# Participation in the life of God and covenant theology: Contours of a theodramatic systematic theology

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Thesis accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Doctor of Philosophy* *in* *Dogmatics* at the North-West University

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Graduation ceremony: May 2022
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the North West University in Potchefstroom for offering me a scholarship for pursuing a PhD in theology at their university. I had no intention of embarking on a PhD study after having completed my Doctor of Ministry. However, the offer of this scholarship stimulated me to do so.

I am deeply grateful for my supervisors. I met Dr. Sarel van der Walt when I attended the Fourth General Synod of the Reformed Churches in South Africa as a fraternal delegate of the United Reformed Churches in North America. When I discussed the possibility of doing a PhD in dogmatics, he agreed to be my second supervisor. Thank you for your guidance and counsel that enabled me to bring this project to completion.

Because of Dr. Hans Burger's deep knowledge of union with Christ and covenant theology, I asked him to be my first supervisor. Thank you for the pedagogically and theologically sound feedback you gave on each chapter. Your probing questions continued to stimulate me to strive for beauty and excellence.

Several people sent me pdf documents of manuscripts, some published and some (as yet) unpublished, that I needed to consult for this study. Thank you Dr. Dmytro Bintsarovskyi, Dr. Hans Burger, Drs. Nynke Dijkstra-Algra, Dr. Jos Douma, Dr. Arnold Huijgen, Dr. Mark Jones, Dr. Larry Perkins, Dr. Audy Santoso, Dr. Koert van Bekkum, Drs. Harry Wendt, and Dr. Paul Williamson.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my copy and language editors. Thank you, Mrs. Jane de Glint and Mr. Doug Field, for the work you did on earlier versions of this thesis. Thank you, Mr. John Barach, for the excellent job in editing the final version with a keen eye for bibliographic detail.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the librarians of the Norma Marion Alloway Library at Trinity Western University (TWU). Your help was especially appreciated during the research and writing of the second half of this thesis throughout the Covid pandemic when you arranged contactless holds pickup.

Mr. Apko Nap deserves special thanks for the encouragement he gave during this project.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their encouragement. My wife Elsina continually encouraged me and, because she worked at TWU, often picked up books at the library for me. Mary-Anne and Reuben helped me with some of the formatting of the final version of this thesis. My brother-in-law, Jan Houweling, arranged the purchase of numerous books in the Netherlands.

Above all, I give my deepest thanks to my triune God whose hand I continually and sometimes mysteriously felt upon me as I worked on this thesis. Thank you for keeping me safe during the Covid pandemic. Thank you also for allowing me to participate in your divine nature in Christ through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

**ABSTRACT**

This study offers a contribution to the theme of participating in the life of God by outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology with participating in the life of God as its integrative centre that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. The purpose of this study is to develop a theological framework that will give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture. To achieve this purpose, this study first analyzes how certain design features of theodramatic systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. Second, it analyzes how the structural design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. Third, it analyzes and evaluates to what extent the consequences of the structural design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice are the result of systemic problems in his federal theology. Fourth, it outlines the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in five acts. Fifth, it sketches the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. Sixth, it sketches how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and Christian practice that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

**Keywords:**

covenant, divine nature, federal theology, Michael Horton, ontology, participation, systematic theology, secularism, theodrama, union with Christ

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study develops a theological framework that gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture. It does so by outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God with Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre. In outlining these contours, this study enters into conversation with covenant or federal theology, which has the concept of the covenant as its integrative centre. The purpose of entering into conversation with covenant theology is to determine which theology with its integrative centre is better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture.

In this chapter, I will first describe the background of this study. Second, I will outline the problem addressed in this study. Third, I will sketch the aims of this study. Fourth, I will outline the goals of this study. Fifth, I will formulate the central theoretical argument of this study. Sixth, I will outline the methodology of this study. Seventh, I will describe the foreground of this study. Eighth, I will sketch the outline of the study.

### 1. The background of this study

I have been interested in the topic of participation in or dwelling in the life of God for some time. My interest was sparked by a personal crisis in my life and by subsequently doing a lot of reading on union with Christ and life in the Spirit. In September 2003, I embarked on a Doctor of Ministry program in Spiritual Formation and Leadership, which culminated in a dissertation entitled *Cultivating a God-generated life: being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit*. The term "God-generated life" was inspired by Calvin's understanding of union with Christ as a substantial ontological union, where the incarnate humanity of Christ is the channel through which the fullness of salvation in Christ is communicated (cf. Calvin, 1960:III:570f.; IV:1382; Billings, 2007:62-65; Evans, 2009:23-29). The purpose of that study was to examine the nature and significance of this ontological union and to give direction for cultivating a God-generated life so that we become people and places where heaven and earth meet because we are born of God.

In January 2018, while attending the Fourth General Synod of the Reformed Churches in South Africa as a fraternal delegate of the United Reformed Churches in North America, the North West University in Potchefstroom offered me a scholarship to pursue a PhD in theology. I accepted the offer

and decided to embark on a design study[1] that would outline the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology using participation in the life of God with Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre.

At this time, there is no systematic theology with participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. There is, however, a growing interest in the concept of participation in the life of God. Billings advocates substantially participating in the life of God through faith in Christ (2007:53-65). Burger speaks about being in God through being in Christ (2008:537; 2017c:299-303). Canlis focuses on pneumatologically participating in the life of God through faith in Christ (2010:14). Evans emphasizes participating in the life of God through being united to the incarnate humanity of Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith (2015:27-30). Fairbairn considers the heart of the Christian faith to entail sharing in the Son's relationship with his Father (2009:13-37). Letham speaks about our partaking of the divine nature through our union with the person of Christ (2019:788; 2011:127). Vanhoozer speaks about participating in the divine nature as participating in the Son's communion with the Father and the Spirit (2010:293; 2014b). This study should be seen in the context of this growing interest and as contributing to the further development of the theme of participation in the life of God.[2]

At this time, there is also no theodramatic systematic theology. There is, however, a growing interest in understanding the Christian faith to be essentially dramatic. Von Balthasar (1905-1988) has written a five-volume study in which he approaches Scripture through the lens of theatre and drama (TD:1988-2003). Building on this study, Vanhoozer has developed his own theodramatic model of communicating the gospel (2005; 2009; 2014b; 2014a). Wright suggests that we can divide the theodrama of Scripture into five acts: (1) Creation, (2) Fall, (3) Israel, (4) Jesus, and (5) Church (1991b:7-32; 1992:140-143). Wells has done the same, but divides the acts up differently: (1) Creation, (2) Israel, (3) Jesus, (4) Church, (5) Eschaton (2004:52-57). Bartholomew and Goheen divide the theodrama of Scripture into six acts: (1) Creation, (2) Fall, (3) Redemption Initiated, (4) Redemption Accomplished, (5) Church, (6) Redemption Completed (2004). Harris proposes a theatrical hermeneutic for reading Scripture (2005). Vander Lugt promotes an interpretative improvisation or performance of the Christian faith on the stage of this world (2014). Farrow believes that it is best to dramatize theology because God's revelatory

[1] A design study answers the research question "What should the structure of a systematic theology look like?" A historical-theological study answers the research question "How has a theological theme been thought about in history?" A biblical-theological study answers the research question "How does the Bible speak about a theological theme?" A contextual study answers the research question "How are a theological theme and related themes viewed in our context?" A conceptual study answers the research question: "What would a certain theological concept look like?"

[2] For a recent exploration into Paul's theology of union with Christ and participation, see Tate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell, 2018. For a comprehensive examination of union with Christ and participation in God in the New Testament, as well as in the early church fathers, contemporary Orthodoxy, and the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, see Macaskill, 2013.

action is inherently dramatic (2017). This study should be seen in the context of this growing interest and as contributing to the further development of understanding the Christian faith to be essentially dramatic.

Outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology with participating in the life of God as its integrative centre should prove to be effective for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit because doctrine is not only the grammar of faith and life (Burger, 2008:20-23; Jones, 2002; Lindbeck, 1984), but also reconceptualizes the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action (Vanhoozer, 2005:90, 377-378; 2014b:25-27, 31-32; 2019:109-113, 132-136). By appealing to our theodramatic imagination, doctrine gives us a theodramatic understanding of ourselves and the practices we engage in. Moreover, by appealing to our theodramatic imagination, doctrine can speak into and resonate with the social imaginary of our secular culture (Bailey, 2020; Rosa, 2019; Thiessen, 2012).

## 2. The problem addressed in this study

The problem addressed in this study lies in the area of covenant or federal theology. This theology uses the concept of the covenant as its integrative centre (Horton, 2006a:13-14; Macleod, 1993:214). At the heart of covenant theology are three overarching biblical covenants: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of creation (often seen as a covenant of works), and the covenant of grace (Horton, 2006a:77-107; Macleod, 1993:215-217). The covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and the new covenant are classified under these three covenants (Horton, 2006a:78; Macleod, 1993:216-217).

Michael Horton's dogmatic studies and systematic theology clearly seek to contrast the concepts of a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology (2005a:10-16; 2005b:107-132; 2007a:153-215; 2011a:602-619). Rather than affirming God's ontological unity with the world and our ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of the Trinity, Horton sees God's unity with the world as a covenantal or ethical unity (Horton, 2005b:84). This study will research and evaluate whether these two ontologies are mutually exclusive or intimately intertwined.

In seeking to contrast covenant and participatory ontology, Horton's covenant ontology is part of classical Reformed covenantal theology, even though he criticizes this tradition at certain points. But there are problems with classical Reformed covenantal theology. First, there is the problem with the word *berit*. Some consider this word to be synonymous with the word "relationship" or the establishment of a relationship (Bavinck, 2004:II:568; Berkhof, 1996:263-264; Horton, 2006a:10; Loonstra, 1990:194-195). Others are of the opinion that, while *berit* can refer to the establishment of a relationship, it refers primarily to a commitment to an existing relationship, shaping it in one way or another (Burger,

2017f:22-25; 2018a:10;[3] 2019a:273-274; Goldingay, 2003:181; Kwakkel, 2009:119-120, 128; Stek, 1994:39-40; Williamson, 2007:43). This study will research and evaluate these opinions.

Second, federal theology assumes that since there can be no "natural"[4] (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of their ontic distance, God condescends and establishes a covenant relationship with them. Consequently, God's fundamental relationship with humanity is considered to be covenantal (Bavinck, 2004:II:568-572; Berkhof, 1996:215; Horton, 2006a:10, 29; Oliphint, 2012:111; Fesko, 2014:138; cf. Stek, 1994:12-16). This position has been criticized by those who believe that an ontology of God's loving presence precedes the divine-human covenants mentioned in the Scriptures. Accordingly, the ontological relationship between God and humanity does not need to be secured with a covenant but is secured by his loving presence (Leder, 2012; 2013; 2014; Burger, 2017f:24). This study will research and evaluate these opinions.

Third, covenant theology finds the unity of salvation in the pretemporal, intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Bavinck, 2006:III:212-215; Berkhof, 1996:265-271; Fesko, 2016a; 2016b; Horton, 2006a:78-82; cf. Loonstra, 1990; O'Donnell III, 2011; Woo, 2018). However, in addition to other problems, this covenant of redemption is considered to be highly speculative and its alleged biblical support to be weak (Huijgen, 2017:4; Williamson, 2018). This study will research and evaluate both positions.

Fourth, the covenant of works promises Adam and his posterity the right to eternal life if he does not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, suggesting that God's primary relationship with humanity is characterized by law and merit (Bavinck, 2004:II:565; Berkhof, 1996:213-14; Horton, 2006a:83-104). However, some state that God did not give Adam the promise that he could earn eternal life on the condition of obedience, but only the promise that he would not die (Burger, 2019a:277-278; Hoeksema, 1976:108; Williamson, 2007:54). Moreover, some also suggest that God's relationship with Adam was not characterized by law and merit, but by grace, love, favor, and inheritance (Barth, 1958a:III/1:231-232; Burger, 2017f:17; De Graaf, 1977:37; Torrance, 1970:67). This study will research and evaluate these positions.

Fifth, covenant theology constructs a supra-historical or meta-covenant of grace that holds all the other covenants together and continues to advance towards its fulfilment in the new creation (Bavinck, 2006:III:200, 205; Berkhof, 1996:279-280; Horton, 2006a:104-107). This study will research whether there is exegetical, biblical-theological, and systematic-theological support for such a theological

[3] The page numbers to Burger's articles (2017f and 2018a) found on www.academia.edu refer to the page numbers of the pdf version of the article that can be accessed with Academia Premium.
[4] "Natural" is put in quotation marks to indicate that, while God, creation, and humanity are inherently compatible, they remain distinct. For further clarification, see chapter 5, note 118.

construct. Furthermore, it will investigate whether it is better to seek the unity and continuity between the covenants in the unity and continuity of God's purpose to bring creation and a new humanity into the eternal Sabbath rest where God is all in all (Williamson, 2007:30-31, 48-49).

Sixth, covenant theology works with an *ordo salutis* or order of salvation in which the benefits of salvation are applied in a series of temporally or logically sequential acts (Bavinck, 2006:III:485-595; Berkhof, 1996:415-549; Horton, 2011a:551-710). This study will research whether the idea of an *ordo salutis* is always and necessarily related to federal thinking or whether the relationship is more contingent. Furthermore, it will investigate whether this order of salvation undermines the organic unity of salvation, where our complete salvation is communicated at once through union with Christ who is clothed with his benefits (Burger, 2017c:243-246; Calvin, 1960:III:537, 725, 798; Gaffin, 2006:43-44).

