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A Place for Truth Studies

Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of God

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Introduction

What does Bavinck mean by “mystery”? What are the implications of the element of “mystery” in theology? (pp.13-14)

Bavinck begins his book by saying “Mystery is the vital element of Dogmatics.” He means not mystery in the abstract-supernatural truth in the Romish sense; but the study of God is immediately for man a mystery. This means we must approach the study of God with “fear and trembling”. Had God not chosen to reveal himself, we would not be able to deny his existence, but we would never know him personally. Although redemption, forgiveness of sins and justification are benefits of Christ's work on our behalf, the goal of our salvation is to know God. However, if God had not revealed himself to man, we would never be able to know him because he is God.

The implications of this are that we should approach the study of God with humility because although man prides himself in knowing all other things, the study of God is quite different. He not only has taken the initiative to reveal himself, but we must paradoxically allow our knowledge of him to cause us to be humble rather than “experts” as we are in any other field of man's knowledge and education. Our knowledge of God is different and it actually changes who we are. The study of dogmatics are God's revelation about himself to man, but we do more than merely study him, we try to grasp and understand what he has revealed to us about himself. We cannot be “original” in our thinking of God. We should seek only to reflect what he has revealed to us about himself.

Even our language is not sufficient to speak about God because we could not find words in the human language to describe him. However, out of his mercy and grace he has chosen to reveal himself to us using human language. Otherwise we would not be able to understand or communicate with him at all. He would indeed be “wholly other” had he not taken the initiative to show himself to man.

After brief reflection write your own short outline of the Old Testament teaching on God. Afterwards summarize Bavinck's outline and consider any differences (pp. 17-18)

- I. God creates the universe and sustains it by his powerful word.
- II. He reveals himself to Adam and Even the creatures he has personally made.

- III. He sends them out of the garden, away from his presence because of their sins however he does not destroy them finally as their sins deserve. Instead, by his grace he promises a redeemer and clothes them with his own righteousness.
- IV. God reveals himself to a people and continues to save his people out of the different parts of the earth. Eventually his remnant will be saved by him as he decides to reveal his word and law to his own. He comes down and to fellowship with his people in different times, circumstances, and in different ways of revealing himself.
- V. God is bringing his people, separated to himself, to an end: that is to know him and to love him. Although he has promised a Messiah, the Messiah is yet to come. It is through the people that he has tabernacled among which he intends to bring the Messiah.
- VI. He calls prophets, priests and kings to witness to himself in the OT. The priests deliver his word to the Kings. The Kings lead the people and make decisions based on the prophets' words, and the priests offer up worship on behalf of the people. They offer the sacrifice God requires until the Messiah will offer up the sacrifice once and for all on behalf of his people. God shows his people in many ways the fact that these sacrifices are never once for all in character, but they are only temporary.
- VII. In God's sovereignty over the nations and providence and sustaining of his universe, he uses good and evil events, people and things to bring his purposes and decrees to fulfillment. God's plan will not be thwarted, neither his judgment turned around. From the foundation of the earth, God elected a people and through real time and history he is accomplishing this election, through his own involvement and eventual incarnation. Ultimately, the offense which God experienced in the garden with the sin of Adam was atoned for, and his wrath propitiated, through not only him taking the initiative in his revelation and salvation, but him coming to be just and the justifier of he who believes in his Son.

Bavinck's Outline of God in the Old Testament

- I. God is a personal being, self-existent, having the source of life in himself, self-conscious, and self-willing, not shut in by nature but exalted above nature, Creator of heaven and earth.
- II. This God can appear and reveal himself in definite places, at definite times, to definite persons: to the patriarchs, to Moses, to the prophets, in the garden, at the building of the tower of Babel, at Bethel, on Sinai, in Canaan, at Jerusalem, on Zion, etc.
- III. This revelation throughout the entire OT, not only in the period before but also in the period of the prophets, is preparatory in character. It is given in signs, dreams and visions, by means of the casting of lot, Urim and Thummin, angels and the Mal'akh Yhwh; it usually occurs at definite moments, ceases and becomes a matter of the past. It is more or less external, stays outside of and above man, is a revelation to rather than in man, and indicates by means of this peculiarity that it serves to usher in

and prepare for the highest and lasting revelation to God in the person of Christ and his continuous abode in the church.

- IV. Accordingly, the OT does not give a complete revelation of God's being. It does indeed furnish a true and reliable knowledge of God, but not a knowledge adequate to his being. The stone at Bethel, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in the desert, the thunder on Sinai, the cloud in the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, etc., are so many signs and pledges of his presence, but they do not comprise him. Moses, unto whom the Lord spake as a man speaketh unto his friend, did not see God until he passed by, Ex. 33:23. Man cannot see God and live, Ex. 33:20; Lev. 16:2. He is without form, Deut. 4:12, 15. He is unpicturable, Ex. 20:4. He dwells in darkness. Clouds and darkness are the indication of his presence, Ex. 20:21; Deut. 4:11; 5:22; I Kings 8:12; II Chron. 6:1.
- V. The same God who in his revelation limits himself, as it were, to definite places, occasions, and persons, is, nevertheless, exalted infinitely high above the whole realm of nature and every creature. Even in those parts of Scripture which stress his temporal and local manifestation the idea of his exaltation and omnipotence is not wanting: the Lord who walks in the garden is the Creator of heaven and earth. The God who appears to Jacob determines the future. Although the God of Israel dwells in the midst of His people in the house which Solomon builds for him, yet even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, I Kings 8:27. He reveals himself in nature, and lives along with his people, as it were; but at the same time he is Incomprehensible, Job 26:14; 36:26; 37:5, the Incomparable, Is. 40:18, 25; 46:5; the One who is exalted infinitely above time and space and every creature, Is. 40:12ff.; 41:4; 44:6; 48:12, the one and only true God, Ex. 20:3, 11; Deut. 4:35, 39; 32:19; I Sam. 2:2; Is. 44:8. Although he, indeed, reveals himself in his names, no name expresses him adequately. He is without name. His name is wonderful, Gen. 32:29; Judges 13:18; Prov. 30:4. The profundities of Deity are far too deep to be sounded by us, Job 11:7, 8; Ecc. Sir. 43:34, 35. To summarize: throughout the entire OT these two elements are found side by side: (a) "God dwelleth with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit," and (b) he is at the same time "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy," Is. 57:15.

I. The Knowledge of God

1. Explain "the finite cannot grasp the infinite"? (pg. 41)

In Latin: *finitum non capax infinitum*. The finite is limited to the realm of the 'phenomenal' realm of the senses and our knowledge comes only by what we can hear, see, smell, taste, touch. We are limited to this realm and cannot ascend into the heights of the infinite ('noumenal') realm in which God exists because we are not made for that realm. Even speaking a priori, we have innate ideas which we view the world, and if all things were equal and we were not in a state of "fallenness" then we might be able to apprehend the existence of God. As it is, we are fallen and cannot apprehend the existence of God, although we cannot deny his existence (Rom.1), but even as God "condescends" as Calvin says to us, by revealing himself to us, our knowledge of his being is still limited because we are creatures, he is the Creator. We can apprehend God when he reveals himself to us in his creation, but we are never able to comprehend him.

Bavinck says: "Religion and the knowledge of God can have their origin only in revelation... It is impossible for God fully to reveal himself to and in his creatures, for the finite does not grasp the infinite" (Mt. 11:27; cf. Deut. 29:29).

2. What does Bavinck mean when he says that there is a knowledge of God which is "natural, universal and necessary"? (pg. 44)

He means what he terms "innate ideas" or the ideas the man, as man seems to have from birth. Man does not consistently live as an empiricist in this physical world. He has innate ideas of "good," "evil," "right," and "wrong," "love," and "beauty." Man from birth thinks of love, but cannot empirically verify it. As Bavinck stated earlier, there is no place on earth where we could empirically investigate the presence of man and not find some sort of religion. Man would rather have a false god, than no god at all. He must presuppose God in order to govern himself in realms of love, mercy, community and morals, etc. This knowledge of God is as Calvin put a sort of "sense of the divine" in our souls; man cannot live in a mere physical world. He also presupposes the world of soul and spirit. Bavinck says: "The truths of mathematics and logic, the principles of ethics, jurisprudence, and religion, are universally fixed and established."

