reformed dogmatics is like the little apologist-girl who slaps her dogmatician-daddy in the face—*all the while being held firmly by her daddy*; for, if Van Til's allegations against Bavinck's theology are valid, then he risks undercutting his own polemical appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* surveyed in chapter 4 above. His theological opponents could simply use Van Til's critiques against Bavinck as their rejoinder against Van Til's employment of Bavinck's thought as the paragon of Reformed orthodoxy. Additionally, by criticizing Bavinck's theology so strongly Van Til risks undercutting his positive presentation of Reformed dogmatics as noted in chapter 3 above. Hence the first dialectical tension: How hard does Van Til want to slap Bavinck in the face at the risk of undercutting both his polemics against neo-orthodox theology and his positive presentation of Reformed dogmatics?

In the second place, Van Til's critique of the "scholasticism" in Bavinck's thought is unoriginal in two senses. First, in terms of its material content, Van Til's critique is a direct appropriation—without citation—of Herman Dooyeweerd's criticism of the scholasticism in Bavinck's thought (along with the scholasticism in Abraham Kuyper's and Jan Woltjer's thought). Second, in terms of its form, Van Til's critique is simply one iteration of the same bipolar polemic that he levels against Kuyper, Berkouwer, and Dooyeweerd, namely, that there are two streams running through the thought of these theologians: a Reformed

1. Cornelius Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism*, International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Philosophical and Historical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964), 147-48; *idem*, *Essays on Christian Education* (Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1971), 89; *idem*, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 98, 403; Eric D. Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895-1987* (Chicago: Olive Tree Communications, 1995), 15, 23.

(i.e., antithetical) stream and a scholastic (i.e., synthetical) stream. Hence the second dialectical tension: On the one hand Van Til presents himself as the American guardian of the neo-Calvinist antithesis, but on the other hand he criticizes the very theological wells from which he draws his neo-Calvinist dogmatic water as having been poisoned by scholasticism.²

Our analysis of this twofold dialectical tension regarding Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought will proceed in two steps. First, in the present chapter we will survey Van Til's various criticisms of Bavinck in order to locate the crux of the critiques and to elucidate the dialectical nature of the critiques. Second, in the following chapter we will demonstrate that Van Til's "scholasticism" polemic is an appropriation both of Herman Dooyeweerd's definition of scholasticism and of Dooyeweerd's application of this definition *contra* neo-Calvinist theology. Then, based upon our findings regarding the nature and the sources of Van Til's criticisms, we will argue that the critiques are invalid due to Van Til's misguided dialectical, idealistic reconstruction of Bavinck's thought.

A. Van Til's Critiques of Bavinck's Thought

1. Dialectical Interpretations of Van Til's Criticisms

Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck's theology and the wider neo-Calvinist theological movement spearheaded by Abraham Kuyper are well known in the Copernican line of Van Til scholarship that was introduced in chapter 1 above. Specifically, self-styled "Van Tilian" scholars frequently portray their master as a

² Both of these points will be demonstrated in chapter 6 below.

veritable Copernicus who revolutionized Christian apologetics *specifically by purging the scholasticism of his Reformed predecessors* and hence producing for the first time ever a truly Reformed approach to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Such is the case, for example, with Greg Bahnsen's interpretation of Van Til's "inward" criticisms of "the teachings . . . of Dutch Reformed authors" such as Bavinck.³ Furthermore, K. Scott Oliphint appropriates Van Til's criticisms of the scholasticism in Bavinck's formulations of epistemological realism and argues that

. . . there is in Herman Bavinck's otherwise most useful analysis of epistemology and theological prolegomena a viral infection—call it Bavinck's bug—that, if it spreads, will serve to undermine the basic foundation of his own Reformed theology.⁴

William's Dennison's remark exemplifies such Copernican interpretations of Van Til's criticisms of the scholasticism in Bavinck's thought:

As most Van Tilians realize, Van Til fought diligently to purge the Reformed tradition from the remnants of scholasticism which remained in the thought of Old Princeton, Kuyper, and Bavinck.⁵

Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck are therefore a part of the larger hero story purported by the Copernican interpretation of Van Til wherein he purportedly saves the entire Reformed tradition from the wiles of scholasticism.

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 13-14. Bahnsen lists Van Til's main criticisms of Bavinck at p. 14n42, yet he makes no attempt to analyze them.

4. K. Scott Oliphint, "The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 201; cf. the expanded version of this article in *idem*, "Bavinck's Realism, The Logos Principle, and Sola Scriptura," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 359-90.

5. William D. Dennison, "Analytic Philosophy and Van Til's Epistemology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 55. Compare Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 13-16, 542. Contrast the more nuanced, critical assessment of John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 339-52, and the non-revolutionary, albeit too brief, assessment of John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, *American Reformed Biographies* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 56.

Not every interpretation of Van Til's critiques of scholasticism follows the Copernican approach, however. Most notably, as we saw in chapter 1 above, Brian Mattson has recently analyzed Van Til's various critiques of Bavinck at some length and has concluded that they are largely superficial, misdirected, and hence invalid.⁶ Additionally, William Masselink argues that, far from trimming select scholastic twigs from the Reformed theological tree, Van Til, insofar as he makes common cause with the "reconstructionists," aims his anti-scholastic axe at the very roots of neo-Calvinist theology (i.e., Kuyper, Bavinck, and Valentine Hepp (1879–1950)):

Instead of reconstruction, we seem to face some destruction. Instead of relieving the "Kuyper tree of some unhealthy twigs," to use Schilder's phraseology, they [i.e., the "reconstructionists," including Schilder, Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, and Van Til⁷] have, according to my thinking, severed some of the roots upon which the life of the tree depends. Instead of removing a few loose shingles from the roof of the calvinistic structure of science, they have, I am afraid, dislodged or attempted to dislodge some of the foundation stones upon which the whole building rests.⁸

Two nearly opposite approaches to Van Til's criticisms are therefore evident in the scholarship. On the one hand, the Copernican scholars hold up these criticisms as the pinnacle of Van Til's Copernican revolution, as if Van Til saved Reformed theology in general and of Bavinck's theology in particular from scholasticism. On the other hand, at least two scholars find Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck's thought to be less than convincing. This dialectical tension in the

6. Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 111-127.

7. William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace: A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith Over Against the Theology and Philosophy of the So-called "Reconstructionist" Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 12.

8. William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, 15. Masselink views Van Til's apologetics as a "departure from Machen's and Warfield's apologetics as well as from Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp. . ." (p. 13).

secondary scholarship mirrors the dialectal tension evident in Van Til's simultaneous pervasive appropriations and totalizing criticisms of Bavinck's thought.

Since Van Til's main criticisms of Bavinck's thought have been treated at length by Mattson, there is no need for a detailed analysis of every point of the various criticisms. However, Mattson's analysis needs to be expanded in several ways. First, Mattson does not cover all of Van Til's criticisms. Arguably, he omits the two most important sources of Van Til's criticisms: (1) *Common Grace and the Gospel* and (2) *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*; for, within these works Van Til provides clues to the motivation behind his criticisms. Second, although Mattson briefly analyzes Van Til's review of R. H. Bremmer's first book on Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, he omits Van Til's review of Bremmer's second book, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*. As will be demonstrated below, due to this omission Mattson draws a false conclusion on an important point of Van Til's analysis of Bavinck's thought. Third, Mattson does not analyze the crux of *all* of Van Til's criticisms against Bavinck's theological and epistemological formulations. Beyond the the obvious fact *that* Van Til misreads and misrepresents Bavinck's thought at several points, much more needs to be said about *why* he criticizes Bavinck's thought in such a perfunctory manner and *why* he chooses the topics of *principia* and epistemology as the main heads for his critiques. Mattson helpfully and correctly elucidates several aspects of the *that*, but he sheds little light on the *why*. Therefore, we must first survey the full scope of Van Til's criticisms before we can attempt to shed

light on *why* Van Til levels these criticisms in the first place.

2. Criticisms in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*⁹

“Herman Bavinck has given to us,” writes Van Til at the beginning of the chapter that is devoted to criticizing Herman Bavinck’s and Valentine Hepp’s formulations of theological epistemology,

the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times. In this chapter we wish to note something of the breadth and depth of Bavinck’s presentation, and then point out where we believe he might have gone somewhat further than he has along the path that he has laid out for us.¹⁰

Van Til proceeds to praise Bavinck’s insistence upon a threefold *principia* for dogmatics: (1) God is the sole source of human knowledge, (2) Holy Scripture is the sole external principle of theology, and (3) believing reason is the sole internal principle of theology.¹¹ Yet, this praise serves as the *terminus a quo* for Van Til’s criticisms; for, he argues that Bavinck contradicts his own *principia* in several ways.¹² According to Van Til, Bavinck’s catalog of self-contradictions includes the following metaphysical formulations: (1) Bavinck fails to escape Thomas Aquinas’ influence with respect to realism, and Bavinck thus falls prey to appealing “to facts as though they were brute facts when it comes to the formulation of a theory of metaphysics.”¹³ (2) Bavinck’s critique of idealism fails to go far enough; for, since he “does not tell us that the basis of his criticism is the

9. Cf. Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck,” 123-27.

10. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 89.

11. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89-91.

12. Van Til repeats this self-contradiction argument against Bavinck elsewhere. E.g., see *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 20.

13. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 92.

presupposition of the self-existent God,"¹⁴ and since he approvingly cites a quip by Aquinas regarding knowledge of heavenly things, Bavinck falls prey to both an anti-Christian, "Aristotelian notion of gradation in the created universe" and an anti-Christian "Greek depreciation of the things of the sense world."¹⁵ (3) By following the metaphysical realism of Aquinas and Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676), Bavinck fails "to distinguish carefully a Christian epistemology from the non-Christian epistemology."¹⁶ (4) Likewise, with respect to scholasticism in general, Bavinck fails to reject "its principle of commingling Aristotelianism with Christian principles."¹⁷ Thus Bavinck's formulation of "moderate realism" is "not a specifically Christian position based upon the presupposition of the existence of the God of Scripture."¹⁸

In addition to these four arguments against Bavinck's metaphysical formulations, Van Til continues his catalog of criticisms with the following allegations against what he views as "the weakest point"¹⁹ in Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, namely, the self-contradictions in Bavinck's epistemological formulations: (1) On the one hand, Bavinck roots human knowledge in the Logos of creation. Yet, on the other hand, Bavinck follows Thomas Aquinas who "trimmed Aristotle's principles down but did not reject the foundation on which they were built."²⁰ Bavinck is thus guilty of mixing pagan Greek philosophy with Christian theology. (2) With respect to natural reason Bavinck follows Aquinas'

14. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 92.

15. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 92-93; quotes at p. 93.

16. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 94.

17. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 94.

18. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 95.

19. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 95.

20. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 95-96; quote at p. 96.

formulation of knowing *per participationem*—a formulation that “has not cut itself free from its monistic origin in Platonic Aristotelian thought.” Hence Bavinck falls prey to “the half-Christian, half-Greek speculation of Thomas.”²¹

3. Criticisms in *The Defense of the Faith*²²

Similar to his critiques in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, the structure of Van Til’s criticisms against Bavinck’s thought in *The Defense of the Faith* proceeds from praise to polemic. The praise part can be seen, for example, in Van Til’s summary of the first section of the book wherein he lauds Bavinck’s formulation of the Reformed worldview (along with Hodge’s and Warfield’s):

It is on the basis of the work of such men as Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, and B. B. Warfield, to mention no others, that we have formulated the broad outline of the Reformed life and world view. It is only by the help of such men that we have been enabled to attain to anything like a consistent Protestantism.²³

The praise is further evident in a similar passage wherein Van Til appropriates Bavinck’s thought (along with Hodge’s, Warfield’s, and Kuyper’s) as a polemic against Roman Catholic and Arminian theology:

The one great defect of the Roman Catholic and the Arminian view is, as noted, that it ascribes ultimacy or self-sufficiency to the mind of man. Romanism and Arminianism do this in their views of man as stated in their works on systematic theology. It is consistent for them, therefore, not to challenge the assumption of ultimacy as this is made by the non-believer. But Reformed theology, as worked out by Calvin and his recent exponents such as Hodge, Warfield, Kuyper and Bavinck, holds that man’s mind is derivative.²⁴

21. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 96-98; quotes at p. 97 and p. 98, respectively.

22. Cf. Brian G. Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck,” 116-23. Note, however, that Mattson does not cover all of the critiques that Van Til levels against Bavinck throughout *The Defense of the Faith*.

23. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 103.

24. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 113; Also cf. p. 276.

Additionally, in chapter ten Van Til summarizes his apologetic methodology in such a way that praise precedes his criticisms:

If Christian theism is not true then nothing is true. Is the God of the Bible satisfied if his servants say anything less?

And have I, following such a method, departed radically from the tradition of Kuyper and Bavinck? On the contrary have learned all this primarily from them. It is Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* that has, more than any other work in modern times, brought out the fact of the difference between the approach of the believer and of the unbeliever. It is Bavinck's monumental work which set a natural theology frankly oriented to Scripture squarely over against that of Romanism which is based on neutral reason. It is Bavinck who taught me that the proofs for God as usually formulated on the traditional method prove a finite god. I have indeed had the temerity to maintain that these great Reformed theologians have in some points not been quite true to their own principles. But when I have done so I have usually tried to point out that when they did so and to the extent that they did so they had departed from Calvin.²⁵

Van Til uses these statements of praise as the *terminus a quo* for his various criticisms of Bavinck's alleged self-contradictions—contradictions which Van Til thinks are rooted in Bavinck's invalid attempt to synthesize Reformed and Roman Catholic thought. Ironically, on the one hand Van Til praises the "main thrust" of Bavinck's theology as being against the "scholastic synthesis" of "Aristotle and Christ."²⁶ Yet, on the other hand, he levels the following criticisms against the scholasticism in Bavinck's thought.

3.1. Chapter 8: A Brief Excursus on Sources

Due to the fact that many portions of *The Defense of the Faith* are concatenations of extended citations from Van Til's various syllabi, a brief note on the sources of chapter eight is necessary. Van Til begins the chapter by noting

25. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 264.

26. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 286.

that most of the material herein is “taken verbatim from a syllabus on *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*.”²⁷ This 1954 syllabus was later divided and published in two separate books: *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*²⁸ and *The Defense of the Faith*. The latter has been published in four editions, two unabridged²⁹ and two abridged.³⁰ Furthermore, within *The Defense of the Faith* the portion of chapter eight which contains Van Til’s criticism of Bavinck’s theology is comprised of an extended citation from Van Til’s book, *Common Grace*, which itself is a concatenation of three articles which Van Til published in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.³¹ Additionally, *Common Grace* was later published within Van Til’s expanded treatment of the same topic—*Common Grace and the Gospel*.³² For simplicity’s sake the following survey will cite only the fourth edition of *The Defense of the Faith*.

3.2. Chapter 8: *Common Grace and Scholasticism*

Van Til alleges that Bavinck and Kuyper fail to overcome the Roman Catholic formulation of the concepts of innate knowledge of God (i.e., *cognitationes insitae*) and common notions (i.e., *koinai ennoiai* and *notiones impressae*). Specifically, Bavinck and Kuyper “sometimes employed the notions of brute fact and of abstract universals,” writes Van Til.³³ Furthermore, “they also at times adopt in their process of reasoning the non-Christian principles of continuity and of discontinuity” insofar as “they seek for *common notions* between believers and

27. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 171; cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.v., 1954.K.

28. Cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.v., 1969.G.

29. For the first unabridged edition, cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.v., 1955.G; The 2008 4th edition of Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, is unabridged and includes added commentary from the editor.

30. Cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1963.B, 1967.A.

31. Cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.vv., 1945.D, 1946.F1-2, 1947.C.

32. Cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.v., 1972.E.

33. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 184-85; quote at p. 185.

unbelievers that are not exclusively based upon the idea of the *sensus dietatis*.”³⁴

They then ignore the difference between the idea of fact and logic as it springs from the position that is based upon the notion of the autonomous man, and the idea of fact and logic which springs from the position that is based upon the notion of the ontological Trinity.³⁵

In sum, then, Bavinck and Kuyper fail to formulate a fully Christian epistemology insofar as they accept the Roman Catholic formulation of common notions and innate knowledge of God, formulations that Van Til views as invalid mixes of pagan philosophy and Christian theology.