The *ordo salutis* scheme has also led to a bifurcation of union with Christ into a federal union and spiritual union where union with Christ is only a formal union with the federal union being synonymous with justification and the spiritual union being synonymous with sanctification (Clark, 2007:262; cf. Evans, 2008:55; 2015:15-21). According to some, this view can lead to a dualistic soteriology that moves salvation away from a participationist understanding of salvation where salvation is in Christ to an appropriationist understanding of salvation where the Holy Spirit, who represents Christ, enables us to appropriate the benefits of salvation (Evans, 2008:40-41; 2015b:23; Newell, 1989:92-101). This study will research and evaluate why this is the case and whether this is intrinsically related to federal theology.

Seventh, federal theology tends to overlook the unique position of Israel in the unfolding of God's purposes, suggesting that the history of Israel is redundant for the unfolding of God's covenant of grace (Burger, 2017f:21, 2018a:7-9). This study will research and evaluate how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's history with Israel and how Israel has a unique position in the unfolding of God's purposes (Burger, 2017a:59-66; 2019a; Kinzer, 2005; 2018; Soulen, 1996; Westerman, 2015; Wright, 1992:139-143; 2006:189-392; 2013:475-537). Some of those who do not overlook the position of Israel see God's covenant with Israel as a republication of the covenant of works (Horton, 2006a:35-50; cf. Estelle, et al., 2009; Jones, 2010). This study will investigate and evaluate this position.

Eighth, covenant theology, like most traditional Protestant theology, interprets Christ bearing the curse of the law as pertaining to the curse on humanity because it failed to keep the law (Gal. 3:10-14). This study will research whether this is indeed the case or whether Christ bearing the curse of the law has to do, in the first place, with Israel and its failure to keep the law (Van Bruggen, 2005:199; Wright, 1993:146-147; 2013:511-537), so that accordingly, as the true Israelite, Christ bears the curse for Israel and also, as the second Adam, represents humanity (Burger, 2017f:27).

Ninth, this study will research whether the fundamental relationship of God with humanity, instead of involving a covenant ontology, implies a participatory ontology of God's loving presence.

Furthermore, it will investigate whether covenant is God's commitment to advance his purpose of bringing creation and a new humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of this loving presence in his coming kingdom. If so, it would entail a reframing of our understanding of divine-human covenants.

This reframed understanding of divine-human covenants can be useful in outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre.[5] Using Horton's dogmatic studies and systematic theology as a starting point for this reframing has certain benefits. First, Horton theologizes within the tradition of classical Reformed covenant theology. Second, Horton is critical of this tradition at certain points and seeks to reformulate it. Third, Horton extensively puts classical Reformed covenant theology in dialogue with current biblical studies, systematic theology, and philosophical theology.

I am aware of one dissertation that examines Horton's covenant theology (Kim, 2013). However, the problem addressed in this study is the problem of "contemporary, evangelical church practice and preaching, which practice and preaching appear either unbiblically to elevate the human will in salvation or unbiblically to undermine the necessity of human response to God's prior grace" (Kim, 2013:iii). The dissertation is a defence of Horton's theology as an antidote to this problem (Kim, 2013:ii-iii).

My overarching research question, therefore, is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture? Questions that arise from this overarching question are:

1. How can certain design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture?
2. How does the structural design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice?
3. To what extent are the consequences of the design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice the result of systemic problems in his federal theology?

[5] "Participation in the life of God" is shorthand for "bringing creation and a new humanity into the fullness of this loving presence in his coming kingdom". A foretaste of this is experienced through faith in Christ.

4. What is the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and participation in the life of God for a theodramatic model of communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity?
5. What are the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants?
6. How do the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a biblically reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture?

## 3. The aim of this study

This study aims to show how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

## 4. Objectives of this study

The specific objectives of this study are, first, to demonstrate how certain design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. Second, this study aims to analyze and evaluate Michael Horton's systematic theology in the light of how the structural design of his systematic theology shapes our communication of the gospel, our Christian identity, and Christian practice. Third, this study aims to research and evaluate problems with classical Reformed covenant theology and Horton's formulation of this theology. Fourth, this study aims to outline the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and participation in the life of God. Fifth, this study aims to sketch the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. Sixth, this study aims to give specific directions on how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

## 5. The central theoretical argument of this study

The central theoretical argument of this study can be formulated as follows: Because God's fundamental relationship with humanity does not entail a covenant ontology, but an ontology of participating in God's loving presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith,[6] a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre is better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture than Horton's model of federal theology. In giving this clearer direction and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice, a participatory ontology, i.e., an ontology of mutual indwelling, and a covenant ontology are not mutually exclusive but intimately intertwined.

## 6. The methodology of this study

The following definition of "theology" will be used as a methodological starting point: "Theology is critical reflection on the practice of the church aimed at helping to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ as clearly as possible and to enable the members of the church to live in Christ and in the Spirit in communion with God and with each other to the glory of God" (Burger, 2008:7). This definition implies that theological reflection is embedded in theory-laden practice,[7] beginning with theory-laden practical concerns and questions, going to theory, and then back to theory-laden practice again. In doing so, it goes through six hermeneutical movements. It begins by describing and interpreting the theory-laden empirical reality of our secular culture and the church within this culture that gives rise to concerns and questions about giving direction for communicating the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice (chapter one, section seven). It continues by exploring how certain design features of a theodramatic systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture (chapter two). It proceeds with an analysis and evaluation of Michael Horton's federal or covenantal theology and the possible implications of the

[6] We can participate in or dwell in God's loving presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit cosmologically as well as soteriologically. Vanhoozer articulates these two levels of participation as follows: "We therefore have to distinguish two kinds of 'being in' or participation in Christ: a general cosmological participation in the Son through whom all things were made (Col. 1:16) and a more particular christological [or soteriological] abiding in the Son in whom there is reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17)" (Vanhoozer, 2010:281-282). Since this study is about the practice of communicating the gospel and living the Christian life, the emphasis of this study is on our soteriological participation in Christ.

[7] For an example of how theological reflection is embedded in the hermeneutical questions of life, see Thiselton, 2007.

structural design of his federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice (chapters three and four). It continues with a sketch of the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants (chapter five). It proceeds with a sketch of the contours a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants (chapter six). It returns to the theory-laden practice that raised theory-laden practical concerns and questions by showing how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre can give specific direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture (chapter seven).[8]

Since all knowing is historically and linguistically situated (Gadamer, 2004:278-290, 301-322; 414-423, 455-506), this study will be done from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. The canonical Scriptures will be read as the Word of God that is the ultimate normative voice for theology. While doctrine is more than grammar and theodramatic direction, in this study doctrine is understood primarily as the grammar of the Christian faith and the theodramatic direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture. This study will be a critical reflection of the practices of the church because it aims to communicate the gospel as clearly as possible so that we become fitting participants in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit to the glory of God (Burger 2008:24; Browning, 1996:37-39).

[8] This methodology was inspired by Burger, 2008:8, 24-25; Browning, 1991:5-9, 35-54.

## 7. The foreground of this study

The foreground of this study is our secular[9] culture and the church within this culture. While our secular culture is not monolithic, it can be described as having the following social imaginary[10] and plausibility structures.[11] First, our secular culture is a culture in which people live as enclosed, individual, rational, buffered[12] selves within an immanent frame[13] of life in which they seek the meaning, significance, and fullness of their lives in a natural and material world that has lost contact with the transcendent beyond themselves.[14] As such, people no longer consider the ontological structure of creation to be enchanted[15] and suffused with the presence of God and angels, having a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) porous[16] relationship with God by living in his loving presence and participating in his life, but consider creation to be intrinsically self-sufficient. Moreover, they do not consider the ontological structure of humanity to be "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) and porous but consider themselves to be innately

[9] I am using Taylor's third sense of "secular," which refers to "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace". "Secularity" in this sense is concerned with the shift in the conditions of belief or the plausibility structures of society and answers the question, "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?" (Taylor, 2007:3, 25). Taylor's first sense of "secular" refers to the retreat of religion from public places, such as politics and the marketplace over against the presence of religion in sacred places (Taylor, 2007:2-4, 14-15, 20). His second sense of "secular" refers to the decline of religious belief and practice as an outcome of modernity (Taylor, 2007:2-4, 14-15, 20). These first two uses of "secular" Taylor considers being merely the subtraction of religious belief, whereas the third use of "secular" includes the change in the conditions of belief (Taylor, 2007:3, 26-29). Helpful introductions to and engagements with the work of Charles Taylor include Burger and Spijker, 2014; Colorado and Klassen, 2014; Hansen, 2017; Root, 2017; Smith, 2014; Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun, 2010.

[10] Taylor describes a social imaginary as "the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings . . . often not expressed in theoretical terms, [but] carried in images, stories, legends, etc." (Taylor, 2007:171-172). Thus, a social imaginary is the way ordinary people intuitively imagine meaning and significance (see also Taylor, 2004:23-30).

[11] A plausibility structure is what a society considers to be believable primarily based on how well it fits with its social imaginary.

[12] A "buffered" self is "essentially the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one's who surroundings, natural and social" (Taylor, 2007:42). As such, a "buffered" self is "not open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers . . . . " (Taylor, 2007:27). For the genealogy of the rational, individual "buffered" self, see Taylor, 1989.

[13] An immanent frame is the self-sufficient natural order of a closed world structure as contrasted to a supernatural frame (Taylor, 2007:542; cf. 539-593).

[14] With the loss of transcendence, the immanent frame suffers from a sense of malaise, see (Taylor, 2007:299-321). Taylor identifies three malaises: "(1) the sense of the fragility of meaning, the search for an over-arching significance; (2) the felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize the crucial moments of passage in our lives; and (3) the utter flatness, emptiness of the ordinary" (Taylor, 2007:309). In an earlier work, Taylor included the threat of the loss of public freedom as one of the malaises (Taylor, 1991:8-10). Taylor sums up this sense of malaise with the words of Peggy Lee's song: "Is that all there is?" (Taylor, 2007:311, 507, 509).

[15] On the enchanted world, see Taylor, 2007:29-43; see also Taylor, 2011:287-302.

[16] A "porous" self is a self that is "open . . . and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers" (Taylor, 2007:27). Clarifying his distinction between a "buffered" and a "porous" self, Taylor writes, "My point was that that disenchantment did not consist in a change in *beliefs*, but rather a shift in which the immediate experience was reconfigured, so that a new issue could arise around belief or non-belief in spirits" (Taylor, 2010:300)

self-sufficient. Accordingly, they consider exclusive humanism[17] to be a viable option. However, this can lead to a disappearance of the soul (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:270).

Second, our secular culture is an expressive[18] culture in which people pursue authenticity by following their desires and defining for themselves what it means to be human. As such, people no longer want to realize their humanity and identity in conforming to external norms, institutions, and values, but realize this through living it out or expressing it in their own way. To be truly human or authentic is ultimately a matter of discovering and choosing one's own self-definition and doing one's own thing (Taylor, 2007:473-504; cf. 440-472, 505-535; see also Taylor, 1991).[19] However, this does result in a loss of communion, loneliness, and fragmentation of their lives.[20] Moreover, it also leads to the perpetration of injustice and the proliferation of victims of this injustice.

Third, our secular culture is an experiential culture that seeks its sources of morality and truth within itself more through personal experience than theory. Accordingly, people's own lived experience often guides how they interpret reality and shape their lives (Taylor, 2007:4-5, 10-14, 16-18). Story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and the expression and explanation of these personal experiences because we have a narrative identity (Root, 2017:143; 2013:169-202; Taylor, 1989:25-52).[21] However, while story or narrative is central, often these narratives are nothing more than a smorgasbord of small narratives that lead to a fragmented understanding of oneself.

Fourth, our secular culture is a distracted culture because it is a technological culture. We live in a culture where "[f]lashing lights, vibrations, bells ringing, little red dots, email alerts, notifications, pop-up windows, commercials, news tickers, browser tabs—everything is designed to capture our attention" (Nobel, 2018:19). This tends to foster a superficial experience of beliefs because it does not encourage deeper reflection on beliefs. Moreover, it leads people to combat the frenzy of their distracted lives through meditation techniques, such as mindfulness (Nobel, 2018:15-30).

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[17] Clarifying the link between his third use of the word "secular" and the view that creation and life are innately self-sufficient, Taylor writes, "a secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing become conceivable; or better, it falls within the range of an imaginable life for masses of people. This is the crucial link between secularity and a self-sufficing humanism" (Taylor, 2007:19-20).

[18] On the expressivist turn, see (Taylor, 1989:368-390)

[19] Taylor writes, "The 60s provide perhaps the hinge moment, at least symbolically. . . . As well as moral/spiritual and instrumental individualisms, we now have a widespread 'expressive' individualism". He adds, "This is, of course, not totally new. Expressivism was the invention of the Romantic period in the late eighteenth century. Intellectual and artistic elites have been searching for the authentic way of living or expressing themselves through the nineteenth century. What is new is that this kind of self-orientation seems to have become a mass phenomenon" (Taylor, 2007:473; Root, 2017:9).

[20] The Beatles articulated this loneliness in their song "Eleanor Rigby" released in 1966. Since that time, the loneliness may only have gotten worse.

[21] Root writes, ". . . when someone tells her story, she reveals her person. Stories are the tentacles of personhood that reach out to share and be shared in. We enter each other's lives . . . through the words of our stories, and entering into these stories binds us one to another" (Root, 2017:143; see also Taylor, 2016:291-319).

Fifth, our secular culture is a culture where every ultimate belief, including belief in God, is one option among others and thus contestable and contested because of the change in the social imaginary and plausibility structures of society.[22] Accordingly, our secular culture has not forgotten its experience of the transcendent and experiences the cross-pressures of "openings to transcendence" and "the closure of immanence" in its search for meaning, significance, and fullness (Taylor, 2007:594-617).[23] The multiple options caused by these cross-pressures have led to many people considering themselves to be spiritual, but not religious.[24] This means that the secularist spin[25] that tips the immanent frame towards "closed world structures" is not the only way to live in a secular age. There is also another take[26] possible that tips the immanent frame towards openness to transcendence as "answering to our deepest craving, need, fulfillment of the good" (Taylor, 2007:548; see also Taylor, 2002).

