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Abstract

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Keywords

Herman Bavinck, Vestigia Trinitatis, Augustine

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TRINITY AND CREATION:
BAVINCK ON THE *VESTIGIA TRINITATIS*

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ABSTRACT: Engaging recent scholarship on Bavinck's revitalization of the *vestigia trinitatis* and its connection to the organic motif, this essay identifies and examines two aspects of Bavinck's account that remain underdeveloped with scholarship on this topic. First, it explores the lingering importance triads within Bavinck's account of the *vestigia*. Bavinck may have developed a primarily non-numerical account of the *vestigia*, but he still acknowledges the place of triadic analogies, especially in humanity. Second, it contextualizes Bavinck's appropriation of the *vestigia* within his understanding of creation as relative, divine, self-communication in order to illuminate how creation can bear the imprint of the Trinity even as the Trinity remains unlike anything in creation. Much work has been done on Bavinck's triform account of creation and his organic cosmology, but these accounts can often miss or gloss over the doctrines that Bavinck utilizes to carefully guard against a direct correlation between God and creation.

KEYWORDS: Herman Bavinck, Vestigia Trinitatis, Augustine,

Introduction

Recent Bavinck scholarship has highlighted Bavinck's retrieval and development of the *vestigia trinitatis*, particularly as it relates to his organic cosmology. Identifying Bavinck's retrieval as framed somewhere between Calvin and Augustine and drawing a close connection between the *vestigia* and Bavinck's organic cosmology, James Eglinton, Gray Sutanto and others have argued that Bavinck modifies the doctrine such that the triform nature of creation is not found *primarily* in triadic patterns of three-in-oneness but rather in non-numerical unity-in-diversity' (Eglinton 2012: 87; Sutanto 2020: 20-21; and Ragusa 2017: 161). As the Triune God is one in three, absolute unity and absolute diversity, so his creation is a glorious display of unity in

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diversity, diversity in unity. In this way, all of creation bears the imprint of its Triune creator. As Eglinton has pointed out, within Bavinck's system that which is like the Trinity is 'consistently describe[d] using the organic motif' (Eglinton 2012: 89).

The significance of Eglinton's work in particular on Bavinck's appropriation and modification of the *vestigia* cannot be underestimated, especially as one seeks to unpack Bavinck's (oft quoted) conviction that:

The thinking mind situates the doctrine of the Trinity squarely amid the full-orbed life of nature and humanity. A Christian's confession is not an island in the ocean but a high mountaintop from which the whole creation can be surveyed. And it is the task of Christian theologians to present clearly the connectedness of God's revelation with, and its significance for, all of life. The Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all of existence is referred back to the triune God, and until the confession of God's Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life (Bavinck 2004: 330).

Here Bavinck identifies the primary goal of the theological enterprise and invites others into its task, which is to trace all things back to the Triune God such that all things are seen in light of him. Eglinton's *Trinity and Organism* has served Bavinck scholarship by highlighting that one cannot fully understand how Bavinck does this without attending to his organic cosmology. Thus, while Bavinck's systematic treatment of the *vestigia* remains a small aspect of his theology proper, his vision of what it means for all of creation to bear a trace of its creator is woven into the fabric of his dogmatic work.

While combined Eglinton and Sutanto have sufficiently identified Bavinck's revitalization of the *vestigia* and its connection to the organic motif, significant areas within their treatments remain underdeveloped or potentially misleading. First, is the lingering importance of triads within Bavinck's account of the *vestigia*. Bavinck may have developed a primarily non-numerical account of the *vestigia*, but he still acknowledges the place of triadic analogies, especially in humanity. As Bavinck notes at the end of his development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the *Reformed Dogmatics*: 'There is much truth in the belief that creation everywhere displays to us vestiges of the Trinity...the perfection of a creature, the completeness of a system, the harmony of beauty—these are finally manifest only in a triad. The higher a thing's place in the order of creation, the more it aspires to the triad' (Bavinck 2004: 333). Here Bavinck argues that triads cannot be excluded from an account of the vestiges. To be clear, it is not that Eglinton or Sutanto's treatments deny Bavinck's identification of triadic patterns in connection with the *vestigia*. Both Eglinton and Sutanto acknowledge the presence and importance of triads within Bavinck's account while arguing that Bavinck 'primarily locates the *vestigia* in the non-numerically oriented paradigm

of “unity in diversity” (Eglinton 2012: 88). Numerical unity-in-diversity, then, is the focal point of contemporary treatment of the vestiges in Bavinck especially in relation to his organic cosmology.