3. What are "innate ideas"? (pp. 44-56). In what ways has this concept been rejected by Christian theologians? Is there a sense in which we can speak of an innate knowledge of God? (pp. 57-59)

Innate ideas are a priori notions which all men have which they use to interpret the world. It has been defined: "Our ability to acquire knowledge presupposes antecedent knowledge. Argumentation and reasoning are based upon self-evident and a priori principles. Experience merely furnishes "notions," contingent truths. Universal and necessary truths can originate in the human mind only."

In Greek philosophy Plato tried to explain this concept by saying that before the soul was joined to the body in the "realm of ideas" we were given these ideas and in this world these ideas come back to us through "reminiscences." Aristotle said that certain general principles were inherent in the constitution of reason, axioms upon which all arguments are based, and which are acknowledged by all. The Stoics spoke of "common, natural ideas" which every derives from sensation due to the very nature of our thought-processes. Cicero said that there are innate seeds of the virtues, faint notions of the most important things which nature planted in the soul. He said: "By nature we believe that the gods exist." In the Enlightenment, Rene' Descartes spoke of knowledge proceeding (not merely from the senses) from a principle of its own, from innate ideas. Chief among these innate ideas, Descartes said, was the idea of God. Later Leibnitz and Malebranche agreed with this. Kant greatly modified this doctrine of innate ideas. He spoke of an a priori and a posteriori knowledge.

This doctrine of innate ideas was rejected by the Socinians, who rejected natural religion, and especially John Locke, Hobbes, and others. They would say that sensation is the source of all human knowledge: "There is nothing in the mind which was previously in the senses."

Christian theologians and the doctrine of innate ideas: "Christian theology as a whole held that there were truths known by nature and not as the result of revelation, truths obtained involuntarily and not by means of intentional study

and reflection; nevertheless, it has definitely rejected the doctrine of innate ideas.”

Justin Martyr: speaks of the idea of God as “the expression of man’s innate opinion regarding an object that can scarcely be defined.”

Irenaeus: [In opposition to the Gnostics] he states that the universe was created by God, reveals God and makes him known; but he does not mention any innate knowledge.

Clement of Alexandria: affirms that the Father and Creator of all things is known “by nature and apart from any instruction.” He states that this knowledge comes from the observance of God’s works.

Tertullian: emphasizes the nature knowledge concerning God. “...from the very beginning a consciousness of God is given to the soul...this is true of every tribe and people. By nature the soul is Christian.”

Augustine: he says that reason perceives and knows universal, necessary, and immutable truths. As we see material objects by the light of the sun (Plato nods), so we perceive the intelligible truths in the light of God.

Scholasticism: unanimous in its rejection of the doctrine of innate ideas. Perception by the senses was considered the beginning of all knowledge.

Martin Luther: Apart from the Holy Spirit reason is simply without the knowledge of God. With respect to divine matters, man is completely in the dark. He acknowledged that God revealed himself in his works, but he teaches that man is no longer able to know God by means of this revelation. Flacius and Chemnitz also agreed with this.

Melanchthon: taught a knowledge of God innate as well as acquired. All the vestiges of God that are observed in his works would be insufficient if the mind did not also have a certain idea or preconception of God.

John Calvin: distinguished between common and special grace, and by means of the former he explained all the good still left in sinful man. He asserted that a divinitatis sensum, or “a sense of a Deity” was implanted in the human soul by “natural instinct.” Institutes I.3.1: “God has implanted in everyone a sense of a Deity, the memory of which he renews frequently and insensibly.” However these “seeds” or “senses” never are fully grown because of man being by in a fallen state.

Reasons why Christian theologians have rejected innate ideas: There was a fear of rationalism and mysticism. If man were born fully endowed (in his soul) with a clear and definite knowledge either of all ideas (Plato), or of God (Descartes), he would thereby become independent of the world; he would be able to obtain pure and perfect knowledge from the storehouse in his own soul.

“Christian theology maintained the doctrine of Holy Scripture: that, whereas we cannot know God’s being as such, all our knowledge of God is obtained indirectly and bears an analogical character...no one arrives at the knowledge of ‘first principles’ or at the idea of God apart from the universe...In a word, there is

not one ethical truth which is recognized everywhere, always, and by all. In the real sense of the word natural theology never existed, no more than natural rights and natural morals.”

On the other hand, Scripture points out the fact that for man objective revelation in nature and in grace is indispensable; but at the same time it recognizes the fact that man is God’s image and offspring, that in his “mind” he possesses the ability to see God in his works, and that he has the work of the law written in his heart, Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:28; Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:15. Everything depends on a right view of this original character of the “common ideas.” Innate knowledge of God” does not mean that God has in such a manner directly endowed man with knowledge that he can dispense with revelation. It does not indicate that man is able to obtain a conscious, clear, and true knowledge of God from the storehouse of his own soul. But it indicates that man possesses both the “capacity, aptitude, power, ability” and the “inclination, tendency, disposition” to obtain some definite, certain, and indubitable knowledge of God.

The Doctrine of Innate Ideas stated succinctly: “The knowledge of God is said to be innate insofar as by means of the principles with which we are endowed from our very birth we can easily perceive that God exists.” There is a revelation of God in all his works, not only in nature as such, but especially also in man.

4. State the difference between innate knowledge and acquired knowledge (pp. 61-68)

While revelation precedes both innate and acquired knowledge, there is a distinction between two kinds of knowledge. Innate has more to do with God’s revelation within a man. As Romans 1 states: Man by nature knows God because he is his “image-bearer” therefore he is conscious not only of himself but of One that has created him. In his fallen state, he suppresses this knowledge, lies to himself and places another “god” in the place of the true God, but he is without excuse.

On the other hand, the acquired knowledge in comparison to innate knowledge searches God’s revelation externally, as it were, to seek to find answers about God. In Christian history we have called these the “proofs” for God’s existence, perhaps it would be better to call them “evidences for the reasonableness of Christianity.” Innate knowledge and acquired knowledge both depend on God’s revelation and God’s existence to make sense of anything, whether it is to internally ask the question “Who am I?” “What is my purpose?” to the external investigation of all the creation (Ps. 19) that depends as much on the light of the sun for our eyes to see as we depend on God’s revelation to understand the creation and order, etc. God has placed his indelible mark on both our being “image-bearers” and as those who “tend to his garden.”

There is only one world. The world which God has made. As created beings in God’s image we can have correct knowledge of the world but not through mere “natural theology,” or through reason alone. Everything that exists is from the hand of God and must be revealed to us by God because all things require interpretation, and God has interpreted all things to us in Scripture. A tree is not a mere tree, but created for God’s glory in God’s garden as it were. The believer and the non-believer can both look at that tree and understand it metaphysically, but epistemologically they have nothing in common in its examination. We may

only interpret that which God has made by using the interpretation he has revealed, whether it be a tree or a mind.

Nature and grace do not stand opposed one to the other. The “self-attesting” Christ and God the Father has revealed himself as much in our daily lives as we walk about in his “theater” as he has revealed himself to us in his special grace in salvation. Both realms are created by God and should not be divided as if we interpret them in different ways. As Calvin has said we interpret everything through the “lens” of the Scripture.

Scripture presupposes our knowledge of God, in fact the so-called “proofs” for the existence of God: cosmological, teleological, moral, ontological, all have affirmations in Scripture insofar as Scripture takes for granted the fact (as it asserts this fact) that common to all man is the knowledge of God. There is not one created thing (and there is nothing but created “things”) that do not show forth God’s glory, even at the atomic level, God’s glory and divine attributes can be seen...so that men are without excuse in believing that God exists.

Throughout history men have tried to “prove” the existence of God. From the heathen philosopher such as Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, etc. have tried to reason from the creation to the “God who is There.” It is a testimony to the fact that man is made in the image of God and by nature a “religious being” however these “proofs” have never been sufficient because of the fall they have not rightly interpreted the things which they gather as data for God’s existence.