3.3. Chapter 13: Amsterdam and Old Princeton³⁶

Staying true to the overall structure of his criticisms against Bavinck’s theology, Van Til begins his section on Bavinck by praising Bavinck’s insistence upon Holy Scripture “as the *principium unicum* of the Christian.”³⁷ Then Van Til levels an allegation to the effect that Bavinck contradicts his own *principium*:

In spite of this stress on the Scripture as self-attesting and as such the primary principle for the interpretation of man and the world, Bavinck too [i.e., in addition to Kuyper] sometimes reverts to the idea that man can without this principle interpret much of experience truly.³⁸

Van Til catalogs Bavinck’s contradictions as follows: (1) Despite his insistence upon Scripture as the *principium unicum*, Bavinck sometimes argues from the *principium* of “self-consciousness as such” without any attempt to relate this

34. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 186.

35. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 186.

36. With respect to the material content of this chapter, note Van Til’s remark in *The Defense of the Faith*, 345n1: “Most of the material in this chapter is taken from the syllabus on *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*.”

37. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 374.

38. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 374.

principium to God or to Christ.³⁹ (2) Within his 1908 Princeton Stone Lectures⁴⁰ Bavinck omits the doctrines of creation and providence in order to meet philosophers on their own terms.⁴¹ (3) Bavinck employs abstract (i.e., non-Christian) definitions of the terms “real” and “ideal” in his use of the phrase, “the unity of real and ideal being.”⁴² (4) Bavinck contradicts his own views of innate and acquired knowledge and of general revelation since he seeks to “start with the *cogito* as such as the foundation of human knowledge.”⁴³ (5) Bavinck fails to properly relate natural and special revelation insofar as he follows Thomas Aquinas’ formulation “that supernatural revelation is necessary for man because natural revelation is uncertain.”⁴⁴ (6) Likewise, because Bavinck follows Aquinas, he unduly lowers the claims of the objective clarity of general revelation. Hence he admits that the Christian “has no compelling proofs for his position,” only probabilities.⁴⁵ (7) Contrary to his own Reformed theology, Bavinck starts with the foundation of Descartes’ “*cogito* as such” and then builds up a “piecemeal” argument from the causal argument to the teleological argument and then to the ontological argument.⁴⁶ Van Til concludes accordingly:

. . . surely we must not follow Bavinck when, starting from man as ultimate, he leads on to an ultimate Cause that is not clearly God, to an ultimate Purpose that is not clearly God’s, and to an ultimate Being who does not help us out of the vicious circle of our thought.⁴⁷

39. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 374-75; quote at p. 375.

40. Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908-1909*, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908).

41. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 375.

42. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 375-76; citing Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 61.

43. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 376.

44. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 376-77; quote at p. 377.

45. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 377-78; quote at p. 377.

46. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 378-79.

47. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 379.

In sum, Van Til charges Bavinck for appropriating Descartes' anti-Christian *cogito* and then building upon this autonomous epistemological foundation a schema of proofs for God's existence that at best proves only the probability of God's existence rather than demonstrates the necessity of God's existence as the ultimate precondition for all truth.

4. Criticisms in *Common Grace and the Gospel*

Despite the fact that some of the material within *Common Grace and the Gospel* is recapitulated in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* and *The Defense of the Faith*, Van Til's longest and most detailed criticisms are found herein.

Furthermore, the context of these criticisms is important background material for chapter 6 below. Additionally, Van Til insinuates that *Common Grace and the Gospel* contains his definitive critique of Bavinck's errors.⁴⁸ Thus for our purposes it is important to survey these criticisms despite a few repetitions.

4.1. The Context of Van Til's Criticisms

Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck's thought throughout *Common Grace and the Gospel* are set within the context of his interpretation of the American debate regarding the Three Points on common grace issued by the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He divides the parties of the debate as follows:

Broadly speaking there are in this latest struggle three parties. (a) There are those who would cling quite closely to the traditional, that is, the

48. Cornelius Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974), 3:31: "For a fuller understanding of the nature of the scholasticism that faced Dooyeweerd as he began his work, a consideration of Herman Bavinck's views would be helpful. But I must refer the reader to my *Common Grace and the Gospel* for a discussion of Bavinck's views."

Kuyper-Bavinck point of view. Professor V. Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam may be said to be the leading representative here. (b) There are those who deny common grace. Herman Hoeksema is now the recognized leader of this group. (c) There are those who would not deny common grace, nor yet affirm it in its traditional form, but reconstruct it. Dr. K. Schilder may be said to represent this group.⁴⁹

For reasons that will become apparent in chapter 6 below, it is important to highlight two points regarding the context of Van Til's criticisms. In the first place, Van Til explicates the third party in terms of a larger theological and philosophical reconstruction movement that seeks both to build upon the traditional Kuyper-Bavinck position and to rebuild "certain abstractions" that threaten the stability of that position:

The reconstruction effort [of Schilder] is closely related to a broad movement in theology and philosophy which attempts to build up the traditional Reformed position while yet to an extent rebuilding it. The Philosophy of Sphere Sovereignty of Professors H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven represents a part of this movement. It seeks to appreciate the concrete approach that Kuyper has given to the problems of theology and philosophy without clinging to certain abstractions that he retained.⁵⁰

He then references an article by Dooyeweerd⁵¹ and a booklet by Cornelis Veenhof⁵² as exemplars of this theological and philosophical reconstruction movement. The importance of Dooyeweerd's article with respect to Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck's theology will be analyzed below.

In the second place, Van Til aligns himself with this reconstruction movement by appropriating a major aspect of Schilder's critique of Kuyper's

49. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1972), 23.

50. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 23.

51. Herman Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939): 193-232.

52. Cornelis Veenhof, *In Kuyper's lijn* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1939).

formulation of common grace—concrete vs. abstract thinking. Hence Van Til comments upon Schilder’s book, *Wat is de Hemel?*,⁵³ as follows: “The whole thrust of his [I.e, Schilder’s] thinking,” writes Van Til, “is an effort to proceed concretely.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Van Til remarks:

The contribution made in this book is of great value. This contribution consists in stressing the need of concrete procedure in all our theological thinking.⁵⁵

Even though Van Til is critical of certain aspects of Schilder’s formulations, he nevertheless appropriates Schilder’s concrete-vs.-abstract thinking motif, and he then uses this motif as the paradigm according to which he levels critiques against Bavinck’s theology. Hence he introduces his criticisms as follows:

It would seem to be obvious that if we are to avoid thinking abstractly on the common grace problem, we must seek to avoid thinking abstractly in the whole of our theological and philosophical effort. Perhaps the first question we should ask ourselves is whether the Kuyper-Bavinck form of theological statement in general, in which nearly all, if not all, who have been engaged in the recent common grace debate have been nurtured, does not, to some extent at least, suffer from the disease of abstraction. Perhaps the physicians have not altogether escaped the disease against which they have inoculated others. As a grateful patient it is my duty now to assert that in my humble judgment such is the case.⁵⁶

Furthermore, later on in the book where Van Til responds to William Masselink he insinuates that he does belong to the so-called “reconstruction theology” movement led by Schilder and Dooyeweerd.⁵⁷

Though he does not spell out herein the significance of this reconstruction

53. Klaas Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?* (Kampen: Kok, 1935); translated and condensed as *idem, Heaven: What Is It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950).

54. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 24.

55. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 25.

56. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 34.

57. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 148ff.

movement with respect to his own criticisms of Bavinck, it is important to note that Van Til recognizes that he is not the only theologian leveling critiques against Kuyper, Bavinck, and other neo-Calvinist thinkers. Van Til's relation to this reconstruction movement is highly significant, and one salient aspect of this relation will be examined in the following chapter—Van Til's appropriation of Herman Dooyeweerd's formulations regarding scholasticism.

4.2. *The Catalog of Van Til's Criticisms*

Van Til summarizes the basic thrust of his criticisms against Bavinck (along with Kuyper and Hepp) in terms of his abstract-vs.-concrete motif. Specifically, he links Bavinck's abstract thinking with an alleged Roman Catholic synthesis of Aristotelian and Christian thought:

Rome's semi-Aristotelian epistemology influences, and accords with, its semi-Aristotelian ethics. Rome's notion of the common area of Reason between believers and non-believers controls its conception of the common cardinal virtues. So also what Kuyper and Bavinck think of the reprobate's knowledge of God will influence what they think of the reprobate's deeds before God. We shall seek to intimate, be it all too briefly, that in the epistemology of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp there are remnants of an abstract way of thinking that we shall need to guard against in our common grace discussion.⁵⁸

After stating generally that Bavinck mixes Aristotle and Christ, Van Til alleges several specific instances of Bavinck's commingling.

In the first place, Bavinck at times contradicts his own affirmation of Holy Scripture as the sole *principium externum* of theology. He does this by adopting "a moderate realism."⁵⁹ Specifically, "by accepting what he calls the good of empiricism and what he calls the good of rationalism, and dropping the evil of

58. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 34.

59. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 44-45; quote at p. 45.

both,” argues Van Til, Bavinck makes common cause with “non-Christian realists” over against rationalism and with “non-Christian rationalists” over against empiricism.⁶⁰

But, we object, the abstract principles of rationalism are not made concrete by bringing them into relation with the brute facts of empiricism, and the brute facts of empiricism are not made accessible by bringing them into relation with the abstract principles of rationalism.⁶¹

Van Til thus concludes that with respect to the *principia* of theology Bavinck falls prey to abstract thinking. In other words, he “does not make a thorough break with Scholasticism.”⁶²

In the second place, a concomitant of his failure to make a clean break with scholasticism is that Bavinck fails to provide a Christian formulation of the incomprehensibility of God. Instead, his view is “obtained in part by Christian, and in part by non-Christian, principles of reasoning.”⁶³ Thus Van Til asserts that on this point Bavinck’s view should be replaced with Calvin’s:

With all our admiration for Bavinck we yet found that he allowed himself to be influenced by the Greek ideal of the comprehension of God. This ideal works havoc with true Reformed theology. Perhaps we may here learn anew from the greatest of theologians, John Calvin.⁶⁴

In the third place, a further concomitant of Bavinck’s scholasticism is that in his formulation of the theistic proofs (1) he “has not altogether cut himself loose from non-Christian forms of reasoning” and (2) he fails “to show that this procedure [i.e., the epistemological procedure of the autonomous man] is

60. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 45.

61. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 45.

62. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 45.

63. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 46-47; quote at p. 47.

64. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 64-65.

basically mistaken.”⁶⁵ Bavinck’s formulation of the proofs is thus

very similar to the old Princeton position, and both are very similar to the Scholastic position. There are differences in degree between these three positions, but they agree in holding that all reasoning about Christian theism must be done on “common” ground. . . . For all his effort to the contrary, Bavinck sometimes seems to offer us a natural theology of a kind similar to that offered by the church of Rome.⁶⁶

Additionally, Van Til avers that Bavinck fails to challenge the Roman Catholic view of natural theology since he fails to “presuppose the ontological trinity” before treating the theistic proofs.⁶⁷ Such a failure has catastrophic consequences for Bavinck’s theology; for, according to Van Til, “unless we may make this presupposition, all human predication is meaningless.”⁶⁸ In sum, Bavinck’s adherence to the Roman Catholic formulation of the theistic proofs and hence to the Roman Catholic view of natural theology undergirding the theistic proofs contradicts “the real position of Bavinck,” namely, that the “Christian must stand with both feet upon the bed-rock of special revelation in his study of nature.”⁶⁹

In the fourth place, yet another concomitant of his failure to overcome scholasticism is that Bavinck’s view of the innate knowledge of God is not fully Christian. Bavinck contradicts his own *principia* by allowing for “the idea of brute facts of Empiricism and the idea of abstract universals of Rationalism.”⁷⁰ Using an idiosyncratic distinction between psychological and epistemological innate knowledge of God, Van Til poses the following question:

Psychologically there are no atheistic men; epistemologically every

65. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 47-48; quote at p. 48.

66. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 48-49; quote at p. 49.

67. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 49.

68. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 49.

69. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 50-51; quote at p. 51.

70. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 51-52; quote at p. 52.

sinner is atheistic. Has Bavinck kept this fact in mind?⁷¹

He answers with a resounding negative:

Bavinck speaks of Cicero as saying that that on which all men agree, because of their common nature, cannot be wrong. Cicero no doubt meant that there is some basis of agreement between all men, epistemologically as well as psychologically. That is to say, for Cicero there was an area of common interpretation, however small, in which all men are epistemologically in agreement. It is on such notions as those of Cicero that Roman Catholic natural theology is built. Bavinck has not always kept this point in mind.⁷²

After further detailing Bavinck's allegedly Roman Catholic—and hence non-Christian—view of humanity's innate knowledge of God,⁷³ Van Til concludes by summarizing the entire catalog of his critiques:

Taken in its entirety, the section dealing with the *cognitio Dei insita* has not escaped the ambiguity that we found in Bavinck's general treatment of the *principia* in science, in his conception of mystery, and in his conception of the theistic proofs. It is the same ambiguity throughout that meets us. And it is the same ambiguity that we have found in Kuyper. These men have certainly led the way in modern times in the direction of working out a truly Protestant theology. But they have not quite had the courage to go consistently along the path they have marked out for us. There are elements of abstract reasoning in their procedure that lead to a natural theology which is not consistently set over against the natural theology of Rome at every point. When they deal with the objective aspect of the matter, that is with the revelational question, they cater, to some extent, to the idea of a probability position. This probability position is the result of seeking for truth in the abstract way, combining impersonal principles with brute facts. When they deal with the subjective aspect of the matter, with the common ideas, they do not make a clear-cut, ringing distinction between that which is psychologically revelational and that which is epistemologically interpretative.⁷⁴

In the fifth place, over against Bavinck's allegedly abstract thinking Van Til proposes another idiosyncratic formulation, namely, the doctrine of the trinity as

71. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 52-54; quote at p. 54.

72. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 54.

73. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 54-57.

74. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 57-58.

the epistemological “concrete universal.”

What has been said by way of criticism on the remnants of abstract thinking found in Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp has virtually suggested the direction of thought we would follow in approaching the question of common grace. The ontological trinity will be our interpretative concept everywhere. God is our concrete universal; in Him thought and being are coterminous, in Him the problem of knowledge is solved.

If we begin thus with the ontological trinity as our concrete universal, we frankly differ from every school of philosophy and from every school of science not merely in our conclusions, but in our starting-point and in our method as well. For us the facts are what they are, and the universals are what they are, because of their common dependence upon the ontological trinity. Thus, as earlier discussed, the facts are correlative to the universals. Because of this correlativity there is genuine progress in history; because of it the Moment has significance.⁷⁵

5. A Brief Criticism in *The Sovereignty of Grace*

In this book Van Til briefly criticizes Bavinck’s “critical realism” as a devolution into Roman Catholic natural theology and hence a departure from Reformed theology:

In recent times Bavinck, much as he stressed the “ethical” character of the Reformation, none-the-less, developed a philosophical prolegomena in which he developed a critical realism. In this he followed Thomas Aquinas.⁷⁶

This brief example displays the consistency of Van Til’s overall criticism of Bavinck’s theology, namely, that the root of Bavinck’s errors is his affinity for scholasticism à la Thomas Aquinas.

6. Criticisms in “Bavinck the Theologian” and “As I think of Bavinck”

In 1961 and 1966, respectively, Van Til wrote review articles for both of R. H. Bremmer’s books: *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* and *Herman Bavinck en zijn*

75. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 64.

76. Cornelius Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace: An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer’s View of Dordt* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1969), 28.

tijdgenoten.⁷⁷ In these review articles Van Til does not level any new criticisms against Bavinck's thought. Nevertheless, these articles are appropriate to consider under the heading of Van Til's criticisms since in both he affirms Bremmer's main criticism of Bavinck's thought—scholasticism.

Mattson makes two assertions regarding Van Til's first review article: (1) He claims that Van Til fails to write on the assigned topic—Bremmer's book—and instead levels unrelated critiques against the theological formulations of Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, and Jan Lever. (2) He claims that Van Til grants Bremmer's allegation of scholasticism in Bavinck's theology largely for the sake of argument.⁷⁸ Both assertions, however, are misguided.

In the first place, Van Til's conclusion undermines both of Mattson's claims.

Referring to Bremmer's books, Van Til writes:

The two volumes together will, no doubt, prove to be of great help not only for the understanding of Bavinck but also for an appreciation of *the double-headed fact* that (a) we must be true followers of Bavinck in order, then, to go beyond him, and (b) to avoid Bavinck's tendency toward Scholasticism we must be alert to the deadly danger of modern activism.⁷⁹

The whole point of the article is to vindicate this "double-headed fact."

