The Missiological Implications of Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Trinity

By Thiago Machado Silva

Two main misunderstandings have developed in recent missiological scholarship, especially in Latin America. One misunderstanding exposed by a number of modern Christian scholars and theologians is that missiology is the heart of and reference point for all theology.[1] The second misunderstanding is to see only Christology as the starting point for missiology.[2] However, the purpose of this study is to respond to these missiological misunderstandings, demonstrating that the doctrine of the Trinity provides a better ground for the mission of the church. In other words, the Trinity is the center and the foundation for all theology. Consequently, a theology of mission is incomplete, and the work of missions is ineffective without a correct view of the Triune God and his relationship with the world. The framework and the basis for missiology is ultimately the being and the work of the Trinity (i.e., the Trinity is the center of all theology, therefore, Christian missions must be Trinitarian).

In developing a Trinitarian missiology, the work of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), is of critical importance. First, because for him, "Scripture alone is the final ground for the doctrine of the Trinity." Second, "The entire creation and especially humankind is a work of the triune God … [and] will exhibit the image of the triune God." Finally, the doctrine of the Trinity uncovers and preserves "the connectedness between nature and grace, between creation and re-creation. The God who created and sustained us is also he who re-creates us in his image."[3] Therefore, Bavinck's doctrine of the

Trinity and his trinitarian system of thought offer some important missiological implications and a solid basis for missions and missionary work.

The primary concern here is to give an exposition of Herman Bavinck's doctrine of the Trinity and to extrapolate the missiological implications of his understanding

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The Author: Thiago Silva is pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, professor of Systematic Theology at the Southern Presbyterian Seminary and PhD student at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

1. See: David J. Bosch, "Theological education in missionary perspective," *Missiology* X/1 (1982): 13–33; David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, (*Orbis: New York, 1991); M. Laing, "Recovering missional ecclesiology in theological education," *International Review of Mission* 98, 1 (2009): 12–24; Martin

Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 190. Bosch affirms that, "the history and theology of early Christianity are, first of all, 'mission history' and 'mission theology.'" [David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 9,15]. Similarly, Martin Kähler writes, "mission is the mother of all theology." [Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission*, 190].

2. Scherer J. A., "Missiology as a discipline and what it includes," in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 2: Theological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Grbis, 1994), 173–87; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21 Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003); Samuel Escobar, "The Search for a Missiological Christology in Latin America," in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994); Samuel Escobar, "Evangelical theology in Latin America: the development of a missiological Christology." *Missiology* 19, no. 3 (1991): 315–332; Daniel A. Rodríguez, "No longer foreigners and aliens: toward a missiological christology for Hispanics in the United States," *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (2003): 51–67; Robert J. Schreiter, "Jesus Christ and mission: the cruciality of Christology," *Missiology* 18, no. 4 (1990): 429–437. Bosch affirms that "a theological foundation for mission is only possible with reference to the point of departure of our faith: God's self-communication in Christ as the basis which logically precedes and is fundamental to every other reflection." [David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 22–23]. For Bosch, Christology is the point of departure and the foundation for missiology. Following the same line of thought, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch claim that Christology is the starting point that defines one's missiology and consequently determines one's ecclesiology. Escobar also proposes that biblical Christology is the foundation for theology of mission. See: Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 209; Samuel Escobar, "Beyond Liberation Theology: Evangelical Missiology in Latin America," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 3 (1982): 113.

3. See: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 2.329–330. Hereafter, *RD*.

of this crucial Christian doctrine. We will focus on Herman Bavinck's trinitarian missiology because, unlike the missiology of his nephew J. H. Bavinck (1895–1964), it has not received much attention. First, we will work with primary and secondary sources on Bavinck's doctrine of the Trinity, including the relation between the ontological and economic Trinity and the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* (the intra-trinitarian pact of redemption). Second, we will analyze the missional character of Bavinck's trinitarian theology in order to determine how the Trinity is related to human culture, and consequently, to missions. Finally, I will provide some personal reflections on Bavinck's trinitarian missiology.

1. Bavinck's Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is the central theme for all Bavinck's theology. For him, the trinitarian nature of God is taught throughout Scripture. In fact, for Bavinck, the doctrine of the Trinity is only acquired through the revelation of Scripture, not by reason or nature. He says, "over against all those who want to base the doctrine of the Trinity on rational grounds, we must undoubtedly maintain that we owe our knowledge of this doctrine solely to God's special revelation. Scripture alone is the final ground for the doctrine of the Trinity. Reason can at most somewhat clarify this doctrine a posteriori" (Bavinck, *RD,* 2.329). He suggests in his Prolegomena that

> [t]he doctrine of the Trinity is of incalculable importance for the Christian religion. The entire Christian belief system, all of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God's Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant…. In the doctrine of the Trinity we feel the heartbeat of God's entire revelation for the redemption of humanity. (*RD,* 1. 333–334).

Bavinck understood that the doctrine of the Trinity does not begin with the Church fathers, but in Holy Scripture. In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck begins his explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity by affirming that the Trinity is already planted in the Old Testament, although not fully developed; in the Old Testament we have the seeds of this doctrine. He says, "This [trinitarian] revelation already begins in the Old Testament" (*RD,* 2.261). In the work of creation, Bavinck sees a threefold cause: Elohim (plural form of the name of God) created the world "by speaking his word and sending out his Spirit" (*RD,* 2.261). There is also a threefold cause in the work of re-recreation. He writes that in re-creation

> It is no longer only Elohim, but YHWH who reveals him and makes himself known as the God of the covenant…. It is again by his word that he makes himself known, and saves and preserves his people (Ps. 107:20)…. And now, just as yhwh in his work of re-creation reveals himself objectively by his Word, in the angel of yhwh, he does this subjectively in and by his spirit. The Spirit of God is the principle of all life and well-being, of all the gifts and powers in the sphere of revelation. (*RD,* 2.262–263).