By the time of Anselm’s Prologium innate knowledge and acquired knowledge began to separated. In fact, man Christians thought that man could reason on a neutral ground using reason alone to prove God existence. During the Reformation however, Calvin taught that man no longer has the eye to see God and that the seed of religion which every man has by birth, is choked and does not bear fruit. Eventually, those who did not heed Calvin’s warning about the seeds being choked and correct interpretation being impossible without revelation ended up with rationalism in Protestantism. Natural theology became rational theology.

5. Summarize the proofs for the existence of God (pp. 68-80)

Bavinck beings with a summary of “proofs” for the existence of God:

- (1) Two are based upon the nature of the universe: (a) Cosmological, (b) Teleological; deduce God’s existence from order and purpose respectively.
- (2) Two are based upon the nature of the human soul; based upon the rational nature of man (a) Ontological, (b) Moral;
- (3) Two are based upon history: (a) The argument from universal consent, (b) Historico-Theological.

The Cosmological Proof

This is presented in different forms. Aristotle: A “first self-moving power” from motion. John of Damascus: The unchangeable, from the changeable. Boethius-Anselm: The absolutely perfect, from the relatively perfect. Thomas Aquinas: A “first efficient cause” from the “series of causes” which cannot be infinite.

In all these forms, the Cosmological proof deduces a cause from an effect. The argument assumes not only that the individual objects existing in the universe are contingent, finite, relative, imperfect; but it also assumes the same in regard to the entire universe; it assumes that an “infinite chain of causes” is inconceivable; and that the law of causality should also be applied to the universe as a whole. Even if we grant the impossibility of an infinite number of regressions, we do not come to a personal God revealed in Scripture, we merely come to an impersonal, first cause, absolute, but it tells us nothing of this being (if indeed it is a being which we could speak intelligibly concerning).

The Teleological Proof

The teleological argument deduces an intelligent cause from the order and beauty, the harmony and purpose evident in the universe as a whole and also in individual creatures. Kant argued that this leads us to “World-Architect” rather than “World-Creator”. Scripture speaks to us in many places about purpose and order in creation. This points us to a purposeful Creator, however we could not know this Creator without revelation of himself, although we do know enough to be without excuse in that which is ordered and purposeful.

The Ontological Argument

Presented in three forms: (1) From the general ideas and norms present in the human mind, such as absolute truth, goodness, beauty, i.e. God (Plato, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm). (2) The real existence of the highest, absolute idea (i.e. of God) from the necessary presence of that idea in thought; as otherwise it would not be the highest idea, the absolute idea, inasmuch as an idea which has real existence is greater and higher than one not having real existence (Anselm, Prologium). (3) It proves God’s existence from the innate character of the idea of God (Descartes). The value of the argument lies in this: that it indicates the fact that man necessarily has an idea of God, and thinks of him as actually existing, and hence: that it places man before the choice of either trusting this necessary testimony or else despairing of his own consciousness.

The Moral Argument

We all have such things as conscience, responsibility, grief, reward and punishment, virtue and happiness, fear of death and of judgment, the triumph of goodness, etc. The power of this argument is in the fact that the moral order within our conscious does not necessarily point to the self-attesting God of Scripture, however it gives evidence, that for some reason our thoughts and will are determined by a moral nature within all men.

Argument from Universal Consent

Religion is not a particular thing which exists in one or two individuals, but something universal spreading over all mankind. A religious inclination (or seed

of religion is in every man). We travel all over the world and see man's need to have religion and worship. Although with revelation men are blinded, the seed is choked as Calvin says, they are worshipful creatures because they are made as worshipers of the True God and they exchange the truth of the True God for a lie. Man because he is created in God's image has a natural inclination to worship and to practice a religion of some kind.

The Historico-Theological Proof

This points to man's study of history. All history whether religious, the arts, etc. have a goal, a telos, an end in view as history progresses (by that very term we see inherent this argument: the term "progress", why not "digress"?). This argument is weak because although man is progressing intellectually and thus culturally, what do we measure this with? How do we know that he is progressing correctly and in a true religious and ethical way. We may have microwaves, but we also have mass-murderers. Is this progress? It seems as much as men try to deny it, there is no doubt that there is not a hand of Providence guiding our world to its appointed destiny.

Although all these are weak as "proofs" for God's existence, they are strong as testimonies to God's existence. The entire universe is a manifestation of God: the whole world is a mirror of his virtues. There is not an atom in the universe in which his everlasting power and divinity are not clearly seen.

As testimonies these arguments are wonderful. As God has revealed himself in natural and supernatural revelation, nature and grace, he has caused us to see from the effect that he is the Great Cause for which all things live and move and have their being. He has placed his imprint upon our hearts, minds and souls and therefore we can have the "idea" of God, although incomplete, and be without excuse as to the way our mind is ordered and thinks through problems. God has made all things by his Divine Decrees through Creation and Providence, he has made all things beautiful, true, and orderly and he upholds these things continually so they do not "fall out of existence" as it were. All things are created things and depend on God to sustain them, even in the seminal form of an idea, we can think only because God has given us this ability to think rationally. We travel the world and see religion, but that only shows us that man by fallen nature is an idol factory, they see all things around them and have no choice but to worship, however they exchange the Creator for the created things. We should note the importance of these testimonies but also the fact that by using the same fallible human reason to establish them, we can also find "holes" in the logic, and deconstruct them as well as construct them as thoughts and arguments. The only thing that makes sense out of this universe, and that which we presuppose and depend upon to make predications, comes from God himself- -his nature and as Creator. We should look to Him as our only source of true knowledge, because knowledge itself would be impossible without his existence.

II. The Name of God

1. What is the connection between God and his names? (pp. 84-90)

The connection between God and his name is that his name is his own revelation to man. Names can be given to men to distinguish them from others

and to describe personalities, etc. But with God, he reveals his own name, his attributes, divine power, and salvation all being revealed with his great and holy name. In the OT God first reveals his name and his faithfulness to Israel, in the NT Jesus, the Son of God comes down from heaven and becomes flesh that all might know God and his name. The richest revelation of the name of God will be in the New Jerusalem. God's name is not his being, as God exists in himself, but his revelation and relation to the creature. His name reveals who God is. God's names are all derived from His revelation; there is not one name which is expressive of the being of God "in itself." The "revealed name" is the basis of all the "names by which we address God."

2. What is anthropomorphic language and can it be legitimately used in relation to God? If so, why? (pp. 90-98)

God uses human language to reveal himself to us. Calvin says in his Institutes that God lisps to us as a Father speaking "baby talk" to a child. Bavinck writes: "It follows that Scripture does not merely contain a few anthropomorphisms; on the contrary, all Scripture is anthropomorphic. From beginning to end Scripture testifies a condescending approach of God to man... If God were to speak to us in divine language, no one would be able to understand him; but ever since creation, he, in condescending grace, speaks to us and manifests himself to us in condescending fashion." Scripture uses many anthropomorphism to reveal God to his people: human organs, sensations, affections, are applied to God. God has a soul (Lev. 26:11; Mt. 12:28); and a Spirit (Gen. 1:2). In Christ God assumed a real body (John 1:14; Col. 2:17); mention is made of his countenance (Ex. 33:20; Is. 63:9); his eyes, eyelids, the apple of his eye, his ears, nose, mouth, lips, hand, right hand, finger, etc. Human emotion is described of God: Joy (Is. 62:5); rejoicing (Is. 65:19); love in all its variations, such as compassion, mercy, grace, longsuffering, etc. Bavinck writes: "Anthropomorphism seems to be unlimited. In order to give us an idea of the majesty and exalted character of God names are derived from every kind of creature, living and lifeless, organic and inorganic."