Accordingly, Van Til clearly *agrees* with Bremmer's assessment that it is time to go beyond Bavinck's scholasticism, and he disagrees only with Lever's,

Dooyeweerd's, and Barth's invalid attempts to do so insofar as these

contemporary theologians ground their formulations in "the deadly danger of

77. Cornelius Van Til, "Bavinck the Theologian: A Review Article," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48-64; a review of R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961); and Cornelius Van Til, "As I Think of Bavinck," *International Reformed Bulletin* 9, no. 27 (1966): 19-26; a review of R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966).

78. Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck," 115.

79. Van Til, "Bavinck the Theologian," 64; emphasis added.

modern activism.” Van Til therefore does not fail to write on the assigned topic; rather, he affirms Bremmer’s critique of the scholasticism in Bavinck’s thought and then analyzes Lever’s, Dooyeweerd’s, and Barth’s formulations according to Bremmer’s premise.

Furthermore, in Van Til’s review of Bremmer’s second book—which review Mattson omits—Van Til explicitly affirms Bremmer’s criticism of the scholasticism in Bavinck’s dogmatics: “Bremmer’s criticism of Bavinck is legitimate,” he writes. “We do well to go *beyond* Bavinck by dropping the remnants of Thomistic realism still present in his thought.”⁸⁰

Additionally, throughout his second review article Van Til recapitulates the “double-headed fact” motif from his first article, albeit without using the term. Thus, on the one hand, Van Til criticizes the “internal inconsistency” in Bavinck’s thought:

We have dwelt on this *internal inconsistency* in Bavinck’s theology because it illustrates, we believe, a measure of ambiguity that appears in his theology at various places.⁸¹

Then, on the other hand, he immediately adds a caveat:

But our negative attitude toward Bavinck must be based upon a positive attitude toward what was, after all, his basic approach, and that was his simple assumption of the direct revelation of God in history through Christ and his Word as found in Scripture.⁸²

Van Til’s recapitulation of the “double-headed fact” motif regarding Bavinck’s “internal inconsistency” is therefore obvious.

Moreover, with respect to Van Til’s seemingly unrelated digressions on B. B.

80. Van Til, “As I Think of Bavinck,” 24.

81. Van Til, “As I Think of Bavinck,” 22.

82. Van Til, “As I Think of Bavinck,” 24.

Warfield, Foppe M. ten Hoor, and Karl Barth,⁸³ these discussions, like those found in Van Til's first review article, are not instances of his failing to write on the assigned topic. Rather, he brings these thinkers under his purview in order to use them as foils for vindicating his "double-headed-fact" interpretation of Bavinck's theology. Thus, on the one hand, he vehemently denies that Barth's dialectical theology is a valid advancement beyond Bavinck's scholasticism:

We could wish that those who want to go "beyond Bavinck" à la Barth would simply tell us that they are done with Bavinck. But we do not really want them to seek for an impossible fusion of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* and the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. We really hope that they will learn to challenge the *Christ* of modern subjectivism as he is set forth in the *Dogmatik* by the Christ of the Scriptures as he is in the *Dogmatiek*.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, on the other hand, he affirms Bremmer's evaluation regarding the need to overcome Bavinck's scholasticism. "To go beyond Bavinck in this fashion," he writes, "may also bear rich fruit for Christian apologetics."

Ironically, the "fashion" that Van Til puts forth as the valid way to advance beyond Bavinck is "the Christ of the Scriptures as he is in the *Dogmatiek*." For Van Til, therefore, the way to overcome Bavinck's scholasticism is to follow Bavinck's *non-scholastic* theology! Hence the dialectical nature of the "double-headed fact."

7. Criticisms in *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*

In his 1974 syllabus on Herman Dooyeweerd's *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* Van Til mostly reiterates his earlier criticisms against the scholasticism in Bavinck's theology rather than leveling new critiques. Nevertheless, this syllabus is highly significant for understanding the *why* behind the *that* of Van Til's criticisms; for,

83. Van Til, "As I Think of Bavinck," 22-25.

84. Van Til, "As I Think of Bavinck," 25.

herein Van Til explicitly connects his criticisms of the scholasticism in Bavinck's thought with Herman Dooyeweerd's earlier criticisms of the scholasticism in Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Jan Wolter's thought. Building upon Dooyeweerd's analysis, for example, Van Til writes, "Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck still have not altogether escaped the Thomistic-Aquinian position."⁸⁵ This important connection between Dooyeweerd's and Van Til's criticisms will be analyzed in the following chapter. For our present purpose of cataloging Van Til's critiques, we will simply summarize his criticisms.

Van Til's dialectical analysis of Bavinck's "double-headed fact" is clearly evident throughout this syllabus; for, he lauds several aspects of Bavinck's theology before recapitulating his earlier criticisms.

Regarding Bavinck's positives, Van Til avers: (1) Bavinck provides great help in formulating "a truly Reformed theology along the lines of the Reformation principle." (2) Bavinck provides the theological paragon for "a truly biblical view of the immanent or ontological trinity as the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience." (3) "[N]o one brought out more forcibly than did Bavinck" the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility and its implications for both Christians and non-Christians. (4) Since all of man's knowledge is covenantal, then Bavinck has correctly argued that "mystery is the life element of dogmatics." (5) Bavinck correctly affirms that since humanity is the image of God, then humans have an "ineradicable" and "certain" knowledge of God.⁸⁶

Despite these positives, Van Til maintains that "Bavinck, as well as Kuyper

85. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:10.

86. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:10.

has not cut himself fully free from scholastic methodology.”⁸⁷ Citing passages from his *Common Grace* syllabus, he alleges the following evidence for Bavinck’s non-Christian scholasticism: (1) Bavinck waffles between Christian and non-Christian philosophies of fact and law. (2) Bavinck adopts a non-Christian form of “moderate realism.” (3) Bavinck’s formulations of God’s incomprehensibility sometimes devolve into invalid syntheses of Christian thought and pagan philosophy rather than maintaining the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian formulations. (4) Bavinck’s formulation of the theistic proofs fails to show that the methodology underlying the proofs is fundamentally misguided. Thus Bavinck’s formulation of the proofs contradicts Calvin’s. (5) Bavinck’s formulation of humanity’s innate knowledge of God is Roman Catholic rather than Christian; for, Bavinck illegitimately employs brute facts from non-Christian empiricism and abstract universals from non-Christian rationalism.⁸⁸

No small measure of perplexity attends Van Til’s “double-headed” praises and criticisms in this section; for, nearly all of the positives that he lists herein are also leveled as criticisms either on the very next page or in Van Til’s other writings that we surveyed above!

Additionally, a few pages later Van Til recapitulates and comments upon the criticisms he leveled against Bavinck’s theology in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*: (1) Bavinck’s realism is “unusable for apologetic purposes” since it falls prey to the same defects as Scottish common sense realism. (2) Bavinck mixes Christian and non-Christian views of certainty. (3) Bavinck affirms the pagan,

87. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:11.

88. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:11.

Greek view of universals.⁸⁹ “Thomas Aquinas,” summarizes Van Til,

trimmed Aristotle’s principles down but did not reject the foundation on which they were built. To an extent, this is also true of Bavinck. He has largely followed Thomas in this aspect. Accordingly, he tells us at one moment that our certainty lies in the Logos of creation, but then forgets about the Logos in the course of his argumentation and makes certainty to exist merely in the fact that there are *a priori* principles regardless of the foundation of these principles.

Here the idea of a “metaphysical archetypal intellect,” the idea of making an “appeal to the analytic judgment” with all that is implied in them is clearly identified, in thought-content if not in words, and rejected as being a foreign element in Bavinck’s thinking.⁹⁰

Van Til’s “double-headed” analysis is clearly evident herein; for, he labels his critiques of Bavinck’s theology as merely “a friendly *Auseinandersetzung*.”⁹¹

Furthermore, Van Til insists that even though Bavinck fell under the scholastic spell of Aquinas, the seed of the “authentic Bavinck”—the Bavinck who insists that natural revelation cannot be understood apart from Scripture—can still be found beneath the inauthentic Bavinck’s scholastic shell.⁹²

For these very reasons, however, Van Til’s dialectical analysis is all the more perplexing. On the one hand, Van Til consistently portrays Bavinck’s epistemology as a corrupt mix of pagan and Christian thought. Yet, on the other hand, he views his own criticisms of Bavinck’s thought as a mere *Auseinandersetzung* between truly Christian brothers. Van Til’s criticisms are thus tacitly attended at every point by two nagging questions: Does Bavinck really have two heads? And if so, then can Bavinck’s non-scholastic seed be separated so easily from his scholastic husk?

89. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:19.

90. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:19-20.

91. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:19.

92. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:21.

B. Summary

1. The Crux of Van Til's Criticisms

Van Til's various criticisms of Bavinck's theology can be summarized in one word—scholasticism. Van Til uses this term to represent the opposite of Kuyper's formulation of the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thought, namely, the *synthesis* of Christian and non-Christian thought. He presents Thomas Aquinas as the paragon of scholasticism; for, according to Van Til, Aquinas represents the most robust attempt of any theologian to synthesize Christian theology and pagan Greek philosophy. Regarding Bavinck's adherence to scholasticism, Van Til argues that on many points, especially with respect to epistemology and theological *principia*, Bavinck falls prey to Aquinas' scholastic, synthesizing influence. Therefore, to return to Van Til's daddy-daughter metaphor, he feels duty bound to slap his dogmatic daddy in the face; hence, he directs several weighty, totalizing objections primarily against Bavinck's scholastic epistemological formulations.

2. Van Til's Perplexing Self-Evaluation of His Criticisms

In light of the weighty catalog of critiques that Van Til levels against Bavinck's epistemological formulations, his understated self-evaluation of these critiques is greatly perplexing. For example, he appears appalled at William Masselink's allegation that Van Til himself has departed from the epistemological formulations of "the great Reformed theologians, such as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Warfield, and Machen."⁹³ He thus exclaims:

93. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 155.

Well, has there been in anything I have ever said or written as much as an insinuation that the root of their thinking was not from the Bible?⁹⁴

Furthermore, after chiding Masselink for misrepresenting his critiques, Van Til insists that with respect to old Princeton he has never “expressed a basic difference with its theology or its basic epistemology.”⁹⁵ Likewise, with respect to old Amsterdam he insists that he has merely “criticized ‘subdivisions’ of the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck.”⁹⁶ Additionally, as we noted above, elsewhere he labels his criticisms of Bavinck as a mere *Auseinandersetzung*.

The irony both of Van Til’s exclamation and his insistence that he has merely criticized subdivisions in Bavinck’s thought is obvious. For, in his catalog of criticisms Van Til blatantly and repeatedly levels totalizing objections against the scholasticism—the Thomistic synthesis of Greek and Christian thought—that allegedly plagues Bavinck’s theology. Does Van Til really think, then, that he has never even *insinuated* that Bavinck’s thinking is not biblically based when, for example, he distinguishes his own view from Bavinck’s, Kuyper’s, and Hepp’s theology in such totalizing terms as follows:

If we begin thus with the ontological trinity as our concrete universal, we frankly differ from every school of philosophy and from every school of science not merely in our conclusions, but in our starting-point and in our method as well.⁹⁷

Likewise, can Van Til’s exclamation be taken seriously after he has alleged that Bavinck exchanges the Holy Scriptures for Descartes’ anti-Christian *cogito* as the epistemological *principium* of theology? Additionally, can Van Til’s exclamation

94. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 155.

95. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 155.

96. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 156; citing Simon Jan Ridderbos, *Rondom het gemene-gratie-probleem* (Kampen: Kok, 1949).

97. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 64.

be taken seriously in light of the totalizing critiques he levels against Bavinck's scholastic, synthesis, Greek-influenced and hence non-Christian thinking which he summarizes Bavinck's errors in statements such as:

With all our admiration for Bavinck we yet found that he allowed himself to be influenced by the Greek ideal of the comprehension of God. This ideal works havoc with true Reformed theology.⁹⁸

Moreover, if Van Til truly criticizes only mere "subdivisions" of Bavinck's thought, then why does he assert that Bavinck's epistemological formulations are "unusable for apologetic purposes"?⁹⁹ And why do the Copernican interpreters of Van Til's thought allege (1) that Van Til's apologetics necessarily sets him at odds with every modern Reformed theologian and philosopher¹⁰⁰ and (2) that a "viral bug" threatens to undermine the entirety of Bavinck's dogmatics?¹⁰¹

3. An Irreducible Dialectic

It is impossible to reconcile fully Van Til's bipolar statements regarding Bavinck's theology. On the one hand, he lauds Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as the greatest modern statement of Reformed theology and extols his labors toward formulating a Christian view of all areas of life.¹⁰² Yet, on the other hand he levels totalizing critiques against Bavinck's "scholasticism," that is, his affirmation of epistemological realism with respect to the *principia* of theology, as if this affirmation is somehow a deadly concession to pagan, anti-Christian, Greek-based philosophy. Therefore, despite Van Til's earnest efforts to vindicate his

98. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 64-65.

99. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 1:19.

100. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 13-20.

101. Oliphint, "The Prolegomena Principle."; *idem*, "Bavinck's Realism."

102. Van Til, "As I Think of Bavinck," 26.

“double-headed fact,” Masselink’s assessment of Van Til’s criticisms is more in accord with Van Til’s own statements; for, Van Til clearly attempts more than a mere trimming of a few twigs—he attempts to decapitate one of Bavinck’s two heads. The dogmatic daddy thus receives far more than a hand slap from his apologist daughter.

The most serious implication of this dialectical tension is that, if Van Til’s criticisms of Bavinck’s theology are pressed to their logical conclusion—and given Van Til’s proclivity for pressing his theological opponents’ views to their logical conclusions, it is difficult to see how else Van Til’s criticisms are to be taken than on his own terms of principled consistency—then he seriously jeopardizes the validity of his pervasive formal, material, and polemical appropriations of Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* as detailed in chapters 2–4 above.

CHAPTER VI.

VAN TIL'S PRESUPPOSITION *IN DEFECTU ET IN EXCESSU* (PART 2): DIALECTICAL APPROPRIATIONS OF HERMAN DOOYEWEERD'S *WIJSBEGEERTE DER WETSIDEE*

In the previous chapter we surveyed the catalog of critiques that Van Til levels against Bavinck's theology, especially his epistemological formulations, and we found that, although Van Til downplays his criticisms as mere intramural disputes over secondary points, the critiques themselves are formulated in totalizing terms: antithesis vs. synthesis; pure Reformed theology vs. an impure scholastic synthesis of Christian theology and Greek philosophy; the authentic, non-scholastic Bavinck vs. the neo-Thomist, scholastic Bavinck. Additionally, we noted that Van Til asserts that a "double-headed fact" must govern one's approach to Bavinck's thought. Thus, on the one hand, Van Til insists that we must go beyond Bavinck's scholastic formulations; yet, on the other hand, he maintains that the only way to go beyond Bavinck's scholasticism is to follow Bavinck's own non-scholastic principles. We further noted that in light of Van Til's pervasive formal, material, and polemical appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, his precarious "double-headed-fact" criticism of Bavinck's theology introduces an irreducible dialectal tension with respect to Van Til's appropriations: Either Bavinck does have two heads and hence Van Til's formal, material, and polemical appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* are jeopardized

accordingly, or Bavinck does not have two heads and hence Van Til's criticisms are misdirected. His criticisms are therefore either *in excessu* or *in defectu*.

In the present chapter we refocus our attention upon Van Til's criticisms, but this time we will ask not *what* Van Til criticizes but *why*: Why does Van Til criticize Bavinck's thought in terms of two Bavincks—the authentic one the scholastic one—and in terms of a “double-headed fact”? Are these criticisms instances of Van Til's Copernican originality? Or, rather, is it the case that, considered within his neo-Calvinist context, Van Til's criticisms are appropriations and development of standard anti-scholastic sentiment evident among a host of neo-Calvinist theologians and philosophers?

Over against the Copernican line of Van Til scholarship, which, as we noted in chapter 5 above, presents Van Til as a revolutionary who saved Reformed theology from the wiles of scholasticism, we will argue that the reason why he levels these criticisms against Bavinck's theology is that he was significantly influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd's anti-scholasticism polemics. Specifically, we will demonstrate that Van Til appropriates both Dooyeweerd's criticisms of scholasticism in general and his criticisms of scholastic elements in neo-Calvinist theology—including Bavinck's theology—in particular. If our attempt to analyze Van Til's criticisms within his neo-Calvinist “reconstructionist” context is valid, then the Copernican interpretation of Van Til as the anti-scholastic hero *contra* the entire Reformed tradition after Calvin will need to be reassessed as an abstraction.