While the church in our secular culture is also not monolithic, it can be described as having the following characteristics. First, many in the church have a faith that can be described as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,"[27] where they perceive the God of the Christian faith as a God who is not involved in their lives and who wants them to be good so that they will feel good.[28] Thus, instead of the Christian

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[22] Taylor refers to the multiple options caused by these cross-pressures of echoes of transcendence and the concurrent pressure of immanentization as a "nova effect", i.e., "the steadily widening gamut of new positions—some believing, some unbelieving, some hard to classify—which have become available options for us" (Taylor, 2007:423). He refers to the further explosion of spiritual options since the 1960s as "living in a spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane" (Taylor, 2007:300). This pluralism of beliefs leads to a mutual fragilization or destabilization of beliefs (Taylor, 2007:303-304). Rishmawy describes this fragilized pluralism this way: "Belief has become less of an on/off switch, and more of a series of dials you can set in various degrees (post-secular, humanist, Romantic, libertarian, eco-feminist, and on and on" (Rishmawy, 2010:51).

[23] About the ambiguity of our secular age with its doubt and longing, its faith and questioning, Smith writes, "While stark fundamentalisms—either religious or secular [e.g., new atheists]—get all the press, what should interest us are these fugitive expressions of doubt *and* longing, faith *and* questioning. These lived expressions of 'cross-pressures" are at the heart of the secular" (Smith, 2014:14).

[24] Bass writes, "The phrase 'spiritual but not religious' is the contemporary way of trying to explain some sort of connection to God, separate from, in tension with, or in opposition to religious institutions" (Bass, 2013:87).

[25] Regarding "spin", Taylor writes, "Some people will undoubtedly feel that the immanent frame calls out for one reading . . . the obvious, the 'natural' one . . . those who see immanence as admitting of no beyond" (Taylor, 2007:550). Thus, a (secularist) spin is a "construal of life within the *immanent* frame that does not recognize itself as a construal and thus has no room to grant plausibility to the alternative" (Smith, 2014:143). Examples of this closed secularist spin would include Dawkins, 2008 and Hitchens, 2008. However, see McGrath and McGrath, 2010; McGrath, 2011b.

[26] A "take" is a "construal of life within the *immanent frame* that is open to appreciating the viability of other takes" (Taylor, 2007:143).

[27] For this term, see Smith and Denton, 2005. While the focus of their sociological study is the religious lives of American teens, the results of their study have implications for the religious lives of American adults because most American teens follow the religious practices of their parents (Smith & Denton, 2005:56, 96, 102, 115-116, 120, 261; see also Dean, 2010:4, 39, 47, 52, 54, 81, 109, 111, 194, 201).

[28] The de facto creed of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has the following tenets: "1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die" (Smith and Denton, 2005:162-163; Moes, 2007:8; see also Dean, 2010:14)

faith involving performing the life of God and living for the other as he does, it is experienced as "a kind of individualized, consumer spirituality (Root, 2017:xvi).[29]

Second, Christians within certain church traditions often live with a partial Jesus who determines their past and their future, but not their present. Instead of realizing that faith joins them to Christ so that their subject is objectively relocated in the risen and ascended Christ and it is no longer they who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in them, many consider Jesus to be someone who died for their sins and who secured their future. However, "[t]he Christian faith is not just about the past or the future. Jesus Christ is not the great absentee in the present; the present is not empty. We are new creations in Christ, as Paul says . . . . (2 Corinthians 5:17)" (Burger, 2017c:7; cf. 12-17; see also Terlouw, 2015:125-134; Hiestand, 2012:47-66).

Third, because many in the church have difficulty perceiving their world in biblical terms, they experience a disconnect between the world they live in and the world depicted in Scripture. Consequently, many are more formed by the social imaginary of the secular culture they live in than the imaginary of Scripture because they do not use this biblical imaginary as their main plausibility structure to understand their life in this world (Vanhoozer, 2016:17-20; 2019:109-113).[30]

It is the hope of this study that the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre will have special significance for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture.[31] As

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[29] Root considers Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to be "a tumor that is wrapped around many organs and bones of twentieth- and twenty-first century American life" (Root, 2017:93-94). For Taylor on the therapeutic turn, see Taylor, 2007:618-623.

[30] Vanhoozer writes, "In his essay 'The Demise of Biblical Civilization,' historian Grant Wacker claims that during the twentieth century, the average American did not renounce the Bible but simply stopped using it as the primary plausibility structure with which to make sense of the world. People began to understand the meaning of events in terms of this-worldly historical processes rather than in terms of divine providence". He adds, "The demise of biblical civilization was a failure of the imagination to read our world in terms of God's word. The demise of biblical civilization is related to the replacement of *sola Scriptura* in the social imaginary of the West by other stories" (Vanhoozer, 2019:109).

[31] Regarding hope for our secular society, Taylor writes, "There is a large element of hope. It is a hope that I see implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and its central promise of a divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided" (Taylor, 1989:521). Elsewhere he writes, "I foresee another future, based on another supposition. This is the opposite of the mainstream view. In our religious lives we are responding to a transcendent reality. We all have some sense of this, which emerges in our identifying and recognizing some mode of what I have called fullness, and seeking to attain it". He adds, "Modes of fullness recognized by exclusive humanisms, and others that remain within the immanent frame, are therefore responding to transcendent reality, but misrecognizing it. They are shutting out crucial features of it. So the structural characteristic of the religious (re)conversions that I described above, that one feels oneself to be breaking out of a narrower frame into a broader field, which makes sense of things in a different way, corresponds to reality" (Taylor, 2007:768).

Taylor has highlighted, human beings inescapably live within a framework or a moral space (Taylor, 1989:3-52).[32] Moreover, "The task of evangelism, and theology, is to take every imagination captive to Scripture, nurture it and help it indwell the drama of the Christ. We must taste, discern and act in the world as it is—made new in Christ. For this we need a theodramatic framework and a biblically invigorated imagination" (Vanhoozer, 2016:177).

### 8. The outline of the study

Having dealt with the introduction to this study in this chapter, in chapter two I will deal with the first question that arises from my overarching research question: How can a theodramatic model of systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture? To answer this question, I will analyze how the nature of Scripture, the nature of hermeneutics, the nature of doctrine, and the nature of structure give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. The chapter will end with a conclusion in which I outline design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology that can give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in such a way that it helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture.

In chapter three, I will answer the second question that arises from my overarching research question: How does the structural design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice? In order to answer this question, I will first use Horton's doctrine of the covenant to analyze the covenant structure of his theology. Then, I will use the design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology developed in chapter two as an investigative tool to continue to analyze Horton' theology. Having analyzed Horton's theology, I will outline consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice.

In chapter four, I will answer the third question that arises from my overarching research question: To what extent are the consequences of the design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice the result of systemic problems in his federal theology? To answer this question, I will first evaluate Horton's model of federal

[32] Commenting on what he had written in *A Secular Age*, Taylor writes, "My book lays out, unashamedly, a master narrative. The adverb bespeaks the view I hold, that we can't avoid such narratives. The attempt to escape them only means that we operate by an unacknowledged, hence unexamined and uncriticized narrative. That's because we (modern Westerners) can't help understanding ourselves in these terms" (Taylor, 2010:300).

theology. I will then draw out the implications of this evaluation for Horton's communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice.

In chapter five, I will answer the fourth question that arises from my overarching research question: What is the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and participation in the life of God for a theodramatic model of communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity? To answer this question, I will sketch the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in five acts. The unifying theme of this theodramatic biblical narrative is the drama of God's mission for his glory. Having first clarified the unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory, explained some of the terminology used in this plot, and outlined the eschatological orientation of the plot, I will sketch the unfolding of the plot of this drama in five acts.

In chapter six, I will answer the fifth question that arises from my overarching research question: What do the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology look like that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants? To answer this question, I will sketch the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology.

In chapter seven, I will answer the sixth question that arises from my overall research question: How do the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture? In order to answer this question, I will first recap the central features of the social imaginary of our secular culture and explain the relationship between our imagination and our plausibility structure. I will then sketch how the contours of this sort of theodramatic systematic theology give direction for clearly communicating the gospel, for properly shaping our Christian identity, and for properly shaping our Christian practice so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

In chapter eight, I will determine whether the central theoretical argument of this study can be sustained.

## CHAPTER TWO: DESIGN FEATURES OF A THEODRAMATIC MODEL OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants so that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture?

The first question that arises from this overarching question is: How can certain design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture? [1]

To answer this question, I will first analyze how the nature of *Scripture* shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice. Scripture contains the gospel we communicate and shapes our Christian identity and practice. Second, I will analyze how the nature of *hermeneutics* shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity. The gospel needs to be understood and interpreted. Third, I will analyze how the nature of *doctrine* shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice. Doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. Fourth, I will analyze how the nature of *structure* shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice. The structure of systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. Fifth, I will conclude this chapter by summarizing how the design characteristics of a theodramatic model of systematic theology outlined in this chapter can give direction to our communication of the gospel and shape of our Christian

[1] Various factors give direction to our communication of the gospel and shape our Christian identity and practice. For instance, the Reformed tradition in which I was raised and to which I still belong gives direction to my communication of the gospel. It has also shaped my Christian identity and practice. A person's character and personality also give direction to our communication of the gospel. A person's age and health do the same. These factors are not normative; they are descriptive. These examples show how factors that give direction to communicating the gospel and shaping of our Christian identity and practice never occur in a vacuum, but always occur within a personal history, tradition, and context.

identity and practice so that it helps us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture.[2]

## 1. The nature of Scripture

If we want to design a model that helps us to clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice, it is beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of Scripture. Scripture contains the gospel we communicate and shapes our Christian identity and practice. To come to this good understanding of the nature of Scripture, I will focus on four approaches to reading Scripture. Scripture is the Spirit's instrument in which God himself is communicatively present and through which the church is called to listen and respond to the voice of God in the obedience of faith. First, I will focus on the narrative approach; second, the redemptive-historical approach; third, the theodramatic approach; and fourth, the theological approach.

### 1.1. The narrative approach to reading Scripture

Scripture contains many different books with separate narratives. These different books with their separate narratives are blended into a rich intertextual whole that allows us to discern the theological worldview that runs through Scripture (Klink and Lockett, 2012:23–24, 98).

Not everyone agrees that there is a theological worldview that gives a narrative unity to Scripture. The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, for instance, tries to locate the meaning of the text in historical referents behind the text of Scripture instead of seeking the meaning of the text in the narrative world of the text of the Scripture itself (Frei, 1974:103–104). Postmodern readers are not only suspicious of grand unifying narratives, but also reject them as totalizing attempts to control one's behavior. They thus believe only in their own local, contextual narratives (Grenz, 1996:44–49). And Jews, who embrace only the Old Testament as their Scriptures, would see no narrative unity between these Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures.

However, I believe what Luke tells us when he writes that Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, opened the Scriptures and "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk. 24:27). He did something similar on the evening of that same day when he appeared to his disciples and opened their minds to understand what Scripture—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms—said about himself: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:46–47). Both of these

[2] Thus, this chapter will deal with themes that are normally dealt with in the prolegomena of a systematic theology. See also chapter six.

statements imply, according to Jesus, that God acts in the history of this world and that these acts have been recorded in Scripture in such a way that there is a rich theological narrative unity in Scripture.[3]

When Scripture is read as a narrative unity, it is of utmost importance to discern the plotline that develops within the biblical story in order to discern how the individual parts of the story fit within the narrative whole. In doing so, we discover the theological worldview in this narrative (Klink and Lockett, 2012:96–97). Discerning the plotline of the story that runs through the biblical narrative is done in different ways. Richard Hays (2014:1–16), for instance, attempts to discern the plotline by reading the Bible backwards. He reads the Old Testament retrospectively in the light of its fulfilment in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He discovers how the Old Testament is the manger which contains Jesus Christ, prefiguring or foreshadowing the deep meaning of his person and ministry. In his view, the New Testament teaches us how to read the Old Testament, and the Old Testament teaches us how to read the New Testament. This requires an imagination converted by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we hear echoes of the Old Testament Scripture in the New. An intertextual fusion thus occurs between the two texts of Scripture (Hays, 1989:26–33; 2003:216–238).[4]

N.T. Wright (Borg and Wright, 1999:19–26) does not consider this approach to be sufficiently historical. History and faith mutually inform each other. As for history, Wright looks for all the available evidence that sheds light on the historical Jesus, including the synoptic Gospels. Using the scientific method of hypothesis and verification, he endeavors to discern how everything fits together into a coherent and simple worldview. He looks for a big picture much as one assembles the bits and pieces of a jigsaw puzzle into the unified whole it is meant to depict.[5] As for faith, faith is knowing Christ. Faith is the knowledge one has of him through having a personal relationship with him. In this personal knowledge of Christ we also come to know about the historical Jesus. According to Wright (Borg and Wright, 1999:26), "the Jesus I know in prayer, in the sacraments, in the faces of those in need, is the Jesus I meet in the historical evidence—including the New Testament, of course, but the New Testament read

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[3] Reading the Bible in the light of its narrative unity is not new (Childs, 1992:30–51; Fesko, 2008:443–477; Klink and Lockett, 2012:94–95; cf. Irenaeus, 1996:I.8.1; I.9.2, 3; I.10.1–3–326, 332; Augustine, 1997:2.9.14). What is new is the emphasis on narrative as a literary and philosophical category (Klink and Lockett, 2012:95). For the influence of the so-called linguistic turn to narrative interpretation of texts, see Heidegger, 2010:144–149; Ricoeur, 1984:I-3, 52–87; Wittgenstein, 2001:section 6 and 18; Magee, 1987:331; Smith, 2005:221–225. For the deep dissatisfaction felt with the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation influencing the turn to narrative, see Frei, 1974:103–104; Klink and Lockett, 2012:96. For the influence of our identity increasingly being experienced in terms of narrative, see Bartholomew and Goheen, 2004:12; Ricoeur, 1991:188–199; 1992:113–168; Stroup 1981:99–198; van Dusseldorp, 2012:172–176.