Language can be used legitimately in relation to God because though the distance between creature and Creator is infinite, it is still God's handiwork. There is a close relation between God and the universe. The only reason we have a right to use anthropomorphic language concerning God is because while he is infinitely incomprehensible in his being and "too far" for man to every travel to be next to him (although in Him we live, move and have our being... he is not very far from us; I am distinguishing between the immanence and transcendence of God and the initiative of man to try to reach the Holy One), he has, as it were "traveled to us" to reveal himself with and in his creatures, and because he has been pleased to reveal his name in and through creatures. It is impossible to speak of God at all without using anthropomorphisms. Bavinck writes: "We do not see God as he is in himself. We behold him in his works. We name him according to the manner in which he has revealed himself in his works. To see God face to face is for us impossible, at least here on earth. If nevertheless, God wills that we should know him, he must needs descend to the level of the creature. He must needs accommodate himself to our limited, finite, human consciousness. He must speak to us in human language." Although this language about God is limited and finite, it is real and true. "To say that our knowledge of God is inadequate, finite, limited, and nevertheless, to maintain that it is real, pure, sufficient is not at all illogical or contradictory."

Theology is not merely symbolical, but rather ectypal or analogical:

1. All our knowledge is out of and through God, and rests upon his revelation, i.e., on objective reason.
2. In order to impart knowledge concerning himself to his creatures, God must needs accommodate himself to their consciousness.
3. The possibility of this “condescension” cannot be denied as it is implied in the very fact of creation and in the existence of any finite being.
4. For this very reason, our knowledge concerning God must remain analogical in character, having for its object not God himself according to his unknowable essence, but God in his revelation to us, in the “the relations which his nature sustains to us,” in his disposition toward his creatures, that this knowledge is, accordingly, merely a vague image or likeness of that perfect knowledge which God has of himself.
5. Notwithstanding, all that has been said, our knowledge concerning God is real, pure, and dependable, because God’s self-consciousness is its archetype, and his self-revelation in the cosmos its foundation.

3. Apart from the covenant name Yahweh, state and explain the most significant names of God in Scripture. (pp. 98-102)

Names of God (Transcendence of God): These are not “proper names” but are the usual appellatives and designations of the Deity. They are Semitic, and indicate God’s transcendence above all creatures. The Semites prefer to call God “Lord,” “King.” They feel deeply dependent upon him, and as his servants they humbly and reverently bow before him. They do not use these names to give expression to philosophic theories concerning the being of God, but emphasize God’s relation to his creatures, especially to man: El- The Mighty One (used also “generically” of other gods). / El-Shaddai- The Powerful One. / Elohim- The Strong and Mighty one, or as the object of fear; full of life and power (the plurality of the name indicates). The name ‘Elohim’ describes the Divine Being in his original relationship and in his continuous causal relationship to the universe. / Elyon- Designates God as the High and Exalted One. These names signify God’s transcendence.

Names of God (Immanence of God): Shaddai, or El Shaddai- The All-Sufficient One. God reveals himself to Abraham when he makes him a father of a multitude of nations and institutes the sacrament of circumcision as a seal of the covenant (Gen. 17:1). It occurs again and again in the time of the patriarchs. The NT equivalent is pantokrator (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 4:8). This name makes God known to us as the One who possesses all power, and is able to overcome all opposition and to make everything subservient to his will. Bavinck writes: “The name Elohim designates God as Creator and Preserver of all things; El-Shaddai represents him as the Mighty One, who makes nature subservient to grace; Jehovah describes him as the One whose faithfulness endure forever; Jehovah

Sabaoth characterized him as the King in the fulness of his glory, surrounded by organized host of angels, governing the entire universe as the Omnipotent One, and in his temple receiving the honor and adoration of all his creatures.”

4. What significance should be seen in the fact that only in the NT does “Father” become “the common name by which God is addressed”? (pg. 109)

Bavinck writes: “The rendering “Lord” (kyrios) for Jehovah is insufficient. It is supplemented by the name “Father.” This name is the highest revelation of God, God is not only the Creator, the Almighty One, the Faithful One, the King and Lord; he is also the Father of his people. A kingdom of the Father who is in heaven takes the place of Israel’s theocratic kingdom. The subjects are also children; the citizens are members of the family...We find here the perfect Kingship; for, here is a King who is at the same time Father, who does not force his subjects to obey him, but creates and protects them.”

The name “Father” in the NT represents the fullness of God’s covenant revelation. In the OT with Israel God referred to himself as the “Father of Israel” but most of the time this was understood in covenantal terms because he had called Abraham and made a covenant with Abraham and his descendant. His descendants were called the children of “their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” What was implicit in this covenantal relationship which God made with man was in the Person of Jesus Christ, his becoming “like one of us” in the image of God, but also as God himself. He restored the relationship that had been broken between man and God, and as the second Adam God justified us because of the work of Christ on our behalf. Therefore, he adopted us as sons, we call call God “Father” in the true sense of the term. But it must be kept in mind that there exists a covenant relationship within the family of God that has made this possible, we cannot speak of God as our Father in the same way that Christ can. But we can now pray “Our Father, which art in heaven...” We have the promise of redemption, knowing that the Spirit is within us we call on God as “Abba, Father.”

III. The Triune God and our Knowledge of Him

1. What are the main points in Bavinck’s discussions of the deity of each person in the Godhead? (pp. 266-274)

Each person in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intimately one in essence, but distinct as persons and in the offices they perform. As God, the Trinity, who is the Creator, sustainer and preserver of his creation and all life, the Godhead is One, but revealed in three persons. Economically, so to speak, the three persons have different “works” which they do for His glory and for man’s good. The Father is God and the Creator, the Initiator of Man’s salvation. He is the great rule of all creation but not entirely separated. The Son has come to reveal the Father (knowledge of the Father) and is he himself an express reflection and revelation of the Father. The Son has willingly submitted himself to take on humanity in order to reveal the Father to man and reconcile man to the Father. The Son, economically, although equal in essence, has submitted to the Father’s will and can indeed say that He and the Father are one, and at the same time that the Father is greater than He. The Son speaks of fulfilling the work of God (John 17) and that He will now return to the glory he had since the foundation of the earth.

Although some teachers in the Church, particularly Arius in the 4th century, taught that the Son was not equal in divinity with the Father, the Bible clearly teaches that he is. He is eternally begotten and the only thing truly made, and born of a woman, was his humanity. A unique and sui generis role that only the Son has taken upon himself to fulfill. He was God and Man, one person with two natures. He was from the beginning and has always been “with” God and “was” God (John 1). The Spirit is equally divine in nature. He is the Father’s breath, sustaining life that is given to man. It is through the Spirit of God that all men, created beings, live and move and have their being and some particularly whom the Father gave the Son to die on behalf of as His own people. The Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, but not separated. He is the divine life and as Christ described him in John 14-16, he is “another comforter” or advocate that would come to live through the Church as Christ was seated at the right hand of God in the heavens. We must remember that all three persons in the Trinity possess the same attributes, but for men and their salvation, they have taken economically different functions to fulfill the divine plan.

2. State and assess Bavinck’s view of the Trinity in the OT, and contrast this with the revelation of the NT. (pp. 255-266)

The revelation of the Trinity begins in the OT, however there is not a full revelation of the Trinity until the NT. Christ before he returns to the Father, tells his disciples to “Go into the world and preach the gospel” and he reveals for the first time God’s true name in his instructions to baptize in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. With the singularity of “Name” we see the unity of the Godhead and with the three distinct definite articles before Father, Son, and Spirit we can apprehend the revelation of God’s plurality in the Godhead.

Some such as the Socinians, Arminians, Herder, Doederlein, et al. thought that there was not revelation of God the Trinity in the OT at all. As Bavinck says, the OT gives a vague idea of God’s trinitarian existence: it is the first installment of progressively revealed teaching. For instance, there is a distinction at Creation among the Father who is creating by his Word and by his Spirit. There is God, Jehovah who reveals himself as the God of the covenant and of the oath, of revelation and history. Through his Word he makes this known, and delivers his people (Ps. 107). At this point we must not conclude that the Angel of the LORD mentioned in the OT is necessarily the Second Person of the Trinity as many of the Church Fathers have taught. Many of the Fathers have thought that the Angel of Jehovah was a theophany of the Logos (Justin Martyr, Theophilis, Irenaeus, Tertullian). God’s Spirit is the principle of all blessings and comfort, gifts and talents within the sphere of revelation.