In making such an argument we are following the lead of Van Til himself; for,

as we noted in chapter 5 above, in his book, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Van Til implicitly indicates his affirmation of certain aspects of the so-called “reconstructionist movement” led by neo-Calvinist theologians and philosophers, such as, Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Schilder.¹ We noted, for example, that Van Til appropriates Schilder’s polemic against the alleged *abstract* thinking in Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s theology and his concomitant assertion that truly Reformed thinking must proceed *concretely*. Moreover, Masselink and Muether both interpret Van Til’s position on common grace to be grounded in this “reconstructionist” movement.² Furthermore, John Bolt suggests that Van Til’s criticism of the scholastic elements in Bavinck’s thought is significantly influenced by Dooyeweerd’s *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, especially Dooyeweerd’s article, “Kuyper’s wetenschapsleer,”³ wherein Dooyeweerd repudiates Bavinck’s “Logos-speculatie” as “neeoplatoons, thomistisch en dus scholastiek” and as contrary to the “bijbelse, reformatorsche” ground-motive.⁴ Therefore, we are not arguing something new. Rather, in light of the affinities between Van Til and the Dutch neo-Calvinist “reconstructionist” philosophers which Van Til himself acknowledges and which have been noted by others, we are merely further highlighting the connection between Van Til’s “reconstructionist” context and his criticisms of Bavinck’s theology.

1. See chapter 5, §A, 4, 4.1, above.

2. William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace: A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith Over Against the Theology and Philosophy of the So-called “Reconstructionist” Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 148ff.; John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, American Reformed Biographies (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 152-53.

3. Herman Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s wetenschapsleer,” *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939): 193-232.

4. John Bolt, “Een gemiste en een nieuwe kans: Herman Bavinck over openbaring en religie,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. George Harinck and Gerrit Neven, Ad Chartas-reeks 9 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006), 153.

After briefly summarizing the current state of scholarship pertaining to Van Til's complex interaction with Dooyeweerd's thought, we will then survey the main lines of Dooyeweerd's analysis of scholasticism in general and of the scholastic elements in neo-Calvinist theology in particular. Next, we will compare the main lines of Van Til's formulations regarding the same. Finally, we will summarize the results of our comparative analysis.

A. Scholarship on Van Til and Dooyeweerd

1. The Untold Story in General

"The full story of Van Til's relationship to the Amsterdam philosophy, and especially to Herman Dooyeweerd, has not yet been told," wrote William Edgar in 2003.⁵ Indeed, eight years later the scholarly relationship between the Dutch-American Reformed apologist, Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) and the Dutch Reformed philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), remains largely unexplored in the secondary literature attending both thinkers. The scant extant scholarship on this topic consists mostly of passing remarks regarding alleged disagreements between the two thinkers.⁶ Furthermore, these remarks are based primarily upon (1) Van Til's *Christianity in Conflict* syllabus⁷ and (2) Dooyeweerd's and Robert Knudsen's contributions to the Van Til festschrift

5. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 57n4.

6. Cf. Leendert Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, ed. Bernard Zylstra and Josina Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1975; repr. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 28, 301n55; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 14, 18-19, 48-52, 673-74; John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 6, 22, 46, 146, 147n26, 172-73, 312; Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 153, 197, 200-201, 216.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict*, Syllabus, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962); cf. Eric D. Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895–1987* (Chicago: Olive Tree Communications, 1995), s.v., 1962.I.

(along with Van Til's replies)⁸ rather than upon Van Til's longest and most detailed criticism of Dooyeweerd's thought—his 1974 syllabus, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*.⁹

John Frame's chapter-length analysis of Van Til's thought vis-à-vis Dooyeweerd's may be an exception in terms of length.¹⁰ However, throughout the chapter Frame does not engage Dooyeweerd's corpus directly; rather, his criticisms are based upon Van Til's second-hand summaries of Dooyeweerd's thought in his *Christianity in Conflict* syllabus.¹¹

Notwithstanding the predominant focus in the related scholarship upon Dooyeweerd's and Van Til's nuanced disagreements, several significant affinities between the two thinkers have been noted. In the first place, as Robert Knudsen remarks, generally speaking, both men shared the same mission—to develop the philosophical implications of Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinist theology:

My own interpretation of Van Til's position, as I have said, places him squarely within the camp of those who hold to this general philosophical position [i.e., "the so-called Calvinistic philosophy"]. There is a broad unity of the major proponents of this school, namely, Herman Dooyeweerd, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, C. Van Til, and Hendrik Stoker, in their attempt to erect a philosophy on the foundation of a Reformed world-and-life-view."¹²

8. Cf. the following essays in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971): Herman Dooyeweerd, "Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought," 74-89; Cornelius Van Til, "Response to Herman Dooyeweerd," 89-127; Robert D. Knudsen, "Progressive and Regressive Tendencies in Christian Apologetics," 275-98; Cornelius Van Til, "Response to Robert D. Knudsen," 298-305.

9. Cornelius Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, Syllabus. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1974); cf. Bristley, *Guide*, 1974. G. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 372, mentions this syllabus only in passing. Likewise, Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 14n44, 673n265, references the syllabus twice but does not analyze any portion of it. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 200-01, omits the syllabus altogether within his discussion of Van Til's reluctant criticism of Dooyeweerd's work.

10. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 371-86.

11. Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict*.

12. Robert D. Knudsen, "Crosscurrents," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 3 (1973): 313.

Knudsen's remark is in harmony with Van Til's insistence that he is "in full agreement" with Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, and Stoker regarding their overarching goal of displaying "the variegated richness of the Christian life-and-world view as a whole."¹³ Thus, Van Til clearly shared the common neo-Calvinist concern to develop an all-encompassing Christian worldview.

In the second place, Van Til supported Dooyeweerd's philosophical school in significant official and unofficial ways. For example, John Muether points out that in 1936 Van Til "eagerly accepted" the offer to become an editor of the Dooyeweerdian school's scholarly journal, *Philosophia Reformata*, and that he held this editorial post for forty-two years.¹⁴ Thus, Van Til actively propagated the *Orgaan van de vereeniging voor Calvinistische wijsbegeerte*¹⁵ in an official capacity, notwithstanding his disagreements with some of Dooyeweerd's philosophical formulations. Likewise, John Frame recalls that Van Til regularly encouraged students who wished to study philosophy to go to *De Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam in order to study under the cosmological philosophers.¹⁶ For

Compare Henry Stob, "Observations on the Concept of the Antithesis" in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity*, ed. Peter DeKlerk and Richard R. DeRidder (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 252: "Let it be said that I share with Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Van Til, and many other Christian thinkers the view that all knowledge is embraced at its edges by an all-encompassing *Weltanschauung*"; cited in Richard J. Mouw, "Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1, 1989): 106. Likewise, Herman Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy: The Greek Prelude*, ed. Robert D. Knudsen, Daniël Strauss, and Al Wolters, trans. Ray Togtmann, vol. 1, *The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd, Series A* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004), 1, indicates that his "Philosophy of the Law-Idea" is an attempt to build upon Abraham Kuyper's thought.

13. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 56-57.

14. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 146, 227. Muether notes, however, that Van Til's participation in the journal appears to be lackluster. E.g., in forty-two years Van Til published only one article in the journal (*Ibid.*, 146).

15. This subtitle appeared on the cover of *Philosophia Reformata* from its inception in 1936 (i.e., vol. 1) until 1992 (i.e., vol. 57).

16. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 371.

example, H. Evan Runner moved to Amsterdam in order to study Dooyeweerd's *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* under Vollehoven after receiving encouragement to do so from Van Til.¹⁷

In the third place, Muether notes that, at first, "Van Til regretted the need to go public" with his criticisms of Dooyeweerd's thought and that he described his dispute with Dooyeweerd as, personally speaking, the most difficult one of his career.¹⁸ Muether's observation can be expanded as follows. In 1974—very late in his career—Van Til leveled a totalizing critique against Dooyeweerd's thought.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the very next year he continued to explicitly appropriate Dooyeweerd's formulations, such as, the four religious ground motives that undergird theoretical thought.²⁰ Also, Van Til continued to publicly defend Dooyeweerd from false misrepresentations of his thought even after having repudiated his entire philosophical project.²¹ In this regard Muether notes that Van Til defended Dooyeweerd against rash American critics, such as Ronald Nash, who attempted to criticize Dooyeweerd without reading any of Dooyeweerd's Dutch corpus.²² Therefore, similar to Van Til's perplexing

17. Cf. Calvin Seerveld, "A Note of Personal Gratefulness," *Christian Renewal*, Special Supplement: Runner remembered (March 10, 2003): 19. Several other articles in this special supplement mention Van Til's influence upon Runner.

18. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 201.

19. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*.

20. Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), 3-7; with *idem*, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 230-239. Regarding the latter, Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 356-57, 369, notes in passing that Van Til appropriates Dooyeweerd's religious "ground-motif" schema in his polemic against Karl Barth's theology.

21. Cornelius Van Til, "Defends Dooyeweerd," *The Banner* 109, no. 33 (August 30, 1974): 20; *idem*, "A Complaint," *The Banner* 109, no. 40 (October 18, 1974): 20; cf. Bristley, *Guide*, s.v., 1974.J1, J2.

22. In addition to the perplexing fact that Van Til continued to appropriate Dooyeweerd's formulations despite his own devastating criticisms against Dooyeweerd's thought, Van Til also defended Dooyeweerd against allegedly rash American critics of Dooyeweerd, such as Ronald Nash; cf. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 201.

dialectical stance toward Bavinck's theology, he evinces a strong measure of affinity toward Dooyeweerd's thought, his totalizing criticisms notwithstanding.

For these three reasons there is much more to the Van Til-Dooyeweerd story than only disagreements. "Surely, then," to borrow Frame's conclusion, "at least in a broad sense, we must describe the Dooyeweerdian school as one significant influence on Van Til's thought, at least after the mid-1930s."²³ Nevertheless, the theological and philosophical relationship between Van Til and Dooyeweerd remains largely underdeveloped in the related scholarship.

2. The Untold Story in Particular

This underdevelopment is acutely evident with respect to Van Til's allegations that a corrosive scholasticism wreaks deadly havoc upon certain aspects of Bavinck's thought. The Copernican line of Van Til scholarship has simply accepted the major and minor premises of Van Til's argument without any critical reflection upon the historical context within which Van Til's argument was developed:

Major premise—scholasticism is inherently bad.

Minor premise—Bavinck's theology is scholastic on certain points.

Ergo—Bavinck's theology is corrupt on certain points and hence must be purged of its scholastic trappings.

Considered abstractly, this argument may at first glance appear to be an instance of Van Til's Copernican originality. However, when the argument is interpreted concretely, that is, when it is viewed within the neo-Calvinist context

23. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 22. Also cf. Frame's similar comment at p. 426.

that Van Til himself claims as his own, then Van Til's reasoning appears as the antipode of revolutionary novelty; for, upon comparing his formulations with Dooyeweerd's, it is clear that Van Til appropriates not only the two premises of his argument but also the conclusion directly from Dooyeweerd's thought.

B. Dooyeweerd on Scholasticism

We turn first to Herman Dooyeweerd's works for the purpose of summarizing the main lines of his critique against neo-Calvinist scholasticism. Due to the immensity of Dooyeweerd's corpus we will have to be highly selective.

1. Brief Excursus on *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*

The work most apropos of our inquiry is Dooyeweerd's three-volume treatise, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*. Two important caveats about this work need to be stated up front, however. First, only the first volume—a translation of *Reformatie en Scholastiek in de Wijsbegeerte*—has been published.²⁴ Volumes two and three exist only in the form of pre-published manuscripts.²⁵ According to a note in the first volume, the material in volumes two and three is comprised primarily of articles which Dooyeweerd published in *Philosophia Reformata* between 1945 and 1950.²⁶ However, it is evident that the new volumes

24. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Reformatie en Scholastiek in de Wijsbegeerte*, vol. 1 (Franeker: T. Wever, 1949); translated as *idem, Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, vol. 1.

25. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy: An Introduction to the Anthropology of the Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea*, vol. 2, 3 vols., The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd, Series A (Paideia Press, 2011); *idem, Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy: Natural Philosophy and Philosophical Anthropology*, vol. 3, 3 vols., The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd, Series A (Paideia Press, n.d.). NB: I am using pre-published editions of vols. 2 and 3 of Dooyeweerd's *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*. Thus, the page numbers cited herein may be slightly different than those in the forthcoming published versions.

26. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:iii: "Parts of Volumes II and III

include materials published in *Philosophia Reformata* at least as far back as 1936. For instance, portions of Dooyeweerd's 1936 article, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," appear in volume two.²⁷

Second, our analysis proceeds upon an assumption, namely, that Van Til had access to all of these newly translated materials in their original, untranslated form. There is strong warrant for such an assumption; for, *Reformatie en Scholastiek* is a work that Van Til references numerous times throughout various writings,²⁸ and his writings evince strong evidence that he was well acquainted with the content of this book. Furthermore, since the bulk of the material within volumes two and three was published in the journal of which he was an editor for over forty years, it is entirely plausible to infer that Van Til was aware of the contents of these articles.

In order to unpack Dooyeweerd's critique of the scholasticism in neo-Calvinist thought, we must first summarize Dooyeweerd's general definition of scholasticism and the context within which this definition is situated, namely, the theory of Western philosophy's four ground-motives that he propounds in *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*.

2. Scholasticism in General: Synthesis Thinking

Two correlations within Dooyeweerd's opening paragraph are notable for

appeared in the journal *Philosophia Reformata* between 1945 and 1950. Volume III was left uncompleted, but it does contain the main ideas of Dooyeweerd with regard to the theory of enkaptic interlacements and Dooyeweerd's anthropological theory of the complex bodily structure of the human being."

27. Cf. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 211; with *idem*, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:46.

28. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Syllabus. (Philadelphia, PA: Reformed Episcopal Seminary, 1940), ch. 14; *idem*, *Christianity and Barthianism*, ch. 5, section 5; *idem*, *The Great Debate Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1970), ch. 5, section D.

our thesis. He begins by placing his life's work in the context of three major events within the closing decades of the nineteenth century: (1) the failure of humanistic philosophy, (2) the rise of neo-Thomism, or what Dooyeweerd calls, "a great Renaissance of Scholastic philosophy, more particularly of Thomism," and (3) the rise of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea, a Calvinist school of philosophy based directly upon the revolutionary work of Abraham Kuyper.²⁹ In this way Dooyeweerd indirectly draws an important correlation between himself and Abraham Kuyper, namely, he presents himself as building directly upon Kuyper's revolutionary neo-Calvinist thought. Additionally, though he has not yet defined the term, he correlates "Scholasticism" with Roman Catholicism in general and Thomas Aquinas in particular. Thus already in the opening paragraph the two main topics of our investigation are set before us in seed form—neo-Calvinism and scholasticism.

Continuing further Dooyeweerd explains that from the *polis* of the ancient Greek city-states to the church-state hegemony of Medieval Roman Catholicism to the shifting church-state relation in the Protestant Reformation to the rise and fall of modern humanism, a "Promethean struggle" between spiritual cultural forces is obvious within the history of the West. He remarks that these spiritual cultural forces express themselves philosophically by means of four "ground-motives."³⁰ Yet, before explicating the ground-motives individually, he divides them into two groups:

Of them, three are clearly dialectical. That is to say, they are torn by an inner dualism, which constantly induces them to span positions in which

29. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:1.

30. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:2-3.

one factor is set irretrievably in diametrical opposition to the other.³¹

If we interpret this statement in light of the sub-title to Part I of the book—“Initial Survey of the Religious Ground-Motives and the Conflict They Produce between the Reformational and Scholastic Spirits in Philosophy”—we perhaps receive a foretaste of the overarching thesis of the book, namely, those who wish to follow Kuyper truly must make a choice for either scholasticism or Reformational philosophy.

2.1. *The Greek Form-Matter Ground-Motive*

Aristotle was the first to use the terms “form” and “matter” to describe this ground-motive, according to Dooyeweerd. “It originated,” he writes,

in an unresolved conflict within the Greek religious consciousness between the ground-motive of the older telluric, chthonic, and uranic *nature religions*, on the one hand, in which a proto-Greek nucleus was supplemented by many elements both of indigenous pre-Greek (Minoan) and of foreign origin, and, on the other hand, the ground-motive of the newer *culture religion*, the religion of the Olympic pantheon.³²

Regarding the nature religions, Dooyeweerd admits the difficulty involved with drawing conclusions based on the scant number of extant pre-Homeric primary sources. Nevertheless, he asserts that enough evidence exists to show that the primary ground-motive of pre-Homeric nature religion is “the motive of *the divine, eternally flowing stream of life*.”³³ Rooted in mother earth, this divine life stream governs the cycle of life and death. It gives life to every individuated form, and it takes life according to the law of fate/necessity (i.e., Anankē).