[4] Christopher Seitz (2011:11, 20, 139–140, 156, 203) objects to Hays's method because he thinks it limits the use of the Old Testament to mere background to the New Testament, while he considers the Old Testament to have a Christian message of its own apart from the use of the Old Testament in the New.

[5] Wright (1992:109–112; 122–126; 1996:137–144; 2013:24–36) defines worldviews as lenses through which we look at the world and generated by story, symbols, praxis, and a set of questions. The questions are: Who are we?, Where are we?, What's wrong?, What's the solution?, and What time is it?

not so much as the church has told me to read it but as I read it with my historical consciousness fully operative". Through this scientific method of hypothesis and verification in which faith and history mutually inform each other about Christ, our knowledge of Christ is increasingly supported and expanded (Borg and Wright, 1999:26).[6]

According to Wright, the story of Israel is decisive for understanding Jesus.[7] Central to understanding Israel's story is God giving Abraham and Sarah the status of a new Adam and Eve through whom he will restore his creation by dealing with the disorder and evil caused by Adam's sin (Wright, N., 1992:260–262). In order to guide and shape Israel—Abraham's descendants—in living the truly human life that God intended them to live and to witness to this kind of life to the nations around them so that the disorder and evil caused by Adam's sin can be dealt with, God gives his people the law or Torah as a way of life to help them embrace its calling (Wright, N., 1992:228–229). Israel, however, fails in living out its vocation by failing to be guided and shaped by the Torah. Consequently, God sends his people into exile just as he expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Thereafter, since their geographical return from exile, Israel does not rule the world but is under the oppression of pagan nations. Moreover, Israel's God has not returned to Zion and become king (Isa. 52:8). As a result, most first-century Jews would have believed that Israel was still in a state of exile (Wright, N., 1992:268–270; 1996:xvii-xviii, 126–127, 203–206). Yet, they also would have believed that God would one day return to Zion and become king. He would restore his creation and either welcome the Gentiles into his people or destroy them. Thus, he would vindicate Israel as his true people (Wright, N., 1992:267–268, 332–334).

Within this first-century historical context, Jesus needs to be understood as a prophet mighty in word and deed, proclaiming and embodying that through him God was defeating evil by bringing the exile to an end and putting things right by inaugurating his kingdom or rule over creation to Israel and the world (Wright, 1996:172, 191–196). Moreover, he saw himself as Israel's Messiah called to act as its representative by fulfilling its calling and enduring suffering and death on the cross in order to defeat evil and bring Israel's exile to an end (Wright, 1996:540–611). With Jesus' resurrection from the dead, God demonstrated his faithfulness to his creation and his covenant by vindicating Jesus as Israel's Messiah

[6] Hays (2011:61) sums up the difference between Wright and himself as follows: "On the one hand, Tom insists that without historical investigation of the factuality of the Gospels, the story is vacuous, not least at the level of concrete action in the world. I insist, on the other hand, that without the canonical form of the story, we could never get the historical investigation right in the first place." For serious objections to Wright's historiographical method, see Evans, 1999:180–205.

[7] For a helpful summary of Wright's theology, see Kuhrt, 2011:31–64. For a theological evaluation of Wright's theology, see (Holland, 2020).

who had ended the exile by defeating sin and death and who was now Lord of the world and whom all nations are summoned to obey (Wright, 1996:612–653; 2003:581, 726–731). [8]

Thus, the narrative approach to Scripture reminds us, unlike the historical-critical, postmodern, and Jewish approaches, that Scripture blends the acts of God in history recorded in the different books of Scripture into a rich intertextual whole that articulates a comprehensive theological worldview.

### 1.2. The redemptive-historical approach to reading Scripture

Here Scripture is read not only in a narrative manner but also in a redemptive-historical way. When I discussed the narrative approach, I noted that when Jesus explained Scripture to the two men on the road to Emmaus and later to his disciples, he implied that Scripture has a narrative unity. This appeared as he taught them that the three parts of the Old Testament—the Law, Prophets, and Psalms—needed to be read in the light of his suffering, death, and resurrection.[9] The difference between the narrative approach and the redemptive-historical approach is that the former considers the narrative unity of Scripture to be a quality of the narrative structure of Scripture itself. The latter considers the unity of Scripture to lie in the progressive unfolding of God's acts in the history of redemption in Christ.

The passage I used from Luke 24 to illustrate the narrative approach can also be used to illustrate the redemptive-historical approach. For when Jesus says to the two men on the road to Emmaus that his suffering and death were necessary to fulfill the three different parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, he is indicating to them that he sees his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel. Thus, Jesus implies that we can read Scripture backwards in the light of its fulfilment in his death and resurrection. He also implies that we can read the Old Testament Scriptures as pointing forward to his death and resurrection.

Thus, when Moses says to the people of Israel, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (Dt. 18:15), we can read this as pointing forward to Jesus Christ. When Isaiah prophesies, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14) and "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6), we can read this as pointing forward to Jesus Christ. And when the psalmist says, "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth

[8] Wright elaborates on this story (2013:474–537), but the storyline is essentially the same. He now refers to the outer story being about God and creation and to the various subplots that need to be understood within this outer story.
[9] Cf. the Nicene Creed: "and the third day he arose again, according to the Scriptures" (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:852).

your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel'" (Ps. 2:7–9), we can see this as pointing forward to Jesus Christ.

Reading Scripture backwards in the light of its fulfilment in Jesus' death and resurrection and forward as pointing to his death and resurrection illustrates that there is a progressive unfolding of God's acts in the history of redemption in Christ. Reading Scripture backward and forward shows us why this redemption was necessary. Ever since the fall into sin, there are three mortal dangers in this world: sin, death, and the devil. Sin makes us guilty and deserves to be punished. Sin defiles and pollutes us. Sin is an addictive power that can destroy us. Sin erects partitions that isolate us from God and each other (Gumbel, 1996:44–47). Because of sin, death came into this world. Death manifests itself in the fact that creation, including ourselves, is subjected to futility and is in bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:20–21). Due to this subjection to futility and bondage to corruption, all creation groans to be delivered (Rom. 8:22–23) so that we can experience the full redemption of our bodies and creation can share in it (Rom. 8:19, 23). In addition to the mortal dangers of sin and death, there is the danger of the devil who has a powerful grip on this world and holds it and its people in captivity. Because God loves his world and its people, he promises that he is going to remove these three mortal dangers of sin, death, and the devil by dealing with each through the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, he restores and transforms humanity as the ruler of his good creation in him. Paul refers to this restoration and transformation of humanity and creation as uniting all things in heaven and earth in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:10). The author to the Hebrews refers to this restoration and transformation as fulfilling creation's intention in bringing many sons to glory together with the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:5–10). Scripture shows us that this redemption would be achieved through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah 53 prefigured the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. Psalm 118 did the same with his rejection, death, and vindication. Psalm 16 alludes to Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Hays, 2003:230). Jesus Christ achieved the redemption of this fallen creation and united all things in him in a new creation by his death and resurrection.

### 1.3. The theodramatic approach to reading Scripture

The theodramatic approach to reading Scripture enriches the narrative reading of Scripture not just by considering the unity of Scripture as a quality of the narrative structure of Scripture, but also by considering this narrative structure as being of a theodramatic nature (Burger, 2017e:43). The difference between a narrative and a theodramatic approach to Scripture has been described as follows:

> Though both narratives and dramas share a common story shape, they represent stories differently. Narratives use narrators and typically recount their stories in the third person (he, she, they) and thus can be kept at arm's length. Dramas, by way of contrast, show rather than tell and are typically enacted in the first person and second person, the language of personal interaction (e.g., "You shall be holy, for I am holy" [1 Pet. 1:16; cf. Lev. 19:2]). And this is perhaps the most important difference, the element that makes drama more suitable than narrative to serve as handmaid to theology: though stories can entrance us and

> invite us into their worlds, dramas insert us into the action and demand that we say or do something. (Vanhoozer, 2014b:252; cf. Vanhoozer, 2009:156–161; Vander Lugt, 2016:8).[10]

The theodramatic approach also enriches the redemptive-historical approach by considering the progressive unfolding of God's acts in the history of redemption in Christ to be dramatic.

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) is one of the first to have given a sustained treatment of the concept of theodrama.[11] According to him, divine revelation is best understood through the lens of theatre and drama because revelation does not just present us with words, but in and through words it also presents us with action (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:15).[12] The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together produce the theodrama. The Father, from whom the whole theodrama proceeds, is the author of the theodrama in which he is himself also included and for which he takes responsibility (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:19, 270, 279–280, 319; 1990b:TDII:62, 78, 271–284; 1993:TDIII:530, 535; cf. 525–535). The Son is the chief actor who creatively actualizes the Father's theodramatic script, making it present and causing it to be embodied on the stage of this world (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:281, 285; 1990b:TDII:87; 1982:GLI:303). The Holy Spirit is the director who guides the performance of the theodrama, enabling the drama to come alive in obedience to the script and reach its goal and purpose (Balthasar,

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[10] Treier adds that "drama is distinct from narrative generally, with its action moving forward by means of speech" (Teier, 2020:557).

[11] For a helpful introduction to von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, see Nichols, 2000; 2011:49–88; Wigley, 2010:73–121. For his theological aesthetics, see Nichols, 1998; 2011:12–48; Wigley, 2010:25–72. For his theological logical theory, see Nichols, 2001; 2011:89–115; Wigley, 2010:122–142. In the introduction to the first volume of his *Theo-Logic*, von Balthasar writes, "From first to last, the trilogy is keyed to the transcendental qualities of being, in particular to the analogy between their status and form in creaturely being, on the one hand, and in Divine Being, on the other. Thus there is a correspondence between worldly 'beauty" and divine 'glory" in the *Aesthetics* and between worldly, finite freedom and divine, infinite freedom in the *Drama*. By the same token, our task in the present theological *Logic* will be to reflect upon the relationship between the structure of creaturely truth and the structure of divine truth. . . . Without philosophy there can be no theology" (Balthasar, 1985:7; cf. Balthasar, 2004a:9, 43–86, 89–98, 109). About participating in transcendentals or the properties of being itself, such as beauty, goodness, and truth, simply by existence, Vanhoozer writes, "The New Testament declares that being is not a generic or impersonal substance or power in which we participate but something personal. Jesus Christ is 'the exact imprint of God's very being' (Heb. 1:3). And while no one has ever seen God, the Word that was with God and was God in the beginning (John 1:1) is also the Son who has 'explained' or 'exegeted [*exēgēsato*] God' (John 1:18, Gk.). Perfect being, the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, therefore has a face. . . . We discover what God is like not by examining the concept of perfect being, as philosophers might do, but rather by attending to the life of Jesus Christ." And he adds, "What should we now say about the transcendentals? Just this: truth, goodness, and beauty are ultimately qualifications of love (God's self-giving being) and the works of love (God's self-giving acts). Furthermore, because God's being is active, it may be better to think of the transcendentals as *theatricals*: perfections of a divine doing (i.e., loving) than which nothing greater can be conceived" (Vanhoozer, 2014b:38–39; 2010:277). Elsewhere he writes, "Participating in God's being-in-communicative-activity means partaking not in a Platonic Greek universal but in a Pauline Jewish particular: the history of Jesus Christ. Participation in the triune God—otherwise known as salvation or eternal life—ultimately hinges on the nature of one's communion with Christ" (Vanhoozer, 2010:279; 2016a:55–56; cf. O'Donovan, 1994:85). This study will follow Vanhoozer and O'Donovan on the theme of transcendentals.

[12] The following abbreviations are used for von Balthasar's trilogy: GL: The glory of the Lord; TD: Theo-drama; TL: Theo-logic.

1988:TDI:298–299; 1993:TDIII:533–534). In addition to the production of the theodrama, there is its realization in presentation, the audience, and its horizon of meaning. When the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present the theodrama on the stage of this world, they do so with a view to drawing us into it (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:309–310). As a result, we are not just spectators, but become participants. In doing so, our life in this world is illumined and a new horizon is opened up for us regarding the meaning and nature of our existence (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:308, 314–315).

Drawing on von Balthasar's understanding of approaching Scripture through the lens of theatre and drama, Kevin Vanhoozer develops his theodramatic model of communicating the gospel.[13] The theodrama has its beginning in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who live in an eternal fellowship and communication of love with one another and who create a world and humanity so that they can participate in this fellowship and communication of love in Christ through the Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2010:57, 156, 268–271, 280–283). This makes the world the stage on which God's glory is manifested. History is the theatre of the gospel in which God dialogically engages humanity with his speech acts. He prompts them to participate faithfully and fittingly in the theodrama that is being played out in the history of this world and the history of their lives. God executes his eternal decree of what is in Christ, moving history forward towards the future consummation of history in the kingdom of God (Vanhoozer, 2014b:66, 244; 2019:128–132). Scripture is the inspired transcript that witnesses to the unfolding drama of redemption. It communicates the profound meaning of this theodrama. Moreover, Scripture prescribes and describes the church's participation in the theodrama. It gives both positive and negative lessons for the church today. To interpret this theodrama, we need to increasingly make the world depicted in the transcript our own by inhabiting it (Vanhoozer, 2014b:24, 246).[14] Only in this way will we be able to

[13] In addition to the understanding of transcendentals, a major difference between Vanhoozer and von Balthasar is that the latter imports the economic drama of redemption into the inner life of the trinity in the form of an eternal kenosis. Von Balthasar (1994:TDIV:323) writes, "The immanent Trinity must be understood to be that eternal, absolute self-surrender where God is seen to be, in himself, absolute love." He adds, "the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son" (cf. Vanhoozer, 2014a:12). According to Vanhoozer, God's love is not characterized by self-emptying, but by fullness (Vanhoozer, 2014a:14). Moreover, he writes, "In employing a theatrical model I am not subscribing to a particular theory of drama but rather deploying a number of themes and concepts that will prove fruitful in our search for Christian understanding" (Vanhoozer, 2009:155).