The NT contains the true development of the OT trinitarian ideas, Bavinck says. “This NT revelation, however, is much clearer: it does not consist in abstract reasoning concerning the being of God, but God manifests himself in the incarnation, in word and in deed. As in the OT, so also in the NT God’s unity is emphasized. God is revealed as Trinity in the NT at creation as well as in the OT. The Father is the Creator of the universe and as such, he is called Father (Mt. 7:11; John 4:21; Acts 17:28; Heb. 12:9). The Son, who bears this name because of his peculiar relation to God, is the Logos through whom the Father created all things (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17), and the Holy Spirit who together with the Father and the Son adorns and finishes the work of creation (Mt. 1:18; Mark 1:2; Rom. 1:4). Bavinck also writes: “In the NT, Jehovah is

called “Father,” richer in meaning than “Lord” (kurios). In the incarnate Son of God all the OT prophecies and shadows of prophet and king, of priesthood and sacrifice, of Servant of Jehovah and Son of David, of Angel of Jehovah and Wisdom, reach their fulfillment. And the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the realization of the OT promise, Acts 2:16 ff.”

Salvation in the NT reveals that God is indeed triune. The entire NT is trinitarian in character. God: Father, Son and Holy spirit is the source of all good things, blessing, comfort, and salvation. At Christ’s birth and baptism, the trinity is revealed. Christ declares unto us the Father, who he describes as Spirit with Life in himself. The Holy Spirit leads Christ and qualifies him for his task, and is called another Comforter (Paraclete). Before Christ departs from this earth he sums up his Trinitarian teaching in the phrase: “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

3. Very briefly, note the salient points in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity. (pp. 274-330)

Bavinck writes: “From the very beginning [of the history of the Church] it is clear that the Trinitarian dogma was not born of philosophic reasoning concerning the being of God, but of earnest meditation upon the facts of revelation, upon the person and work of Christ.”

Apostolic Fathers - The apostolic fathers do not make frequent mention of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, they distinguish him from—and place him on an equality with—the Father and the son.

2nd Century Against Gnosticism - The deity of Christ begins to have dogmatic significance and is expressed in clearer terms. Justin Martyr often calls Christ “God”; he even calls him “God” with the definite article prefixed to the term, ho theos, and ascribes different exalted attributes to him. The immanent relations between the Father and the Son is not yet clear from his writings. Justin’s concept of the trinity is faulty in certain respects: “The Father is hidden, in opposition to the Son; he teaches the generation of the Son by the will of the Father and with a view to creation; and he represents the Son as subordinate to the Father.” The Church later would reject these errors. Some have called Justin and Arian, this should not be done. Justin clearly and unequivocally teaches that the Son is God. He states that the Son was not created by generated, and he explains this by using the illustrations of one fire kindled by another and of the word that proceeds out of one’s mouth. Although very influenced by Greek philosophy, Justin proved from the Word of God the Logos-nature of Christ, his preexistence, generation, the creation of all things through the Logos, Christ’s Sonship and his Godhood. Irenaeus is the ardent opponent of the Gnostic conception of the Deity and of the theory that makes the Logos the rational principle in the universe. The Logos is not a creature but a hypostatic (distinctly personal) Word, preexistent, very God, etc. Irenaeus does not fully indicate how the trinity exists in the unity, and how Father, Son, and Spirit, though possessing one and the same divine nature, are nevertheless distinct. Tertullian complements and corrects the teachings of Irenaeus. He teaches that the three persons are “of one substance, of one condition, and of one power; they are the one God.” “The mystery of the economy distributes the unity into a trinity.” He says as a ray of the sun is also the sun, so there are divers “aspects, forms, images and modulations” in the one and undivided substance. The Son is distinct from the Father, and the Spirit is distinct from

both, but they have the name of God and Lord in common. They are “one God” not be separated. Tertullian furnishes the Latin concepts and the terms that are necessary to express the true meaning of the trinitarian dogma. Origen conceived of the generation of the Son as an eternal process immanent in the being of God. The “generation” of the Son is “eternal.” The Father and the Son have all the divine attributes in common: the Father and the Son are one. It is not true that besides God we also worship the Son, but in God we worship the Son. Origen falls back upon subordinationism while affirming the unity and equality and trying to keep the distinctions between the persons of the Godhead. Origen represented the Father as “God” with the definite article prefixed to the term *ho theos* and the Son as God with the article omitted *theos*.

Council of Nicea (325)- The church did not follow Origen. It rejected subordinationism, and at Nicea it confessed the full, true divinity of Christ. Nicea maintained the personal distinctions in the being of God and confessed that the Father and the Son (and the Spirit) were God. Before Nicea the main difficulty was to derive the trinity from unity; after Nicea the opposite difficulty presented itself.

The Development of the Trinity by Athanasius, the Three Cappadocians, and Augustine - The complete development of the Trinity came from Athanasius, the three Cappadocians, and Augustine. Athanasius devoted his entire life to the defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. He rejects the Gnostic and Arian dualism between God and the world together with all its intermediate beings. In God there are no non-essential elements. God does not become anything; he is everything eternally. Just as the Trinity is from eternity so it is to eternity; hence, Father, Son, and Spirit are from eternity to eternity. Athanasius maintains the unity of the Trinity by teaching that they three are “the same in essence,” in “substance” and in attributes; that the Father is the “first principle” and the “fountain” of the Godhead. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen build upon Athanasius’ doctrine of the Trinity. The entire Greek Church has accepted this doctrine as embodied in the decisions of the ecumenical councils of which this church recognizes the first seven, and it differs from the Western view only with reference to the expression *filioque* (and from the Son). Augustine rejected all the earlier theories that posited a dualism between the Father and the Son. The Son, being himself very God, is not less invisible than the Father and is perfectly equal to the Father. Augustine teaches that God’s very essence dwells equally in three persons. Augustine arrives at a different conception of OT theophanies. Formerly, these theophanies had been referred to as revelations of the Logos inasmuch as the Father is hidden, but Augustine ascribes them as well to the Father and to the Spirit, who as well as the Son are able to reveal themselves and whose manifestations cannot be separated from those of the Son. Augustine completed what Tertullian began.

Historical Erroneous Views of the Trinity - In the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of the Christian religion; every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine. The importance of the doctrine is to present the truth that the unity of the essence does not obliterate the trinity of the persons and that the trinity of persons does not abolish the unity of the essence, for there is always a danger of deviating from the correct position in either direction and of falling into the error of Sabellianism or of Arianism. Arius (Arians)- Arius was preceded by the Ebionites, the Alogi, Theodotus, Artemon, Paul of Samosata, etc. who held that Christ was a man born in a supernatural manner, at his baptism anointed by the

Holy Spirit and qualified for his task, and exalted as Lord, but denied his preexistence and divine nature. They accepted an “adoptionistic” Christology. In the 4th c. this was adopted by Lucian and his disciple Arius of Alexandria. Arius taught that inasmuch as God is “unbegotten” and without beginning, he is absolutely unique. He is ineffable, incomprehensible, unable to enter into direct communion with that which is finite, unable to impart his being, the very essence of which is agennesia. All that exists outside of his being came into existence and was created by his will. Before God began his creative activity, he brought into existence a kind of intermediate being to act as a medium through whom he created all things, a distinct “hypostasis” or “essences” called in Scripture wisdom, son, logos, image of God, etc. He also called into existence a third and lower hypostasis, namely, the Holy Spirit. Even though there was a time when the logos was not, he was a “perfect creature.” Sabellianism existed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and were preceded by Noetus, Praxeus, Epigonus, who taught that in Christ, the Father himself was born, suffered, and died; that the names Father and Son indicate one and the same person in different relations; namely, before and during the period of his incarnation per se and in his historical manifestations; or that Christ’s divine nature is the Father and that his human nature is the Son. In the 3rd century this monarchianism, patripassionism, or modalism was advocated and developed by Sabellius. Father, Son, and Spirit are three names for one and the same God, one and the same being.