Additionally, the life stream is viewed as a sort of “*psychic fluid*” that is not

31. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:3.

32. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:3-4; quote at p. 4.

33. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:4-5; quote at p. 5.

limited by bodily forms and is hence unable to die. Dooyeweerd labels this ground-motive as the Greek “matter motive,” and he presents the Greek god Dionysus as the paragon of this ground-motive.³⁴

Dionysus’ antipode—the Delphic god, Apollo—is the paragon of the Greek culture religion, according to Dooyeweerd.³⁵ “In contrast to the religion of nature,” he writes,

it was the religion of *rational form, measure, and harmony*. . . . The Olympian deities left “mother earth” and became *immortal, radiant form-gods*, who in their supersensible form and personal shape were equivalent to *idealized and personified cultural powers*.³⁶

Dooyeweerd labels this ground-motive the Greek “form motive” accordingly, and he holds up Homer’s epic poetry as “its most brilliant expression.”³⁷

Dooyeweerd asserts that, notwithstanding the antithesis between Apollo’s form motive and Dionysus’ matter motive, the Greek culture religion

attempted to absorb into itself the older religion, both as to its original Greek and as to its imported and its pre-Greek domestic elements. It attempted to adapt it to its own ground-motive of form, measure, and harmony. In particular, it sought to restrain the ecstatic, telluric worship of Dionysus by means of the lawful form principle of the service of Apollo. At Delphi, Apollo and Dionysus became brothers, with the latter losing his indeterminate wildness and appearing in the more serious role of a “shepherd of souls.”³⁸

In this passage Dooyeweerd introduces a hallmark trait of his view of scholasticism, namely, synthesis thinking. In other words, the Greek attempt to domesticate the antithetical relationship between Dionysus and Apollo is the first large-scale example of synthesis thinking in Western philosophy, and this

34. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:5-6; quotes at p. 6.

35. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:6, 8.

36. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:8.

37. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:8.

38. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:8.

attempted synthesis serves as a paradigmatic adumbration of Dooyeweerd's later analysis of synthesis thinking within scholastic philosophy.

Returning to his analysis of the attempted Greek matter-form synthesis, we find that Dooyeweerd avers three reasons why this alleged synthesis was doomed to fail: (1) the culture religion failed to engage the deepest problem of life—death; the Olympian deities were powerless against Anankē; (2) the ethics of the Olympian gods were out of accord with ethics of the Greek people, as if the gods lived “beyond good and evil” (Homer); (3) due to the socio-political transition from Mycenaean knighthood to the Greek *polis*, the Homeric version of what takes place on Mt. Olympus became sorely out of touch with ordinary Greek people.³⁹

Despite the ultimate failure of the Greek synthesis, however, Dooyeweerd argues that an important aspect of this attempt to unite the form and matter motives lived on—“the *dialectical religious ground-motive*.”⁴⁰ That is to say, in subsequent Greek thought

the principles of form and matter are unbreakably interrelated, in the sense that they mutually presuppose each other. In their dialectical interrelationship they determine the Greek concept of the “nature” (*physis*) of things.⁴¹

Dooyeweerd therefore employs this dialectical religious form-matter ground-motive as the hermeneutical key that unlocks the meaning of the sometimes wildly divergent and antithetical streams within Greek thought:

This dialectical ground-motive leads Greek thought into true polar antithesis and causes it to diverge into movements that seem to oppose

39. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:9-10.

40. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:10.

41. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:11.

each other radically. These, however, manifest their underlying affinity within this ground-motive itself. The Greek intellectual community was rooted in this ground-motive, and for this reason it is quite impossible to understand the history of Greek philosophy in its uniqueness without having come to grips with it.⁴²

Therefore, according to Dooyeweerd, the crux of the Greek form-matter ground-motive is its attempt to synthesize polar opposites.

2.2. *The Biblical Creation-Fall-Redemption Ground-Motive*

“The second ground-motive,” begins Dooyeweerd, “is that of *creation, the fall into sin, and redemption through Christ Jesus in the communion of the Holy Spirit.*”⁴³

Due to its concomitant doctrine of creation, the Christian ground-motive is diametrically opposed to the Greek form-matter ground-motive; for, as he concludes after citing Psalm 139: “Truly, the message of this psalm stands as the antipodes of the Greek dualism of the form and matter motives.”⁴⁴ Dooyeweerd argues that the apex of the antithesis between the Christian and Greek ground-motives evinces itself in their respective anthropologies. Whereas Christianity posits the human heart as “the integral, individual-spiritual fundamental unity of all the functions and structure of temporal reality,” the Greek dialectical synthesis posits a

religious dualism of the Greek form-matter motive, which comes to its clearest expression in the religious antithesis found in Greek anthropology between a material body and a theoretical mental substance having the character of pure form.⁴⁵

42. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:11.

43. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:11.

44. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:11-12 ; quote at p. 12. Compare p. 25: “There is an absolute antithesis between the ground-motive of the Christian religion and that of the Greek religious consciousness. This antithesis holds just as well between the Christian and the humanistic ground-motives, even though in its process of formation the latter passed through the former.”

45. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:12.

Furthermore, with respect to the fall into sin, whereas Christianity posits a “radical” rebellion in the human heart against “the absolute Source of life” and hence a “spiritual death” within man’s heart that “affected the temporal cosmos in its entirety,” the Greek dialectical motive cannot allow the idea of sin since Greek thought precludes divine revelation altogether.⁴⁶ Additionally, Dooyeweerd argues, albeit only implicitly, that the incarnation of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ is a further antipode to Greek anthropology; for, Jesus took to himself both “the root and the temporal ramifications” of human nature, namely, soul and body.⁴⁷ “Thus,” he avers, “as long as it is understood in its pure, Scriptural sense, this [Christian] religious ground-motive in no way manifests in itself a dialectical, dualistic character.”⁴⁸

In its struggle against Hellenism, however, the Christian ground motive was corrupted by the Greek form-matter motive, argues Dooyeweerd in a passage that serves as a segue into the third ground-motive.⁴⁹ He reasons that from the Christological and trinitarian controversies to Gnosticism to the *Logos* speculation of the early Apologists to Marcionism, the church was plagued on every side with the dualistic Greek form-matter ground-motive. By God’s grace, however, the church fought back against all of these dualisms, and Augustine especially managed to preserve the Christian ground-motive in its basic form.

No one was yet in a position, however, to achieve a sufficiently independent expression of the Christian ground-motive within

46. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:12-13; quotes at p. 13.

47. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:13.

48. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:14.

49. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:14-15.

philosophical thought itself. In particular, there existed at this time great unclarity concerning the relationship of philosophy to dogmatic theology, because the inner connection of philosophic thought to the religious ground-motives had not yet been discovered.⁵⁰

Accordingly, philosophy became subordinated to theology and then identified with it. What is more, argues Dooyeweerd, because Christian theology did not yet recognize the pagan ground-motive of Greek thought, there was no objection to taking over lock, stock, and barrel many important elements from ancient philosophy," hence "theologians resorted to adapting or accommodating heathen thought to the doctrine of the Christian church."⁵¹ Thus again we find the characteristic trait of Dooyeweerd's view of scholasticism—synthesis thinking.

2.3. The Scholastic Nature-Grace Ground-Motive

The attempt by Christian theologians "to bridge the radical antithesis between the Greek and the Christian ground motives" led to a new dialectical theme that dominated the Medieval Roman Catholic cultural hegemony in the same way that the form-matter ground-motive dominated Greek culture—"nature and grace."⁵² Even Reformed theology could not escape this scholastic dualism; for, despite the attempts of Luther and Calvin to build upon Augustine's preservation of the Christian ground-motive, Melanchthon introduced a revised version of the scholastic nature-grace dualism into Reformed theology thus giving rise to a Protestant version of Scholasticism.⁵³ The

50. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:14.

51. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:15.

52. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:15.

53. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:15-16. For Dooyeweerd's further explication of how the nature-grace dualism invades Protestant scholastic thought, see pp. 33-39. Also cf. 2:12-13.

Roman Catholic version of scholasticism, on the other hand, was dominated by the theology of Thomas Aquinas, “who,” argues Dooyeweerd,

posited nature as the autonomous but subordinate “preamble” of grace or supernature. Further, the mutual relationship between these was conceived as that between matter and form. Thus Thomas came to his solution with the aid of the same device that had already done service in the Greek intellectual community to bind together two antagonistic religious ground-motives.⁵⁴

2.4. *The Humanistic Nature-Freedom Ground-Motive*

The fourth ground-motive arose within philosophy during the era of the Renaissance, explains Dooyeweerd. During this time Roman Catholicism’s Medieval church-state hegemony began to decline, and at the same time, he notes, “the idea of the absolute *autonomy* or self-legislation of the human personality, centered in its reason,” began to dominate.⁵⁵

Hand in hand with this new *freedom motive* of the humanistic ideal of personality, there developed a new conception of nature. . . . Here nature was viewed as the macro-cosmic reflection of the human personality, as a cosmos that offered infinite possibilities for the deployment of man’s creative powers. . . . It was regarded as independent of all supernatural powers and influences.⁵⁶

Thus a humanistic nature motive—exemplified in Giordano Bruno’s definition of nature as *natura naturans*—became wedded to its complete opposite, the humanistic freedom motive, and conflict between the two was inevitable; for, as Dooyeweerd argues, although the mathematical advances in modern science led to a rationalistic scientific ideal based on the nature motive, the the apex of the

54. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:16. At pp. 16-17 Dooyeweerd remarks that the nature-grace ground-motive will be examined in detail in the second volume of this work.

55. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:17.

56. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:17.

freedom motive (i.e., fully autonomous human persons) critiqued this rationalistic scientific ideal on empirical grounds, thus causing an irreconcilable conflict between the two ground-motives. Empiricism (in the form of historicism) thus replaced rationalism as the new scientific ideal, and the same irreconcilable conflict ensued, claims Dooyeweerd. Further, he avers that this cycle of conflicts has led to “a process of religious uprooting.”⁵⁷ “In this entire development,” concludes Dooyeweerd,

the dialectical character of the humanistic ground-motive comes into sharp relief. Until the end of the previous century it had undergirded the thought of the Western community at large. Through its absolute supremacy in modern culture, it had also impressed its conceptual pattern in many ways upon Catholic and reformational thought, at least insofar as these intellectual currents did not want to have themselves banned from the scientific community.⁵⁸

3. Scholasticism in Neo-Calvinist Thought in Particular

Now that we have seen that Dooyeweerd defines scholasticism in terms of synthesis thinking—specifically, a synthesis between one of the three non-Christian ground-motives with the Christian ground-motive—we are in a position to survey his allegations against the patent scholasticism in the neo-Calvinist theological formulations of Kuyper and Bavinck and philosophical formulations of Jan Woltjer (1849–1917). In order to view his critiques in their proper historical perspective, however, two factors should be kept in mind.

In the first place, Dooyeweerd treats Kuyper as the paragon of Neo-Calvinist thought. Therefore, despite the fact that throughout his article on Kuyper’s

57. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:18-19; quote at p. 19; also cf. 2:16.

58. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:19.

epistemology and throughout volume two of *Reformation and Scholasticism* Dooyeweerd devotes most of his attention to Kuyper's thought, he nevertheless lists Bavinck's and Woltjer's names along with Kuyper's. In "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," for example, Dooyeweerd employs Kuyper's *reformatorische grondconceptie* as the explicit standard by which he judges not only Kuyper's thought, but also Bavinck's and Woltjer's:

Immers in deze rede heb ik mij genoodzaakt gezien den vinger to leggen op bepaalde gedachtenlijnen in de geschriften van Kuyper, Woltjer en Bavinck, die m. i. met de inzonderheid door Kuyper ontwikkelde *reformatorische grondconceptie* der Christelijke wijsbegeerte op geenerlei wijze te rijmen zijn.⁵⁹

Specifically, Dooyeweerd places his finger on the following crux of these alleged "bepaalde gedachtenlijnen":

De waarheid is deze, dat aantoonbaar de beide gedachtenlijnen in Kuyper's wetenschappelijke arbeid met elkander in tegenspraak zijn en dat een innerlijke verzoening daarom onmogelijk moet worden geacht, wijl zij op elkander volstrekt uitsluitende uitgangspunten teruggaan.⁶⁰

Apart from one exception, this *de-beide-gedachtenlijnen* premise governs Dooyeweerd's entire criticism of the scholasticism in Kuyper's theology and hence his entire criticism of the scholasticism in Bavinck's and Woltjer's thought. The one exception is that, according to Dooyeweerd, Kuyper's Reformational conception of the heart overcomes the scholastic, dualistic errors that plague Bavinck's and Woltjer's anthropological formulations:

Slechts Kuyper deed hier den geweldigen greep, welke met één slag den anthropologischen kijk in schriftuurlijken zin radicaal omwendt. Noch in Woltjer's genoemde geschriften, noch in Bavinck's *Beginselen der Psychologie* zal men deze opvatting van het hart terug vinden. Beide blijven hier volkomen in de scholastische leer van de zielsvermogens en

59. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 193.

60. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 196-97.

het intellect als leidend, centraal deel van de ziel bevangen.⁶¹

Therefore, in contradistinction to Bavinck and Woltjer, Kuyper alone receives Dooyeweerd's commendation for overcoming scholasticism on this foundational anthropological point.⁶²

In the second place, Dooyeweerd appreciates Kuyper far more than he criticizes him. For example, we have already noted above that in volume one of *Reformation and Scholasticism* Dooyeweerd presents Kuyper as the direct philosophical predecessor to *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*. Additionally, he begins his article on Kuyper's epistemology with (1) a lamentation over the fact that he has to criticize his former teachers and (2) an attempt to relativize his criticisms by noting the unique challenges that his predecessors faced:

Zij waren mijn leermeesters, voor wie ik groote liefde en hoogachting koester, en die baanbrekenden arbeid hebben verricht in een tijd, toen het behooren tot den kring der Vrije Universiteit nog als een abdicatie aan het wetenschappelijk geweten werd gebrandmerkt.⁶³

Furthermore, the critiques of the scholastic line in Kuyper's thought that we will survey below in volume two of his *Reformation and Scholasticism* are preceded by lofty commendations, such as:

Through this critical religious turn in his understanding of science, Kuyper indeed became the spiritual father of the new reformational philosophy. It is not an overstatement to call his appearance a critical turning point in the history of Western philosophical thought, since there, for the first time, the relation between religion and philosophy was determined *solely on the basis of the reformational ground-motive of the Christian religion itself*.⁶⁴

61. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 211-12; also cf. *idem*, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 3:121.

62. Cf. John Bolt, "Een gemiste en een nieuwe kans: Herman Bavinck over openbaring en religie," 153.

63. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 193.

64. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:15.

Dooyeweerd therefore levels his critiques against Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Woltjer's scholastic formulations only after praising their pioneering work.

3.1. Kuyper's First Line: The Truly Reformational

Dooyeweerd argues that the Reformational line in Kuyper's thought begins in God's Word and charts its course solely according to the Christian ground-motive. He describes this line as

. . . prescientific, or rather, supra-theoretical in character, which means that it is concerned solely with the presuppositions of a genuinely reformational philosophy and does not draw out the implications of these presuppositions within the realm of actual scientific inquiry.⁶⁵

Dooyeweerd lists four philosophical presuppositions for this Christian ground-motive: (1) the confession of God's sovereignty as the Creator according to what is revealed in Scripture; (2) the acceptance in faith of Scripture's teaching regarding the heart as the "religious root" or nexus of humanity's temporal existence; (3) the confession of humanity's radical fall into sin, Jesus Christ's radical redemption from sin, and the concomitant antithesis in every sphere of life implied in these two facts; (4) the belief in a need for a repudiation of traditional scholastic anthropology.⁶⁶

Additionally, Dooyeweerd avers that, beyond establishing these four presuppositions for a truly Reformational philosophy, Kuyper made another significant advancement for Reformational philosophy with respect to the doctrine of sphere sovereignty, namely, he "raised sphere sovereignty to the level of a cosmological principle that is directly connected to God's absolute

65. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:75.

66. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:75.

sovereignty as Creature of the universe.”⁶⁷ Thus, although Kuyper himself did not develop the sphere sovereignty doctrine scientifically, “he did state the starting point for such an elaboration with great clarity.”⁶⁸

3.2. *Kuyper’s Second Line: The Scholastic Synthesist*

Despite his praise for the philosophical accomplishments arising out of the truly Reformational line in Kuyper’s thought, Dooyeweerd asserts that a contradictory scholastic line—a line of “accommodation” or synthesis thinking—corrupts certain aspects of Kuyper’s thought, especially his scientific theological formulations. Rather than having the Christian ground-motive as its starting point, this scholastic line of thought is rooted in an illegitimate attempt to accommodate the Christian ground-motive to the form-matter, nature-grace, and nature-freedom ground-motives.⁶⁹ Dooyeweerd adduces three examples to demonstrate this scholastic tendency.

In the first place, despite his high esteem for Kuyper’s formulation of the heart, Dooyeweerd criticizes Kuyper’s affinity for scholastic anthropology:

As far as I know Kuyper was the first to fathom, in its full depth and riches, the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the heart as the religious center of human nature, and to lift this teaching from the overgrowth of Greek philosophy. Even so, in his scientific theological works he continued to use the scholastic constructs of body and soul.⁷⁰

In the second place, Dooyeweerd asserts that Kuyper’s, Bavinck’s, and Woltjer’s response to Kant’s epistemological revolution is beset by so-called neo-scholastic

67. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:77.

68. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:78; also cf. *idem*, “Kuyper’s wetenschapsleer,” 224.

69. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:78.

70. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:46.

“critical realism.” He sets up this assertion by first noting that the neo-Thomists, led by Cardinal Mercer, attempted to meet Kant’s critique with synthesis thinking, namely, they attempted to transform Kant’s “critical idealism” into “critical realism.”⁷¹

The core of the challenge was to bring to expression, in the problem areas internal to philosophy, the basic religious conception of Calvinism that Kuyper had developed so masterfully. It was precisely here, however, that the scholastic and humanistic traditions proved too strong, and Kuyper was unable to wrestle free of the established ways of posing the problems.⁷²

According to Dooyeweerd, Kuyper, Bavinck, and Woltjer attempted to answer Kant’s challenge by advocating the critical realist position that Kuyper formulated in his *Encyclopaedie*. However, instead of following Kuyper’s truly Reformational line of thought, the neo-Calvinists succumbed to the influence of Cardinal Mercer and the neo-Thomists.

Thus there arose in this new Reformed school of thought a “critical realism,” which initially was welcomed by many Reformed scholars as the dawn of a Calvinistic philosophy. Intrinsically, however, this critical realism was as alien to Reformed principles as was the old scholasticism of the days of Gisbert Voetius.⁷³

Specifically, Dooyeweerd labels two aspects of Kuyper’s epistemological formulations as scholastic and hence problematic: (1) his supposition that the soul is *anima rationalis* with two primary faculties—knowledge and will and (2) his solution to the subject-object problem in terms of a distinction between *elements* and *relations*.⁷⁴ Regarding the latter, Dooyeweerd rejoins:

71. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:54-55.

72. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:55.

73. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:55; also cf. *idem*, “Kuyper’s wetenschapsleer,” 199.

74. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:56.

This theory was nothing more than an adaptation of the “critical” viewpoint of modern humanistic epistemology to traditional scholastic psychology and ontology. It has not the slightest internal connection with Kuyper's basic religious conception of Calvinism.⁷⁵

He goes on to further criticize Kuyper's *elements* and *relations* theory as a mere objective “idea-realistic twist” to Kant's subjective critical idealism.⁷⁶

Therefore, it is evident that Dooyeweerd views the “critical realist” formulations of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Woltjer as a significant deviation from the pure Reformational line in Kuyper's thought.

In the third place, as a concomitant of his repudiation of critical realism, Dooyeweerd argues that the *logosleer*⁷⁷ inherent within Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Woltjer's formulations of critical realism is beset by synthesis thinking. He reasons that since the Logos theory has a long and honored pedigree in Christian theology, it is not surprising that the neo-Calvinists made use of the doctrine. Nevertheless, Dooyeweerd insists—“Let the theory be examined!”⁷⁸ Accordingly, after subjecting the *logosleer* to a lengthy historical analysis beginning with its origins in the Platonic school, Dooyeweerd concludes that the theory is a thoroughly corrupt synthesis of Christian and non-Christian ground-motives.⁷⁹

On the basis that the Logos doctrine is patently non-Christian, he then argues that Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Woltjer's theory of science unduly “*logicized* God's order for the creation” and that hence the *logosleer* could not provide the basis for an adequate rejoinder to Kant's epistemological critiques. “For,” reasons

75. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:56.

76. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:56-57; quote at p. 57.

77. Cf. Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper's wetenschapsleer,” 197, 207ff.

78. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:59.

79. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:59-71.

Dooyeweerd regarding what he sees as the crux of Kant's critiques,

no change was made in Kant's view that all law-governed relations without exception are *logical*. Instead, the origin of these relations was sought not in the *human*, but in the *divine* Logos, the divine Reason with its unity of "logical thought" and "word" that had already been spoken of by Philo. The relationships in knowable things thus were not seen as *subjectively* logical, but as *objectively* logical; and it was thought that this logical nature was what allowed them to be grasped by our logical thought. For these thinkers [i.e., Kuyper, Bavinck, and Woltjer] maintained that in the process of gaining theoretical knowledge, as Aristotle had taught, there is a union between the subjective logical function of thought and the objective logical ontic forms of knowable things.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in addition to alleging that the neo-Calvinists' use of the *logosleer* precluded their ability to answer Kant's critique of knowledge with a truly Christian rejoinder, Dooyeweerd avers that Kuyper's use of the Logos doctrine flatly contradicts his formulation of sphere sovereignty.⁸¹

Based upon these three examples of scholasticism in Kuyper's thought, Dooyeweerd reaffirms his premise regarding the two divergent lines therein—a purely Reformational line and a scholastic line. "This, however," he insists,

in no way proves that both viewpoints have an equal right to exist in an intrinsically reformed philosophy. It only shows that Kuyper lacked the opportunity to carry through his basic reformed conception in the internal course of scientific inquiry.⁸²

4. Summary

For Dooyeweerd, scholasticism is synthesis thinking. More specifically, it is the attempt to synthesize the two antithetical poles of one or more of the three non-Christian religious ground-motives: form-matter, nature-grace, or nature-

80. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:71.

81. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:72-74.

82. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:74; also cf. *idem*, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer," 210.

freedom. Insofar as all such attempts are deviations from the Christian ground-motive, however, they are doomed to end up in a never-ending dialectical tension.

The Greek dialectical synthesis between the matter and form motives—between Dionysus and Apollo—is paradigmatic for Dooyeweerd’s formulation of scholasticism. All subsequent syntheses are recapitulations of the this foundational synthesis. Hence volume one of Dooyeweerd’s *Reformation and Scholasticism* is devoted to ancient Greek philosophy up to and including Plato.⁸³ In stark contrast to the dialectical form-matter ground-motive, the Christian ground-motive of creation, fall, and redemption is diametrically opposed to all forms of synthesis thinking. Due especially to the Christian doctrine of creation, the Christian ground-motive precludes all dualisms and dialectic tensions by definition. The Roman Catholic scholastic synthesis is an attempt to synthesize the Greek and Christian ground-motives. Yet, insofar as these two are mutually exclusive, the synthesis can only be dialectical in nature. Hence scholasticism is doomed to fail according to its own self-contradictory presuppositions. Likewise, the modern humanistic nature-freedom ground-motive cannot advance beyond a dialectical synthesis between mutually exclusive principles and hence it is no more successful than any of the other attempted syntheses.

The whole point of Dooyeweerd’s theory of the four ground motives is to demonstrate that Christianity alone provides the basis for a non-dialectical, non-dualistic, non-synthesis-based worldview. With respect to scholasticism, therefore, by arguing that it is based upon dialectical synthesis thinking,

83. Cf. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 1:39.

Dooyeweerd repudiates it as non-Christian. Therefore, according to Dooyeweerd, since Kuyper and the neo-Calvinists have fallen prey to synthesis thinking especially with respect to epistemology and the philosophy of science, neo-Calvinist theology must be purged of its scholastic trappings.

C. Van Til on Scholasticism

Van Til never wrote a book or syllabus exclusively on the topic of scholasticism. Nevertheless, he frequently employs both the term and the concept throughout many of his writings. It can even be said that scholasticism is a primary polemical theme that runs throughout Van Til's thought. In the following survey we will focus primarily upon the syllabus that contains his most extensive discussion of scholasticism—his lengthy, three-part critique of Herman Dooyeweerd's thought.⁸⁴ Due to the length of this syllabus, our treatment must be selective.

1. Scholasticism in General: Synthesis Thinking

Van Til defines the term "scholasticism" explicitly only once throughout his entire corpus, despite the fact that he employs the term frequently.⁸⁵ His definition is found in Part III of *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, which part is entitled, "Synthesis Thinking":

Scholasticism is an attempt to combine the man-centered thinking of the Greeks, notably of Aristotle, with the God-centered thinking of Christianity. Thomas Aquinas, the chief scholastic thinker, interpreted the "lower" half of reality by means of the notion of (a) human

84. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*.

85. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56, notes that Van Til uses this term "imprecisely," that is, usually in reference to what he interpreted as Aquinas's allegedly autonomous use of human reason.

autonomy with its implicates of an abstract, timeless principle of identity, thought of as correlative to a pure contingency notion of diversity and the “upper half” of reality by means of the notion of the creation-fall-redemption by Christ through communion with the Holy Spirit. . . .

Thomas thought he could combine the scale-of-being idea of the Greeks, climactically expressed in the philosophy of Plotinus with the Augustinian notion of the struggle between the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Terrena*.⁸⁶

Not only is the title of Part III—“Synthesis Thinking”—an emulation of Dooyeweerd’s basic definition of scholasticism, but also Van Til’s language of “creation-fall-redemption” is clearly a recapitulation of Dooyeweerd’s formulation of the Christian ground-motive. Additionally, Van Til’s “combination” language bear obvious resemblance to Dooyeweerd’s language of “synthesis thinking” and “accommodation.” Furthermore, earlier in the same work Van Til defines the scholastic worldview using Dooyeweerd’s “synthesis” terminology explicitly:

After we have seen what the non-Christian view of life is in its opposition to the christian view of life it is easier to see what the scholastic view of life is. It is the fruit of an effort to synthesize these two.

Scholasticism thinks it is intelligible to synthesize (a) the Christian and the non-Christian view of man (b) the Christian and the non-Christian view of the principle of unity (logic) and (c) the Christian and the non-Christian view of diversity by which man must interpret God, himself and the world.⁸⁷

In yet another passage Van Til defines the “nature of scholasticism” in terms of “synthesis thinking”:

It is a world and life view, a view including philosophy as well as theology which makes an amalgam of the Greek form of apostate thought, the Greek paideia with the Christian thought, the Christian paideia. Thomas of Aquinas [*sic*] is the greatest exponent of this synthesis. Calvin’s thinking is in principle opposed to this synthesis. But

86. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:1. Also cf. 1:9-14 wherein Van Til criticizes scholasticism within traditional apologetics.

87. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:26.

many of his followers fell back to an extent on scholastic forms of thought. Even the recent revival of Reformed thinking has not been able to escape scholasticism wholly. Even Kuyper dared not to be altogether true to his deepest convictions in the field of apologetics.⁸⁸

Moreover, Van Til employs Dooyeweerd's "synthesis thinking" terminology in the title of his polemical book that we surveyed above, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands*.⁸⁹

Additionally, Van Til defines the crux of scholasticism in terms reminiscent of Dooyeweerd's formulation. First, consider Van Til's formulation:

The root-error of Scholasticism is that it fails to place the whole man, as the creature made in the image of God, subject to the ordinance of God.⁹⁰

Then, compare Dooyeweerd's summary of the same crux in terms of "law" and "subjugation":

In contrast to this Greek view, the scriptural doctrine of creation underscores the truth that thought is not the *origin* of the divine creation order, but is rather *subject* and subordinate to that order. . . . God's order for the creation is only disclosed to human thinking when humankind begins to bow in faith before God's majesty, submitting his thought to God's law instead of trying to logicize that law in accordance with Greek *logos* theory.⁹¹

Whether or not Van Til appropriates Dooyeweerd's formulation, his point is the same.

2. Scholasticism in Neo-Calvinist Thought in Particular

Van Til's appropriation of Dooyeweerd's definition of scholasticism becomes even more obvious as we look at his specific critiques against the scholasticism

88. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:31. Also cf. p. 21: "This scholastic *paideia* constitutes a synthesis of the Greek and the Christian *paideia*."

89. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*. Cf. chapter 4, §A, above.

90. Cornelius Van Til, "Bavinck the Theologian: A Review Article," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 52.

91. Dooyeweerd, *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, 2:71.

latent in Kuyper's thought; for, Van Til simply recapitulates the main points of Dooyeweerd's earlier criticisms.

In the first place, Van Til appropriates Dooyeweerd's *de-beide-gedachtenlijnen* premise in terms of "Kuyper the Calvinist" and "Kuyper the Thomist." According to Van Til, the former "taught *E Voto Dordraceno*," but the latter "spoke with the voice of Thomas" and hence "[h]is reasoning is scholastic."⁹²

Although he does not admit to appropriating Dooyeweerd's premise specifically, Van Til asserts that he is in full agreement with Dooyeweerd's analysis of Kuyper's *de beide gedachtenlijnen* as summarized in Dooyeweerd's article, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer."⁹³ Hence he admits that he "is in agreement with Dooyeweerd on the need for removing scholastic elements from Kuyper's thinking. . . ."⁹⁴ Likewise, Van Til affirms Dooyeweerd's two-lines analysis of Kuyper's thought by asking the following rhetorical question with an implied affirmative:

Haven't I expressed agreement with Dooyeweerd's assertion that, whether in philosophy or in theological apologetics, we must go beyond Kuyper's scholasticism by building on and developing his Calvinism?⁹⁵

Similarly, Van Til expressly affirms Dooyeweerd's two-lines analysis in this remark:

[Kuyper's] basic religious conviction was Calvinistic but, *as Dooyeweerd says*, when he was, somehow, unable to be fully himself, then he fell back on Scholasticism.⁹⁶

92. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:28.

93. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's wetenschapsleer"; cf. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:22-24.

94. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:24.

95. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:10.

96. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:28; emphasis added.

Therefore, it is clear that Van Til not only affirms Dooyeweerd's analysis of Kuyper's *de beide gedachtenlijnen*, but also recapitulates this criticism in terms of two Kuypers—the Calvinist and the Thomist.

In the second place, aspects of Van Til's own analysis of the scholasticism in Kuyper's thought are recapitulations of Dooyeweerd's prior analysis. For example, just as Dooyeweerd argued that Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Woltjer's affirmation of critical realism and its concomitant *logosleer* precluded these neo-Calvinist thinkers from providing a truly Reformational answer to Kant's skeptical critique of knowledge, so Van Til avers:

On the basis of Kuyper's argument there would be no confrontation between believers and unbelievers because neither would or could exist except by way of a common participation in one pure faith having faith in itself, without ever having anything to believe.

Kuyper should have told his skeptic friends . . . that they are unable to be skeptical except they are what the Scripture says they are. . . . As it is the argument of part of the *Encyclopedia* compromises the Christ of Scripture, the Logos of John's gospel with the *Logos* of the Greeks, the One of pure negation.⁹⁷

In the third place, despite the fact that he has appropriated Dooyeweerd's definition of scholasticism in general and his specific criticisms of the scholastic elements in neo-Calvinist thought in particular, Van Til attempts to turn Dooyeweerd's argument on its head by asserting that Dooyeweerd himself falls prey to the very scholastic line of synthesis thinking that he sought to purge from Kuyper's thought!⁹⁸ Thus Van Til categorically rejects select aspects of Dooyeweerd's thought. For example, he writes:

One may accept either the Kuyperian *or* the Dooyeweerdian view of sphere-sovereignty but one cannot consistently accept both. The are

97. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:28.

98. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:51-62.

exclusive of one another.⁹⁹

Furthermore, he concludes his syllabus with a categorical rejection of Dooyeweerd's entire philosophical project:

We had looked toward the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea, and especially toward Dooyeweerd's expression of it to lead us onward against the forces of apostate thinking in the philosophic field. We had hoped that Dooyeweerd would really build his philosophy upon Kuyper's Calvinism and not on Kuyper's Scholasticism.