According to Bavinck, "A threefold divine principle underlies creation as well as re-creation and sustains the entire economy of Old Testament revelation" (*RD,* 2.256). Creation and re-creation in the Old Testament are a work of God, the Word (*Logos*), and the Spirit.

> After the Old Testament period, the doctrine of the Trinity was further developed by intertestamental Judaism. Bavinck affirms that Divine Wisdom was hypostatized, and trinitarian doctrine was influenced by Philo, Plato's doctrine of ideas, Stoic's doctrine of the logos, Greek dualism, and Jewish theology.[4] According to Bavinck, "While this development shares language with the New Testament, its world of ideas is quite different" (*RD,* 2.256).

The true development of the doctrine of the Trinity happened in the New Testament period. What was implicit in the Old Testament now became explicit in the New Testament. As Bavinck states, "In the events of the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit, this one true God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Spirit."[5] In the New Testament one can see more clearly that God is a Triune God and that, like in creation and re-creation, there is also a threefold work of God in salvation. Through the revelation of the New Testament

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4. For a more detailed description of the directions of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Intertestamental Judaism, see *RD,* 2.264–268.

5. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,*2.269. Bavinck explains that the New Testament principles are not new, but the same as the Old Testament principles. He writes, "They are the same principles that were operative also in the event of creation and the entire economy of the Old Testament. The Father, who bears this name mostly in relation to the Son and to his children, is the same as he who can be called Father, and also the same as the Creator of all things…. The Son, who bears this name especially because of his utterly unique relation to God, is identical with the Logos, through whom the Father created all things…. And the Holy Spirit, who received his name especially with a view to his work in the church, is the same Spirit who jointly with the Father and the Son beautifies and completes all things in the creation." See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,*2.269.

one learns that "all salvation, every blessing, and blessedness have their threefold cause in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (*RD,* 2.270).

The Father is the Father in relation to the Son (John 14:6–13; 17:25–26), and according to Bavinck, he is "the first in the order of existence (John 5:26) and hence the Father both in creation and re-creation, from whom all things exist (1 Cor. 8:6)."[6] The Son is the Son of the Father. He is the *Logos*, the word that became flesh. Through the Son, the transcendent God become immanent in relation to his creature. Bavinck clarifies that the Son

> was fully able to reveal the Father because from all eternity he participated in his divine nature, his divine life, his divine love, and so on, and was by nature Logos. Since God communicated himself to the Logos, the Logos could communicate himself to us. The Logos is the absolute revelation of God, for from all eternity God communicated himself in all his fullness to him.[7]

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament is the same Spirit that was active in the Old Testament. In Bavinck's words, "It is the same Spirit who at one time spoke through the prophets (Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15; 1 Pet. 1:10–11; 2 Pet. 1:21), testified in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:19–20), was resisted by Israel (Acts 7:51), and produced faith (2 Cor. 4:13), who would descend on the Messiah and dwell in the church (Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18–19; Acts 2:16–18)" (*RD,* 2.277). The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God. Through the work of the Spirit, God's elected people are united with the Son and have communion with the Father, and as the Son glorifies the Father, so the Spirit glorifies the Son and the Father; as the Son points to the Father, the Holy Spirit points to the Son and to the Father.

Although there are these trinitarian elements in Scripture, Bavinck says that we still do not have a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity. However,

> it does teach us that the one name of God is only fully unfolded in that of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It very clearly and plainly declares that all God's outgoing works (*ad extra*), both in creation and re-creation, have a threefold divine cause. It leaves no doubt whatever that this threefold cause constitutes three distinct subjects who relate to each other as persons. And so Scripture contains all the data from which theology has constructed the dogma of the Trinity. (*RD,* 2.279).

From the Apostolic Fathers to Ireanaeus, Tertullian, and Origen; from Nicaea to Augustine, the doctrine began to be fully developed as a response against heresies that emerged throughout the centuries, such as Arianism and Sabellianism. Arianism is a non-trinitarian doctrine that "places the Son somewhere between God and the created universe"[8] denying the divinity of the Son. Sabellianism comes from the teachings of Sabellius, who believed that there is only one God that operates in different forms: as Father in creation, as Son in redemption, and as Spirit in sanctification. Father, Son, and Spirit are only different names or modes of the one God. Both Arianism and Sabellianism failed to maintain the triunity of God.[9]

1.1. Ontological and Economic Trinity

For Bavinck, it was fundamental to maintain the triunity of God. He claims, "To the church the doctrine of the Trinity was the dogma and hence the mystery par excellence. The essence of Christianity—the absolute self-revelation of God in the person of Christ and the absolute self-communication of God in the Holy Spirit—could only be maintained, the church believed, if it had its foundation and first principle in the ontological Trinity" (*RD,* 2.296). Here Bavinck makes an

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6. Bavinck, *RD,* 2.272. Bavinck writes, "Thus, both in the Old and in the New Testament, God is the Father who occupies first place. His is the purpose (Acts 4:28; Eph. 1:11), the good pleasure (Matt. 11:26; Eph. 1:9), the initiative in creation and re-creation (Ps. 33:6; John 3:16), the kingdom and the power (ἐξουσια, δυναμις, Matt. 6:13 kjv; Rom. 1:20; Eph. 1:19), the righteousness (Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4; John 17:25; Rom. 3:26; 2 Tim. 4:8), the goodness, wisdom, immortality, unapproachable light (Matt. 19:17; Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 6:16)."