Various Manifestations of Arianism

The distance between God and the world is infinite and at every point in this distance a place may be assigned to the Son, from the place on the throne next to God, down to the position next to creatures, angels, or men. This accounts for the fact that Arianism has appeared in various forms.

1. **Subordinationism** - The Son is indeed eternal, generated out of the essence of the Father: he is not a creature and was not brought into being out of nothing; nevertheless, he is inferior and subordinate to the Father. The Father alone is “THE God” while the Son of God received his nature from the Father by communication (Taught by Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Nicomedia). The Son is similar not same as the Father.

2. **Arianism (Proper)**- The Son and the Holy Spirit, who existed before the creation of the world, owed their creation to the Father’s free will, and that it was only because of their office that they were called God.

3. **Socinianism** - The Father is the only true God. The Son was a holy man, whom God created by means of a direct and supernatural conception, prior to which he did not exist. He was created in order to proclaim a new law to mankind. The Holy Spirit is a divine energy or power.

4. **Unitarianism** - Socinianism was not able to retain those supernatural elements which it had accepted at the beginning: Jesus came to be looked upon as a mere man, albeit an example of virtue and piety. Liberalism and rationalism contributed to Unitarianism’s theology.

Various Manifestations and Development of Sabellianism

In contrast to Arianism, Sabellianism retains the divinity of the Son and the Spirit but in such a manner that all distinctions between the three persons disappear.

1. **Patripassionism** - The belief that the suffering of the Son can be predicated of the Father, that Father, Son, and Spirit are three names for the same being (Praxeus).

2. **Marcellus of Ancyra and Photinus of Sirmium** - The Son and the Spirit are divine attributes which for a time become personal with a view to creation and redemption.

3. **Sabellianism (Proper)**- Modalistic monarchianism (Taught by Sabellius, Medieval Pantheists, Anabaptism, Servetus).

Orthodoxy: Bavinck writes-“Among themselves [the Trinity] the three persons are related to one another in an absolute manner, by means of generation and spiration; their personal distinctness coincides completely with their immanent relationships. The Father is Father only and eternally, the Son is Son only and eternally, the Spirit is Spirit only and eternally. And because each is himself in an eternal, simple, and absolute manner; hence, the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. The Father is God in his character as Father, the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as Holy Spirit. And inasmuch as all three are God, they all partake of one divine nature. Hence, there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, worthy of eternal praise!

4. Is the doctrine of the Trinity existentially important? If so, how? (pp. 330-334)

The doctrine of the Blessed Trinity is very important existentially. As people who live in God’s created world, we must know God in order to know ourselves; when we look within ourselves and the creation, God has imprinted his image upon us and it. We must look only to Him, the Triune One to understand who we are and are in creation, what God has done on our behalf in Christ and through the Spirit, in order to not live in confusion. All of life and understanding is founded upon the doctrine of the Trinity.

As men we live in this world as either covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. In God, we live and move and have our very being. It is because of Him that we are sustained each day and have a purpose and understanding and all the blessings of life. As religious creatures, made in God’s image, we either worship God or we make a god in our own image. We are by nature “religious beings” and we cannot escape this fact. We seek daily to understand ourselves and our universe, but if we do not understand and know the Trinitarian God who has revealed Himself we will fail at true knowledge.

God is both transcendent and immanent. If we see only God’s transcendence we will end up at best deists or idealists; if we see God’s immanence we could end up with pantheism and seeing ourselves as united to God in some way. However, the Trinitarian God who has had mercy on us has revealed himself as the One who is lifted up and sits in a High and Holy place, but also the One who is close to the humble (Is. 57:17). The Trinity explains the doctrine of who God really is: He is not us, but He made us in His image. He is not one with the creation, but the Creator of, and sustainer of all things he did by his wisdom. He is indeed lifted up and Holy but for us, and our salvation has come in the person

of Christ to take upon His own wrath against sin and restore us in His image for us to have knowledge of him and to be recreated by his Holy Spirit. All of our life experientially is Trinitarian in character and only with the revelation of the Trinity can we rightly know anything.

Including love and wisdom among men. We do not truly love or have wisdom or knowledge without a right concept of God. He is wisdom, we are relational creatures desiring love and affections because love and affection was first within the Divine Godhead among the three Persons existing in all the fullness of the Godhead.

5. What is meant by the incomprehensibility of God and how does this differ from the unknowability of God? (pp. 13-37)

There is a doctrine that speaks of God as *totaliter aliter*, or “wholly other.” On the one hand this is true, but only partially; on the other hand we need to understand in light of God’s revelation. God is wholly other if we mean that he is God; He is aciey, self-existent, without any need outside His own being and person, existing in three Persons. He is perfect without any need; true fullness, that man can never understand. He is holy, dwells in unapproachable light and pure perfection. Even in writing these words I am only making analogies based on men, but more than that, making analogies based on his revelation. Although he is wholly other in a sense, or would be, he has chosen in his goodness to reveal himself to man. He has come down to man.

The incomprehensibility of God is found in the fact that he is Holy and a being that is in space and time, while at the same time he transcends space and time. He is transcendent but also immanent; One being, but existing in One Essence in Three Persons, all three Persons equally divine subsisting and “being” as One: *distintinctio non sed separatio*. God is never fully comprehensible by man as God, but because he has revealed himself within man, in the creation and in Scripture, man can apprehend who God is but never fully know him. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2: “Only the Spirit knows God fully” but he has chosen to reveal himself to us so that we might know him as well, therefore as Paul says in Romans 1, men are without excuse if they try to deny his existence. It is an established fact which they cannot ever deny truly.

As God, he has divinely stooped as it were to speak “babblings,” “baby-talk” to his creatures in creation and scripture. He has revealed himself as man, in the Person of Christ and He sends His Spirit that we may be renewed and have knowledge of him as Father. All these things, although true revelations of God, are still just “baby-talk” to men. We may, rather can, only speak of God by analogy. Because in his divine wisdom he made man in His own image, man can grasp, apprehend the reality and have knowledge of God but only by analogy. Only by comparing God with something we can understand as finite men.

There is a theology of God that was taught by the Protestant Scholastic theologians called the *theologia archetya* and the *theologia ectypal*. *Theologia archetya* is the knowledge that God as God has of himself. This is the ultimate pattern of not merely all theology, but all knowledge. Because God is who He is, all man’s knowledge is derivative in character. The *theologia ectypa* is all true and finite theology of God and knowledge of man and creation. It is in a sense a

reflection of the *theologia archetypha*. Our knowledge as Christians, redeemed by God's Spirit who have the "mind of Christ" have a knowledge of God called *theologia viatorum*. *Theologia Viatorum* is the theology of the viatores, or pilgrims in contrast to the knowledge of God of those who have gone before and look upon the face of God: *Theologia beatorum*. These are those who "have seen God" and dwell in his presence after death. The *theologia viatorum* is imperfect theology of believers in the world "on their way" through being "in Christ" being renewed and sanctified, and not yet in heaven as of yet.

God is not unknowable with regard to his Being, who He is. He is the One who has revealed himself, lest he would be wholly unknowable. He is indeed incomprehensible, but not unknowable.

IV. The Decree of God

1. What is God's decree? (pp. 369-372)

The decree of God is his eternal purpose, whereby he foreordains everything that comes to pass; so as to not to do any harm to the will of the creature, nor is he the author of evil. This is the realization of God's thought and will brought forth. Bavinck writes, "Apart from God's knowledge and will nothing could ever come to pass. Thought would be absent from creation if it were not for the fact that God in wisdom created all things." The will and decrees of God are above time; they are eternal. They did not merely occur from man's perspective "back a long time ago." Eternity is above time and should not be remembered as the past, but in an analogical way as always existing in God's eternity and essence which is one and unchanging. However, with regards to man, we perceive God's will and decree as it unfolds in time and place (e.g. in his revelation in Scripture), so that man perceives his decree in the plural although in the mind of God it is singular.

2. Note the key elements in the history of the doctrine of the decree of God. Use diagrams if this proves helpful. (pp. 344-369)

I. Philosophy, Jewish Theology, and Mohammedanism

Philosophy speaks of either a pantheistic determinism and a deistic doctrine of free will. Jewish theology stresses the free will of man even in his sinful condition. Mohammedanism says that God is the absolutely omnipotent Despot in relation to man who is entirely passive to his will.