The focus on non-numeric unity-in-diversity makes sense given that Bavinck’s appropriation and reworking of the vestiges is one of the more unique aspects of his dogmatic development of the doctrine of the Trinity and informs his subsequent systematic development. However, this emphasis has led some to miss the role of the triads in Bavinck completely, such as can be seen in David Ragusa’s article on Bavinck “Trinity at the Center of Thought and Life.” In his article Ragusa draws on Eglinton but misses the nuance of Eglinton’s treatment and makes the following claim concerning Bavinck’s approach to the vestiges: “The creation, therefore, displays *vestigia trinitatis* not in the Medieval sense of numerically specific and speculative triads, but by way of “non-numeric unity-in-diversity” (Ragusa 2017: 161). Ragusa’s engagement with Bavinck through the lens of other contemporary scholarship shows a potentially problematic trend insofar as a lack of development of Bavinck’s appreciation and rationale for maintaining triads within his larger account can lead to a misconstrued understanding of Bavinck’s account. An account that potentially skews Bavinck’s own understanding of what it means for creation to be a theater of God’s revelation in which the Christian mind is not satisfied until it ‘refer(s) all of creation back to the Triune God’ (Bavinck 2004: 330). Thus, there remains room within Bavinck scholarship to see how the triadic pattern fits with Bavinck’s focus on non-numeric unity-in-diversity, especially as Bavinck’s unity-in-diversity motif is increasingly recognized as unique and generative.

The goal of this essay is not to undermine or disagree with the work that Eglinton and Sutanto have done; rather, it is to make a modest contribution to the growing awareness of Bavinck’s retrieval of the *vestigia* by examining two aspects of Bavinck’s account that remain underdeveloped within scholarship on this topic. It will do this by exploring the importance of triads within Bavinck’s appropriation of the *vestigia* tradition followed by a brief examination of how Bavinck’s appropriation of the *vestigia* is situated within his understanding of creation as relative, divine, self-communication. This essay will also explore how Bavinck draws on the classical notion of the divine ideas in order to illuminate how creation can bear the imprint of its maker. In almost every account of the trinitarian mediation of creation, Bavinck appropriates the doctrine of the divine ideas to maintain the creator/creature distinction while simultaneously showing how creation bears the communicative imprint of its maker. Much work has been done on Bavinck’s triniform account of creation and his organic cosmology, but these accounts can often miss or gloss over the doctrines that Bavinck utilizes to guard carefully against a direct correlation between God and creation. Cer-

tainly, current treatments do not miss crucial elements like the creator/creature distinction or Bavinck's doctrine of divine incomprehensibility, but there are still aspects of Bavinck's triform account of creation that remain in need of exploration.

Bavinck on Triads

In the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck frames his treatment of the *vestigia* within the epistemic bounds of revelation. For Bavinck, the doctrine of the Trinity can only be known from special revelation (Bavinck 2004: 329). Thus, any account of the vestiges flows from a reasoned response to special revelation and comes from within faith as a response. As we will see later, this does not exclude a metaphysical account of the vestiges as it relates to God's divine action in creation. However, it does guard against Barth's later concern that the vestiges become a second root of the doctrine of the Trinity (Barth 2009: 1.1 §8.3). As Eglinton rightly notes, Bavinck's development of the vestiges 'shows how one can be wholly against natural theology *and* wholly for the *vestigial trinitatis*' (Eglinton 2012: 89). For Bavinck, following many within the classical tradition, the vestiges do not serve to prove or provide another ground of the doctrine but flow from within faith and are rooted in the basic affirmation that the world, created by God, displays its maker all the way down. This becomes clear when Bavinck identifies the vestiges as useful for clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity *a posteriori* and defends this claim by appealing to Scripture:

Scripture itself points to this truth by saying that all created beings will show these imprints and human beings will exhibit the image of the triune God. Hence, however must the revelation of God in his works has been shrouded and our mind's eye has been darkened by sin, it cannot a priori be denied that the mind, illumined by revelation, can discover in nature the imprints of the God whom it has come to know from Scripture as triune in his mode of existence and action. (Bavinck 2004: 330).

Scripture not only reveals the identity of God as three-in-one, but it invites believers to find echoes, traces, and images of God in creation. Why? Because creation bears the imprint of its maker; it is a mirror of God's glory and bears the markings of its maker everywhere.

Carefully framed within this epistemic context, whereby the vestiges are not rational proofs or a second root of the doctrine of the Trinity, the imprints of God in creation for Bavinck can be seen in two different ways, both serving to illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity and bring believers to a deeper sight of the triform nature of created reality. The first, as highlighted in recent scholarship, is in the non-numerical unity and diversity of creation. Writing in his locus on significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, after carefully situating his development within the theological tradition,

Bavinck claims ‘The Trinity reveals God to us as the fullness of being, the true life, eternal beauty. In God, too, there is unity in diversity, diversity in unity... in the case of creatures we see only a faint analogy of it’ (Bavinck 2004: 331). As God is perfect and absolute unity-in-diversity, so his creation is a mirror, an organic whole in which unity-in-diversity is manifest throughout.

The second way creation bears the imprint of its maker is in triadic patterns that can be found in creation. Developing his doctrine of the Trinity in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck identifies the various triads that have been used as analogies or arguments to illuminate and elucidate the doctrine such as threefold patterns in Scripture, the triadic patterns of creation discerned within medieval approaches, and Augustine’s analogies (Bavinck 2004: 322-329). Along with these, Bavinck also explores the identification of triadic patterns in non-Christian religions, classical philosophy, and philosophy of Schelling and other idealists. While firmly dismissing the attempts to prove the doctrine and warning against constructing the doctrine ‘on rational grounds,’ Bavinck’s approach to these triadic patterns is surprisingly positive.

Contrary to the contemporary assumptions that Reformed theologians, following Calvin, consistently reject the *vestigis* tradition, Bavinck remains convinced that tracing triadic patterns and utilizing them within dogmatic development is valuable. For Bavinck, ‘Scripture itself gives us freedom to use them when it says that creation and especially humankind is a work of the triune God’ (Bavinck 2004: 329). Bavinck affirms the existence and dogmatic usefulness of triadic patterns insofar as they are framed within the content of scriptural revelation, rooted in the doctrine of creation, and bound within the creator-creature distinction. Furthermore, properly framed, the analogies and triadic patterns discerned within creation are not just useful for dogmatic development. For Bavinck, they also serve to fill an existential need to behold the God who is both redeemer and creator. ‘In the final analysis [analogies and proofs] owe their existence to a profound religious need, not to a craving for empty speculation or to an immodest curiosity. If God is indeed triune, this has to be supremely important, for all things... are from him and through him and to him’ (Bavinck 2004: 331). In affirming the usefulness of vestiges and analogies for the Trinity, Bavinck goes further than Calvin was willing to. However, Bavinck does not abandon the Reformed tradition in doing so, as Richard Muller has pointed out the ‘concept of the *vestigial trinitatis*, “vestigis” ... stamped on the created order and specifically, on human nature, was, therefore, noted by the [Reformed] orthodox with varying degrees of receptivity’ (Muller 2003: 157). Thus, Bavinck’s appropriation of the vestiges is not a derivation from the Reformed tradition but a development in its multiform approach to them.