7. Bavinck, *RD,* 2.274. With regards to the Son, Bavinck wonderfully affirms that he is the Son "by nature and from eternity. He is elevated far above angels and prophets (Matt. 13:32; 21:27; 22:2) and sustains a unique relation to God (Matt. 11:27). He is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35), the only begotten Son (John 1:18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9ff.), God's own Son (Rom. 8:32), the eternal Son (John 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:5ff.; 5:5–6) whom the Father gave to have life in himself (ζωην ἐχειν ἐν ἑαυτῳ, John 5:26); he is equal to the Father in knowledge (Matt. 11:27), honor (John 5:23), creative and re-creative power (John 1:3; 5:21, 27), activity (John 10:28–30), and dominion (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; 22:29; John 16:15; 17:10); and he was condemned to death precisely on account of his Sonship (John 10:33; Matt. 26:63ff.)." See Bavinck, *RD,* 2.275.

8. Bavinck, *RD,* 2.291. According to Bavinck, Arianism appeared first in the form of *subordinationism*, which believed that the Son is eternal but inferior and subordinate to the Father. Then it appeared in the form of *Socianism*, which held that the Father is the one true God, the Son is a holy human being created by God, and the Spirit is nothing more than a divine power.

9. For a more detailed description of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity throughout history, see Bavinck, *RD,* 2.279–296. For Bavinck, it was Athanasius, the three Cappadocians, and Augustine [that] elaborate and complete the doctrine of the Trinity [on the basis of the Nicene Confession]. See Bavinck, *RD,* 2.285.

important distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity.

The ontological Trinity is the Trinity in itself, the being of the triune God, and the economic Trinity is how each one of the Persons in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) work in creation and redemption. In order to better understanding this distinction, one needs to understand the distinction between essence and person. Bavinck clings to the Reformed tradition and makes this distinction. He says that "the distinction between this divine essence and the three persons in God has its analogy in the life of creatures. Here, too, we make a distinction between the nature of persons and the persons themselves. Paul, John, and Peter all possess the same human nature but, as individual persons they are distinct from that nature and from each other."[10] In the Godhead, there is only one essence but three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is unity in essence and diversity in persons. Bavinck clarifies

> As in the ontological Trinity the Father is first in the order of subsistence, the Son second, the Spirit third, so also in the history of revelation the Father preceded the Son, and the Son in turn preceded the Holy Spirit. The "economy" of the Father was especially that of the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1); the "economy" of the Son started with the incarnation; and the "economy" of the Holy Spirit began on the Day of Pentecost (John 7:39; 14:16–17). The Father came without having been sent, the Son came after being sent by the Father (Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 3:16; 5:23, 30, 37; 6:28ff.; etc.), and the Holy Spirit only came because he was sent both by the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7). (*RD,* 2.320).

In the ontological Trinity Bavinck studies the meaning of the word "essence" and "person" and the relation between "essence" and "person" and between the persons of the Trinity among themselves. Bavinck states that in the ontological Trinity there is unity in diversity, one essence in three persons. He argues that, "the persons,

10. Bavinck, *RD,* 2.299. In this distinction between essence and person, Bavinck follows Aquinas who affirmed that, "In a divine person there is nothing to presuppose but essence, and relation or property. Whence, since the persons agree in essence, it only remains to be said that the persons are distinguished from each other by the relations. Secondly: because the distinction of the divine persons is not to be so understood as if what is common to them all is divided, because the common essence remains undivided; but the distinguishing principles themselves must constitute the things which are distinct. Now the relations or the properties distinguish or constitute the hypostases or persons, inasmuch as they are themselves the subsisting persons; as paternity is the Father, and filiation is the Son, because in God the abstract and the concrete do not differ.' (*Summa Theologiae*, 1.40.2).

though distinct, are not separate. They are the same in essence, one in essence, and the same being. They are not separated by time or space or anything else. They all share in the same divine nature and perfections. It is one and the same divine nature that exists in each person individually and in all of them collectively" (*RD,* 2.300). With regards to the essence, we affirm that there is only one eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, and good God, and with regards to the persons of the Godhead, we affirm that this one God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, there is unity in the divine essence and diversity in the divine persons.

Bavinck explains the distinctions among the three persons following Augustine's path. He says that the Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He affirms that "The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, accordingly, are distinct subjects in the one divine essence. As such they bear different names, have distinct personal properties, and always appear in a certain order, but in their "inward" and "outward" relations. The distinctness of the individual persons, therefore, arises totally from the so-called "personal properties": (1) paternity ("unbegottenness," active generation, and active spiration); (2) filiation or sonship, passive generation, active spiration; (3) procession or passive spiration" (*RD,* 2.305).

