

# NOT SUBTLE ENOUGH: AN ASSESSMENT OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON HERMAN BAVINCK'S REFORMULATION OF THE *PACTUM SALUTIS* CONTRA "SCHOLASTIC SUBTLETY"

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## Introduction

HERMAN BAVINCK'S (1854–1921) formulation of the *pactum salutis* has received attention in several modern historical-theological studies. Anthony Hoekema's 1953 dissertation on Bavinck's covenant theology provides the first analysis in English, though his aim is to offer little more than a summary of Bavinck's primary formulation.<sup>1</sup> In 1990 Bertus Loonstra published a dissertation on the *pactum salutis* wherein he summarizes Bavinck's formulation, analyzes its reception in twentieth-century Dutch theology, and criticizes Bavinck for allegedly opening the door to extreme formulations of the doctrine.<sup>2</sup> More recently, J. Mark Beach and Cornelis Venema have surveyed Bavinck's presentation of the *pactum*, though, like Hoekema, their interest is only to summarize Bavinck's main formulation in brief.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in a recent systematic-theological essay on the relation between metaphysics and soteriology, John Webster references Bavinck's "magisterial treatment" of the *pactum* in order to support his argument for the necessity of grounding the economy of redemption in the work of the immanent Trinity.<sup>4</sup> He offers little historical explication, however, either of the *pactum salutis* in general or of Bavinck's presentation of it in particular.

None of these studies represent a comprehensive analysis of Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis* whether considered in the context of Bavinck's corpus—which is the focus of the present essay—or in relation to the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox formulations that undergird Bavinck's early twentieth-century reformulation of the doctrine. These

1. Anthony Andrew Hoekema, "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant" (ThD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953), 76–81. (NB: I will follow the page numbering of the retypeset e-book edition published by Full Bible Publications: Clover, SC, 2007, <http://j.mp/Hoekema>.) For Bavinck's primary statement of the doctrine, see "The *Pactum Salutis*" in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 3:212–16 (#346).

2. Bertus Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond: Beschrijving en beoordeling van de leer van het pactum salutis in de gereformeerde theologie* (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1990), 148–50, 182, 184, 274, 336.

3. J. Mark Beach, "The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13 (2002): 115–16; Cornelis P. Venema, "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 88–90; cf. Venema, "Bavinck the Dogmatician (12): The Doctrine of the Covenant (Part 2)," *The Outlook* 60, no. 4 (August 2010): 26–27.

4. John Webster, "It was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him': Soteriology and the Doctrine of God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae, 15–34 (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011), 30.

studies—some of which only intend to outline Bavinck’s views on the *pactum*—have not explored the full range of Bavinck’s usages of the doctrine throughout volumes three and four of his *Dogmatics* and throughout his shorter writings. As a result, a fulsome presentation of Bavinck’s doctrine of the *pactum salutis* is lacking. What is of greater import, a truncated presentation of Bavinck’s formulation risks misinterpretation by analyzing individual aspects of his formulation apart from the whole. The latter is clearly the case with Loonstra’s weighty criticism of Bavinck’s role in twentieth-century formulations of the *pactum salutis*.

### I. Loonstra’s Critique

Loonstra interprets Bavinck’s formulation of the *pactum salutis* to be more than a mere repristination of seventeenth-century formulations such as can be found in Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) or Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683–1729).<sup>5</sup> Thus he notes that Bavinck appropriates such seventeenth-century formulations of the doctrine, “yet, not without criticizing its development in the Reformed tradition” as beset on some points by “scholastic subtlety.”<sup>6</sup> Loonstra is not satisfied with Bavinck’s anti-scholastic corrective, however. For after summarizing the main features of Bavinck’s critical yet appreciative reformulation of the doctrine and surveying its reception among subsequent twentieth-century Dutch Reformed theologians, he concludes that Bavinck is to blame for a significant shift that occurs in twentieth-century statements of the doctrine, namely, God’s counsel is conflated with his essence. This divergence from seventeenth-century formulations is possible, according to Loonstra, because “the covenantal unity of the Trinitarian persons is no longer viewed as a result of their mutual agreement in the covenant transaction,” but rather “God’s very being is viewed as federal....”<sup>7</sup>

Later on he develops this general criticism by leveling a specific charge against Bavinck’s formulation: “ontologizing” the covenant idea. Loonstra explains:

“Ontologizing” the covenant concept occurs when, by one way or another, the covenant and existence, or the covenant and certain aspects of existence, are considered to be identical. This occurred in the Reformed tradition under the influence of Bavinck and Kuyper. The covenant was introduced as an ontological category in the realm of the immanent trinity. Bavinck, Kuyper, Schilder, Hoeksema, and J. A. Heyns have characterized the essential unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a *federal* unity.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 140.

6. “In zijn *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* heeft Bavinck (1854–1921) de leer van het goddelijke verlossingsverbond overgenomen, zij het niet zonder kritiek op de uitwerking daarvan in de gereformeerde traditie.

“Een direct schriftbewijs sluit hij uit. De wijze waarop de gereformeerde vaders dit bewijs hebben trachten te leveren, bestempelt hij als scholastieke spitsvondigheid.” Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148; cf. Beach, “The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius,” 115.

7. “De verbondenheid van de trinitarische personen wordt niet meer voorgesteld als het resultaat van hun wederzijdse accoordverklaring in de ‘verbonds-handel,’ maar rechtstreeks teruggevoerd op hun wezeneseheid. Dit is mogelijk doordat reeds het wezen zelf van God als federaal wordt beschouwd (Bavinck, Kuyper, Schilder, Hoeksema, J.A. Heynes, Wentzel).” Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 184.

8. “Ontologisering van de verbondsgedachte treffen wij daar aan, waar op de een of andere wijze het verbond als met het bestaande, of met bepaalde facetten van het bestaande, identiek wordt

Loonstra then surmises the following motives behind Bavinck and Kuyper's alleged desire to "ontologize" the covenant:

Their motives are therefore clear. They have themselves thus been made to defend against the accusation of tritheism—to which the doctrine of the inner-Trinitarian covenant must lead, according to the critics. Moreover, they want to avoid the possibility that the pact would be seen as something incidental. They thought this could be achieved by grounding it in God's nature.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, Loonstra alleges elsewhere that Bavinck alone is to blame for fostering the idea the the *pactum salutis* is

grounded in an immanent-Trinitarian covenant life of the three divine persons. This idea is introduced by Bavinck and subsequently taken over by many others. In this way every decision of God receives a Trinitarian-covenantal character. Schilder has demonstrated this consequence. In this way it could happen that the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* might lead to a sort of tritheistic theology.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, the crux of Loonstra's allegation—that Bavinck "ontologizes" the covenant concept in his formulation of the *pactum salutis*—raises the question as to whether Bavinck is actually guilty of the charge. However, before we look to his writings to answer this question, we must first call attention to a methodological fallacy in Loonstra's critique: anachronism.