As Bavinck appropriates the concept of *vestigia trinitatis*, he also maintains the classical distinction between vestiges and images and the affirmation that certain aspects of creation mirror God with greater perspicuity. Augustine and Aquinas, who Bavinck cites throughout his development of the vestiges in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, both differentiate between vestiges and the image of God. Towards the end of his theology proper, amid his discussion on the importance of the dogma of the Trinity for the doctrine of creation, Bavinck writes:

There is much truth in the belief that creation everywhere displays to us vestiges of the Trinity. And because these vestiges are most clearly evident in humanity, so that human beings may even be called ‘the image of the Trinity,’ humanity is driven from within to search out these vestiges. The perfection of a creature, the completeness of a system, the harmony of beauty—these are finally manifest only in a triad. The higher a thing’s place in the order of creation, the more it aspires to the triad. One sense this effect even in the religious aberrations of humankind. Schelling’s attempt to interpret mythology along trinitarian lines, for example, is more than a genial fantasy (Bavinck 2004: 333).

For Bavinck, all of creation bears the imprint of its maker, but not all of creation displays *who* its maker is equally or clearly. This does not mean that Bavinck thinks one can ascend the chain of being up to God, but rather within God’s created world there is a hierarchy or order of beings, and certain beings display *who* God is more clearly (Bavinck 2004: 437). At the top, or as Bavinck later describes in his locus on creation, at the center, are those beings that are not just imprints or vestiges but images, namely humanity (Bavinck 2004: 437). ‘While all creatures display *vestigis* of God, only a human being is in the *image* of God’ (Bavinck 2004: 555). As God’s image bearers, humanity displays both a glorious non-numerical unity-in-diversity *as well* as a numeric triad of one-in-three/three-in-one.

According to Bavinck, humanity is an organic whole, displaying a profound and beautiful unity-in-diversity. For Bavinck, the image is ‘too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being...it can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God (*vestigia Dei*) are spread over many, many works, in both space and time, so also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in humanity whose members exist both successively one after the other and contemporaneously side by side’ (Bavinck 2004: 577). For Bavinck, the image of God is profoundly communal, a non-numeric unity that unfolds into a glorious diversity of individuals who all display the image of God together.

However, humanity does not just bear a generic unity-in-diversity but also displays a triadic structure, particularly in the psychological life of humanity and the structure of self-consciousness. (Bavinck 2004: 303). In an Augustinian move, Bavinck identifies a triadic pattern in the structure of human self-consciousness and utilizes it as a kind of psychological analogy for the Trinity. However, he does so using the modern philosophical grammar of self-consciousness and personality. Drawing on Schleiermacher and others, Bavinck articulates the three moments that constitute human personality as the moments wherein a subject confronts themselves as object and unites the two 'in an act of self-consciousness' (Bavinck 2004: 303 and Bavinck 2018: 64-69). He carefully qualifies his utilization, continuing by noting that the use of 'moments' cannot be understood as 'moments' within God 'because he is not subject to space or time, to extension or division' (Bavinck 2004:303). Rather, 'they are 'hypostases,' modes of existence in one and the same being' (Bavinck 2004:303). Furthermore, even as he utilizes and qualifies how the grammar of self-consciousness forms a faith analogy for the Trinity, he similarly notes the distinction between human personality and the divine, namely that human nature comes to full development in humanity as a whole, whereas 'the divine nature similarly develops its fullness in three persons, but in God these three persons are not three individuals alongside each other and separated from each other but a threefold differentiation within the divine being (Bavinck 2004:303). Thus, there are faint but important analogies of the absolute, divine personality of God in humanity, but those faith analogies cannot be used as rational arguments or as the means by which God becomes triune (Bavinck 2004:327). Rather, they serve as faint but helpful analogies within his development of the doctrine of the Trinity and articulation of the relationship between the persons. For Bavinck, the unfolding of human self-consciousness, which functions as a central element in Bavinck's anthropology and epistemology, is a faint but important analogy of the Trinity. As with Augustine, Bavinck finds an analogy for the Trinity within the tri-fold structure of human subjectivity. And this for Bavinck allows him to utilize modern theological grammar of un-folding, personality, and self-consciousness while also attending to and utilizing classical categories. .