However, Dooyeweerd's new form of synthesis thinking, his seeking for *religious* instead of intellectual unity is regressive and compromising at best. The apologetics implied in Dooyeweerd's philosophy seem to be no better than the apologetics of the Aquinas-Butler type while the theology implied in his philosophy is worse than that of the theology of the old-Princeton or the old-Amsterdam men. Dooyeweerd has gone "beyond" Kuyper but his "transcendental method" based on his religious-supra temporal sphere of occurrence leads toward the theological directionalism of Berkouwer, Kuitert, etc.¹⁰⁰

Notwithstanding the dialectical perplexity present herein due to Van Til's simultaneous appropriation of and polemic against Dooyeweerd's formulations with respect to scholasticism, his categorical repudiation of Dooyeweerd's thought *according to Dooyeweerd's own definition of scholasticism—"synthesis thinking"*—is yet another example of Van Til's appropriation of Dooyeweerd's thought.

3. Summary

In light of the several lines of evidence adduced above primarily from Van Til's syllabus, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, three conclusions may be drawn with respect to Van Til's definition of scholasticism in general: (1) Based upon his recapitulation of Dooyeweerd's "synthesis thinking" terminology

99. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:57.

100. Van Til, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 3:54.

and his ground-motive language, it is clear that Van Til appropriates Dooyeweerd's definition. (2) Furthermore, both Van Til and Dooyeweerd present Thomas Aquinas as the paradigmatic scholastic synthesizer. (3) Finally, both Van Til and Dooyeweerd interpret the crux of scholasticism as an invalid assertion of human autonomy and hence a violation of God's law.

Regarding Van Til's critiques of the scholasticism in neo-Calvinist thought in particular, three conclusions may be drawn: (1) Van Til appropriates Dooyeweerd's premise regarding two lines of thought in Kuyper's theology—a truly Reformational line and a corrupt scholastic line. In Van Til's parlance, Dooyeweerd's two lines become "Kuyper the Calvinist" and "Kuyper the Thomist." Furthermore, as with Dooyeweerd, so with Van Til—all of his criticisms proceed from this two-lines premise. (2) Van Til fully agrees with Dooyeweerd's assessment regarding the need to go beyond Kuyper's scholasticism in order to formulate a truly Reformational epistemology and philosophy of science. (3) Oddly, after appropriating Dooyeweerd's formulations regarding scholasticism, Van Til turns Dooyeweerd's own criticism against its original formulator and claims that Dooyeweerd himself has fallen prey to scholastic "synthesis thinking." Hence a dialectical tension attends Van Til's appropriations of Dooyeweerd's thought.

D. Van Til on Bavinck in light of Dooyeweerd

The fact that Van Til appropriates both Dooyeweerd's definition of scholasticism and his criticisms of the scholastic elements in neo-Calvinist thought places Van Til's criticisms of the scholastic elements in Bavinck's

theology in a whole new light. With the true source of Van Til's criticisms in view, we are now in a position to consider the soundness of the criticisms themselves.

1. Van Til's criticisms are largely second-hand.

In light of Dooyeweerd's critiques of the scholastic elements in Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Woltjer's formulations, Van Til's criticisms of the scholastic elements in Bavinck's theology are manifestly unoriginal. Even though he expands upon certain points of Dooyeweerd's criticisms with respect to the detailed theological formulations within Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, Van Til's criticisms never advance beyond the overarching critique that he appropriates from Dooyeweerd—"synthesis thinking."

Furthermore, several aspects of Van Til's specific criticisms of Bavinck's thought give the impression that he has simply emulated Dooyeweerd's criticisms of Kuyper's thought.

In the first place, Van Til follows Dooyeweerd's example of praising his neo-Calvinist predecessors before polemicizing against the scholastic elements in their thought.

In the second place, Van Til's "double-headed-fact" analysis that governs his entire criticism of Bavinck's thought is a recapitulation of Dooyeweerd's overarching *de-beide-gedachtenlijnen* analysis of Kuyper's thought. Accordingly, just like Dooyeweerd argues that, Kuyper, in his better moments, was truly Reformational, so Van Til argues that, Bavinck, in his better moments, followed Calvin's pure Reformed thinking rather than Aquinas' corrupt synthesis thinking. In this manner, both Dooyeweerd and Van Til oddly aver that they

know the true intentions of their predecessors better than their predecessors themselves knew them!

In the third place, just as Dooyeweerd argues—with Van Til’s explicit agreement—that contemporary Reformed philosophy must go beyond the scholasticism in Kuyper’s thought, so Van Til argues that contemporary Reformed theologians must go beyond the scholasticism in Bavinck’s thought.

In the fourth place, just as Dooyeweerd argues against the critical realism and *logosleer* in Kuyper’s thought, so Van Til argues against the critical realism and Logos doctrine in Bavinck’s thought.

Therefore, with respect to the sources of Van Til’s criticisms against Bavinck’s theology, we conclude that Van Til’s polemics are largely recapitulations of Dooyeweerd’s prior criticisms and that, accordingly, the “Copernican” interpretation of Van Til’s role in Reformed theology as the sole champion *contra* scholasticism is historically untenable.

2. Van Til’s criticisms are unsound.

Although a full analysis of Dooyeweerd’s first-hand and Van Til’s second-hand criticisms of the scholasticism in neo-Calvinist thought is beyond the scope of this thesis, a few critical comments based upon the primary source evidence adduced in chapters 5 and 6 are in order.

2.1. The current analyses, both pro and con, are underdeveloped.

We have already noted in chapter 5 that the secondary scholarship regarding Van Til’s criticisms of the alleged scholasticism in Bavinck’s thought is divided

with respect to the validity of the criticisms.¹⁰¹ On the one hand, the Copernican scholars, such as, Bahnsen, Dennison, and Oliphint, argue to the effect that Van Til single-handedly saved Reformed theology from the wiles of scholasticism and thus revolutionized Reformed theology. Additionally, in an effort to reestablish the validity of Van Til's criticisms of neo-Calvinist scholasticism in contemporary Reformed theology, Oliphint appropriates and expands Van Til's criticisms against Bavinck's critical realist epistemological formulations in two recent publications.¹⁰² However, these Copernican interpretations of Van Til remain lost in historical abstraction regarding Van Til's view of scholasticism insofar as they fail to note (1) that Van Til appropriates both his definition of scholasticism and his critiques of neo-Calvinist scholasticism primarily from Dooyeweerd and (2) that Van Til's view of scholasticism is significantly influenced by the debates at *De Vrije Universiteit* over the validity of classical Reformed scholasticism; for, Van Til clearly sides with the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* philosophers in rejecting all forms of scholasticism over against Valentijn Hepp's¹⁰³ and Hendrik Steen's¹⁰⁴ stern criticisms of Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's views.¹⁰⁵ These highly

101. Cf. chapter 5, §A, 1, above.

102. K. Scott Oliphint, "The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 201-232; *idem*, "Bavinck's Realism, The Logos Principle, and Sola Scriptura," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 359-90.

103. Valentine Hepp, *Dreigende deformatie*, 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1937); cf. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*.

104. Hendrik Steen, *Philosophia Deformata* (Kampen: Kok, 1937).

105. For an introduction to the basic issues at stake in the debate, including Hepp's and Steen's polemics and Dooyeweerd's rejoinders, see ch. 6 in Marcel E. Verburg, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, Passage 5 (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989); also cf. Daniël F. M. Strauss, "Skolastiek en Gereformeerde Skolastiek kontra Reformatories-christelike denke," *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologische Tydskrif* 10, no. 2 (March 1969): 97-114; Jacob Klapwijk, "Rationality in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Tradition," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan Van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 113-131; Albert M. Wolters, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan Van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff

significant contextual factors are completely overlooked by the Copernican interpretations.

On the other hand, Mattson and Masselink have challenged the validity of Van Til's criticisms. Mattson's alleges that Van Til read Bavinck's work uncharitably at points and hence misinterpreted several of his formulations. While this is undoubtedly true in the instances that Mattson cites, such an analysis does not penetrate to the heart of Van Til's criticisms as a whole, namely, his appropriation of Dooyeweerd's formulations regarding scholasticism in general and neo-Calvinist scholasticism in particular. Thus, although Mattson has made real progress with respect to challenging the details of Van Til's criticisms, he has not reached the final destination with respect to either the historical context or the *scopus* of the criticisms.

The opposite is the case with Masselink's analysis. Whereas Mattson is mostly correct on the details but insufficient on the historical context, Masselink is mostly correct on the context but insufficient on the details. For example, Masselink argues correctly with respect to the context of Van Til's criticisms that "Van Til expresses general agreement with Dooyeweerd's criticism of Kuyper's Epistemology."¹⁰⁶ "It appears," he likewise surmises, "that Van Til's general approach to historical Reformed theology resembles that of Schilder, Vollenhoven

(Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 113-131. (I am indebted to Professors Danie Strauss and Harry Vandyke for alerting me to the Verburg and Strauss sources via correspondence on the Thinknet newsgroup <<http://www2.redeemer.ca/dooyeweerd/thinknet-forum.php>>.) For Van Til's alignment with the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* philosophers on this issue, see his remarks regarding Hepp's and Steen's "false criticism" in Cornelius Van Til, "Response to Herman Dooyeweerd," 92; also cf. *idem*, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics*, 2:22. Incidentally, it should be noted that in one place Van Til uses Hepp's term, "dreigende deformatie," positively, albeit in a sense unrelated to the scholasticism debate at *De VU*, namely, with reference to developments at Princeton Seminary: *idem*, "De 'Preaching Mission'," *De Reformatie* 17, no. 21 (February 19, 1937): 167.

106. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, 120.

and Dooyeweerd.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, despite his accurate assessment of Van Til’s neo-Calvinist context, Masselink misconstrues aspects of Van Til’s position, such as his formulation of the essence and task of apologetics.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, insofar as a sound analysis of Van Til’s criticisms requires an accurate interpretation both of his historical context and of the details of his position, not only the Copernican interpretations but also the non-Copernican analyses require further refinements in order to overcome the current dialectical tension within the Van Til scholarship regarding his criticisms of neo-Calvinist scholasticism.

2.2. The “double-headed fact” premise is wholly subjective.

Emulating Dooyeweerd’s allegation that there are two irreconcilable “lines” in Kuyper’s thought—a Reformational line and a scholastic line—Van Til divides Bavinck’s thought into two halves and argues that the truly Reformed half of Bavinck’s thought is at odds with the scholastic half. Furthermore, just as Dooyeweerd argues that Kuyper’s Reformational line is stronger than his scholastic line and thus may serve as the foundation for a truly Reformational philosophy, so Van Til avers that Bavinck’s truly Reformed side is stronger than his scholastic side and thus may serve as the foundation for a truly Reformed theology and apologetic. The underlying premise of Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s criticisms of neo-Calvinist scholasticism is therefore the same: regarding their most basic presuppositions, or, to use Dooyeweerd’s terminology—regarding their ground-motives—there are two Kuypers and two Bavincks.

107. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, 18.

108. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, 176. Cf. chapter 2, §B, above.

However, the two-Kuypers and two-Bavincks premises are wholly subjective. This fact becomes immediately apparent as soon as one asks: How does one determine that there are two Kuypers or two Bavincks instead of one each? By what norm is such a bipolar determination made? The answer to these questions reveals the subjectivity of the premise: According to the norms supplied by the critics themselves!¹⁰⁹

How then do Dooyeweerd and Van Til establish their norms? Do they they start with an objective historical analysis of Kuyper's and Bavinck's views of the nature of scholasticism? Or, do they begin by analyzing Kuyper's and Bavinck's own evaluations of whether or not the scholastic method is appropriate for Reformed theology?

The answer to both questions is negative. Dooyeweerd's and Van Til's method begins not objectively but subjectively. They impose an idiosyncratic definition of scholasticism—a subjective norm—upon Kuyper's and Bavinck's theological formulations, and then they formulate both their two-Kuypers and two-Bavincks premises and their anti-scholastic criticisms on the basis of this subjective norm.

Specifically, their subjective analysis proceeds as follows. First, they assert that the history of Western thought is controlled by four ground-motives. Second, they argue that scholasticism is defined as a synthesis of the Christian ground-motive with one of the three non-Christian ground motives. Then, upon the basis of this definition, they allege that Thomas Aquinas is the paragon of scholastic

109. Cf. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, 17, who argues a similar rejoinder against Schilder's attempt to separate the true Kuyper from the false Kuyper: "This is truly a subjective undertaking, because who is to determine what is the true Kuyper—only the critic—only Schilder!"

“synthesis thinking.” Third, they search Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s writings for any theological formulations that appear to be influenced by Aquinas’ synthesis thinking. Fourth, wherever they find scholastic-looking formulations in Kuyper’s or Bavinck’s writings they immediately allege that non-Christian synthesis thinking has corrupted these aspects of Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s formulations. Therefore, not only the two-Kuypers and two-Bavincks premises but also the method of Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s criticisms is subjective.

With respect to Van Til’s “double-headed-fact” criticism specifically, in light of his subjective premise and method, Van Til’s assertion is methodologically untenable; for, he fails to demonstrate objectively that Bavinck’s theological formulations have been corrupted by a dialectical synthesis between Christian and non-Christian thought. All that Van Til’s criticisms demonstrate is that—*formally considered*—Bavinck recapitulates and develops theological formulations not only from Augustine and Aquinas but also from Reformed scholastics. Despite the fact that Van Til—according to the subjective criterion that he appropriates from Dooyeweerd—deems all scholastic formulations to be inherently non-Christian, he fails to demonstrate *materially* that in the places where Bavinck employs scholastic formulations he does so either with specific intent to mix Christian and non-Christian conceptions or with the specific consequence of actually achieving such a misguided synthesis.

2.3. The historical scope is severely limited.

In addition to the subjective premise and method of Van Til’s criticisms, the severely limited historical scope of his analysis of Reformed scholasticism leaves

his assessment of Bavinck's scholasticism open to the charge of reductionistic historical abstraction; for, following Dooyeweerd, Van Til limits the scope of his polemics exclusively to Kuyper and Bavinck.

However, even if we leave aside the question of whether or to what extent it is historically accurate to classify nineteenth-century neo-Calvinist theology as an expression of Reformed scholasticism,¹¹⁰ Van Til's use of Bavinck's and Kuyper's theology as the sole basis for his repudiation of Reformed scholasticism in general is methodologically unsound; for, he neither analyzes *any* Reformed orthodox theologian between Calvin and Kuyper nor compares the neo-Calvinist expression of scholasticism with the scholastic formulations of Reformed orthodox theologians, such as, Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Johannes Polyander (1568–1646), William Twisse (c.1577–1646), Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676), John Owen (1616–1683), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), Herman Witsius (1636–1708), Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722), and Bernhard De Moor (1710–c.1765)—to list only a few of the Reformed scholastics who Bavinck references copiously throughout his *Dogmatiek*. In other words, Van Til—following Dooyeweerd—omits the entire period of Reformed orthodoxy from his negative assessment of neo-Calvinist scholasticism *as if neo-Calvinist scholasticism can be easily analyzed and quickly repudiated without regard for the three centuries of Reformed orthodoxy that precedes and undergirds it*. Therefore, insofar as they are based upon an historically abstract understanding of Reformed scholasticism

110. E.g., Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 84, argues that the era of Reformed orthodoxy and its concomitant scholastic methodology came to an end in the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of pietism and rationalistic dogmatics.

that is limited exclusively to the early neo-Calvinist era, Van Til's polemics against Reformed scholasticism in general and the scholastic elements of Bavinck's formulations in particular are historically untenable.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters we have analyzed the most basic presupposition undergirding Cornelius Van Til's formulation of Reformed apologetics—his presupposition of Reformed dogmatics. We have examined this presupposition from a variety of perspectives (i.e., historically-contextually, formally, materially, polemically, dialectically), and we have found that looking at this presupposition from each of these perspectives reveals that Van Til's thought depends upon Herman Bavinck's theological formulations in salient ways, many of which have been significantly underdeveloped in the related scholarship. The following conclusions may be drawn from these analyses.

A. Van Til is neither a Copernicus nor a "Van Tilian" but a neo-Calvinist.

Much of the scholarship pertaining to Van Til is based upon the premise that he is a theological Copernicus who single-handedly ushered in a new era of Christian thought. To a limited extent this line of scholarship appreciates Van Til's reliance upon his Reformed predecessors (especially Kuyper); however, by focusing almost exclusively upon the ways in which Van Til allegedly goes beyond his predecessors and purges their naive mistakes, this Copernican line of

scholarship fails to elucidate Van Til's thought within his historical context. The lack of scholarly attention to Van Til's pervasive appropriation of Herman Bavinck's theological formulations is a case in point.