Loonstra argues that Klaas Schilder goes *beyond* Bavinck and Kuyper in two respects: (1) in claiming that the divine essence itself is covenantal and (2) in claiming that the covenant of works depends upon the *pactum salutis*.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as we have noted above, Loonstra also argues that Schilder's extreme formulations are the chief proof that *Bavinck's* position is incorrect. Thus the teacher is blamed for the student's error. Similarly, Loonstra alleges that Hoeksema goes *beyond* Bavinck and Kuyper into extreme formulations regarding the *pactum salutis*,<sup>12</sup> and he avers that, since Wentzel claims that

beschouwd. In de gereformeerde traditie is dit onder invloed van Bavinck en Kuyper gebeurd. Het verbond werd als ontologische categorie ingevoerd in de omschrijving van de immanente triniteit. Bavinck, Kuyper, Schilder, Hoeksema, en J.A. Heyns hebben de wezenseenheid van de Vader, de Zon en de Heilige Geest gekenschetst als een *foederale* eenheid." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 274.

9. "De motieven daarvoor zijn duidelijk. Zij hebben zich daarmee teweer gesteld tegen het verwijt van tritheïsme, waartoe de leer van het binnen-trinitarische verbond volgens critici zou moeten leiden. Bovendien hebben zij willen vermijden dat het pact als iets incidentieels zou worden gezien. Zij dachten dit te bereiken door het te funderen in Gods wezen." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 274.

10. "... de gedachte dat he *pactum* gefundeerd is in een *immanent-trinitarisch verbondsleven* van de drie goddelijke personen. Deze gedachte is door Bavinck geïntroduceerd en door velen overgenomen. Ieder besluit van God krijgt op deze wijze een trinitarisch verbondskarakter. Het is Schilder geweest die deze consequentie liet zien. Langs deze weg kan worden voorkomen dat de leer van het *pactum salutis* tot een soort tritheïstische godsleer zou leiden." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 336.

11. "De verbondsrelatie tussen de drie personen komt niet eerste tot stand in Gods eeuwige raad, maar is kenmerkend voor Gods wezen. . . .

"In nog een ander opzicht spijst Schilder de opvattingen van zijn leermeesters Kuyper en Bavinck toe. Gods verbond met zichzelf beschouwt hij niet als de grondslag van alleen het genadeverbond, maar van het verbond van God met de mens als zodanig, ook vóór de zondeval." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 163. Loonstra notes not only that Schilder goes beyond Bavinck and Kuyper on these points, but also that he goes against them regarding the constitution of the mediator; cf. *Ibid.*, 165.

12. Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 172.

the divine life is a “covenantal subsistence [verbondsbestaan],” he “is thus in the line of Bavinck, Kuyper, and Schilder.”<sup>13</sup> Again, the conclusion that Loonstra draws from these analyses—that *Bavinck’s* formulation is unsound—is a non sequitur. For whether Schilder’s, Hoeksema’s, or Wentsel’s formulations are extreme, or whether these thinkers attempted to expand Bavinck’s formulation beyond its original scope, in neither case does it follow that the predecessor is to blame for the mistakes of his successors. Moreover, Loonstra never actually proves that Bavinck himself “ontologizes” the covenant. Rather, as we will see below, he abstracts one of Bavinck’s statements regarding the relation of the divine essence and the *pactum salutis* from its context, analyzes this statement in terms of extreme formulations found in subsequent theologians, and concludes anachronistically that, since some of Bavinck’s protégés are guilty of “ontologizing” the covenant, then he too must be guilty of the same.

## II. Bavinck’s Formulation of the *pactum salutis*

“For dogmatics as well as for the practice of the Christian life, the doctrine of the covenant is of the greatest importance.”<sup>14</sup>

So Bavinck begins his treatment of the *pactum salutis*. He continues by explaining, albeit briefly, the chief reason why this doctrine is of paramount importance in Reformed dogmatics: in contrast to the undervaluation of covenant theology in both Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology, Reformed theology views *all* true religion—whether before or after the fall and whether in the Old or New Testaments—as a covenant between God and humans. “But [Reformed theology] did not even stop there,” he remarks,

instead, it sought and found for these covenants in time<sup>15</sup> a stable, eternal foundation in the counsel of God, and again regarded this counsel—conceived as aiming at the salvation of the human race—as a covenant between the three persons in the divine being itself (*pactum salutis*, counsel of peace, the covenant of redemption).<sup>16</sup>

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13. “Gods wezen is trinitarische gemeenschap. ‘Verbond’ beduidt zijn inziens ten diepste ook ‘innerlijke gemeenschap.’ Daarom kan in die zin gezegd worden, ‘dat het goddelijk bestaan van de Vader, de Zoon en de Heilige Geest als zodanig en in zichzelf een verbondsbestaan is.’ Wentsel is hiermee in de lijn van Bavinck, Kuyper en Schilder.” Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 182; citing B. Wentsel, *God en mens verzoend, Godsleer, mensleer en zondeleer, Dogmatiek deel 3a* (Kampen, 1987), 223.

14. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:212.

15. By “these covenants in time” Bavinck means the covenant “established with unfallen humanity (the covenant of works), or with the creation in general in the person of Noah (the covenant with nature), or with the chosen people (the covenant of grace).” *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:212. There is a potential ambiguity herein regarding the relation of the covenant of works and the *pactum salutis*. However, in light of his whole statement it seems best to parse the relationship as follows: although the covenant of works is grounded in God’s eternal counsel (as are all his works *ad extra*), it remains distinct from the aspect of the counsel that pertains specifically to redemption (i.e., the *pactum salutis*). This interpretation comports with Bavinck’s description of the relation between the covenants of works and grace as “essentially distinct” and with his explication of the relation of these covenants to God’s counsel (and by implication to the *pactum salutis*) as follows: “God, who knows and determines all things and included also the breach of the covenant of works in his counsel when creating Adam and instituting the covenant of works, *already counted on the Christ and his covenant of grace.*” *Ibid.*, 3:224–28 (#349); quotes at pp. 325 and 328 (emphasis added) respectively; cf. Willem Jan van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius: (1603–1669)*, trans. Raymond Andrew Blacketer, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 231–33.

16. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:212–13.

According to Bavinck, then, Reformed theology not only posits both the unity of pre- and postlapsarian religion and the unity of the Old and New Testaments upon its doctrine of the covenant, but also it grounds the doctrine of the covenant in the eternal *consilium Dei* concerning man's salvation, a *consilium* that is itself a covenant, namely, the *pactum salutis*. Hence the doctrine's paramount importance.