While it is important to situate Bavinck's development within his relatively classical treatment of the doctrine of God, his utilization of and augmentation of contemporary philosophical grammar for dogmatic development shows Bavinck's appreciative-yet-critical engagement with modern philosophy, especially German idealism. Bavinck's Augustinian inspired appropriation of contemporary conceptions of self-consciousness within his description of God as absolute, divine personality. Bavinck utilizes the modern grammar of self-consciousness and its three-fold movement as an analogy for the Trinity. Much like Augustine's psychological analo-

gy, this is not meant to describe the Trinity or be a “ground up,” rational explanation of the Trinity, but it is meant to provide an analogy to clarify the doctrine and see the way that creation mirrors its creator.

For Bavinck, the drive to seek vestiges is related to being God’s image bearers. As God’s image bearers, humanity is created to seek out the vestiges of God in the created world. ‘ “Humanity” is driven from within to search out these vestiges’ (Bavinck 2004:333). To see the creation as a mirror of its creator *is* part of the task of what it means to be an image bearer. Thus, finding non-numeric unity in diversity as well as triadic patterns is a part of what it means to be an image bearer. That is why Bavinck in his short but profound treatment of the vestiges in his theology proper appreciates the observations of medieval theology and even speculative, idealistic philosophy. Although they have often been utilized for the wrong purpose, namely trying to rationally demonstrate the doctrine of the Trinity, the work of observing the vestiges in creation is part of what it means to be human. Far from dismissing the tradition’s focus on finding the vestiges in creational triads or diminishing some of the speculative philosophical accounts in Hegel, Schelling and others, Bavinck affirms them if they are moved from the realm of rational speculation into the realm of reasoned reflection on creation through the lens of scripture with the eyes of faith.

In distinguishing between vestiges and an image, Bavinck is not presenting anything altogether novel. However, what is unique is that Bavinck’s claim about the image of God is situated within his account of the vestiges as non-numeric unity-in-diversity. Therefore, creation as a whole reflects God in its non-numerical unity-in-diversity, *and* there are parts that are meant to more clearly display the reality that God’s triunity is one-in-three and not just unity-in-diversity in general. Here we observe an interesting feature of Bavinck’s organic cosmology; namely, that while he grounds unity-in-diversity in the unity-in-diversity of the Godhead, the Godhead is not a generic unity-in-diversity but rather the Triune God. A triform account of reality *must* attend to the particular reality of the God who has revealed himself as the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One does need to tread carefully here, for Bavinck does not develop these lines of thinking as clearly as one might desire. After his brief treatment on the vestiges within his theology proper, Bavinck does not return to the topic in detail. He does, in his section on creation note the earlier distinction he made between vestige and image, and he continually draws on the organic motif and God’s triunity as the ground for the unity-in-diversity of creation. However, what is clear is that Bavinck does retain the importance of triads within his affirmation of non-numeric unity-in-diversity. For all his appropriation and development of the vestiges, he maintains from the classical approach an array of creational triads throughout. For example, as Bavinck

develops his conception of what it means to image God, he identifies both the *unity-in-diversity* of the image and various elements in which one can discern a triadic structure, such as in the psychological life of humanity, particularly the structure of self-consciousness (Bavinck 2004: 557).

If this is the case, it is an important nuance to the way Bavinck appropriates the *vestigia* tradition, especially in terms of how he develops humanity as the image of God. Space does not allow a further exploration of this concept now, but at the very least, it may open up an exploration of how Bavinck vigorously maintains the creator/creature distinction while adamantly affirming the analogical nature of the vestiges and images throughout his dogmatics. As he does, he develops a full-orbed account of what it means for creation to be a mirror of its creator, a theater of divine glory. It is a theater that at once displays a non-numeric unity-in-diversity but also triadic patterns.