The term "person" (*persona*) signifies that the three persons in the divine being are not "modes" of appearance (modalism), but each one in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) have a distinct existence of their own. Each one shares the same essence but different personal attributes. The Father is unbegotten; i.e., as the first person of the Trinity he has a prominent role. According to Bavinck, "This name of "Father," accordingly, is not a metaphor derived from the earth and attributed to God. Exactly the opposite is true: fatherhood on earth is but a distant and vague reflection of the fatherhood of God (Eph. 3:14–15). God is Father in the true and complete sense of the term" (*RD,* 2.307). The second person of the Trinity is the Son; he is the Son in relation to the Father. Bavinck states that, "In Scripture he bears several names that denote his relation to the Father, such as word, wisdom, logos, son, the firstborn, only-begotten and only son, the image of God, image (εἰκων), substance (ὑποστασις), stamp (χαρακτηρ) [cf. Heb. 1:3]" (*RD,* 2.308). He is the one eternally generated from the Father, and in the words of Bavinck with regards to the second person of the Trinity, "God's offspring is eternal" (*RD,* 2.310). The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and his property is "procession." The Holy Spirit is

not merely a power or a spiritual force, but he is a person and he is God, such as the Father and the Son. As Bavinck says, "Scripture establishes beyond any doubt that the Holy Spirit is the subjective principle of all salvation, of regeneration, faith, conversion, repentance, sanctification, and so on; in other words, that there is no communion with the Father and the Son except in and through the Holy Spirit" (*RD,* 2.312).

Thus, according to Bavinck, in the ontological being of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –, "the Trinity can neither be augmented nor diminished: it is complete" (*RD,* 2.313). Once the eternal ontological trinity—the being of the triune God (*ad intra*)—is recognized, taught, and confessed in Bavinck's theology, he turns to the economic Trinity—the revelation and work of the triune God (*ad extra*)—and his redemptive activity in history. The economic Trinity speaks of how the divine Persons "manifest themselves outwardly (*ad extra*) in their revelations and works" (*RD,* 2.318). The way God acts and relates to his creature in the world (economic Trinity) is a reflection of who God is (ontological Trinity). Or, as Bavinck writes, "the 'ontological' Trinity is mirrored in the 'economic' Trinity" (*RD,* 2.318).

Every work of God *ad extra* has one source, which is God. But they manifest and come into being through the work of each one of the persons in the Godhead, "each of whom plays a special role and fulfills a special task, both in the works of creation and in those of redemption and sanctification" (*RD,* 2.319). According to Bavinck, "all things proceed from the Father, are accomplished by the Son, and are completed in the Holy Spirit." (*RD,* 2.319–320). The works *ad extra*, such as creation, providence, incarnation, sanctification, and so on, says Bavinck, "are works of the Trinity as a whole," although, "in an 'economic' sense, the work of creation is more specifically assigned to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son, the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit" (*RD,* 2.320).

1.2. The Pactum Salutis

One important trinitarian doctrine, which is fundamental to the purpose of this article, is the *pactum salutis*. In volume 2 of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, inside the realm of the covenant of grace,[11] Bavinck elaborates the *pactum salutis*, which he also calls the counsel of peace, or the covenant of redemption. He is not alone in his formulation of the *pactum salutis*. He lists some historical figures that wrote on this doctrine. He says,

> This last-mentioned covenant occurs, briefly and materially, already in Olevianus, Junius, Gomarus, and

others 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, Mastricht, Marck, Moor, and Brakel, in order finally to be opposed by Deurhof, Wesselius, and others and gradually to be banished from dogmatics altogether.[12]

In the *pactum salutis*, Bavinck includes the whole Trinity in the work of redemption. In his work, *Our Reasonable Faith*, he writes, "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."[13] It is an intra-trinitarian covenant among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with regards

11. Covenant of grace is the covenant God established with humans immediately after the fall of Genesis 3, and it is grounded not in our virtues and merits, but in God's grace and mercy. According to Bavinck, "Sin, accordingly, is different from misery; its character is ethical, not physical. It is a violation of God's commandment and a severance of his communion. Consequently, that communion can only be reestablished from the side of God and at a certain point in time. From the very first moment of its revelation, grace assumes the form of a covenant, a covenant that arises, not by a natural process, but by a historical act and hence gives rise to a rich history of grace." See: *RD,* 3.197.

12. Bavinck, *RD,* 3.213. Bavinck also mentions K. Olevianus, *Het wezen van het Genadeverbond*, in *Geschriften* (Den Haag: Het Reformatische Boek, 1963), §1; F. Junius, *Theses theologicae*, in *Opuscula theologica selecta*, ed. Abraham Kuyper (Amsterdam: Muller, 1882), c. 25, th. 21; F. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam: J. Jansson, 1664), on Matt. 3:13; Luke 2:21; 19:1; J. Arminius, *De sacerdotio Christi*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Begnall, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), I, 2–51; W. Ames, *De morte Christi*, in *Medulla theologica*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam: Loannem Lanssonium, 1628), I, 5; G. Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648–69), II, 266; A. Essenius, *Dissertatione de subjectione Christi ad legem divinam* (Utrecht: Antonii Smytegelt, 1666), X, 2. For a more detailed historical description and development of this doctrine, see Richard Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65. It seems also that Augustine himself was already pointing toward a *Pactum Salutis* when he wrote, "What we are saying may perhaps be easier to sort out if we put the question this way, crude though it is: In what manner did God send his Son? Did he tell him to come, giving him an order he complied with by coming, or did he ask him to, or did he merely suggest it? Well, whichever way it was done, it was certainly done by word. But God's Word is his Son. So when the Father sent him by word, what happened was that he was sent by the Father and his Word. Hence it is by the Father and the Son that the Son was sent, because the Son is the Father's Word. Would anyone adopt so blasphemous an opinion as to suppose that it was by a word in time that the Father sent the eternal Son to appear in the course of time in the flesh? Though it is true that in the Word of God which was in the beginning with God and was God, that is to say in the Wisdom of God, there was timelessly contained the time in which that Wisdom was to appear in the flesh." (*De Trinitate*, II.2.9).

13. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 273.

to his redemptive work in the world, and this eternal intra-trinitarian covenant is the basis and the foundation for the covenant of grace between God and humans established in history. He claims that, "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 relationships with each other. They are so closely related that the one stands or falls with the other."[14] According to Bavinck, the *pactum salutis* is the "principle, the motivating power, and the guarantee of the work of redemption in time."[15]

> This pact of salvation, however, further forms the link between the eternal work of God toward 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, 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. Indeed, in the covenant of grace established by God with humanity in time, human beings are not the active and acting initiators, but it is again the triune God who, having designed the work of re-creation, now brings it about. (*RD,* 3.215).

Therefore, to say that the *pactum salutis* is the foundation for the covenant of grace is also to say that the covenant of redemption within the ontological Trinity made in eternity is the basis for the redemptive work of the economic Trinity in history, after the fall. As Bavinck states, "the covenant of grace was ready-made from all eternity in the pact of salvation of the three persons and was realized by Christ from the moment the fall occurred. Christ does not begin to work only with and after his incarnation, and the Holy Spirit does not first begin his work with the outpouring on the day of Pentecost (*RD,* 3.215).

> The pact of salvation makes known to us the relationships and life of the three persons in the Divine Being as a covenantal life, a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom. Here, within the Divine Being, the covenant flourishes to the full…. The greatest freedom and the most perfect agreement coincide. The work of salvation is an undertaking of three persons in which all cooperate and each performs a special task…. It is the triune God alone, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who

together conceive, determine, carry out and complete the entire work of salvation. (*RD,* 3.214–215).

Bavinck's *pactum salutis* is firmly grounded in Scripture and it flows from his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. He relates the eternal intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption to its historical fulfillment; that is, the *pactum salutis* established in eternity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes to action in history in the covenant of grace established between the Trinity and the first human beings.

> The covenant of grace 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.[16]

In volume 4 of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck links the *pactum salutis* with soteriology, more specifically our union with Christ, justification, and sanctification. He writes, "our being made righteous rests in God's decree and in the *pactum salutis*" (*RD*, 4.178), and "the mystical union starts already in the pact of redemption (*pactum salutis*)" (*RD,* 4.250). Bavinck points to the fact that, "already in the pact of salvation (*pactum salutis*) Christ positioned himself in relation to his own and assumed their place as mediator." (*RD,* 4.214). In other words, Bavinck suggests that every aspect of the *ordo salutis* is a result and an expression of the *pactum salutis*. Bavinck claims

> For election is from eternity: the pact of redemption that includes the atonement of the Mediator for his own is from eternity. All 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. (*RD,* 4.216).

Bavinck ends his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity with three statements. First, the doctrine of the Trinity and the distinction between ontological and economic Trinity provides knowledge of the fulness of the one true and living God. Second, the doctrine of the Trinity is extremally important for the doctrine of creation

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14. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 272.
15. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.
16. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 273.

that can be maintain only on the basis of a triune God. Third, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental for the Christian religion, because "the entire Christian belief system, all of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God's Trinity" (*RD,* 2.333).

In the doctrine of the Trinity Bavinck finds the central point for all his theology, as John Bolt claims, "His heart and mind sought a trinitarian synthesis of Christianity and culture, a Christian worldview that incorporated what was best and true in both pietism and modernism, while above all honoring the theological and confessional richness of the Reformed tradition dating from Calvin."[17] It is in the doctrine of the Trinity that we can find unity in Bavinck's system of thought. Now we turn to Bavinck's trinitarian worldview in order to determine how the Trinity is related to human culture and consequently, to missions.

2. The Missional Character of Bavinck's Trinitarian Theology

According to Bavinck's biblical worldview (Creation, Fall, and Redemption), the triune God is active and working in our whole Christian life, from the beginning to the end. We are chosen and saved by the Father, through the objective work of the Son, by the internal and subjective work of the Holy Spirit. We are preserved and blessed by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Briefly, that is the redemptive story of Scripture, and it can be summarized in Bavinck's words, "the essence of the Christian religion consists in the reality that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God" (*RD,* 1.112). That is the essence of Bavinck's trinitarian worldview and theology.

Bavinck's trinitarian theology is missional in its essence, first of all, because his doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental tool against non-Christian worldviews and other pagan systems of thought such as Deism, pantheism, monism, and materialism. He explains that Deism cuts every relationship between God the Creator and his creatures; Pantheism identifies God the Creator with his creatures cutting every distinction between them; Monism also believes that there is no distinction between God and creation, that the world is made of only one material substance, and there is no such thing as God, spirit, or soul (cf. *RD,* 2.331). In the chapter of Creation, Bavinck writes

> Pantheism attempts to explain the world dynamically; materialism attempts to do so mechanically. But both strive to see the whole as governed by a single principle.

In pantheism the world may be a living organism, of which God is the soul; in materialism it is a mechanism that is brought about by the union and separation of atoms. But in both systems an unconscious blind fate is elevated to the throne of the universe. Both fail to appreciate the richness and diversity of the world; erase the boundaries between heaven and earth, matter and spirit, soul and body, man and animal, intellect and will, time and eternity, Creator and creature, being and nonbeing; and dissolve all distinctions in a bath of deadly uniformity. Both deny the existence of a conscious purpose and cannot point to a cause or a destiny for the existence of the world and its history. (*RD,* 2.435).