II. The Early Church, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Augustinianism

Because the early church tried to defend man's moral nature, freedom and responsibility in context with heathen fatalism and gnostic naturalism, there was no justice done concerning God's decrees, the focus was on man's relationship to it at this time. An absolute predestination and an irresistible grace were not taught; God's counsel consisted in his foreknowledge plus the determination of reward and punishment which was demanded by this foreknowledge. There explanation was that sin weakened man and made him mortal. He is able to choose natural good and to accept or reject the grace offered to him (prevenient grace). If man accepts it, it will cooperate with him, but he must persevere until

the end. If he does, then they have been foreknown and foreordained unto salvation. Pelagius in the 5th century (followed by Coelestius, and Julian Bishop of Eclanum) taught that God is good and just; consequently, that every creature that owes its existence to him must be good by nature. This good nature can never be changed into an evil and wicked nature. Free will is God's greatest gift to man because of man being made in God's image. Man has the freedom to do the right and also to do wrong according to Pelagianism. This teaching came to the conclusion that Adam's fall only concerned Adam, it did not affect his posterity. All men are born in the same moral condition in which Adam was created. There is no original sin; death is not a punishment for sin but something common and natural. Because of this, predestination is reduced to a divine prevision of man's free deeds and merits plus a corresponding predetermination of punishment and reward. Predestination is entirely dependent upon foreknowledge of man's good deeds. In milder form, Semi-Pelagianism, taught by John Cassianus, was asserted in the middle ages. According to Cassianus, human nature has indeed been vitiated by sin. Man is not dead however, but merely ill. He resembles a sick person who is unable to cure himself but is able to take medicine and to long for recovery; he is like a man who fell into a well and is unable to bring himself out of it safely. Those whom God sees in advance will respond with their free will, he predestins to be his people. Predestination and reprobation therefore, are dependent upon God's foreknowledge. "To will is in our power, to make perfect is in God's power." Augustine arrived at his doctrine of predestination through a study of the book of Romans. Augustine taught that "Predestination is nothing else than the 'foreknowledge and the preparation of God's kindnesses, whereby they are most certainly delivered whoever are delivered'." Predestination is not according to merit or worth, but is purely of grace. God's sovereign will, his absolute authority, is the only cause of predestination. God owes no man anything, and can with justice (because he is a sinner) condemn all, but in his good pleasure he makes one vessel unto honor, another unto dishonor. The one's God has not predestined, are necessarily predestined to wrath, to honor God's good justice. We do not know who these are, only the Lord knows those who belong to him. However, God is not the author of evil and does not create evil in the reprobate heart, he allows it to go its own way without his grace. God gives justice to some and mercy to others. Just why God saves some and leaves other to perish is a mystery.

III. The Doctrine of Predestination from Augustine to the Reformation

Council of Ephesus, 431 condemned Pelagianism and Nestorianism. By the time of the Council of Trent because of the debates concerning predestination, centering particularly upon the atonement during the middle ages and if Christ died for all or not, the doctrine had changed quite a bit. Roman Catholicism asserted that man was born sinful and if baptized in the Church as a child the Holy Spirit would regenerate and begin working his prevenient grace in the individual's heart. A person had free will and could accept or reject this work of grace; it was not irresistible. If a person lived according to the standards of the church (in seven steps) concerning salvation, this early baptism and prevenient grace would work for the person and God would pronounce that individual as being justified by his works. This was works of congruity. Further, this infused grace can be lost if a man does not persevere in it. If he perseveres and performs good works, these works are coupled with Christ's works by means of a merit of condignity. The Council of Trent (1546-1564) states that Christ was

sent in order that 'all men might receive the adoption of sons,' i.e., that he made atonement for all men. Man is able to accept or reject, to retain or lose God's grace. Here again, predestination is suspended on foreknowledge. This Roman Catholic theology is not full blown Pelagianism. This is an unmerited grace. With regards to reprobation, the teachings of Augustine and Thomas are divided. Augustine is infralapsarian because he teaches that the decree of reprobation follows original sin and only that, so that reprobation is a 'righteous abandonment in the same mass'.

IV. The Lutheran development of Predestination

It is opposed to Roman Catholicism and a return to Paul and Augustine. Luther and Melancthon both agreed on the doctrine of Predestination until 1527 when Melancthon disagreed with Luther and taught a synergism of grace. Luther's doctrine rested on an anthropological basis: on the deep corruption of sin and man's impotence. Predestination was not as important to Luther as was justification, it was of secondary importance. After the Remonstrants were condemned at the Synod of Dort, Lutherans taught that God wills the salvation of all, and the Gospel is offered to all, then, a consequent will by means of which God decides actually to grant salvation to those whose persevering faith in Christ he has foreseen.

V. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (in the Reformation)

The Reformed remained true to the Pauline and Augustinian doctrine of predestination. Through the influence of Calvin this doctrine was given a place in the confessions of all Reformed churches. A great difference in the degree of emphasis upon and in the manner of approach to the doctrine of predestination is apparent in the way in which it is treated in the various confessions and by the various theologians. The a priori method postulates predestination and derive from it the doctrine of salvation; the a posteriori take as the starting point the doctrine of salvation and reason back to predestination. Whether predestination is discussed in Theology (the a priori order), or in Soteriology (the a posteriori order) does not necessarily imply an essential difference in principle. In Calvin's study of the epistle to the Romans (1538-1541), he was led to accept a more definite view in regard to man's lack of freedom and the truth of election. The most Calvinistic and express statements on the subject of predestination are found in the Consensus of Geneva, The Canons of the Synod of Dort, the Lambeth Articles, the Irish Articles of 1615, and The Westminster Confession of Faith. Whether predestination is made a part of the doctrine of God (the a priori order) or is treated at the beginning or in the middle of the doctrine of salvation (the a posteriori order) does not necessarily imply an essential difference in principle. It is significant that the a priori order is usually followed by Reformed theologians; while Lutherans, Arminians, and Roman Catholics, and most of the more recent dogmatists have gradually begun to adopt the a posteriori order. GOD'S GLORY, NOT MAN'S SALVATION, IS CONSIDERED THE CHIEF PURPOSE OF PREDESTINATION.

VI. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (cont'd) in the Controversy to Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

This controversy is rooted in the struggle between Augustine and Pelagius. According to Pelagianism both original and actual sin (unbelief) logically

precede election and reprobation; according to Augustine ONLY original sin precedes predestination. According to supralapsarianism, predestination logically precedes not only actual but also original sin. Hence, Pelagianism: original sin, actual sin, predestination; Augustinianism or infralapsarianism: original sin, predestination, actual sin; supralapsarianism: predestination, original sin, actual sin. Many followers of Augustine accepted the doctrine of a two-fold predestination: a predestination unto glory and a predestination unto death or wrath. The three reformers Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin arrived at the supralapsarian view: election and reprobation are deeds of God's sovereignty, logically preceding God's decree concerning the fall. Nevertheless, Calvin often follows the infralapsarian reasoning. The Synod of Dort expressed itself in an infralapsarian manner but did not in any sense condemn supralapsarianism. It rejected Arminianism.

A. Stated Simply:

1. THE PELAGIANS- 1) A decree to create man. 2) A decree to send Christ in order to redeem fallen humanity, to cause him to die for all and to be proclaimed to all, and to grant to all "grace sufficient" unto salvation. 3) A decree determining the eternal salvation of some on the ground of foreseen faith, and the eternal punishment of others on the ground of foreseen unbelief.