The abstract nature of such scholarship is acutely noticeable with respect to the topic of scholasticism; for, in the eyes of self-styled "Van Tilians," Van Til becomes a Copernican hero who not only saves the entire Reformed tradition from the wiles of scholasticism but also provides Reformed theology, for the first time ever, a truly Reformed (i.e., non-scholastic) formulation of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. In short, Van Til becomes the first thinker in the history of the church to provide the world with a Christian view of *everything*.

The problem with these bombastic interpretations, however, is that they are based on an abstract reading of Van Til's life and works, a fact that becomes immediately apparent when one notes from whom Van Til appropriates his theological and philosophical formulations. For example, it is beyond dispute that Van Til pervasively appropriated theological formulations from Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Likewise, it is undeniable that Van Til appropriated copiously from Herman Dooyeweerd's philosophical formulations, most notably, his "ground-motives" formulation, his concomitant definition of "scholasticism" as "synthesis thinking," and his critiques of scholasticism in neo-Calvinist theology. These two concrete contextual facts not only directly undermine the Copernican interpretation of Van Til's thought, but also they elucidate the primary historical context within which Van Til's thought ought to be interpreted: twentieth-century Dutch neo-Calvinism.

Moreover, if Van Til is more accurately interpreted as a neo-Calvinist than a Copernicus, then also he is more accurately described as “Reformed” than “Van Tilian.” For, Van Til not only frequently reflects upon his affinity for Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s theology, especially in his formative years, but also he explains his own life purpose in terms of upholding Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist vision. It could even be said that, since Van Til views himself as the North American guardian and champion of Kuyper’s antithesis thinking over against all forms of synthesis thinking, he should be labeled as a “Kuyperian” rather than a “Van Tilian.” Or, insofar as he presupposes Bavinck’s Reformed dogmatics for his Reformed apologetics, he would more accurately be labeled a “Bavinckian” than a “Van Tilian.” Yet, with respect to his own work, Van Til eschews all such labeling. The only adjective that he uses to describe his own work is simply “Reformed” (which he understood to mean “consistently Christian.”) Furthermore, Van Til is strongly averse to theological novelty in his own apologetic formulations, he polemicizes fiercely against the theological novelty in the writings of modern theologians (especially neo-orthodoxy), and he consistently interprets his own theological contributions as modest attempts to further the pioneering work of his Reformed predecessors. Additionally, Van Til never published any article, book, or syllabus with his own name in the title.

For all of these reasons the adjective “Van Tilian” is a *non sequitur* both logically and historically, and it deserves to be retired from theological discourse accordingly. If a replacement for this neologism is desired, then let the term that Van Til himself preferred suffice—“Reformed.”

In sum, Van Til's neo-Calvinist context has been significantly underdeveloped in the related scholarship. One major reason for this anomaly is the ahistorical nature of the Copernican interpretations of Van Til's thought. However, rather than abstracting Van Til from his context in order to present him as a Copernicus, the most appropriate and most accurate method for interpreting Van Til's thought is to read his work within the neo-Calvinist context in which he lived, moved, and had his being. When due respect is paid to his historical context, Van Til appears not as a Copernican revolutionary, but as a twentieth-century neo-Calvinist thinker. Additionally, Van Til appears not as a founder of a new school of so-called "Van Tilian" apologetics, but as a neo-Calvinist thinker carrying on and developing the tradition of *Reformed* apologetics.

B. Van Til's apologetics presupposes Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

With respect to Van Til's most basic presupposition, insofar as he pervasively appropriates Bavinck's formulations formally, materially, and polemically, his presupposition should be understood as follows: Van Til's Reformed apologetics largely presupposes Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

Regarding Van Til's formal appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, although the evidence for a link between Van Til's and Bavinck's formulations of the nature and function of apologetics in theological encyclopedia is more implicit than explicit, it is nevertheless significant that Van Til's formulation is nearly identical to Bavinck's. In contrast, Van Til clearly sets his view over against Warfield's reversal of the relationship between the two. Also, he clearly criticizes Kuyper for allegedly underestimating the necessity of apologetics. Yet, he has

nothing negative to say about Bavinck's formulations, and he hints, albeit briefly, that he aligns his own view with Bavinck's. Moreover, Van Til's first presupposition itself is a summary of Bavinck's view, namely, that dogmatics logically precedes apologetics and provides it with its material content—the dogmas of the Christian faith.

Regarding Van Til's material appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, his most significant summary of Reformed dogmatics—*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*—is largely a condensation of Bavinck's *magnum opus*. Throughout *An Introduction* Van Til both explicitly and tacitly appropriates copious amounts of Bavinck's formulations, sometimes with citations yet frequently without. Additionally, several programmatic themes in Van Til's apologetical formulations derive directly from Bavinck's theological formulations. Furthermore, Van Til repeatedly lauds Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* as the preeminent modern formulation of Reformed dogmatics. Therefore, although Bavinck is certainly not the only Reformed theologian whose work is included in Van Til's presupposition of Reformed dogmatics, he is nevertheless Van Til's primary dogmatic resource.

Regarding Van Til's polemical appropriations of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, it is no surprise that the theologian whose work Van Til primarily relies upon for his positive statement of the Reformed faith is the same theologian whose theological formulations he employs polemically against the rise of neo-orthodoxy both at the former headquarters of Kuyper's neo-Calvinist movement (*De Vrije Universiteit*) and at Van Til's Alma Mater (Princeton Seminary), namely, Herman Bavinck. Van Til's use of Bavinck's thought as the paragon of Reformed

orthodoxy *contra* various forms of heterodox modern theology is most notable in *The New Synthesis Theology of The Netherlands*, in his several polemical writings against Karl Barth, and in *The Theology of James Daane*. He likewise employs Bavinck's dogmatics polemically, albeit only briefly, in *Jerusalem and Athens*.

For all of these reasons there is sufficient warrant not only to conclude that Van Til's presupposition of Reformed dogmatics is essentially a presupposition of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, but also to suggest that Van Til's thought cannot be accurately interpreted apart from Bavinck's. For, if, according to Van Til himself, it is true that the apologist receives from dogmatics the very dogmas that apologetics seeks to defend, then insofar as Van Til's apologetic formulations presuppose Bavinck's dogmatic formulations, the former cannot be accurately interpreted apart from the latter. In this regard appreciation for Van Til's pervasive appropriation of Herman Bavinck's dogmatics is significantly underdeveloped in Van Til scholarship.

To highlight the fact that Van Til's apologetics largely presuppose Bavinck's dogmatics is not to say that Van Til merely parrots Bavinck's theological formulations at every point of his apologetic formulations. Nor is it to deny that Van Til is a brilliant, powerful, creative, and trenchant thinker in his own right. Rather, the implication is that, since he follows Bavinck closely on so many points, the very points at which "Van Tilian" scholars claim that Van Til advances beyond his predecessors and corrects their views—especially with respect to the doctrine of God, theological metaphysics, and theological epistemology—are the very points that need to be elucidated more clearly in relation to (1) Bavinck's

formulations in particular and (2) the Dutch and North American neo-Calvinist contexts in general within which Bavinck and Van Til operated, respectively. Specifically, Van Til scholarship needs to pay more attention to the neo-Calvinist theology and philosophy arising out of *De Vrije Universiteit* during Van Til's lifetime; for, much of his scholarly work is directly rooted in that context.

In sum, although multiple streams of influence flow into his thought, and although Van Til's thought cannot be reduced exclusively to one theological, academic, ecclesiastical, or geographical context, nevertheless, regarding his specific presupposition of Reformed dogmatics, Van Til largely presupposes Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. This important fact has been significantly underdeveloped in the extant scholarship.

C. Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck are unoriginal.

With respect to both their form and content, Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck are direct appropriations of Herman Dooyeweerd's earlier criticisms of the alleged scholasticism in the neo-Calvinist thought of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Woltjer. Van Til advances beyond Dooyeweerd only with respect to quantity insofar as he applies Dooyeweerd's overarching criticism against Bavinck's so-called "critical realism" with more specificity and to more points of Bavinck's formulations. Nevertheless, Van Til's criticisms are manifestly unoriginal.

This fact has been entirely overlooked both by the Copernican line of Van Til scholarship which has recently attempted to recapitulate Van Til's criticisms against Bavinck's theology and by the scholars who have offered either rejoinders to Van Til's criticisms or ameliorating analyses of Van Til's criticisms.

Hence the scholarship on both sides of this issue has failed to penetrate to the heart of the matter, namely, the tumultuous debate at *De Vrije Universiteit* over *gereformeerde scholastiek*. Insofar as Van Til clearly sides with Dooyeweerd's position in this debate and appropriates Dooyeweerd's view of scholasticism accordingly, Van Til's criticisms of the alleged scholasticism in Bavinck's thought must be interpreted in light of that historical context. For this reason the Copernican interpretation of Van Til's role as the anti-scholastic hero of Reformed theology in America is misdirected; for, if there is such an anti-scholastic champion (which itself is a highly debatable assertion), it would have to be Dooyeweerd, not Van Til, insofar as the latter appropriates his formulations from the former.

D. Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck are methodologically unsound.

Van Til's arguments against the alleged scholasticism in Bavinck's thought are subjective. Rather than engaging Bavinck's own understanding of scholasticism, he imposes a subjective norm (i.e., Dooyeweerd's definition of "scholasticism") upon Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, and then he further posits a bipolarity based upon this norm—the scholastic Bavinck versus the truly Reformed Bavinck. The problem with this method is that *anyone* can be polarized and dismissed as "scholastic" according to the mere whims of the one wielding the critique. However, by merely imposing a subjective norm upon Bavinck's thought, Van Til does not prove that Bavinck succumbs to the alleged evil inherent in Dooyeweerd's definition, namely, anti-Christian synthesis thinking. Nor does Van Til prove that Bavinck is in fact bipolar. Rather, both the two

Bavinck's supposition and the norm upon which it is based are abstractions that are imposed upon Bavinck's thought from without.

Furthermore, the subjectivity of Van Til's criticisms against Bavinck is illustrated most strikingly (and most perplexingly) in his attempt to dismiss Dooyeweerd's thought as "scholastic" using a similar argument; for, if the very source from which Van Til appropriates his definition of scholasticism (i.e., Dooyeweerd's criticisms of scholasticism) is itself beset by scholasticism, then, by implication, the very definition of scholasticism that Van Til appropriates from Dooyeweerd is itself scholastic, and Van Til would then be guilty of the same charge of scholasticism that he levels against Dooyeweerd! Hence Van Til's subjective argument leads straight into a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Additionally, even if his subjective critiques were granted methodological validity for the sake of argument, then Van Til's conclusion would be wholly subjective nonetheless; for, the conclusion would be that since Van Til knows Bavinck's thought better than Bavinck himself knows it, then Van Til may properly grant himself the right to assert that the way to move "beyond" Bavinck is to build upon the alleged non-scholastic Bavinck. However, what if another scholar were to come along and argue the opposite, namely, that the way to move beyond the non-scholastic Bavinck is to follow the scholastic Bavinck? By what standard would the case be decided?

For all of these reasons Van Til's criticisms proceed from a subjective *terminus a quo* and lead to a subjective *terminus ad quem*, and thus they are methodologically unsound.

E. Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck are historically untenable.

Concomitant with the subjective form of Van Til's criticisms is the fact that these criticisms lack objective historical material for their basis. Van Til does not analyze in any meaningful way Bavinck's own thoughts on the history of scholasticism. Nor does he analyze any Reformed scholastic theologian from Calvin to Kuiper. Rather, the historical scope of his entire analysis of scholasticism is limited exclusively to Thomas Aquinas' theology and to neo-Calvinist theology (i.e., Kuiper and Bavinck). Hence Van Til's use of the term "scholasticism" is more of an ahistorical philosophical construct that he employs merely for polemical purposes rather than an historically accurate description of the nature and purpose of school-based theology in its medieval, Reformation, or post-Reformation expressions. Furthermore, insofar as Van Til's philosophical construct imposes an anachronistic understanding of scholasticism upon Bavinck's thought and hence precludes an historically accurate analysis of Bavinck's theological formulations either in their own context or in relation to the three centuries of Reformed scholastic theology that precedes Bavinck's day, his criticisms are misguided, inaccurate, and historically untenable. In this regard we affirm Mattson's conclusion that Van Til's criticisms are based largely upon cursory and uncharitable readings of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*, a point which is somewhat surprising given the copious amount of detailed theological formulations that Van Til appropriates from Bavinck's theology for formal, material, and polemical purposes.

F. Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought is dialectical.

This latter point regarding the historical untenability of Van Til's criticisms is closely related to the dialectical tension inherent in Van Til's simultaneous pervasive appropriations and stringent criticisms of Bavinck's thought. On the one hand, Van Til's Reformed apologetics largely presupposes Bavinck's Reformed dogmatics as the source of the dogmas that Van Til seeks to defend and vindicate vis-à-vis all forms of modern heterodoxy. Yet, on the other hand, to speak in terms of Van Til's own metaphors, the apologist-daughter slaps her dogmatician-daddy in the face by leveling totalizing critiques against several fundamental features of Bavinck's theology. Therefore, a pressing dialectical tension arises from Van Til's bipolar assessment of Bavinck's theology: If Van Til presses his arguments against Bavinck's scholasticism to their logical conclusion (i.e., that Bavinck's theology is beset by non-Christian synthesis thinking), then he undercuts his own pervasive formal, material, and polemical appropriations of Bavinck's thought.

However, he clearly does not want to go all the way with such criticisms. Hence he settles for a half-way house—the bipolar Bavinck. Such a conclusion, however, is not only open to the charge of subjectivity, but also is inconsistent with Van Til's penchant for pressing the principles of his polemical interlocutors to their logical conclusions.

This dialectical tension is the most likely root cause of the Copernican interpretations of Van Til's thought. For, when Van Til's criticisms of neo-Calvinist scholasticism are pressed to their logical conclusion, then the net result

is that the only truly Reformed, non-scholastic thinker left standing in the entire history of the church is Cornelius Van Til. Neither Kuyper, nor Bavinck, nor Dooyeweerd, nor any of the Princeton theologians pass Van Til's scholasticism test; for, according to him they all fell prey to various degrees of synthesis thinking. Hence the self-styled "Van Tilians" can claim accurately, to a limited extent, to be following the lead of their teacher when they laud him as the greatest theologian since Calvin or the most profound apologist since Aquinas. For, when Van Til's criticisms are pressed to their logical conclusion, then such hyperbolic inferences would be warranted. Nevertheless, such claims only represent one side of the dialectical tension.

G. Van Til's appropriation of Bavinck's thought is more positive than polemical.

All things considered, the Copernican interpretations remain misguided, despite the negative side of the dialectical tension to which they can appeal; for, Van Til's positive appropriations of Bavinck's thought in particular and neo-Calvinist thought in general far outweigh his perplexing and, at points, self-contradictory criticisms. For example, based solely upon his pervasive appropriations of Bavinck's thought and his high esteem for Bavinck's life and work, it is self-evident that Van Til appreciates and emulates Bavinck's theology more than he criticizes it. Furthermore, it is clear that Van Til knows that his own work cannot stand without Bavinck's. For these reasons Van Til's writings simply do not provide warrant for the conclusion that Van Til is a Copernicus; for,

scholars need look no further than his most basic presupposition to see that Van Til is wholly dependent upon his neo-Calvinist context. However, his writings do provide sufficient warrant for inferring not only that Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck's thought, despite their totalistic form, are in fact intended to be understood as subsidiary in nature, but also that Van Til's overall attitude toward Bavinck is overwhelmingly positive. This attitude is well summarized by Van Til's conclusion to his review of R. H. Bremmer's *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*:

What lover of the gospel can help but be thankful to God for the life and labor of Herman Bavinck? He, perhaps more than others has inspired them to enter fully, and sympathetically into the problematics of modern thinking in every sphere of human interest. *Nihil humani mihi alienum est*. This motto was his. He knew he was saved by grace alone. He knew this all his life. He knew this especially on his death-bed. It is the Christ for whom Bavinck labored so prodigiously and in whom he died so peaceably, in whose name alone we may and must say: "Where are the wise, where are the scribes, where are the disputers of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that the world by its wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believed" (I Cor. 1:19-20).¹

1. Cornelius Van Til, "As I Think of Bavinck," *International Reformed Bulletin* 9, no. 27 (1966): 26.

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