Only the Christian worldview maintains the unity and diversity of creation and the correct distinction between creature and Creator. Consequently, the Christian answer for all these heretical worldviews is found in the doctrine of the Trinity, for this reason, humans can only find rest in the confession of the triune God of Scripture. Bavinck writes, "the Christian doctrine of the Trinity makes God known as essentially distinct from the world, yet having a blessed life of his own. God is a plenitude of life, an "ocean of being." He is not "without offspring" (ἀγονος). He is the absolute Being, the eternal One, who is and was and is to come, and in that way the ever-living and ever-productive One" (*RD,* 2.331).

> Here is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches. In virtue of this unity the world can, metaphorically, be called an organism, in which all the parts are connected with each other and influence each other reciprocally. Heaven and earth, man and animal, soul and body, truth and life, art and science, religion and morality, state and church, family and society, and so on, though they are all distinct, are not separated. There is a wide range of connections between them; an organic, or if you will, an ethical bond holds them all together. (*RD,* 2.435).

Therefore, Bavinck's doctrine of the Trinity places us in right relationship with God and consequently with our culture. In paganism, pantheism, materialism, and all other non-Christian worldviews, according to Bavinck, the distinction between creature and Creator is lost; people do not stand in right relationship with the Creator and consequently, they stand in a confusing relationship with each other and with the world.

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17. John Bolt (ed.), "Grace and Nature," In Bavinck, *RD,* 1.15.

In paganism a human being does not stand in the right relationship to God, and therefore not to the world either. Similarly, in pantheism and materialism the relation of human beings to nature is fundamentally corrupted. One moment man considers himself infinitely superior to nature and believes that it no longer has any secrets for him. The next moment he experiences nature as a dark and mysterious power that he does not understand, whose riddles he cannot solve, and from whose power he cannot free himself. Intellectualism and mysticism alternate. Unbelief makes way for superstition, and materialism turns into occultism. (*RD,* 2.438).

According to Bavinck, paganism, pantheism, and materialism are pagan worldviews that have been present in the world since always, and as Nelson D. Kloosterman observes, "when Bavinck came on the scene in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, evolutionism and naturalism had begun to dominate the sciences. Already the socio-political thought and philosophy of Ernst Troeltsch, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Leo Tolstoy, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the like, had achieved international stature and acceptance."[18] Cornelis van der Kooi writes that Bavinck "was deeply impressed by the facts of the modernization of the society and concerned about the cultural effects that these changes in society have for Christian faith and theology."[19] Bavinck observes that only in the biblical worldview "a human being is placed in the right relation to the world because he has been put in the right relation to God" (*RD,* 2.438). For Bavinck, the Christian trinitarian worldview overcome these cultural challenges by placing us in right relation to the triune God and consequently to the world.

We know ourselves to be children of the Father, redeemed by the Son, and in communion with both through the Holy Spirit. Every blessing, both spiritual and material, comes to us from the triune God. In that name we are baptized; that name sums up our confession; that name is the source of all the blessings that come down to us; to that name we will forever bring thanksgiving and honor; in that name we find rest for our souls and peace for our conscience. Christians have a God above them, before them, and within them. Our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity" (*RD,* 1.334).

Second, because his doctrine of creation reflects the Trinity and gives us a 'point of contact' with the world around us. Bavinck writes, "just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity" (*RD,* 2.422). The ontology (being) of the creation reflects the triune Creator-God, in whom there is perfect unity and perfect diversity, and the creation, as distinct from the Creator, possesses a relative unity and relative diversity. As James Eglinton rightly affirms, "Trinity *ad intra* leads to organism *ad extra*…. God as the archetypal (triune) unity-in-diversity is the basis for all subsequent (triniform) ectypal cosmic unity-in-diversity,"[20] and in his *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, he claims that, "one of the central themes in Bavinck's worldview was the distinction between God as being and the creation as becoming."[21] Nathaniel Gray Sutanto claims that, "Creation displays an organic ontology of diversities in unity precisely because in God there is an archetypal unity and diversity."[22] The consequence of humans reflecting the Trinity and being created in the image of the triune God is that, the mission of the church is incomplete unless one comes to the confession of the Trinity; in other words, there is not Christian mission without the confession of the triune God. Otherwise, "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" (*RD,* 2.330).

Third, by taking into account the biblical notion of "being sent", Bavinck's Trinitarian theology helps us see how our missionary labors fit into what God always has been doing. Bavinck's Trinitarian thought helps us to see the missionary need around us, to know how to speak to that need, and to understand our equipping and calling in that great work. This "sending" idea speaks of the work of the economic Trinity and it is a historical result of the intra-trinitarian *pactum salutis* established in eternity. Influenced by Augustine,[23] Bavinck argues that, "the Father came without having been sent, the Son

18. Nelson D. Kloosterman, "The Legacy of Herman Bavinck," *Banner of Truth* (October, 2008). Available at https://banneroftruth.org/ (Accessed in February 04, 2019).

19. Cornelis van der Kooi, "Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth on Christian Faith and Culture," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 72–78, at 72.

20. James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 80.

21. James Eglinton, *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 59.

22. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin," *International Journal Of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 2 (2016): 175.