[14] Vanhoozer clarifies his characterization of Scripture as transcript, script, and prescript in the following manner. Scripture is transcript because it is "an authoritative record of God's work, an inspired transcript". Scripture "is *not* a script in the sense of a detailed blueprint for action (or the future) . . . In a looser sense, however, Scripture remains the church's script, a divinely commissioned and authorized written witness to the ongoing drama of redemption, for which doctrine gives direction to disciples for understanding and participation". Moreover, Scripture is a prescript in the sense that it "also prescribes, authorizing spiritual medicine (e.g., the fear of the Lord; faith) that, if taken as directed, leads to beneficial and healthy results: wisdom, *salus* (welfare)" (Vanhoozer, 2014b:24; cf. 2009:165–174; 2016b:101–103, 170–173). Because Scripture does not give us detailed lines to perform, Vander Lugt considers it more appropriate to call Scripture a transcript than a script. Moreover, because Scripture is canonical transcript of precanonical and canonical performances, referring to Scripture as a transcript is a constant reminder that the "stage preceded the page". Furthermore, it is a reminder that Christianity is a "religion of the Stage" as well as a "religion

faithfully and fittingly perform it today by putting on Christ through the direction and prompting of the Holy Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2014b:236, 250).[15]

The following unifying themes of the drama of Scripture have been suggested. First, the unity of *the drama of new creation*, as defended by Greg Beale. According to Beale, as Adam and Eve lived in God's presence in his cosmic temple in the Garden of Eden, so God's new humanity will live in his presence in his city-temple or new creation. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ launched the fulfilment of this eschatological new creation goal as an already-but-not-yet fulfilment and is available to those who embrace Jesus Christ through faith (Beale 2004:25; 2011:15–16, 19; Beale and Kim 2014:17–28, 135–140; cf. Leder, 2012; 2013; 2014; Alexander, 2008; 2018).

Second, the *drama of the kingdom*, as defended by N. T. Wright. According to Wright, the Old Testament is a story in search of the ending in which God would return to Zion and become king. This happened in and through Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Wright, 2012:240–245; cf. Goldsworthy, 2002; Dempster, 2003).

Third is the unifying theme of the *drama of God's mission for his glory* as defended by Christopher Wright.[16] Because God has a mission for his glory, he created and redeems the world and humanity to glorify and enjoy him forever (Wright, C., 2006:62–65, 404; cf. 22, 188). This makes the Bible a product of God's mission that witnesses to the drama of God's mission for his glory (Wright, C., 2004:103–104, 120–122, 137; 2006:22, 51; cf. Hamilton, 2010).[17]

Fourth, we find the unifying theme of the *drama of covenant*, as defended by William Dumbrell. According to Dumbrell, when God speaks about "establishing my covenant" with Noah in Genesis 6:18, it has to do with continuing or maintaining a covenant relationship and thus refers to God's pre-existing covenant relationship with creation that progressively unfolds in the other covenants in Scripture with a view to bringing creation and humanity into the eternal Sabbath rest (Dumbrell, 1984:26, 34–35, 42–43; 1985:40, 176–179; cf. Hahn, 2009; Gentry and Wellum, 2018).[18]

This study will use the drama of God's mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his loving presence as the unifying theme that gives coherence to the various acts of the theodrama

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of the Book". Thus, he thinks it is more accurate to refer to Scripture only as a transcript and prescript. Viewing Scripture as a prescript "points to Scripture's role in generating and guiding post-canonical performances" (Vander Lugt, 2016:95, 96, 97; cf. 87–114). While Vander Lugt makes good points, this study will use the terminology of script, transcript, and prescript for Scripture as Vanhoozer uses these terms because they sufficiently incorporate Vander Lugt's concerns.

[15] For suggested acts of the theodrama, see Vanhoozer, 2014b:94-98; Wells, 2004:52–57; Wright, N., 1991b:7–32; 1992:140–143.

[16] Vanhoozer does not include this drama in his survey although he alludes to it in a footnote.

[17] For the theme of God's glory, see also VanDrunen, 2015.

[18] The unifying theme of federal theology will be discussed in the next two chapters.

of Scripture. More precisely, it will use the drama of God's mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit.[19]

This unifying theme is used because it expresses the fundamental relationship God has with his creation and humanity, namely, that we live in God's loving presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit and participate in his life (Ps. 104:30; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). Moreover, it corresponds with the goal of the theodrama, which is bringing creation and humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of God's loving presence in Christ through the Spirit in the coming kingdom of God, that is to say, the new heaven and new earth where God will be all in all (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:28). The beginning of the fullness of this Sabbath rest of the coming kingdom of God where God will be all in all is experienced today through faith as we entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ and allow him to form himself in us through his Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20; 4:19).[20]

This study understands covenant to be God's commitment to secure and guarantee this purpose of God's mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. (Leder, 2013:207–220; Williamson, 2007:11–12, 43). Using the unifying theme of the drama of God's mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his presence in this manner integrates the themes of the presence of God (Beale, Leder, Alexander), Sabbath rest (Dumbrell), new creation (Beale, Alexander), kingdom of God (N.T. Wright),[21] covenant (Dumbrell, Leder, Williamson), and the glory of God (Chr. Wright).[22]

### 1.4. The theological approach to reading Scripture

The church has always practised a theological interpretation of Scripture in one form or another (Bartholomew and Heath, 2016:1; Treier, 2008:39–77). Reading Scripture was experienced as a spiritual discipline through which one entered into the depth of the text of Scripture by intensively engaging and reflecting on the words of Scripture in order to be caught up in them and transformed by them (Treier, 2008:41–45). Moreover, since Jesus Christ is considered the key to all of Scripture, the Old Testament has been read as prefiguring Christ through the Christocentric reading strategies of allegory and typology

[19] For the importance of knowing the unifying theme that gives coherence to the various acts of the theodrama of Scripture and theatrical performance, see Stanislavski, 1948:116–119, 273, 276; cf. Vander Lugt, 2016:101–102; Vanhoozer, 2005:371–374, 379; 2014b:118.

[20] Why the unifying theme of God's mission for his glory is used will be further developed in chapters 5 and 6.

[21] This study distinguishes between the kingdom of God as the new heaven and new earth and the inaugurated rule of the king of this new heaven and new earth today through the Holy Spirit. For this distinction, see Van Bruggen, 1996:64–72.

[22] Vanhoozer uses the unifying theme of a covenantal courtroom drama to integrate the themes of new creation, kingdom of God, and covenant (Vanhoozer, 2014b:102–110; cf. 2005:50–56). While it is not his unifying theme, von Balthasar mentions God's lawsuit as a theme in dramatic theology found in the prophetic literature and the Pauline epistles and discusses how this theme was used by Marcus Barth to structure a five-act play (von Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:152–159; cf. Barth, 2006).

(Treier, 2008:45–51). Furthermore, through the practice of *lectio divina* (divine or prayerful, contemplative reading of Scripture) and the use of the interpretive method of the fourfold sense of Scripture—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical—Scripture was read with a view to certain kinds of application to Christian practice (Treier, 2008:51–55). What is more, Scripture was read through the theological lens of the apostolic teaching (Treier, 2008:57–58).

But what was practised in one form or another has been discontinued by many over the course of time. Some have traced the beginning of this discontinuation to the abandonment of the premodern sacramental mindset, which viewed creation as participating in eternal realities. According to them, this abandonment began with Thomas Aquinas' acceptance of "pure nature" (i.e., nature conceived apart from its final end) and Duns Scotus' affirmation of univocity of being (i.e., we talk about God in the same way we talk about human beings, thus making creation independent of God). Consequently, God's relationship with the world became merely external, his governing of the world was seen as based on his will separated from his being, and people came to believe that "universals do not have a real existence in the mind of God, but are simply names that we assign to particular objects" (Boersma, 2011:80; cf. 19–25, 65, 68–83; Levering, 2008:18–25; Balthasar, 1989:GLIV:395–396; 1991a:9–29). The Enlightenment, with its insistence upon objectivity and neutrality, finalized this abandonment of the sacramental mindset (Treir, 2008:27, 47; Goheen and Wright, 2016:171).

But what was discontinued has re-emerged, stimulated, according to some, by Barth's theological engagement with Scripture in his commentary on Romans and his subsequent exegetical work in other commentaries and his *Church Dogmatics* (Bartholomew and Heath, 2016:1; Paddison, 2016:29; Treier, 2008:17–20). Like Barth, many had become disenchanted with the secular mode of reading Scripture as practised by the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, which imagined that it could interpret Scripture in a so-called neutral manner without any theological assumptions and imposed limits on the interpretation of Scripture by "subjecting it to the demands of methodical naturalism" (Rae, 2016:109; Billings, 2010:49, 147).

This dissatisfaction with historical-critical interpretation led to a movement known as the theological interpretation of Scripture, which wanted to read Scripture again within "the conceptual world of the text itself" as "an instrument of God's communicative presence in this world" (Rae, 2016:94; Billings, 2010:180).

This conceptual world of the text itself is read within the parameters of the *regula fidei* or rule of faith. This rule of faith does not predetermine the meaning of Scripture, nor is it a superstructure placed upon Scripture or simply a summary of Scripture. Rather, it is the underlying unity of Scripture that serves as a "horizon of interpretive preunderstanding," guiding the church in its interpretation of Scripture (Green, 2011:77–80; Swain, 2011:111; cf. Gadamer, 2004:289–296; 302; 311–318; 384; 464–465). As

such, the rule of faith clarifies the scope and limit of the message of Scripture. Moreover, it points to what God does in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit as its narrative centre (Billings, 2010:22–23; Vanhoozer, 2005a:19).

This movement does not reject the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation because it does provide helpful insights into the historical world behind and in the linguistic world of the text. Yet, it considers it to be insufficient in itself for the task of theological interpretation of Scripture (Paddison, 2016:29; Billings, 2010:225; Plumber, 2010:315; Balthasar, 1982:GLI:538). Accordingly, the church must always "recontextualize historical-critical studies," because "history is a theatre of divine action" (Billings, 2010:225).

The theological interpretation of Scripture can be characterized in the following way. First, it considers Scripture to be a divine communication or address of God to the church. More precisely, Scripture is the Spirit's instrument through which the church is called to listen and respond to the voice of God in obedience of faith, for this God desires communion with those he has created by having them participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Paddison, 2016:29, 33–39; Thomas, 2016:198, 204; Holt and Spears, 2016:82–93; Demptser, 2016:146–146; Bartholomew, 2015:19–24; Billings, 2010:80, 103; 199–206; Swain, 2011:7, 16, 61, 96; Fowl, 2009:9; Vanhoozer, 2019:74; cf. Huijgen, 2019b:24–34).

Second, theological interpretation not only considers Scripture to be a divine address; it also considers God to be communicatively present in Scripture, desiring to draw us into an ever-deeper communion with himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. As God is providentially present in the world, so he is providentially present in Scripture working out his purpose in our lives (Paddison, 2016:30–31, 39–42; Billings, 2010:206–213).

Third, theological interpretation is a practice of the church. Since the church of today is not the first to read Scripture, it draws on earlier, premodern theological interpretations of Scripture and reads Scripture in communion with those who have read it before. Accordingly, the current practice of reading Scripture is sustained and nourished by the wisdom of previous generations found in the tradition of the church (Treier, 2008:31, 42–45; Holt and Spears, 2016:72–81; Green, 2011:73–74, 126; Fowl, 2009:52; Swain, 2011:99–118).

Fourth, theological interpretation has as its goal the formation of the moral character of the reader so that he grows in his love for God and his neighbour. The more we know the Christ about whom Scripture speaks, the more we will learn to love God and our neighbour as Christ did for the sake of the world (Treier, 2008:32, 45–46; Thomas, 2016:204–207; Billings, 2010:224–225; Green, 2011:126; Vanhoozer, 2019:72–75, 80–85; cf. Huijgen, 2019b:34–40). Moreover, the more we know the Christ about whom Scripture speaks, the better we will know our place with regard to Scripture: not as those

who proudly master Scripture, but as those who humbly submit and attend to Scripture, serving those who are greater than themselves and whose interests are more important than their own (Vanhoozer, 2006a:92; Green, 2011:126).

### 1.5. Conclusion

I began this section on the nature of Scripture by stating that if we want to design a model that clearly communicates the gospel and properly shapes our Christian identity and practice, it will be beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of Scripture. Scripture contains the gospel we communicate and shapes our Christian identity and practice.