Bavinck, Creation as God's Self-Communication and the Vestiges

An account of Bavinck's understanding of the vestiges, however, is incomplete without attending to his trinitarian metaphysics and his account of divine action. Following Augustine and Thomas, and appealing to the Belgic Confession for support, Bavinck describes creation as the embodiment of the ideas of God in the *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Christian Worldview* (Bavinck 2019: 77-80). Creation, according to Bavinck, is a free and communicative act of God arising from within the eternal communication of the Father to the Son. Bavinck identifies God's inner self-communication (generation and procession) as the archetype and metaphysical ground for his communication *ad extra*. According to Bavinck: 'The dogma of the Trinity... tells us that God *can* reveal himself in an absolute sense to the Son and the Spirit, and hence in a relative sense also to the world... Generation and procession in the divine being are the immanent acts of God, which make possible the outward works of creation and revelation' (Bavinck 2004:333). God's absolute communication *ad intra* is the archetype and ground for his relative communication *ad extra*, and it is the eternal communication of the Father, Son, and Spirit that accounts for the possibility of creation. It is with the archetypal communication of Father to the Son that the divine knowledge of the diverse ways his essence could be communicated in an ectypal way to creatures. Furthermore, in accordance with the eternal processions and relations within the Godhead, Bavinck identifies the Father as the one from whom all things come, the Son as the one in whom the 'ideas' of all 'existent things are present' and the Spirit as the one in whom the first principles of life are present (Bavinck 2004: 333). This does not mean that the Word is equated the divine ideas by which God creates the world but identified with them.

Creation is God's first act of revelation, or ectypal self-communication to his creatures. Because it belongs to God's very essence to be triune and the essence of God is not a bare monad but in its triunity, the complete fullness of being and life itself, God's self-communication in the act of creation is related to but not necessitated (in the strict sense of necessity) by the being that he is. Creation *is* in a true sense a relative self-communication, a revelation of the Triune God. As Bavinck articulates in the *Philosophy of Revelation*:

[T]he world rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, the secret of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly it will discover that revelation underlies all created being. In every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with omnipresence of God; the finite is supported by the infinite, all being is rooted in becoming (Bavinck 2018: 24).

Creation bears a resemblance to its creator; the whole world is a vestige of the Trinity, unity-in-diversity, a glorious divine self-communication, and triform all the way down. Thus, 'all the works of God *ad extra* are only adequately known when their trinitarian existence is recognized' (Bavinck 2004: 333).

It is vital here to carefully qualify Bavinck's claims. All things reveal the truth about who God is, for his act of communication *ad extra* is the source and ground of all things. However, even though all knowledge finds its ontological source in God and is made metaphysically possible by God's *ad intra* communication, Bavinck is careful to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge and not collapse or confuse metaphysical and epistemological principles. Thus, there is genuine knowledge of the created world that is rooted in God's revelatory act but is oriented to created reality itself. However, because the world—the cosmic organism—itself rests on God's creating and sustaining activity, it remains a vital and inescapable task to relate all things back to God, who is Triune--a glorious unity-in-diversity.

The Trinitarian Mediation of Creation: Bavinck and Divine Action

Bavinck's utilization of the language of unity-in-diversity and even absolute unity and absolute diversity to describe the Godhead, might sound to modern ears as though he is moving towards a kind of social-trinitarianism and possibility an account of divine action in creation that identifies the distinctive roles of the persons in creation rather than affirming the classical doctrine of inseparable operations. This latter possibility seems like it could be a potentially fruitful avenue for contemporary trinitarian theology. Modern theologians such as Colin Gunton and Wolfhart Panenbergh have charged classical accounts of creation as being deficiently Trinitarian

because they emphasize the unity of divine action at the expense of the distinctive roles of the persons in creation (Vidu 2021: xvii). The result they claim? A monistic account of God's divine agency which renders the Trinity superfluous to accounts of creation (Gunton 1998: 154). Often placing the blame at the feet of Augustine for orienting the West's doctrine of Creation in a merely monotheistic direction and identifying Thomas Aquinas as the prime exemplar of this approach, theologians like Gunton and Pannenberg suggest that theology retrieve Irenaeus's account of creation because it presents a more full-orbed account of the agency of the Son and Spirit God's act of creation (Pannenberg 1991: 26-29).