#### A. The *pactum salutis* as the *consilium Dei* concerning Redemption

The distinction that Bavinck draws at the outset of his formulation between (1) the *pactum salutis* as the “stable, eternal foundation” in the *consilium Dei* and (2) “these covenants in time”—a distinction he later describes as “the link between the eternal work of God toward salvation and what he does to that end in time”<sup>17</sup>—deserves attention for at least three reasons. First, this eternity-time distinction is based upon an important aspect of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God, namely, the orderly correlation between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra*.<sup>18</sup> Second, none of the current studies on Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis* analyze this important correlation. Third, as we will see in the following survey, Loonstra's allegation that Bavinck unduly “ontologizes” the *pactum salutis* is based on a misinterpretation of his formulation of God's counsel.

In order to demonstrate the importance of Bavinck's classification of the *pactum salutis* as the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption, we need to examine briefly his explication of the *consilium Dei* in general.

##### 1. The *consilium Dei* in the Reformed Dogmatics<sup>19</sup>

Bavinck begins his discussion of God's counsel by asserting an underlying distinction with respect to God's works: they are either (1) “purely immanent” works that pertain to “God as—according to his self-revelation—he exists in himself” or (2) “external works” that pertain “to the creatures who will exist outside of his being.”<sup>20</sup> He then distinguishes these external works as either (1) *opera Dei ad intra* which include the various decrees that comprise “the one, eternal ‘counsel of God’” or (2) *opera Dei ad extra* which include all the works of creation and re-creation.<sup>21</sup> “These decrees,” explains Bavinck, “establish a connection between the immanent works of the divine being and the external works of creation and re-creation.”<sup>22</sup> To explain the nature of this connection, he asserts that God's decrees possess three characteristics: (1) all of the decrees derive from God's free knowledge; (2) all of the decrees are based upon God's sovereign free will; (3) the realization of

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17. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:215.

18. See Richard A. Muller, “God as Absolute and Relative, Necessary, Free, and Contingent: The *Ad Intra-Ad Extra* Movement of Seventeenth-Century Reformed Language about God,” in *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*, ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim (Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2010), 56–73.

19. Cf. Cornelis P. Venema, “Bavinck the Dogmatician (10): The Doctrine of Election,” *The Outlook* 60, no. 2 (March 2010): 29–31.

20. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:342. Similarly, he writes elsewhere: “Still, we must differentiate between God's decree and its execution, just as we must distinguish between God's being and his works *ad extra*. God's decree is a work *ad intra*, immanent in the divine being, eternal, and extratemporal.” *Ibid.*, 2:373.

21. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:342.

22. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:342.

the decrees is implied in their idea.<sup>23</sup> All of these characteristics follow from God's aseity, his utter self-sufficiency and complete independence from the world; nevertheless, God maintains his omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent relation to the created world without negating his aseity. Thus Bavinck writes: "In the counsel of God the theism of Scripture posits a connection between God and the world, simultaneously maintains the absolute sovereignty of God and the complete dependence of his creatures, thus avoiding both the error of pantheism and that of Deism."<sup>24</sup>

Bavinck's use of "connection" language regarding (1) the distinction between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra* and (2) the transcendent-yet-immanent relation that God maintains with the world provides the theological backdrop for his description of the *pactum salutis* as "the link between the eternal work of God toward salvation and what he does to that end in time."<sup>25</sup> In this light the *pactum salutis* can be described as the eternal *opus Dei ad intra* that undergirds, grounds, guides, and guarantees all of the *opera Dei ad extra* regarding the historical economy of redemption.

## 2. *The consilium Dei in Magnalia Dei*

The relationship between the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption and the *pactum salutis* receives fuller explication in Bavinck's *Magnalia Dei* than in his *Dogmatics*.<sup>26</sup> "That God is the first in the work of salvation," he writes in the former, "is evident not only from the fact that special revelation proceeds wholly from Him, but also is clearly manifested in the fact that the whole of that redemptive work rests upon an eternal counsel of redemption [een eeuwigen raad der verlossing]."<sup>27</sup>

Just as God's works of creation and providence are rooted in an eternal counsel, argues Bavinck, so also is his work of re-creation. After collating a series of texts that describe the nature of this unbreakable, immutable, and everlasting counsel as an expression not only of God's mind but also of his will (Psa. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 14:27, 26:10; 46:10; Luke 2:14, 7:30; Acts 20:27; Rom. 8:28–29, 9:11; 11:5; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4, 5, 9, 11, 3:11; Heb. 6:17), Bavinck argues that the content of this counsel is comprised of three purposes, each of which is determined in a manner that reflects the proper order of Trinitarian Persons: (1) election in Christ, (2) the entire acquisition of redemption for the elect, and (3) the full application of redemption to the elect.<sup>28</sup> Thus he concludes: "The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are well founded for the people of the Lord in the eternal and immutable counsel of God."<sup>29</sup>

23. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:342–43.

24. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:343.

25. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:215.

26. Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1909); translated as *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956). Bavinck intended this work to be a non-technical summary of his *Dogmatiek*; see Hoekema, "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant," 9. Note that Bavinck did not publish vols. three and four of the second edition of his *Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok) until 1910 and 1911, respectively; therefore, it is at least plausible to infer that Bavinck used the 1909 publication as an opportunity to refine and/or to expand his formulation of the *pactum* in relation to the *consilium Dei*.

27. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 266 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Magnalia Dei*, 296.

28. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 266–68.

29. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 268.

For Bavinck, the chief importance of the *consilium* concerning redemption is its revelation that, from beginning to end, God alone—specifically, each person of the trinity working together eternally to bring about redemption—is the source of humanity’s salvation. “For if salvation,” he avers,

to a greater or lesser extent depended upon man, upon his faith and his good works, then salvation would be eternally lost to him. But the counsel of God teaches us that the work of redemption is from beginning to end the work of God, that it is most uniquely the divine work. Redemption, quite as much as creation and providence, is solely the work of God. . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together have thought out the whole work of redemption and have determined it, and they are the ones also who will carry it out and will complete it. Man does nothing in it. All things are of God, through Him, and unto Him. Hence our soul can rest in it with unperturbed certainty.<sup>30</sup>