I am now in a position to draw some conclusions. First, the narrative approach reminds us that while Scripture contains many different books with separate narratives, these different books with their separate narratives are blended into a rich intertextual whole in order to articulate a comprehensive theological worldview. Second, the redemptive-historical approach reminds us that because Jesus saw his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel, the redemptive-historical unity of Scripture lies in the progressive unfolding of the history of redemption in Christ. Third, the theodramatic approach to reading Scripture reminds us that the narrative structure is theodramatic. Scripture is a drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something. Moreover, the theodramatic approach used in this study reminds us that God is on a mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Fourth, the theological approach reminds us that Scripture is the Spirit's instrument in which God himself is communicatively present and through which the church is called to listen and respond to the voice of God in the obedience of faith. God desires communion with those he has created by having them participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, theological interpretation reminds us that reading Scripture has as its goal the formation of the moral character of the reader so that he grows in his love for God and his neighbour.

Understanding the nature of Scripture to be narrative, redemptive-historical, theodramatic, and theological in the way just summarized has the following implications for the communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice.

First, because books of Scripture with their separate narratives are blended into a rich intertextual whole in order to articulate a comprehensive theological worldview, we need to realize that the gospel we communicate is about the announcement of the new creation that is present in Christ because of his victory over sin, death, and the devil. Moreover, the resurrection life or eschatological Sabbath rest of this new creation is breaking forth into our broken present through the Holy Spirit. This resurrection life or eschatological Sabbath is the source of the formation of our Christian character and practice.

Consequently, the gospel we communicate should not be reduced to merely the gift of the forgiveness of sins.

Second, because Jesus saw his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel, we need to realize in our communication of the gospel that we can read Scripture backwards as Jesus did and, by implication, also forward as pointing to Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil through his death and resurrection.

Third, because Scripture is a drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something, we need to realize that the gospel we communicate involves participating in God's redemptive drama for his glory by having us live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Participating in God's redemptive mission for his glory lies at the heart of the formation of our Christian character and practice.

Fourth, because Scripture is the Spirit's instrument in which God himself is communicatively present and through which the church is called to listen and respond to the voice of God in the obedience of faith and have the moral character of its members formed, we need to realize that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity is about fostering communion with God by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The nature of hermeneutics

If we want to design a model that helps us to clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice, it is not only beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of Scripture. It is also beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of hermeneutics, because the gospel needs to be interpreted and understood. To come to this good understanding, I will focus on three aspects of the nature of hermeneutics: hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation, hermeneutics and the mind of Christ, and hermeneutics and the nature of language.

### 2.1. Hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation[23]

This study understands hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation. This implies that hermeneutics is not just about a set of rules and methods for interpreting texts (epistemology) but also focuses on who the understanding person is and under what conditions he is able to understand (ontology). Ontological factors that play a role in the process of understanding, that guide this study, and that are essential for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice are time and history, body and finitude.[24]

[23] "Hermeneutics" also refers to "the philosophical discipline of analyzing the conditions for understanding" (Zimmerman, 2015:6; cf. Burger, 2017a:36; de Bruijne, 2017:22). This section engages with hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline.

[24] For the application of this insight to the hermeneutics of doctrine, see Thisselton, 2007.

With regard to time and history, we are not disengaged beings who experience a value-neutral world on which we impose meaning. Rather, we are engaged selves who participate in and are shaped by the stream of history in which we are embedded from our birth. Consequently, interpretation is not something we do occasionally, but something that belongs to our human condition. To be is to interpret and to understand (Gadamer, 2004:288–289, 311–318; 506; Heidegger, 2010:144–149; Zimmermann, 2015:30–32)! Accordingly, our perception of the world is not primarily theoretical, neutrally examining objects from a distance, but practical, understanding how the web of relations in which we are embedded is meaningful to us (Heidegger, 2010:138–149; Gadamer, 2004:318–387; Zimmermann, 2015:8, 39). Moreover, because we participate in the stream of history and are shaped by it, tradition as such is not a hindrance to understanding, but the precondition of it (Gadamer, 2004:289–296; Zimmermann, 2015:50).[25]

With regard to body and finitude, because God created us as embodied, finite human beings, we do not have a God's-eye view of reality. Moreover, our understanding is always a subjective and limited interpretation of reality. This finiteness and embodiment of our humanity is also reflected in the fact that the world is given to us already interpreted through an intricate linguistic web of words and concepts that have developed historically over time. Consequently, we do not use language as a toolbox of labels that we attach to things in the world in a disengaged, instrumental manner in order to designate them. We use language as the medium through which we relate to and interpret our experience of life and our being in the world (Gadamer, 2004:401–506, 568–575; Heidegger, 2010:155–161; Zimmermann, 2015:13–15, 42–43). Thus, our being in the world is like a conversation in which we creatively appropriate pre-existing conceptual vocabulary and dialogically seek to come to an understanding of our experience of life (Gadamer, 2004:401–407, 412, 462, 480, 569–570; Zimmermann, 2015:41–43, 45–47). Because God created us this way, he can communicate with us as embodied, finite human beings with his Word and Spirit.

Being embodied and finite beings who participate in and are shaped by the stream of time and history and who use the medium of language to relate to and interpret our experience of life and our being in the world means that God uses a greater context to influence how we understand a particular part.[26] When we interpret text, then, there is always a creative movement between our understanding of our life

[25] While tradition as such is not a hindrance for understanding but a precondition of it, it can become a hindrance because, like all human activity, it is ambivalent.

[26] Even though the ontological factors of time and history, body, and finitude play a role in the process of understanding for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture, this does not mean that these ontological factors always play a positive role in the process of understanding and conforming us to Christ. Because we are not only formed by the ontological factors of time and history, body and finitude but also malformed, God does not approve of everything that happens and not all understanding is willed by him.

experience and the world of the text that we attempt to interpret, with the parts creatively clarifying the greater context and the greater context creatively clarifying the parts. This is known as the hermeneutical circle or spiral (Osborne, 2006:32, 417–419; Thiselton, 2009:14; Zimmerman, 2015:26, 37, 51, 67, 129).

This move to the subject of understanding and the conditions under which we understand does not entail relativism. "After all, to claim that all knowledge is relative to a personal standpoint is not at all the same as claiming that only individual perspectives exist and are all of equal value. It is only to claim that we are not gods who look down on our world, but finite creatures deeply affected by the course of history" (Zimmermann, 2015:18). Moreover, understanding through personal engagement is more like playing a game or performing a piece of music. When we play a game or execute a musical score we cannot simply make up our own rules for playing the game or make up our own musical score. We have to play the game according to the pre-existing rules of the game or perform the piece of music according to the musical score. When we interpret a text, we cannot simply make up the meaning of the text. We must interpret the text according to the text's linguistic structure (Gadamer, 2004:111; Ricoeur, 1981:159; Zimmerman, 2015:42).[27]

This makes hermeneutics the art of understanding and interpretation (de Bruijne, 2017:19, 23; Gadamer, 2004:163, 185, 191, 194, 279, 302; Thiselton, 2009:1–5; Zimmerman, 2015:1–2). It is not the skill of obtaining epistemological certainty scientifically. It is the art of realizing how, given the ontological factors of time and history, body and finitude, God uses Scripture or other means of communication outside Scripture in the process of understanding in order that we may clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice. This art of understanding and interpretation is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Kwakkel, 2020), and especially when he gives us the mind of Christ.

### 2.2. Hermeneutics and the mind of Christ

With the fall into sin, humanity closed themselves to living in God and each other's loving presence and became turned in on themselves and self-enclosed. This being turned in on ourselves and being self-enclosed leads to a hermeneutical groaning that has consequences for our understanding (Rom. 8:22-23). Thus, understanding also needs to be seen in the light of salvation. God the Father in principle redeems us from our hermeneutical groaning by sending us Jesus Christ and the Spirit. As the "brightness" and the "exact imprint of God's very being", "the true light, which gives light to everyone", and "the light of the world", the Son is ultimately the one who breaks open our enclosed selves and enlightens our darkened

[27] Ricoeur, however, criticized Gadamer because he "paid too little attention to how linguistic structures both limit and facilitate the interpretation" (Zimmerman, 2015:62). In addition to linguistic structures limiting and facilitating interpretation, the personal situation of the reader does the same. For instance, the significance of a text will be different for a person in a state of joy and excitement than for someone experiencing grief and sadness.

minds, enabling us to hear and understand his Father and to desire to listen to his Father and do his will (Jn. 1:9 Jn. 8:12; 9:5; Vanhoozer, 2014b:64–65). He can do all of this because, when he took on human flesh and lived among us, he lived on earth with the same filial openness and receptivity as he lived in heaven (Swain and Allen, 2013:123–124, 129; Boyer, 2009:258–259, Torrance, 2008:176–177; Vanhoozer, 2014a:15–16, 20; Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:256, 259, 269; cf. 243–271; Webster, 2006:144–145, 147, 149, 151).[28] He did this as our substitute and representative with the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death.

The Father demonstrated that he had in principle redeemed us from our hermeneutical groaning with the life and death of Jesus Christ by raising his Son from the dead as the first fruits of his new creation (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). When Christ ascended into heaven, he ascended as the resurrected and glorified Christ in whom the moral order of creation had been restored and transformed (O'Donovan, 1994:ix, xv-xviii, 13–15, 17, 19–20, 31–32, 53–67). Because we were united with Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension, our subject is objectively relocated in the risen and ascended Christ. We participate in his position in the moral order of the renewed creation (O'Donovan, 1994:22, 25, 76–97, 247–248; 2014:14, 40–41; Burger, 2018b:100–101; Vanhoozer, 2006:29). Moreover, because we participated with Christ in his death and resurrection, our old self has died and our new self has come to life in him (Rom. 6:3–11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:20–24; Col. 3:5–11). This also has implications for the healing and renewal of our understanding, for in the risen Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3; Burger, 2017e:40–41; Vanhoozer, 2006:24–29).

God the Father also in principle redeems us from our hermeneutical groaning by sending us the Spirit. The Spirit groans for the fulfilment of God's new creation purpose in the resurrected Christ and helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26; O'Donovan, 2014:1). He can do so because he is the Spirit who searches the deep things of God and who gives life (Jn. 6:63; 1 Cor. 1:10). This life includes the life of our hermeneutical renewal. The Spirit gives us this life of hermeneutical renewal by doing in us what Christ has done for us, "so that it is no longer [we] who live, but Christ who lives in [us] (Gal. 2:20). Consequently, our union with Christ in his death and resurrection in history slowly begins to take form in our lives as our old self increasingly dies and our new self increasingly comes to life. The Holy Spirit opens our enclosed selves and joins us to the risen Christ, mysteriously communicating his mindset of filial openness and responsiveness to us so that we begin to hear, listen to, understand, and do the will of

[28] The eternal, filial responsiveness of the Son to the Father implies an eternal, hypostatic subordination, but not a substantial subordination (Boyer, 2009:271). Eternal, hypostatic subordination does not lead to the Son having a different will than the Father because the Father and the Son (and Spirit) possess a common or shared will which they each hold properly and distinctively as Father and Son (and Spirit) internal to the indivisible fullness of their being (Swain and Allen, 2013:122–123, 126–131; Allen, 2013:83–89; Boyer, 2009:264–267; Muller, 2003:324–332; Vanhoozer, 2014a:19).

his heavenly Father just as he did and does. In short, in opening up our enclosed selves and joining us to the risen Christ, the Spirit enables us to subjectively share in his position in the moral order of the renewed creation (Burger, 2016:55–62; O'Donovan, 1994:22–26, 76, 101–120, 247–248). As such, he enables us to conform to that order by participating in Jesus' subjectivity so that we receive the perspective of the mind of Christ and no longer interpret and understand according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10; Burger, 2017e:41–42; Dalferth, 1988:85–88, 158–161, 212–213, 219–223; O'Donovan, 1994:22–27, 85, 87, 101–105, 109, 111–113, 140–141; 2013:93–97).[29]

While the Father in principle redeeming us from our hermeneutical groaning by opening up our enclosed self and relocating it in Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit in which we are primarily passive, the Father does use the means of faith to join us to Christ (Jn. 6:57; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:21; Burger, 2017e:46; Dalferth, 1988:219–223; O'Donovan:2014:40–41; cf. 24–69). In filial openness and dependence, faith considers the Father's address to us in Christ in his Word to be trustworthy and entrusts itself to Christ. Accordingly, in filial openness and responsiveness, faith entrusts itself to this address. Faith allows this address to make its home in it. This filial dependence and responsiveness of faith, which considers the redeeming work of God in Christ to be trustworthy and entrusts itself to Christ for redemption and which considers the Father's address to be trustworthy and which entrusts itself to this address is ultimately the filial dependence and responsiveness of the faith of Christ (cf. Allen, 2013:83–89). The more we put on Christ through the filial dependence and responsiveness of faith, the more Christ will communicate his filial dependence and responsiveness of faith to us and grant us the gift of the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit.[30]

Putting on Christ through faith so that Christ communicates his filial dependence and responsiveness of faith to us and grants us his mind or moral attitude through the Holy Spirit is a discipline or activity that needs to be nurtured (Burger, 2014:201–203; 2016:70–71; 2017a:50–51). The nurturing disciplines include celebration (Ex. 5:1; Ps. 145:7; Phil. 4:4), confession (Nu. 5:7; Ps. 32:5; Jas. 5:16), fasting (Ps. 69:10; Zech. 8:19; Mt. 6:16–18), fellowship (Ps. 133:1–3; Ac. 2:42; Rom. 12:4–17; Eph. 4:15–16; Col. 3:8–17), meditation (Ps. 1:2; Ps. 63:6; Phil 4:8), prayer (2 Ki. 19:15–19; Mt. 5:44; Ac. 2:42; Eph. 6:18), silence (Ps. 62:1, 5), solitude (Mt. 14:23), submission (Col. 3:18–24; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 4:7), worship (Ps. 99:5; Ac. 13:1–3; Heb. 12:28).[31] However, even though putting on the mind of Christ is

[29] Von Balthasar refers to Jesus as "the norm of every real and possible drama in the personal and public domains" (Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:83).
[30] Evans, would include this model of union with Christ under "pneumatological-incarnational realism" (Evans, 2015a:27–30).
[31] Books helpful in cultivating spiritual disciplines or practices include Andrews, 2016; Calhoun, 2005; Chandler, 2014; Douma, 2012; Foster, 1978; 1998; Nouwen, 1999; 2007; Smith, 2009; 2013; Troost, 2013; Warren, 2016; Willard, 1991; 2002. For a biblical theology of personal transformation, see Millar, 2021. For biblical, practical

a discipline we nurture, in this life, our understanding will always be "provisional and open to correction" (Vanhoozer, 1998:300; cf. 367–452; Burger, 2014:199–200).[32]

Receiving the mind of Christ shows us that participation in Christ should be our hermeneutical starting point in the process of interpretation and understanding in order to be able to clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice. All other hermeneutical reflection should be built upon this soteriological basis (Burger, 2014b:199–204).