While not identifying Bavinck as a social trinitarian, the recent work of Bruce Ashford and Craig Bartholomew *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach*, seeks to identify Bavinck's theology as a fertile ground from which to develop a robust Irenaean doctrine of creation because of his Trinitarian focus. Bartholomew and Ashford draw on the following quote from Bavinck to demonstrate his trinitarian and Irenaean impulses: 'the Son and Spirit are not viewed a secondary forces but as independent agents or 'principles' (*principia*), as authors (*auctores*) who with the Father carry out the work of creation, as with him they also constitute the one true God' (Bavinck as quoted by Ashford and Bartholomew 2020: 99). The implication of their citation, particularly within their attempt to recover a more robustly Trinitarian account of creation, is that Bavinck constructs an account in which the Son and Spirit seem to operate as independent personal agents whose agency is drawn into the work of the Father yet remains distinct. How and in what way, Ashford and Bartholomew leave underdeveloped. This is problematic because as Bavinck continues to develop his account of creation along trinitarian lines, he moves to affirm the doctrine of inseparable operations whereby the 'outward words of God are common and indivisible' (Bavinck 2004: 422). Furthermore, he identifies the importance of attending to the unity of divine action in creation as essential for establishing the divinity of the Son and Spirit. For Bavinck, if the outward action is not common and indivisible, then Son and Spirit are not divine agents. Thus, the doctrine of the indivisible operations is not a way to secure a bland monism void of trinitarian action but a way to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity.

In articulating divine action in creation, Bavinck affirms the indivisibility of the *opera ad extra*, attributing all of God's works to a single *principium*, and yet he also seeks to maintain the distinction between the persons (Bavinck 2004: 318). In his locus on the Trinity, Bavinck affirms that the divine movement into the economy is a mirror of its immanent life whereby the divine missions are 'bound up with the eternal processions, noting that the external works 'come into being through the cooperation of the three persons, each of whom plays a special role and fulfills a special task'

(Bavinck 2004: 319-321). What Bavinck specifically means by ‘cooperation,’ ‘special role,’ and ‘special task’ is not clarified until his treatment of the topic in his locus on creation. Here Bavinck undoubtedly opposes the idea that there are three efficient causes in creation or even three associated causes (*tres causae sociae*) (Bavinck 2004: 422). Personal agency is qualified. There is one efficient causality while also ascribing a kind of personal causality to the Father, Son, and Spirit. This is important as Bavinck does affirm that the creation itself, as the result of one efficient cause, most clearly displays God’s unity. However, he also affirms that within the one efficient cause of creation there is a diversity of causality, not insofar as there are three efficient causes but that within God’s movement into the divine economy each person accomplishes the act of creation in a way fitting to the order of divine processions.

In other words, Bavinck develops a way to attribute causality to the persons without compromising the unity of divine action in creation. As he does, one can hear the echoes Bavinck’s articulation of God’s *ad intra* self-communication that grounds the possibility of his communication *ad extra*. The ‘Father [is] the first cause,’ ‘the Son as the personal ‘Wisdom, the Logos, by whom everything is created,’ and the Holy Spirit as the ‘immanent cause by which all things live and move and have their being, receive their own form... and are led to the destination’ (Bavinck 2004: 418). As Creation is ectypal self-revelation of the One, triune God, Bavinck highlights the Son’s relationship to creation insofar as it is in the Son that the Father ‘contemplates the idea of the world itself, not as though it were identical with the Son, but so that he envisions and meets it in the Son in whom his fullness dwells. Contained in the divine wisdom, as a part and in sum, lies also the wisdom that will be realized in the creatures [to come]. He is the Logos by whom the Father creates all things’ (Bavinck 2004: 424).