If it is true that redemption is rooted in an eternal Trinitarian counsel comprised of election, the acquisition of salvation, and the application of salvation, then there must be a link between this eternal counsel and its execution in time, else this redemption would hang in the air, so to speak. Bavinck demonstrates such a link by interpreting God’s dealing with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 as both the first and the paradigmatic execution of this eternal counsel in time: “As soon as man has fallen, therefore, the counsel of redemption begins to work.”<sup>31</sup> He explains that Adam and Eve’s first sin in effect sold themselves into bondage to Satan. Nevertheless, God comes to the rescue: he breaks humanity’s covenant with Satan, places enmity between humanity and the Serpent, and promises that the seed of the woman will one day crush the Serpent. According to Bavinck, this ironic episode in which grace and mercy triumph despite sin and judgment is nothing less than God’s execution of his eternal counsel of redemption in the form of the covenant of grace.<sup>32</sup> Hence the eternity-time correlation is of paramount importance:

The counsel of redemption, fixed in eternity, and the covenant of grace with which man is acquainted immediately after the fall, and which is then set up, stand in the closest of relationships with each other. They are so closely related that the one stands or falls with the other.<sup>33</sup>

Bavinck explains this close relationship in terms of the three aspects of the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption noted earlier: election, acquisition, and application. Although the *consilium* includes and hence cannot be separated from election, he argues that it should not be reduced to election: “Election is not the whole counsel of redemption, but is a part, the first and principal part, of it. Included and established in that counsel is also the way in which the election is to be actualized—in short, the whole accomplishment and application of redemption.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus in Bavinck’s view the highest, most profound expression of God’s Trinitarian work of redemption is made known in the eternal counsel of

30. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 269–70.

31. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 270.

32. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 270–72.

33. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 272.

34. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.

redemption, and the highest, most profound form in which this counsel is expressed is that of a covenant: “[The counsel of redemption] is a Divine work of the Holy Trinity. In other words the counsel of redemption is itself a covenant—a covenant in which each of the three Persons, so to speak, receives His own work and achieves His own task.”<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, he argues that this eternal covenant—the *pactum salutis*—is the eternal, immutable, basis for the historical economy of redemption that comes to expression via the covenant of grace. And just as the eternal counsel is established in a Trinitarian manner, so its execution in time reveals the work of all three divine persons:

The covenant of grace which is raised up in time and is continued from generation to generation is nothing other than the working out and the impression or imprint of the covenant that is fixed in the Eternal Being. As in the counsel of God, so in history each of the Persons appears. The Father is the source, the Son is the Achiever, and the Holy Spirit is the one who applies our salvation.<sup>36</sup>

Importantly, Bavinck eschews any conflation of the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption—the *pactum salutis*—and the covenant of grace. “There is this big difference between them,” he writes,

that in the history of time the eternal idea of God comes to be revealed and actualized. The counsel of redemption and the covenant of grace cannot and may not be separated, but they differ from each other in this respect, that the second is the actualization of the first. The plan of redemption is not enough in itself. It needs to be carried out.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Summary

An all-important point appears in the opening lines of Bavinck’s analysis of the *pactum salutis* in his *Dogmatics*, namely, the *pactum* is the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption. Therefore, the distinctions that Bavinck uses to explicate the relation between the *consilium Dei* and the *essentia Dei* such as the distinction between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra* also apply to the distinction between the *pactum salutis* and the covenant of grace.

In *Magnalia Dei* Bavinck expounds upon the *consilium-pactum* relationship in two salient ways. First, the counsel of redemption is comprised of three interrelated eternal purposes: (1) election in Christ, (2) the acquisition of salvation, (3) the application of salvation. Second, this counsel, despite its intimate correlation with the covenant of grace in terms of idea and execution, cannot be conflated with it; for, time is dependent upon eternity at every point, the creature upon the Creator; yet the opposite is not the case.

Collating Bavinck’s formulations in both works yields the following portrait of the *pactum salutis*: the *pactum* is the *opus Dei ad intra* that grounds, guides, and guarantees all of the *opera Dei ad extra* concerning redemption.

Contra Loonstra, Bavinck no more “ontologizes” the *pactum salutis* than conflates the *consilium Dei* with the divine essence. Rather, he expressly

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35. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.

36. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.

37. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.

denies such a conflation:

Included in this counsel of God are all the things that exist and will occur in time, in short, the whole plan, [the blueprint of] “the intelligible universe.” *This world plan, though closely connected with God’s being, may not be equated with that being, nor therefore with the Son, that is, the Logos.* It relates to God’s being in the same way world-consciousness is related to God’s self-consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, Bavinck employs standard Reformed orthodox Trinitarian distinctions specifically for the purpose of *avoiding* the conflation of God’s essence and his works (i.e., pantheism). Furthermore, by means of positing the *pactum salutis* as the form or mode of the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption, Bavinck firmly upholds the clear correlation in the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra*—a correlation that would be unintelligible if Bavinck truly intended to “ontologize” the *pactum*. Since Loonstra omits all of these distinctions, his interpretation of Bavinck’s formulation conflates what Bavinck everywhere distinguishes, and as a result his criticisms arise from abstract, unsound premises.

## B. Historical Survey

After briefly introducing the *pactum salutis* as the *consilium Dei* with respect to humanity’s redemption, Bavinck provides a concise historical sketch of the doctrine’s history:

[The *pactum salutis*] occurs, briefly and materially, already in Olevianus, Junius, Gomarus, and others [i.e., J. Arminius, W. Ames, G. Voetius, A. Essenius] and was then further developed at length by Cloppenburg and Cocceius. It subsequently received a fixed place in dogmatics in Burman, Braun, Witsius, Vitringa, Turretin, Leydekker, Maastricht, Marck, Moor, and Brakel, in order finally to be opposed by Deurhof, Wesselius, and others and gradually to be banished from dogmatics altogether.<sup>39</sup>

Bavinck does not analyze any of these theologians’ formulations. Rather, as we will see below, he mildly criticizes the doctrine’s “defective form” in general.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, several aspects of his succinct historical survey are notable.

First, by naming Olevianus as the first formulator of the *pactum*, Bavinck is likely appropriating—whether directly or indirectly via Geerhardus Vos’ 1891 rectorial address—the historical analyses of Heinrich Heppé and Gottlob Schrenk, both of whom identify Olevianus as the doctrine’s fount.<sup>41</sup>

38. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:373 (emphasis added).

39. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:213.

40. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214.