2. Augustine- Supralapsarian position (that reprobation is an act of God's sovereignty) is implied in this view. 1) A decree to create man and to permit him to fall. 2) A decree to elect some out of this corrupt mass unto eternal life, and to allow others to remain in the perdition wherein they have involved themselves. Both election and reprobation presuppose a fallen humanity, a "corrupt mass" as Augustine teaches. Augustine usually favors the infralapsarian representation; in his reasoning he does not go back beyond the fall; he views reprobation as an act of God's justice. According to Augustine, only original sin precedes predestination. He considers original sin to be a sufficient ground for reprobation (cf. Romans 9). 3) Finally, a decree determining the means whereby the end in view will be realized. With Augustine predestination or election is always a predestination unto glory. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin arrived at the so-called supralapsarian view of the doctrine of predestination, according to which both election and reprobation are to be viewed as acts of God's sovereignty, logically preceding God's decree concerning the fall, sin, and redemption through Christ. Calvin purposely refuses to go beyond the secondary causes of salvation and perdition, and therefore often reasons in an infralapsarian manner. Calvin writes: "Foreknowledge and permission do not solve the problem, because God, foreseeing the fall, could have prevented it; accordingly, he voluntarily permitted the fall because it seemed good to him. Accordingly, the fall of Adam, sin in general, and all evil, were not only foreseen by God but in a certain sense were willed and determined by him. There must have been a reason, unknown to us, why God willed the fall; there is a 'deeper divine decree' logically preceding the fall." The final and deepest cause of reprobation as well as election is the will of God. With Calvin, the supralapsarian and infralapsarian representation alternates.

3. Supralapsarianism - A divine foreknowledge of all possibilities precedes every decree, a "knowledge of simple intelligence." 1) A decree determining the purpose for which God would create and govern all things, namely, the revelation of his virtues (mercy and justice). Respectively, in the eternal salvation of a definite number of man conceived as yet only as possibles,

“creatable and fallible,” and in the eternal punishment of another definite number. 2) A second decree determining the existence of human beings who would be so wretched and pitiable that they would be fit objects of God’s mercy and justice. The actual existence of such human beings necessitated. 3) A third decree to create a man adorned with the image of God to be the head of humanity and “by an efficacious permission” to allow him to fall so that he would involve his entire posterity in that fall. 4) Finally, a decree to manifest God’s mercy in the elect by providing a Mediator for them and by granting them the gifts of faith and perseverance, and to show God’s justice in the reprobate by withholding saving grace from them and by giving them up unto sin. The churches always objected to this view and not one Reformed confession contains this representation.

VII. Religious Sects and Isms that have Opposed the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination

During the time of the Reformation: Erasmus, Bolsec, Castellio and others. The Socinians denied predestination and even divine omniscience. The Arminians in the Netherlands (Remonstrants) taught election conditioned on foreknowledge. In France, Amyraut propounded the doctrine of hypothetical universalism. Arminianism paved the way for rationalism, and during the 17th and 18th centuries (the Enlightenment) the former exerted its influence upon neonomianism, deism, Quakerism, methodism and so forth. Of late deistic Pelagianism has been superseded by pantheistic and materialistic determinism. At present some deny predestination entirely, others view it as God’s purpose to save all people, while still others accept a predestination conditioned on foreseen faith (or unbelief). The only Arminian exception is the Missouri Lutheran Synod.

VIII.

4. What is Pelagianism and what does it teach? How is it most effectively critiqued? (pp. 372-382)
5. Using great care, state precisely what is meant by the terms “supralapsarianism” and “infralapsarianism” and assess (I) the strengths and weaknesses of each view, and (II) the legitimacy of their distinctions. (pp. 382-394)- I begin my definition with a summary that Andrew Webb has stated: All Calvinists agree that God chose or elected those persons whom he was going to mercifully save before the act of creation per Ephesians 1:4-6 --

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:4-6 NIV)

However, Calvinists do not always agree on the logical order of events that occurred in the mind of God prior to His election. Infralapsarians maintain that God first decreed the Creation and the Fall, and then considering all men as fallen, mercifully elected some to salvation while the others were

passed over or reprobated. Supralapsarians, on the other hand, believe that God's decree to save some and condemn others occurred before his decree of the Fall. In effect, the Fall became the means that God ordained to bring about the creation of these two distinct groups that His mercy might be evidenced in the salvation of the elect, and his justice evidenced in the condemnation of the reprobate.

Calvin states:

18. THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE WICKED EMPLOYED BY GOD, WHILE HE CONTINUES FREE FROM EVERY TAIN.

This last chapter of the First Book consists of three parts:

I. It having been said above that God bends all the reprobate, and even Satan himself, at his will, three objections are started. First, that this happens by the permission, not by the will of God. To this objection there is a twofold reply, the one, that angels and men, good and bad, do nothing but what is appointed by God; the second, that all movements are secretly directed to their end by the hidden inspiration of God, sec. 1, 2.

II. A second objection is, that there are two contrary wills in God, if by a secret counsel he decrees what he openly prohibits by his law. This objection refuted, sec. 3.

III. The third objection is, that God is made the author of all wickedness, when he is said not only to use the agency of the wicked, but also to govern their counsels and affections, and that therefore the wicked are unjustly punished. This objection refuted in the last section. John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion, Book 1, Chapter 18

Nowhere, however, in the above citation is the decree of God to predestinate some said to occur before (Supra) or after (Infra) the Fall (Lapsus). In fact the order of God's decrees is not even addressed, the above quote merely states that God's reprobation is active and "not by a bare permission only" to paraphrase the WCOF.

No I don't actually think you're going to be able to find a reference anywhere in the Institutes that proves incontrovertably that Calvin was Supra or Infra, I tried like the Dickens myself about a year ago when I was trying to figure out what side I should come down on. I found on doing further reading that Calvin did not really address the issue, and that historians seem to agree that it was first raised by his follower Theodore

Beza, for example:

"Despite his interest in the anti-Aristotelian, Peter Ramus, whose views were rejected by Beza, Arminius had been a theological disciple of that rigorous Calvinist, whose supralapsarianism *added something to Calvin's doctrine of election*. The decree of election, according to Beza, preceded the fall of man and contemplated man's fallen state as part of the plan of God." (emphasis mine) [John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, Oxford, 1954,

p.263]

My own view on the issue these days is that if Calvin did not address the issue, and the Westminster Standards appear to be deliberately understated on the issue (per Sinclair Ferguson's lectures on the WCOF), then what right, need, or ability do I have to attempt to assert in what order God decreed predestination?

6. What is reprobation? Is it a biblical doctrine? If so, in what sense? (pg. 394)
7. What is the "glorious character of election"? (pp. 401-407)

V. The Works of God

1. State, and discuss the biblical justification for, Berkhof's definition of creation. (Berkhof, pg. 129)
2. What is meant by Creatio ex nihilo, and why is it theologically important? (Berkhof, pg. 133)
3. Summarize and assess what you consider to be the most important competing views on the origin of things. (Berkhof, pp. 138-40; 150-64)
4. State, and discuss the biblical accuracy of, Berkhof's definition of Providence (Berkhof, pg. 166)
5. What are the elements in Providence? Give reasons and biblical backing for your answer. (Berkhof, pp. 169-176)

VI. The Character of God

1. In what different ways have the attributes of God been classified? Does any classification deserve preference? (pp. 113-142)
2. Bavinck provides the following listing of incommunicable attributes of God. In your view, what are the single most important Scriptures in relation to each of them? (A maximum of three passages should be given for each.) Independence (pp. 143-45); Immutability (pp. 145-52); Infinity with respect to time and space (pp. 152-164); Unity (pp. 164-68); Simplicity (pp. 168-72)
3. What is a "communicable" attribute? What is meant by the following attributes? Spirituality (pp. 175-183); Omniscience (pp. 183-95); Wisdom (pp. 195-99); Veracity (pp. 199-202); Goodness (pp. 203-09); Holiness (pp. 209-15); Righteousness (pp. 215-223)
4. How is the will of God related to evil? (pp. 224-238)
5. Distinguish between the preceptive and the decretive will of God. Is the

distinction present in Scripture? (pp. 238-41)

6. In what sense is God omnipotent? (pp. 241-45)

7. Why should we ascribe glory and blessing to God (pp. 246-251)

VII. The Angels of God

1. Outline the biblical view of the following aspects of angelology:

- a. The nature of angels.
- b. The angels' relationship to each other
- c. The function of angels

(pp. 143-49)

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