23. Augustine writes, "So too the trinity together produced both the Father's voice and the Son's flesh and the Holy Spirit's dove, though each of these single things has reference to a single person… the three are inseparably at work in each of the things which are

came after being sent by the Father (Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 3:16; 5:23, 30, 37; 6:28ff.; etc.), and the Holy Spirit only came because he was sent both by the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7)" (*RD,* 2.320), and finally, the church was sent by the triune God into the world with a mission. Bavinck explains, "while the Son and the Spirit have visibly appeared in the incarnation and the outpouring, their mission is completed in their invisible coming into the hearts of all believers, in the church of the Son, in the temple of the Holy Spirit. There has been an eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father in order that, through and in them, he himself should come to his people and finally be "all in all" (*RD,* 2.321–322). And he goes on to conclude that, "God by his Spirit now moves from the temple on Zion to take up residence in the body of Christ's church, which is, consequently, born on this very day as a mission and world church" (*RD,* 3.501). According to John Bolt, this "trinitarian perspective rooted in revelation … is the foundation of the Bavinck tradition's missional character."[24] As Bolt writes,

> With respect to God, "mission" refers to the intratrinitarian notion of sending, the sending of the Son by the Father, and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. With respect to the church, "mission" refers to the dominical command to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18–20). [25]

As the Son was sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son, so the church, entrusted with the gospel, was sent by the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.[26] His view of the church and its catholicity is a result of his trinitarian theology and "is based on the conviction that Christianity is a world religion that should govern all people and sanctify all creatures irrespective of geography, nationality, place, and time."[27] Bavinck claims that Christianity is "universal and capable of permeating and sanctifying all others [religions]."[28] The church that is catholic was sent by the Trinity into the world with the gospel that redeems and sanctifies, and his view is fully grounded in Scripture.

Bavinck explains that the first five books of Scripture (Genesis to Deuteronomy) begin with the creation of the entire cosmos and a vision of the whole humanity, and conclude by focusing attention on a small people and its concerns about holiness and cult.[29] According to Bavinck, "the law of YHWH regulates everything even to the smallest minutiae. Not only the priests but also the kings; not only the cultic and the moral but also the civil and social and political dimensions of life are governed by the one law of God. Here we encounter an inner catholicity, a religion that encompasses the whole person in the wholeness of life."[30] And he goes on to conclude that, "this prophecy was fulfilled in the fullness of time. And again it is noteworthy that the foundation on which the church is built is just as broad as that of Israel. God so loved the world, the cosmos, that he sent his only Son, the one by whom all things were created."[31] In Christ, God is reconciling the world with himself (2 Cor. 5:19), and according to Bavinck

> Christianity knows no boundaries beyond those which God himself has in his good pleasure established; no boundaries of race or age, class, or status, nationality, or language. Sin has corrupted much; in fact, everything. The guilt of human sin is immeasurable; the pollution that always accompanies it penetrates every structure of humanity and the world. Nonetheless sin does not dominate and corrupt without God's abundant grace in Christ triumphing even more (Rom. 5:15–20). The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin, it is able to restore everything.[32]

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mentioned as having the proper function of manifesting the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit." Cf.: *De Trinitate,* IV.5.30. Augustine also affirms that, "Since then it was a work of the Father and the Son that the Son should appear in the flesh, the one who so appeared in the flesh is appropriately said to have been sent, and the one who did not to have done the sending." Cf.: *De Trinitate,* II.2.9. And finally, "Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender." Cf.: *De Trinitate,* IV.5.27.

24. John Bolt, "The Missional Character of the (Herman and J.H.) Bavinck Tradition," *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 55.

25. John Bolt, "The Missional Character of the (Herman and J.H.) Bavinck Tradition," 44.

26. Cf.: John 20:21–22: "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." According to the Gospel of John, it seems that the sending of the Church is bound to the sending of the Holy Spirit; the two go together, in other words, the sending of the church is only possible with the sending of the Holy Spirit. For a much more detailed account of Bavinck's view on the catholicity of the church, see Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–251.

27. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 221.

28. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity," 221–222.

29. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity," 222.

30. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity," 222.

31. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 223.

32. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 224.

From this restored people, the church is born as an organic community of people, not limited to the walls of the temple, and as Bavinck writes, "no matter how small and insignificant it thus appeared, this church was truly catholic, heir of the future, proclaimer of a joy destined for all creatures."[33] According to Bavinck, the catholic presence of the church in the world "follows directly from the unity of God himself, from the unity of the divine mediator between God and humanity, from the unity of the Spirit, from the unity of truth, from the unity of the covenant and the unity of salvation."[34] Bavinck's understanding is that the catholicity of the church is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament, and it is based on the unity of the Trinity.

In the Middle Ages, Bavinck claims, every aspect of life encountered the church. The church was the center of life as the temple was the center of the city. However, "a new worldview has arisen that does, to be sure, grant freedom of religion to all that is itself unconnected with Christianity and the church and seeks to eliminate the latter from public life in order to relegate them to private life and thus to reduce them to sectarian phenomena… The contemporary culture takes place without reference to Christianity and church."[35] For this very reason, Bavinck recognizes modern society's need for the gospel. Since the fall of Genesis 3, every aspect of creation has been corrupted by sin; "humanity as a whole, and every person in particular, is burdened with guilt, defiled, and subject to ruin and death. . . [and] all people are sinners and that all need the forgiving love of the Father, redemption by Christ, the renewal of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; etc.)" (*RD,* 3.78, 79). Since the forgiving love of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit are found in the gospel entrusted to the church, in order for one to see humans forgiven, redeemed, and renewed by the triune God, one needs to understand that the primary mission of the church in this world is to preach and teach the gospel, because the gospel is the only medicine against the disease of sin that has damaged the world; the gospel fights sin and points humans to the Trinity. According to Bavinck, the gospel

only battles sin looks at all men from the same perspective. It knows no social positions or classes, no rich or poor; it only knows sinners and offers the same grace to

all indiscriminately. Thus it proclaim the eternal worth of every human being. It also maintains the possibility of redemption for those who have fallen the lowest, points all people to the same way of redemption—the way of regeneration, faith, and conversion—and subsequently creates a spiritual community for all believers, which is rooted in Christ and for that reason permanently surpasses all human associations and survives them by far.[36]