41. Relying on Heppé’s *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik*, Vos notes that the *pactum salutis* can be traced back to Olevianus. “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” trans. S. Voorwinde and W. Van Gemeren, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 234–267 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 248; a translation of *De verbondsleer in de gereformeerde theologie: rede bij het overdragen van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Grand Rapids, Mich.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Democrat, 1891). Note that Bavinck refers to Vos’ rectorial address both in his survey of the history of covenant theology in general and at the conclusion of his subparagraph on the *pactum salutis* in particular (#346); see *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:210n32,

Second, even though he might have been influenced to some degree by the Heppes-Schrenk line of scholarship on the *pactum*, Bavinck is not only critical of this older scholarship at points, but also his approach to historical theology is sufficiently nuanced to realize that a dogmatic concept may be formulated long before its terminology is formalized. For example, he asserts:

Covenant theology is not the brainchild of Cocceius, as Ypey thought, nor a peculiar feature of the German Reformed theology that is supposed to have been begotten by Melancthon, as Heppes pictured it. The incorrectness of these sentiments has been demonstrated with a forceful array of arguments and is now also recognized by everyone. The doctrine of the covenant does not even originate with Olevianus, Calvin, or Bullinger but is found in principle already in Zwingli, who, in his polemic with the Anabaptists, maintained the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, even though he follows the older scholarship in locating the first formulation of the *pactum salutis* in Olevianus, it is not unwarranted to assume that, just as Bavinck found adumbrations of covenant theology in Zwingli, so also he would, at the least, be open to finding adumbrations of the *pactum* before Olevianus. Incidentally, it is worth noting that recent scholarship has found such adumbrations in Martin Luther, Johannes Oecolampadius, Guilmus Budaeus, Calvin, and the Geneva Bible.<sup>43</sup>

Third, Bavinck's admission that the *pactum salutis* was "banished from dogmatics altogether" is a significant transitional statement; for, it not only mitigates the force of his subsequent criticisms of the doctrine in the sense that they are to be read as an acknowledgement of the partial truth in others' criticisms of the doctrine, but also this statement sets the stage for Bavinck's manifold positive usages of the doctrine throughout the remainder of his *Dogmatics*. Thus it provides a counterpoint: knowing full well that the doctrine has been banished by some, Bavinck nevertheless attempts to reassert the doctrine's utmost importance for Reformed dogmatics and ethics.

### C. Criticisms of "scholastic subtlety"

*Pace* Hoekema and Venema, the crux of Bavinck's critique of the *pactum salutis* is his juxtaposition of "scholastic subtlety" with "a scriptural idea."<sup>44</sup>

216n48; cf. Bavinck's two references to Vos at the head of § 44 in *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 7th ed., 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 3:174. Regarding Heppes and Schrenk, see Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*," 11.

42. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:209–10.

43. For a brief survey of recent *pactum salutis* scholarship regarding antecedents to the doctrine, see Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*," 11–12; Cornelis P. Venema, "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 88n55. Regarding Calvin as an antecedent, see also Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 212–14.

44. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:213 and 214 respectively; cf. Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148. Hoekema, "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant," 77, omits all of Bavinck's critiques except his rejection of Zechariah 6:13. Venema, "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck," 88, notes that Bavinck expresses misgivings about "scholastic subtlety," but he lists only Zechariah 6:13 and the use of extra-biblical legal terms (i.e., presumably *fideiussor* and *expromissor*). Thus neither study presents the full breadth of Bavinck's critiques. Regarding Bavinck's historical analysis of scholasticism in general, see ch. 4 in *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, esp. pp. 144–49; also note his pejorative uses of "subtlety" in relation to scholasticism at pp. 147, 162. Additionally, it is worth noting that the *pactum salutis* is the only

Regarding the former, Bavinck rejects Zechariah 6:13—the verse that he seems to interpret as the *locus classicus* for the doctrine among the Reformed scholastics—as a prooftext for the doctrine.<sup>45</sup> He also dismisses as “scholastic subtlety,” albeit implicitly, the following aspects of the doctrine’s historical development: (1) the inference (based on Job 17:3; Isa. 38:14; Psa. 119:122, and Heb. 7:22) that Christ had become the guarantor (borg) of humanity before God;<sup>46</sup> (2) the application of the juridical distinction between a *fideiussor* and an *expromissor* to the *pactum*; (3) the question of whether in the *pactum* Christ bears the sins of Old Testament believers conditionally or unconditionally; (4) the debate regarding whether the *pactum* is a testament or a covenant.<sup>47</sup>

#### D. Positive Formulation

“Nevertheless,” writes Bavinck, “this doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, despite its defective form, rests on a scriptural idea.”<sup>48</sup> He locates the essence of this “scriptural idea” in a collation of texts pertaining to Christ’s subordination to the Father in his office of mediator:

For as Mediator, the Son is subordinate to the Father, calls him his God (Ps. 22:2; John 20:17), is his servant (Isa. 49f.) who has been assigned a task (Isa. 53:10; John 6:38–40; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31; 17:4) and who receives a reward (Ps. 2:8; Isa. 53:10; John 17:4, 11, 17, 24; Eph. 1:20f.; Phil. 2:9f.) for the obedience accomplished (Matt. 26:42; John 4:34; 15:10; 17:4–5; 19:30).<sup>49</sup>

He infers from these texts that this special relation between the Father and Son must have begun not at Christ’s incarnation but in eternity; for, the incarnation itself presupposes the Son’s assigned task. Moreover, reasons Bavinck, given that Christ’s mediation is rooted in eternity, it follows that he executes his office of mediator in the Old Testament prior to his incarnation. “Scripture also clearly attests this fact,” asserts Bavinck,

when it attributes the leadership of Israel to the Angel of Yahweh (Exod. 3:2f.; 13:21; 14:19; 23:20–23; 32:34; 33:2; Num. 20:16; Isa. 63:8–9), and sees Christ also functioning officially already in the days of the Old Testament (John 8:56; 1 Cor. 10:4, 9; 1 Pet. 1:11; 3:19). For there is but one mediator between God and humankind (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5), who is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8), who was chosen as Mediator from eternity (Isa. 42:1; 43:10; Matt. 12:18; Luke 24:26; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8), and as Logos existed from eternity as well (John

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Reformed doctrine throughout his entire *Dogmatiek* against which Bavinck levels a charge of “scholastic subtlety.”

45. Whether Bavinck thinks Zechariah 6:13 is the *locus classicus* for the *pactum salutis* in Reformed orthodoxy or that it is simply one bad prooftext among many good ones, recent scholarship on the exegetical history of the *pactum* has demonstrated that Zechariah 6:13 is not the *locus classicus* for the doctrine. See Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*,” 24, 31, 37–39, 48, 53, 64.

46. This second critique is odd given the fact that Bavinck himself asserts the same thing elsewhere: “In the *pactum salutis* the Son already acted as the Guarantor [borg] and Mediator [middelaar] of his own.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:122 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:193.

47. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:213–14. The fourth critique is also slightly odd given that Bavinck himself insists that the *pactum salutis* is a *συνθηκη* rather than a *διαθηκη*. *Ibid.*, 214–15.

48. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:194.

49. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214.