### 2.3. Hermeneutics and the use of language

Earlier I wrote that ontological factors that play a role in the process of understanding and that hermeneutically guide this study include body and finitude. And I wrote that the finiteness and embodiment of our humanity is also reflected in the fact that the world is given to us already interpreted through an intricate linguistic web of words and concepts that developed historically over time. This makes the use of language important for the process of understanding.

Earlier I also mentioned that words do not get their meaning by standing for external objects or by being associated with ideas in the mind. They are tools or instruments that determine how we think about and give meaning to our life in the world from within the context of the actual situations of our everyday life. Thus, we will understand a particular sentence only within the rules of the "language game" or the context within which a word is used (Vanhoozer, 1998:208). Language can be compared to a toolbox with which we do things (Austin, 1975). According to J. L. Austin (1911-1960), we can distinguish between three different linguistic or speech acts. First, we can perform a *locutionary* act with a sentence, i.e., utter a sentence that has a certain reference or meaning, such as "John hit the ball." Second,

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approaches to spiritual formation, see (Boa, 2020). For spiritual formation in theological perspective, see Greenman and Kalantzis, 2010.

[32] The fact that understanding needs to be seen in the light of salvation and receiving the mind of Christ implies that our starting point for understanding should not be epistemology, but soteriology. For classical or strong foundationalism as an epistemological starting point for justifying knowledge claims, see Burger, 2017a:59–60; Grenz and Franke, 2001:30–31; Frame, 1987:386; Murphy, 2005:191; Plantinga, 2000:82–85; 2015:13–15; Wolterstorff, 1983:1–5; 1984:28–30; Wood, 1998:78, 84–85. For the weaknesses of classical or strong foundationalism, see Burger, 2017a:60; Frame, 1987:105, 386–391; Plantinga, 1983:59–63; 2000:93–99; 2015:15; Wolterstorff, 1984:58–62. For the eclipse of the agency of God in classical or strong foundationalism, see Bowald, 2015:1, 16–17, 19, 179; Burger, 2017a:59–63. For the church's reaction and adaption to classical foundational epistemology's demand for undisputed, self-evident, value-neutral, basic or foundational beliefs in order to be able to justify beliefs and have epistemological certainty concerning knowledge in general, see Bowald, 2015:23, 74–181; Burger, 2017a:63; Huijgen, 2019b:27, 122, 157–159; Sarot, 2011:261–262. For the use of the word "foundation" as a soteriological and ecclesiological metaphor for our salvation in Christ and for the church being the body of Christ, see Burger, 2014b:197, 204; 2017a:61–62, 65. For the relationship between seeing understanding in the light of soteriology and clearly communicating the gospel in our secular, pluralist society, see Burger, 2014b:201–203; 2017a60–64. For reading Scripture with the mind of Christ as not implying an anti-realist, postmodern perspectivism that claims that there is no truth, but only relative truths, see Burger, 2017a:64; Grenz, 1996:93, 110. For reading Scripture with the mind of Christ as not implying playing off Scripture against the perspective of the mind of Christ, see Burger, 2017a:64. For reading Scripture with the mind of Christ and a critical-realist epistemology, see Burger, 2008:7, 23; cf. Wright, N., 1992:35; Vanhoozer 1998:300–302, 322–323.

we can perform an *illocutionary* act with the same sentence, i.e., utter the sentence with the force of urging someone to hit the ball ("Hit the ball!"). Third, we perform a *perlocutionary* act with the same sentence, i.e., bringing about or achieving something with the sentence so that the person hits the ball (Austin, 1975:94–132).[33] The distinction between locution and illocution enables us to distinguish between the content of a sentence (locution) and the intent of the sentence (illocution). Thus, speech cannot be disconnected from the intent of the speaker (Vanhoozer, 1998:209).[34]

What applies to speech acts in the use of ordinary language also applies to texts. According to Paul Ricoeur, a text is "a discourse told by somebody, said by someone to someone else about something" (Ricoeur, 1976:30). What applies to human texts in general also applies to Scripture in particular. Scripture as a text is "a discourse told by somebody, said by someone to someone else about something". The focal point of this text is not primarily language as an abstract system or codes of interrelated meaning, but the concrete message that emerges when the system or code of language is used in the form of a speech act used in sentences. When Scripture says something (*locution*), it counts as an intended act (*illocution*) that is meant to have a particular effect (*perlocution*).

Scripture is addressed not only to one person as in a spoken conversation but also to all who read and engage it according to rules of the genre of its written discourse. Moreover, Scripture's frame of reference has been extended beyond the frame of its immediate situation to include the situation of any reader of the text. As such, Scripture projects "a new way of being in the world" that needs to be appropriated by those who dialogically engage it. In doing so, Scripture mediates a fusion between the horizon of the author (the world behind the text) and the reader (the world in front of the text) through which the reader comes to a new understanding of himself (Ricoeur, 1976:37).

When we read Scripture, we do not just have an encounter with the language of a text, but with God himself, the author of this language, because God uses the text as a medium through which he speaks to and addresses the readers of Scripture, intending to say something to them.[35] As the theological

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[33] Building on the insights of Austin, John Searle proposes the classification of illocutionary acts into five basic categories: representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1975:354–358). By classifying all illocutionary speech acts into these five basic categories, Searle is contending that "speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behaviour" that we need to learn and internalize (Searle, 1969:12, 16, 22, 39–42; Vanhoozer, 1998:209–210). Moreover, he is asserting that there are not "an infinite or indefinite number of language games or uses of language," as Wittgenstein claimed (Searle, 1975:369; Vanhoozer, 1998:209). Instead, "there are a rather limited number of basic things we do with language: we tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes, and we bring about changes through our utterances. Often we do more than one of these at once in the same utterance" (Searle, 1975:369; 1979:29; Vanhoozer, 1998:209).

[34] It probably is more accurate to say that instead of performing three different speech acts with a sentence, we perform one speech act, viz. we utter a locution that counts as an intended act. Strictly speaking, the perlocution is not an act of the speaker, but its effect (cf. Burger, 2017e:53).

[35] *Contra* Ricoeur who separates the author(s) of Scripture from the text of Scripture so that Scripture has a semantic autonomy of its own. I agree with Vanhoozer when he states, "On the one hand, Ricoeur detaches meaning from

interpretation of Scripture reminds us, God can do this because he is communicatively present in Scripture, desiring to draw us into an ever-deeper communion with himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. When God speaks to us through the medium of the text of Scripture, he is appropriating and accepting the words of humans as his own words (Wolterstorff, 1995:51–54; Burger, 2008:15–16).[36]

Kevin Vanhoozer anchors God's divine discourse in the immanent and economic Trinity. According to Vanhoozer, our view of Scripture is predicated upon our view of God and his providence in the history of this world (Vanhoozer, 2002:131). Accordingly, because God's being is a dynamic communicative[37] activity between the Father, Son, and Spirit and God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity reveals[38] his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity, Scripture is God's communicative action in and through which God speaks as a communicative agent addressing and engaging those who hear and read it through "a rainbow of divine communicative acts" (Vanhoozer, 2012:35; cf. 9–13, 202, 291–292; cf. Huijgen, 2019b:24–31).[39]

In this way, Vanhoozer locates Scripture in the economy of redemption and gives it a mission in this economy of redemption analogous to the missions of the Son and the Spirit in this economy of redemption. As the Son was sent on a mission, so Scripture is sent on a mission. As God's communicative action was embodied in Jesus, so his communicative action is verbalized in Scripture. As God sent Jesus to draw people into the new covenant community and have them participate in his divine life in Christ, so God sent Scripture to do the same. As God's communicative action in Jesus was accompanied by the

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authors. The written text is autonomous of its author; it sets out on a career of its own. On the other hand, he affirms the text as discourse. These two moves may, in the end, prove contradictory." He then adds, "Ricoeur's analysis of discourse tacitly appeals to the author throughout: as originator of the event, as artisan of the work, as proposer of its world. His definition of discourse, therefore, ought to be expanded in order to make these implicit appeals more explicit. Discourse, I submit, is 'something said *by someone* to someone about something.' After all, things do not get said on their own" (Vanhoozer, 1998:214, 216). In a similar vein, Vanhoozer writes that Gadamer cannot separate the intention of the text from the intention of the author (Vanhoozer, 1998:107, 142, 201–280; 2005:157).

[36] God's speech, according to Wolterstorff, cannot be reduced to revelation because when God reveals, he dispels ignorance, while when he speaks, he takes a normative stance towards us and demands things of us (Wolterstorff, 1995:23, 35). It is beyond the scope of this section to determine why God appropriated the texts he did and not others, as well as how the process of appropriation took place. For helpful insights in this regard, see Burger, 2017b:142–144.

[37] About the word "communicate", Vanhoozer writes, "To communicate (Lat. *communicare*) is to 'share' or 'make common' (Vanhoozer, 2010:203, 207, 211).

[38] When Vanhoozer writes that the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity, he means that "the economic Trinity corresponds to but does not exhaust or encompass the reality of the immanent Trinity" (Vanhoozer, 2010:203).

[39] Taking his cue from Barth who identified God the Father as the revealer, God the Son as the revelation, and God the Holy Spirit as the revealedness, Vanhoozer identifies God the Father as the locution or the agent who initiates communication, God the Son as the illocution or the content of the communication, and God the Holy Spirit as the perlocution or consequence of the communication (Vanhoozer, 2002:154–156, 291–292). Bowald indicates that there may be theological problems with this correspondence between the three persons of the Trinity and the three forms of speech acts but does not state what the problem may be (Bowald, 2015:200). Burger states that because the Father always addresses us in Christ through the Spirit, identifying the three persons of the Trinity with the three different forms of speech acts has its limitations (Burger, 2017a:40)

Spirit and requires the Spirit, so his communicative action in and through Scripture is accompanied by the Spirit and requires the Spirit to extend Christ's communicative action (Vanhoozer, 2005:60, 70–71, 228). This makes Scripture God's covenant document that contains the unified speech act of a single speaker through speech acts of different human authors that "both recount the history of God's covenant dealings with humanity and regulate God's ongoing covenantal relationship with his people" (Vanhoozer, 2005:137, cf. 68). As such, Scripture is not only a binding and authoritative witnesses to God's revelation but is itself also revelation (Vanhoozer, 2005:38, 147, 267, 276).[40]

Locating Scripture in the economy of redemption as God's covenant document through which God communicates and reveals himself, with a mission analogous to the missions of the Son and the Spirit, gives Scripture stability of meaning. It does so because meaning is "the result of communicative action, of what an author has done intending to certain words at a particular time in a specific manner". This leads to a literal or literary sense of meaning where the "literal [or literary] sense of an utterance or text is the sum total of those illocutionary acts performed by the author intentionally and with self-awareness". With regard to understanding a text, "understanding consists in recognizing illocutionary acts and their results". With regard to interpreting a text, "interpretation is the process of inferring authorial intentions and of ascribing illocutionary acts" (Vanhoozer, 2002:202-203).[41]

Yet, there is more to the meaning of a text than the literal or literary meaning. Because Scripture is God's covenant document it is not only a binding and authoritative witness to God's revelation, it also contains the unified speech act of a single speaker through speech acts of different human authors. Because the Word of God is embodied in Jesus Christ in the New Testament and because of the continuity of God's acts in his Word, later revelations can be prefigured in earlier texts. Thus, typological or figural meanings of Scripture are possible. Because of the close relationship between Christ—the incarnate Word of God, into whose image God wants to transform us—and the Scriptures as the Word of God, God can use his Word to transform us into Christlikeness. This leads to a transfigural reading of Scripture, because the more we see the glory of Christ in Scripture, the more we can be transformed in his image (Vanhoozer, 2012:795–797). In this approach, the literal or literary sense of particular texts does not change but is extended to Scripture as an organic whole.[42]

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[40] Like Wolterstorff, Vanhoozer does not reduce Scripture to revelation (Vanhoozer, 2005:45, 48).

[41] In his earlier writings, Vanhoozer champions the authorial discourse intention over against the New Criticism (1940–1970) that "lost interest in the author and instead focused on the text's formal features (i.e., the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text)" (Vanhoozer, 1998:26; cf. 82, 157). He also advocates authorial discourse intention over against postmodern deconstructionist and pragmatist philosophers like Derrida and Fish (Vanhoozer, 1998:19–22, 38–40, 48–66, 70–81, 119–132, 168–174, 181–186, 198–202, 211–215, 295–297, 317–321).