Following this line of reasoning, Bavinck continues to develop his account of divine action *ad extra*. Like Aquinas, Bavinck draws on the concept of exemplary causality in his development of divine action in the world, but he does not ascribe it to the persons. Rather in reference to the Godhead who creates the world by his divine wisdom and his Word. As Bavinck write: ‘He is however, not merely the “exemplary cause”; he is also the “creating agent.”’ (Bavinck 2004: 425). As creating agent, Bavinck takes his theme of creation as a communicative act, describing the threefold communication of the one divine being in the act of creation. The Father pronounces the original Word, effectively calling things into being from nothingness. The Son, in whom is the original idea of the world itself, is the one in whom creation is spoken and its origin as the one ‘from whom it arises as its cause and example, and in whom it rests’ (Bavinck 2004: 425). As such, the Son is also the final cause of creation, for in him the whole creation is meant to be gathered up and brought back to the Father.

The Spirit contains the ‘willing of the world, the idea of which is comprehended within divine wisdom’ (Bavinck 2004: 426) and is the immanent cause by which all things have their being, receiving their form.

Drawing back to the topic of the *vestigis*, Bavinck grounds the vestiges in his account of creation as the Triune God’s free and unnecessary act of relative self-communication. Thus, as a gift of divine self-revelation, creation itself bears the marks of its creator everywhere both in triadic forms but also in non-numeric unity-in-diversity. There is only one efficient cause of creation, but there is a diversified causality attributed to the persons that Bavinck tries to maintain as fitting to the order of the persons and their relations within. Bavinck’s affirmation that the reality of the whole of creation bearing the mark of its maker—a *vestige* or imprint—is rooted within this metaphysical account whereby the Triune God, whose inner life is communicative, communicates himself to another. In communicating himself to another, the unity of the divine life is maintained while each person acts in a manner fitting to the inner-trinitarian relations. However, at times, one wishes that Bavinck’s treatment here contained a little more clarity.

Conclusion

What is clear is that Bavinck’s approach to the *vestigia* has significant epistemological implications. For Bavinck, if the creation is God’s relative self-communication such that the whole world displays the reality of God, then the world cannot be truly known until its triform nature is apprehended. This, for Bavinck, does not mean that the world itself remains unknowable apart from knowledge of the Triune God, but it does mean that the deepest reality and coherence of the world remains unknown and enigmatic until one can perceive its relation to God. For Bavinck, this cannot be done outside of Scriptural revelation. Thus, while one can develop a Trinitarian metaphysics of creation, it can only be done as a reasoned response to God’s divine special revelation in Scripture. In fact, it is on the basis of Scriptural revelation alone, Bavinck says that we are freed to use rational arguments and reason to understand what it means that ‘the entire creation and especially humankind is a work of the triune God (Bavinck 2004: 329). As believers, shaped by Scripture, look out into the world and see the unity-in-diversity of it *and* triads they perceive the triform nature of reality.

Thus, the grammar of the vestiges comes from within the life of faith such that it shapes the theological imagination of believers to look into the world and behold the glory of God. Or in more Bavinckian language surveying the creation from the mountaintop and relating all things back to God. This is not the same as seeing triads in the world and thinking they solve the riddle of the Trinity. Rather, it goes the other direction, drawn into the mystery of the Triune life, one can see his radiance and glo-

ry in and through all of creation. Bavinck's account does not indicate that the re-reading of creation yields triads everywhere but, in some places, while opening up space for the unity and diversity of creation to be re-read as reflective of the creator God.

There is, of course, more to be explored. This essay is simply the beginning of filling out Bavinck's conception of the *vestigia*. Noting the lingering importance triads within Bavinck's account of the *vestigia* and contextualizing his appropriation of the *vestigia* within the understanding of creation as relative, divine, self-communication is part, but not the whole, of what Bavinck writes on the *vestigia*. However, it is vital to note this aspect of the vestiges in Bavinck, especially as the non-numeric unity-in-diversity of his appropriation of the vestiges is emphasized within contemporary scholarship.

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