1:1, 3; 8:58; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; etc.).<sup>50</sup>

These three collations of texts—regarding (1) the Son’s economic subordination to the Father in the economy of redemption, (2) the Son’s preincarnate mediation in the Old Testament, and (3) the Son as the sole mediator between God and humanity—comprise Bavinck’s attempt to improve the allegedly “defective form” of the *pactum salutis* by explicating the “scriptural idea” upon which it rests. He makes no attempt, however, either to explain the individual texts in any depth or to connect his collations with prior Reformed orthodox interpretations of these texts.<sup>51</sup>

Since Hoekema, Loonstra, Beach, and Venema summarize the remainder of Bavinck’s formulation of the *pactum salutis*, there is no need to restate the details here.<sup>52</sup> However, three important points not noted in these summaries deserve attention.

### 1. Appropriation of Geerhardus Vos’ rectorial address

Bavinck appropriates several formulations from Vos’ rectorial address. To see the similarities, consider, in the first place, Vos’ emphasis upon the dual motifs of sovereign freedom and dipleuric covenantal dynamics that come to full expression in the *pactum*:

The covenant of redemption is nothing other than proof for the fact that even the work of redemption, though it springs from God’s sovereign will, finds its execution in *free deeds performed in a covenantal way*. If Christ the Mediator is the object of predestination, He is, as guarantor, equally the *freely acting person* who desires to do God’s will and who, as He comes forth from the glory which He had with the Father, says: “Behold, I come!” Instead of the covenant idea being presented here in a forced way, one must much rather say that *only here does it fully come to its own. For it is only in the triune Being that the perfect freedom dominates which the covenant idea appears to demand*. Here the covenant is *completely two-sided*, whereas before the Fall it still had to be regarded as one-sided to the extent that man, as God’s subordinate, was in duty bound to act upon the covenant that was proposed.<sup>53</sup>

Then compare Bavinck’s strikingly similar emphases upon consummate divine freedom and dipleuric covenantal dynamics in the *pactum*:

The *pactum salutis* makes known to us the relationships and life of the three persons in the Divine Being as a covenantal life [verbondsleven], a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom. Here, within the Divine Being, the covenant flourishes to the full. Whereas the covenant between God and humankind—on account of the infinite distance between them—always more or less has the character of a sovereign grant (διαθηκη) here, among the three persons, it is a pact (συνηκη) in the full sense of the word. The greatest freedom and the most perfect agreement coincide.<sup>54</sup>

50. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214; cf. Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148.

51. Loonstra argues that Bavinck’s formulation is strongly influenced by that of Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706); see *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148–49.

52. See Hoekema, “Herman Bavinck’s Doctrine of the Covenant,” 76–81; Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148–49; Beach, “The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius,” 115–16; Venema, “Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck,” 88–90.

53. Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” 245–46 (emphases added).

54. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214–15 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*,

In the second place, consider Vos' remark concerning the distinction between predestination and the *pactum* with respect to the divine will:

In predestination the divine persons act communally, while economically it is attributed to the Father. In the covenant of redemption they are related to one another judicially. In predestination there is the one, undivided, divine will. In the counsel of peace this will appears as having its own mode of existence in each person.<sup>55</sup>

Then compare Bavinck's formulation regarding predestination and the *pactum*:

In the decrees, also in those of predestination, the one will of God occupied the foreground, and their Trinitarian character was still blurred. But here, in the *pactum salutis*, the work of redemption stands out in its full divine splendor. It is *the* divine work par excellence. Just as at the time of the creation of humanity, God intentionally consults with himself in advance (Gen. 1:26), so, in the work of re-creation, each of the three persons even more clearly acts in his own distinct character.<sup>56</sup>

In the third place, throughout his rectorial address Vos emphasizes what he terms "the Reformed principle," namely, that the entire work of redemption is solely of God. Relating this principle to the *pactum*, he writes: "In the clear light of eternity, where God alone dwells, the economy of salvation is drawn up for us with pure outlines and not darkened by the assistance of any human hand. It is a creation of the triune One from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things."<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, Bavinck repeatedly emphasizes the same principle in his formulation of the *pactum*, albeit without using Vos' term. Thus he writes, echoing Vos: "Re-creation, like creation, is a work of God alone; of, through, and unto him are all things; no human offered him advice or gave him a gift that he might be repaid."<sup>58</sup>

In the fourth place, consider Vos' tenacious insistence that the entire *ordo salutis* is grounded upon the *pactum salutis*:

But the covenant of redemption also has meaning for the application of salvation.... For the Reformed, therefore, the entire *ordo salutis*, beginning with regeneration as its first stage, is bound to the mystical union with Christ. There is no gift that has not been earned by Him. . . . Now the basis for this order lies in none other than in the covenant of salvation with Christ [i.e., the *pactum salutis*].<sup>59</sup>

Then compare Bavinck's similar formulation wherein he grounds the entire application of salvation via the covenant of grace in the *pactum*:

But also the *pactum salutis* further forms the link between the eternal work of God concerning salvation and what he does to that end in time. The covenant of grace revealed in time does not hang in the air but rests on an eternal,

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3:194.

55. Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 246.

56. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:215 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:194–95.

57. Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 247.

58. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:215 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:195.

59. Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 248.

unchanging foundation. It is firmly grounded in the counsel and covenant of the triune God and is the application and execution of it that infallibly follows.<sup>60</sup>

These examples reveal that Bavinck incorporates several salient points from Vos' rectorial address into his formulation of the *pactum salutis*. This is not to say that he merely appropriates material from Vos without adding any refinements of his own. Rather, this observation simply suggests that at these points he clearly builds upon the work of his close colleague and friend and that, in this sense, Bavinck is not alone in his nineteenth-century attempt to revive the "banished" seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox doctrine of the *pactum salutis*.<sup>61</sup>

## 2. Use of divine "essence" language

That Bavinck draws a strong correlation between the *pactum salutis* and the divine essence is beyond dispute. As Loonstra correctly notes, Bavinck asserts:

The *pactum salutis* makes known to us the relationships and life of the three persons in the Divine Being as a covenantal life [verbondsleven], a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom. Here, *within the Divine Being* [binnen het Goddelijk wezen], the covenant flourishes to the full.<sup>62</sup>

However, it is by no means clear that the nature and purpose of Bavinck's correlation are what Loonstra interprets them to be: an *identification* of the *essentia Dei* and the *pactum salutis*. "In other words," explains Loonstra regarding Bavinck's use of *verbondsleven*, "the inner-Trinitarian relationship among the three persons as such has the character of a covenant relationship, and the *pactum salutis* is therefore the highest expression of this relationship."<sup>63</sup> The implication of Loonstra's interpretation is that, in Bavinck's view, for God to exist is for God to exist *specifically and necessarily in covenant*. The *pactum salutis* is thus a *necessary* aspect of God's very essence insofar as it comprises the mode of the inner-Trinitarian relation.