The summary of Bavinck's theology and missiology is this, "that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God" (*RD,* 1.112). Bavinck's Trinitarian nature of mission brings all three persons of the Godhead into focus in mission theology, and in doing that, it uncovers and preserves the relationship between nature and grace, between creation and re-creation. "The God who created and sustained us is also he who re-creates us in his image. Grace, though superior to nature, is not in conflict with it. While restoring what has been corrupted in it by sin, it also clarifies and perfects what is still left in it of God's revelation" (*RD,* 2.330). Therefore, as we have attempted to demonstrate in this study, Bavinck's trinitarian theology provides a reorientation of thinking by placing the triune God at the center of theology in general and mission in particular. As Bavinck rightly concludes, "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" (*RD,* 2.330).

Thus, Bavinck defines the essence of Christianity—including Christian missions—in trinitarian terms. Moreover, since all creatures have the unmistakable seal of the Trinity (created in the image of the triune God), one can be sure that our investigation of reality will not be able to arrive at an adequate conclusion unless one come to the confession of the Trinity. Bavinck, following the line of Augustine, claims that the human mind remains unsatisfied until our whole existence turns to the triune God. The Trinity is the origin, type, model, and image of all other systems, including the church's mission.

3. Personal Reflections

If the above analysis of Bavinck's trinitarian theology is correct, I suggest that a few personal reflections follow. Christian mission is essentially God's work. In such way, the triune God is the author and the source of power for all missionary activity. That is, the Christian mission is related to the Triune God, and this means that from the beginning to the end the Christian mission is

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33. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 225.
34. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 227.
35. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," 244.
36. Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 142.

God's mission, not human's. Therefore, as the body of Christ, the church does not promote Christian mission, the church is the servant or instrument of the true agent who promotes the mission in the world: the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian mission is born in the heart of God, operates in history by the power of the Holy Spirit, and points to the glorification of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

God the Father is a missionary God because it is he who is the owner of the field and sends his workers to the field (See Psalm 105:17; Acts 9:17; Luke 10:2; Matt. 9:37,38). Christian mission proceeds from the Father. God the Son is a missionary God because in him we find the full realization of the God's mission. Jesus' mission in the world was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to this world as a result of a divine commissioning, and he harmonized his own mission given by the Father with the mission that he gave to his disciples, when he said: "As the Father has sent me, so have I sent you." (John 20:21). Note the order of the "sendings" in this passage. First, the Son of God was sent by the Father, which makes Jesus the first and divine missionary. He, in turn, sent his disciples, making them missionaries of the gospel. Jesus' actions throughout his ministry had a missionary character. Mission is the historical realization on behalf of all mankind through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, God the Holy Spirit is a missionary God because he is the driving force of God's mission. In Acts 1:8 we have the understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as being highly missional in character and purpose. The church at Pentecost readily and spontaneously became missionary in its essence by being empowered by the Holy Spirit, therefore, Holy Spirit and mission cannot be separated or detached from each other.

That being said, it is clear that the church is missionary in a derived sense, for it is the triune God who sends and empowers the church for mission. The church is not the incarnation of Jesus, but it is the continuation of his ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit; the church acts in the power of the Spirit, which is the transforming force of human life and society. In this way, Christian mission, according to Bavinck, is defined and determined by the Trinity.

For this reason, there is a desperate need for a mission theology that is not anthropocentric or ecclesiocentric, but theocentric. An anthropocentric missiology rests in human needs and makes humans the center of mission, and an ecclesiocentric missiology rests in the responsability and the initiative of the church in preaching the gospel, while a theocentric missiology rests in God

and his initiative of saving and redeeming humans. In other words, both anthropocentric and ecclesiocentric missiologies are from below, while a Trinitarian missiology if from above; it begins with the Triune God. Bavinck's trinitarian theology provides for that need by placing the Trinity as the center for all theology and missiology. Bavinck says, "In the doctrine of the Trinity we feel the heartbeat of God's entire revelation for the redemption of humanity" (*RD,* 2.333). In fact, all other areas of theology flow from the Trinity; theology and Christian missions stand or fall with the doctrine of the Trinity. Only in the creation of the Father, the incarnation of the Son, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit can one find salvation and eternal life. The message of the church must be that there is no redemption apart from the triune God, or in Bavinck's words, "our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity." (*RD,* 2.334). For Bavinck, the message proclaimed by the church is not only that Jesus saves, but that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—save.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that the framework and the basis for missiology is ultimately the being and the work of the Trinity; i.e., the Trinity is the center of all theology, therefore, Christian mission must be Trinitarian. As we have seen in Bavinck's theology, unlike Martin Kähler's and other's understanding, mission is not the mother of all theology, the Trinity is. And unlike Bosch and others, the point of departure for mission is not Christology, but the Trinity. As we have demonstrated, the missional character of Bavinck's theology is based on the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically the relationship between the ontological and the economic Trinity; his trinitarian worldview—creation, fall, redemption—is the only worldview able to overcome our pagan and idolatrous culture by means of the gospel that is the only medicine for the disease of sin.

It is also clear in Bavinck's trinitarian system of thought that, every other area of theology, such as Christology, ecclesiology, including missiology, flows from the doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, it is suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity is the central theme in Herman Bavinck's theology and it provides the fundamental ground for Christian mission, the framework for our understanding of cultural challenges, and the basis for the missionary activity of the church. In fact, there is no church, mission, or theology without the Trinity.▪