That Bavinck does not "ontologize" the *pactum salutis* in this sense is clearly seen when one pays careful attention to the content, context, and scope of Bavinck's formulation. In the first place, Bavinck's exegesis of *verbondsleven*—"a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom"—does not comport with Loonstra's emphasis on "the three persons as such"; for, whereas Bavinck focuses upon the *sovereign freedom* of the divine persons regarding their unified purpose to redeem fallen sinners, Loonstra focuses upon the *necessary* covenant relationship of the three persons per se. In this

60. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:215 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:195.

61. For an introduction to Bavinck's strong personal and professional relationship with Vos, see George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 18–31.

62. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214 (emended and emphasis added); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:194. For Loonstra's reference to Bavinck's assertion, see *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148.

63. Loonstra interprets Bavinck's usage of "verbondsleven" as follows: "Met andere woorden: de binnen-trinitarische verhouding der drie personen heeft als zodanig het karakter van een verbondsverhouding en het *pactum salutis* is daarvan de meest duidelijke manifestatie." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148.

manner Loonstra both conflates Wentsel's ontological term—*verbondsbestaan*—with Bavinck's ethical one and directly contradicts Bavinck's insistence, stated elsewhere, that the *pactum salutis* is a free and personal Trinitarian work: "The entire work of re-creation is not just a decree of God; it is rooted in the free and conscious consultation of the three persons [i.e., the *pactum salutis*]. It is a personal, not a natural, work."<sup>64</sup>

In the second place, had Bavinck intended to "ontologize" the *pactum salutis* in Loonstra's sense, then his statement regarding the flourishing of the covenant "within the Divine Being [binnen het Goddelijk wezen]"<sup>65</sup> fails to achieve this purpose; for, by describing the *pactum* as "within" rather than "as" or "as the mode of subsistence of" the Divine Being, Bavinck implicitly distinguishes it from God's being per se. In the third place, if Bavinck truly "ontologized" the *pactum salutis* in the sense purported by Loonstra, one would expect to find the doctrine treated under the *locus de Deo* in volume two of the *Dogmatics*. However, as will be noted below, all of Bavinck's usages of the *pactum salutis* appear in volumes three and four within soteriological contexts. In the fourth place, as we saw above, in volume two Bavinck clearly distinguishes between God's essence and his decree and between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra*. He draws these distinctions for the express purposes of (1) avoid-ing all forms of necessity with respect to creation and re-creation (i.e., pantheism) and (2) guarding the sovereign freedom of God's determinations both to create and to re-create. Seen in this light the entire scope of Bavinck's soteriology militates against Loonstra's allegation; for, he highlights not only God's sovereign freedom concerning his purpose of redemption but also the pure grace that undergirds the *pactum salutis*, and both emphases entirely undercut all pantheistic attempts to ground the necessity of re-creation in God's essence per se.<sup>66</sup>

For all of these reasons, despite the fact that Bavinck describes the divine life in general terms as a *verbondsleven*, it does not follow that he intends this description to be applied beyond the *consilium Dei* concerning salvation, as if the divine essence is constituted by the *pactum salutis*—a supposition that, when pressed to its logical conclusion, would deny the contingency of creation and the pure grace of re-creation.

### 3. Exclusively soteriological usages

Loonstra alleges the opposite: "For Bavinck, the Trinitarian covenant relationship between the divine persons is broader than the *pactum salutis*."<sup>67</sup> To prove this allegation, one would have to demonstrate that

64. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:276 (emphasis added); for a similar formulation regarding the Noachic covenant, see *Ibid.*, 3:225.

65. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:214. Compare another similar formulation: ". . . a covenant among the three persons of the divine being itself [een verbond der drie personen in het Goddelijk wezen zelf]." *Ibid.*, 405; cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:396.

66. This overarching theme of Bavinck's formulation of covenant theology—including the *pactum salutis*—is well summarized in Bavinck's own words: "Thus in a marvelous way the doctrine of the covenant maintains God's sovereignty in the entire work of salvation. It far surpasses the covenant of works to the degree that Christ exceeds Adam. God's threefold being is manifest much more clearly in the re-creation than in the creation. It is the Father who conceives, plans, and wills the work of salvation; it is the Son who guarantees it and effectively acquires it; it is the Spirit who implements and applies it. And into that entire work of salvation, from beginning to end, nothing is introduced that derives from humans. It is God's work totally and exclusively; it is pure grace and undeserved salvation." *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:228–29.

67. "Voor Bavinck is de trinitarische verbondsverhouding tussen de goddelijke personen breder

Bavinck applies the *pactum salutis* outside of soteriological contexts. However, Loonstra offers no such proof. Furthermore, the following catalog of Bavinck's usages of the doctrine demonstrates that in every place where Bavinck employs the *pactum salutis*, he does so in a specifically soteriological context.

In the first place, Bavinck introduces the covenant with nature (i.e., the Noahic covenant) as an aspect of the covenant of grace in a broad sense, which covenant is itself the historical enactment of the *pactum salutis*.<sup>68</sup> In the second place, he delineates the distinctions among the covenant of nature, covenant of grace, and the *pactum salutis* as well as describes their underlying unity.<sup>69</sup> In the third place, Bavinck describes the monopoleuric institution of the covenant of grace and the dipoleuric dynamic involved in its application by stating that there is a sense in which the *pactum salutis* "expands to become a covenant of grace. The head of the covenant of grace is at the same time its mediator. For that reason, from the moment of its public announcement, it comes with the demand of faith and repentance (Mark 1:15)."<sup>70</sup> In the fourth place, Bavinck draws a parallel between Christ's incarnation and the covenant of grace that relies upon the *pactum salutis*: the incarnation is like the covenant of grace in the sense that both are rooted in a free, personal, eternal purpose of the Trinitarian Persons that grounds, guides, and guarantees their historical outworking within the economy of redemption. In this sense, then, like the covenant of grace, "[t]he incarnation was prepared from eternity; it does not rest in the essence of God but in the person. It is not a necessity as in pantheism, but neither is it arbitrary or accidental as in Pelagianism."<sup>71</sup>

In the fifth place, Bavinck grounds Christ's pre-incarnate execution of his threefold office to his appointment as mediator in the *pactum salutis*.<sup>72</sup> In the sixth place, Bavinck grounds Christ's vicarious satisfaction in the "the unshakable covenant of redemption [het onwankel-baar verbond der verlossing]."<sup>73</sup> In the seventh place, Bavinck observes that Reformed orthodox theologians maintained, vis-à-vis κενωσις theories of Christ's humiliation, that in the *pactum salutis*, Christ "had from all eternity voluntarily taken upon himself to be the acquirer and administrator of our salvation and thus the Servant of the Lord."<sup>74</sup> In the eighth place, Bavinck distinguishes the Reformed view of the *ordo salutis* from the Lutheran view by pointing out that, for the Reformed, every benefit of Christ that is applied to the church in time presupposes an eternal bond formed between Christ and his church in the *pactum salutis*.<sup>75</sup> In the ninth place, Bavinck employs the *pactum salutis*—especially its concomitant distinction "between the decree and its execution, between the 'immanent' and the 'objectivizing' act"—in his criticism of the doctrine of eternal justification.<sup>76</sup> In the tenth place, Bavinck avers that, since in the *pactum salutis* Christ acts as the eternal guarantor

dan alleen het *pactum salutis*." Loonstra, *Verkiezing - Verzoening - Verbond*, 148.

68. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:216.

69. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:227–28.

70. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:229.

71. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:276–77; quote at p. 277.

72. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:365; see also *Ibid.*, 2:403, 4:685.

73. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:405–06; quote at p. 406; cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:397.

74. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:432.

75. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:523.

76. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:590–91; quote at p. 591.

and mediator of his own, then “it needs to be in the foreground of our consciousness that all the benefits of salvation are secured by Christ and present in him and that he himself, as the Lord from heaven, is by his Spirit the one who distributes and applies them.”<sup>77</sup>

In the eleventh place, Bavinck grounds the benefit of “alien and external righteousness” that believers receive in justification in Christ’s eternal work of mediation that was initiated in the *pactum salutis*.<sup>78</sup> In the twelfth place, Bavinck nuances his earlier criticism of the doctrine of eternal justification by drawing a parallel between “a precious truth that can or may or will not be denied by any Reformed person” found therein and the same truth that also comes to expression in the *pactum salutis*:

For election is from eternity; the *pactum salutis*, including the atonement of the Mediator for his own, is from eternity; everything that happens in time—especially the work of salvation—is continually traced in Scripture to God’s decree in eternity; justification could not occur in time were it not securely established in eternity. But this does not yet make it advisable to speak of an eternal Justification or of a Justification from eternity. For Scripture nowhere models this usage.<sup>79</sup>

In the thirteenth place, echoing his nuanced view of eternal justification, Bavinck asserts that the imputation of the whole Christ with all of his benefits to the elect can be viewed from multiple perspectives, including the eternal perspective provided by the *pactum salutis*.<sup>80</sup> Finally, in the fourteenth place, Bavinck argues that the Reformed, over against the anthropological-based Lutheran formulation of the mystical union, grounded the mystical union theologically:

The *unio mystica* is begun in the *pactum salutis*. The incarnation and satisfaction presuppose that Christ is the head and mediator of the covenant.... There is after all no participation in the benefits of Christ apart from communion with his person. The imputation and granting of Christ to his own comes first, and our incorporation into Christ again precedes our acceptance of Christ and his benefits by faith.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to these fourteen usages of the *pactum salutis* throughout volumes three and four of his *Dogmatics*—all of which appear in exclusively soteriological contexts—Bavinck employs the doctrine in his less technical writings. For example, we have already noted above his discussion of the *consilium Dei* concerning redemption in *Magnalia Dei*. To this we can add two implicit and one explicit usages in *Saved By Grace*, all of which are soteriological in character.<sup>82</sup>

77. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:122.

78. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:214.

79. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:216 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4:199.

80. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:225–26. Compare his earlier use of multiple perspectives to describe the imputation of Christ’s benefits: “This imputation and donation of Christ and his benefits already took place, ideally, in the decree and from all eternity. It was objectively realized in Christ as head and mediator when he became human, died, and was raised. Materially it is also the content of the word of the gospel. It is individually applied and distributed only in the internal calling and passively accepted on the human side in regeneration. Whether it takes place in childhood, youth, or later, before or during the hearing of the Word, logically it always precedes the act of really believing.” *Ibid.*, 4:123.

81. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:250 (emended); cf. *idem*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4:235.

82. See Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit’s Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed.

### III. Conclusions

Hoekema's positive, albeit brief, survey of Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis* does not adequately present the depth and breadth of Bavinck's early twentieth-century reformulation of the seventeenth-century doctrine. Nor do Beach, Venema, or Webster attempt such a presentation. Meanwhile, the significant influence that Geerhardus Vos' inaugural address exerts upon Bavinck's formulation has gone unnoticed. Similarly, the full scope of Bavinck's usages of the *pactum salutis* throughout volumes three and four of his *Dogmatics* and throughout his shorter writings such as *Magnalia Dei* and *Saved By Grace* has not received sufficient notice.

In light of (1) the distinctions Bavinck draws between God's essence and his works; (2) the distinctions he draws between the *opera Dei ad intra* and *ad extra*; and (3) the extensive catalog of exclusively soteriological usages of the *pactum salutis* throughout his *Dogmatics* and his shorter writings, it is clear that Bavinck does not "ontologize" the *pactum salutis* in the sense of employing it beyond the purview of the counsel of redemption as is alleged by Loonstra. Rather, according to Bavinck himself, the *pactum salutis* is rooted not in the *essentia Dei* but in the *opera Dei ad intra*. Moreover, Bavinck's preeminent concern to maintain God's sovereignty over both creation and re-creation—and hence his emphasis upon the contingency rather than the necessity of God's works of creation and re-creation—that pervades his treatment of covenant theology militates against the pantheistic conclusion that is the logical consequence of Loonstra's critique, namely, that the *pactum salutis* is as necessary as is God's essence. Instead of grounding the economy of redemption in an ontological necessity, the only sort of necessity that can be claimed for Bavinck's view is one which arises subsequent to God's free decisions to create and to re-create a contingent world. In this sense and this sense alone can necessity be attributed to the *pactum salutis* as formulated by Bavinck—once God has purposed to accomplish the redemption of his elect, *then* this purpose is as immutable, omnipotent, unchanging as is God's very essence. Furthermore, *pace* Loonstra's anachronism, whether those twentieth-century theologians who sought to go beyond Bavinck's formulation failed to maintain his aforementioned distinctions regarding the *pactum salutis* and the *essentia Dei* has no bearing on the soundness of Bavinck's position itself.

For these reasons an adequate historical assessment regarding both the role that Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis* plays in twentieth-century Dutch theology and the nature of his appropriation of seventeenth-century formulations of the *pactum salutis* contra "scholastic subtlety" requires more subtlety than it has received heretofore.