[42] Storer helpfully compares Vanhoozer and Henri de Lubac and notes that whereas Vanhoozer emphasizes God's communicative action through the literal, canonical sense of Scripture, de Lubac emphasizes God's communicative action through the spiritual sense of Scripture that illuminates the great allegory of Christ. For Vanhoozer, this implies that the meaning of a text is determinate, bound to the locutions and illocutions of a text; for de Lubac, this

However, this redemptive-historical context of Scripture not only includes the text of Scripture; it also includes the reader of Scripture for it shows how he "figures" in the story and is related to Christ in the history of redemption.[43] Accordingly, when we behold "the glory of the Lord in the face (i.e., literal sense) of the biblical text . . . the Spirit uses [this] to effect our own transfiguration 'from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:18)". In doing so, "the Spirit uses Scripture to form interpreters into active actors in the theodrama [of Scripture]" (Vanhoozer, 2012:797; Burger, 2017a:59–60).[44] Thus, the "economy of communication terminates not in the text, but in us" (Vanhoozer, 2009:74). As active actors, we complete the text when we perform it.[45]

### 2.4. Conclusion

We began this section on the nature of hermeneutics by stating that if we want to design a model that clearly communicates the gospel and properly shapes our Christian identity and practice, it will be beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of hermeneutics because the gospel needs to be understood and interpreted. I am now in a position to draw some conclusions.

First, hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation reminds us that understanding and interpreting the gospel is not the skill of obtaining epistemological certainty scientifically, but the art of realizing how our own subjectivity and context play a role in our linguistic analysis and interpretation of Scripture and in understanding how God uses Scripture and is actively present in Scripture to call us to listen and respond to his voice in obedience of faith.

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implies that the meaning of a text is infinite because Scripture mediates the infinite mystery of God revealed in Christ. Behind these two approaches to determining the meaning of a text lie two different ontologies: a communicative/covenantal ontology for Vanhoozer and a sacramental ontology for de Lubac (Storer, 2014:1–102). For a critique of a "spiritual reading" of Scripture that departs from the literal text, see Provan, 2017:199–225. For his criticism of a Christian-platonic sacramental ontology, see Provan, 2017:416–423.

[43] Burger aptly shows how the fourfold sense of reading Scripture can be reconfigured to give a fourfold perspective on how the reader is included in the theodrama of Scripture. First, he is included historically in the literal reading of Scripture. Second, he is included allegorically because he participates in the story of Jesus Christ. Third, he is included morally or tropologically because he lives his life today in the tension of the already and not yet. Fourth, he is included anagogically because he longs for the fulfillment of God's new creation in the coming kingdom of heaven (Burger, 2017a:60–61). In the light of the fact that allegorical interpretation has a history of finding fanciful different (*allos*) interpretations of a text that arbitrarily change its literary sense, I would prefer to speak of being typologically included in the theodrama of Scripture because we participate in the story of Jesus, since typology does not change the literary sense of the text but only its referent (Vanhoozer, 2012:786–787).

[44] To use the language of speech act theory, this is the perlocutionary effect of God's speech acts in Scripture. Because the perlocutionary effect refers to the effects or significance of the meaning of a speech act, it does not change the determinate meaning of the speech act. It simply shows that there is an abundance of significance or application in the meaning of Scripture for all the different readers of Scripture. Vanhoozer refers to this perlocutionary effect of the meaning of the speech act as the significance of the text distinguishing it from the meaning of the text (Vanhoozer, 1998:259–263). However, he also refers to it as the extended meaning of the text (Vanhoozer, 1998:262; cf. 2012:797).

[45] Hart links the word "performance" to "*parfournir* (to accomplish entirely, achieve, complete)" (Hart, 2007:5; Farlow, 2017:9)

Second, hermeneutics and the mind of Christ remind us that our understanding and interpretation of the gospel needs to be seen in the light of sin and salvation. With the fall into sin, our *nous* or mindset became turned in on itself and self-enclosed so that our understanding and interpretation became futile and darkened. With our salvation in Christ, God breaks open our enclosed selves by relocating our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renewing our understanding by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ, thereby enabling us to understand and interpret the gospel with the perspective of the mind of Christ.

Third, hermeneutics and language remind us that understanding and interpreting the gospel involves recognizing the rules of the "language game" or intent of God's speech acts as he communicates through the various genres of Scripture or the "rainbow of [his] communicative acts".

Understanding the nature of hermeneutics has the following implications for the communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. First, because God uses the ontological factors of time and history, body and finitude as the medium in which he is active in the process of our understanding and interpretation of the gospel, we need to realize in our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity that we do not have a God's-eye view of reality and that our understanding will always be a subjective and limited interpretation of reality.

Second, because our fallen *nous* or mindset is turned in on itself and self-enclosed, we must realize that God needs to break it open by relocating our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renewing our understanding and interpretation by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ and thereby enabling us to understand and interpret the gospel and have our Christian identity and practice shaped with the perspective of the mind of Christ. Thus, our focus in communicating the gospel and having our Christian identity and practice properly shaped should not be on gaining epistemological certainty, but on acquiring the mind of Christ through being united with Christ through faith and the Holy Spirit.

Third, because understanding and interpreting the gospel involves recognizing the rules of the "language game" or intent of God's varied speech acts, we need to realize in our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice that understanding and interpreting Scripture involves becoming good readers of Scripture.

### 3. The nature of doctrine

If we want to design a model that helps us to clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice, it is beneficial to have not only a good understanding of the nature of Scripture and the nature of hermeneutics, but also a good understanding of the nature of doctrine. To come to this good understanding, I will focus on four aspects of the nature of doctrine: doctrine as grammar, doctrine and drama, doctrine as dramatic direction, and doctrine and Christian identity and

formation of Christian practice.[46] In doing so, I will be drawing out the implications of what we concluded about the nature of Scripture and the nature of hermeneutics.

### 3.1. Doctrine as grammar

In 1984, George Lindbeck (1923–2018) wrote a book on the nature of doctrine that challenged two of the models by which the nature of doctrine is often understood because, based on his 25 years of ecumenical work and years of teaching doctrine, he considered these two models to be conceptually and practically problematic in meeting the challenges the changing situations continue to present to the church (Lindbeck, 1984:7). The first model of the nature of doctrine is the cognitive-propositional model "in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities" (Lindbeck, 1984:16). The second model of doctrine is the experiential-expressive model that "interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations" (Lindbeck, 1984:16). Because Lindbeck considers both these models to be problematic in meeting the challenges the changing situations continue to present to the church, he proposes a third model for understanding the nature of doctrine. This model is the cultural-linguistic model of doctrine.

Earlier I noted that some of those influenced by the linguistic turn in philosophy, impacted by Wittgenstein, rejected the idea that words get their meaning by standing for external objects or being associated with ideas in the mind. Instead, they emphasized that words are tools or instruments that determine how we think about and give meaning to our life in the world from within the context of the actual situations of our everyday life. Moreover, I noted that because language is part of the world we inhabit, we have no point of view outside of language from which we can evaluate the relationship between language and the world.

Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model needs to be understood within this linguistic framework, for this model emphasizes that "religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and value systems—that is, as idioms for the constructing of reality and the living of life)". If religion resembles languages and cultures, then the "function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action" (Lindbeck, 1984:18–19; Vanhoozer, 2005:10).

[46] The section on doctrine and drama deals with the relationship between doctrine and drama in more general terms. The section dealing with doctrine as dramatic direction builds on this more general relationship by showing how doctrine gives direction for fitting participation of God's drama of redemption. Moreover, the presupposition of this study is that doctrine has ontological implications.

Understanding doctrine as rules of discourse does not deny that they express propositional convictions.[47] But these are "second-order rather than first-order propositions and affirm nothing about extra-linguistic or extra-human reality." Thus, as second-order propositions they make "intrasystematic rather than ontological truth claims". Consequently, this approach "does not locate the abiding and doctrinally significant aspects of religion in propositionally formulated truths, . . . but in the story it tells and in the grammar that informs the way the story is told and used". "On this view, doctrines acquire their force from their relation to the grammar of a religion." These doctrines "illustrate correct usage rather than define it." (Lindbeck, 1984:80–81). Learning doctrine, therefore, is like learning a language through participating in its use by speaking that language (Lindbeck, 1984:81).

Understanding doctrine as second-order propositions that make intrasystematic truth claims helps us in understanding what is at stake when first-order statements of a religion change because of the challenges posed by the changing situations in which we live. According to Lindbeck, when this happens, this does not change the ontological truth claims as such, but it requires only an application of the grammar or rules of discourse of doctrine to these ontological truth claims, simply expressing them in a different way, such as Jesus being 'the Messiah', Jesus being the 'incarnate Logos', Jesus being the 'Man for Others', or Jesus being 'the humanity of God' (Lindbeck, 1984:82). "Yet, amid these shifts in Christological affirmations and in the corresponding experiences of Jesus Christ, the story of passion and resurrection and the basic rules for its use remain the same." (Lindbeck, 1984:83). Moreover, "Christians allow their cultural conditions and highly diverse affections to be molded by the set of biblical stories that stretches from creation to eschaton and culminates in Jesus' passion and resurrection." (Lindbeck, 1984:84).

This emphasis on the biblical story shaping social and ecclesial practice involves a priority of practice over theory, emphasizing a "performance interpretation" or "embodiment" of the biblical story where our secular culture does not absorb the biblical story, but the biblical story absorbs our secular culture (Lindbeck, 1996:222–225; 1984:118). However, because of the variety of perspectives within the biblical story, "the meaning ascribed to texts is underdetermined to the extent that their use in shaping life and thought is unspecified" (Lindbeck, 1997:36). Thus, to be able "to appeal to Scripture as a whole for the contemporary guidance of the church", the church needs a norm outside of Scripture "to decide *which* part of Scripture to apply in any given situation and how" (Lindbeck, 1997:39; Vanhoozer, 2005:172).

For Lindbeck, this norm lies in the church's use of the narrative (Lindbeck, 1984:80). The church's use of the biblical narrative is what makes doctrine normative (Vanhoozer, 2005:172).[48] This is

[47] There is a debate as to whether this is true for Lindbeck himself. It is beyond the scope of this study to adjudicate this debate.

[48] While for Lindbeck the church's use of the biblical narrative is what makes doctrine normative, after reading Wolterstorff work on divine discourse (1995), he was also open to authorial-discourse functioning as a norm for

how doctrine regulates the Christian faith or functions as the grammar of the language of the Christian community that illustrates its correct usage in meeting the challenges that changing situations continue to present to the church. This cultural-linguistic model of doctrine does not suffer from the conceptual and practical problems in meeting these challenges that the cognitive-propositional and emotional-expressive models of doctrine have.[49]

### 3.2. Doctrine and drama

Even though Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine has met significant criticism, the benefit of his approach is its emphasis on ecclesial practice and performance of doctrine (Vanhoozer, 2005:xiii). To do justice to this emphasis, Vanhoozer develops his alternative model to doctrine, which he aptly calls a canonical-linguistic approach. This model is meant to integrate the best of the cognitive-propositional with its emphasis on information, emotional-expressive with its emphasis on expression, and cultural-linguistic with its emphasis on rules for Christian practice (Vanhoozer, 2005:106). The essence of this model is that it considers the nature of doctrine to be dramatic or theatrical direction for fitting participation in or performance of the drama of redemption (Vanhoozer, 2005:30–33).[50]

While the concept of theatre is not mentioned very often in Scripture (e.g., Acts 19:29, 31), there are at least five reasons for comparing doctrine to drama (Vanhoozer, 2000:91–92).[51] First, because "the essence of drama is persons presenting themselves to one another, largely through language, but also through deeds", Scripture is dramatic both in its form and its content (Vanhoozer, 2014b:27; 2000:91 ).[52] Scripture's content is dramatic because Scripture is ultimately a drama of God's mission for his glory by having creation and humanity live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. God brings creation and humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of his loving presence

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doctrine (Lindbeck, 1998:40–49). However, he made no effort to show how these two norms can function side by side (Vanhoozer, 2005:167, 173, 183–184).

[49] Drawing on the criticism of others, Kevin Vanhoozer considers Lindbecks's model of doctrine to be reductionist in that it has a reductionist view of doctrine in general, a reductionist view of the cognitive-propositional model in particular, and a reductionist view of the cognitive dimension of doctrine. Moreover, he believes that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of doctrine fails to distinguish between the meaning of the biblical story and the significance of the story for the church community. Moreover, because the church community often lacks a consensus on how to apply the rules to new problems and challenges posed by the changing situations in which we live, the church community, in reality, is often unable to provide the stability for church doctrine that Lindbeck thinks his model gives it (Vanhoozer, 2005:84–88, 96–97, 121, 141; cf. McGrath, 1990:15–20; Tanner, 1997:141).

[50] Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines drama as "[Late Latin *dramat-, drama,* from Greek, deed, drama, from *dran* to do, act]" (Merriam-Webster, 1996: "drama"). Accordingly, Vanhoozer writes, "A drama is a *doing* (from *drao* = "I do")" (Vanhoozer, 2010:195). Considering the nature of doctrine to be dramatic or theatrical direction for fitting participation in or performance of the drama of redemption does not imply advocating drama in the worship service. It is simply a metaphor for describing the nature of doctrine (Vanhoozer, 2014b:242).

[51] Comparing doctrine to drama is not necessary, but expedient. Thus, this comparison has a ministerial goal (Vanhoozer, 2014:21).

[52] This means that comparing doctrine to drama is "not imposing an external model (i.e., the theater) onto Scripture". Moreover, it means that the Bible is dramatic literature that resembles a play and can be compared to a script or transcript (Vanhoozer, 2005.:244–246).

in Christ through the Spirit in the coming kingdom of God or the new heaven and new earth where God will be all in all.[53] Scripture's form is dramatic because as God sent Jesus to draw people into his loving presence and have them participate in his divine life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, so God sent Scripture to do the same. Accordingly, Scripture is "part of the drama itself" (Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:112; cf. 102–115; Vanhoozer, 2005:70–71). Scripture is God's communicative action in Christ through which he desires to draw us into an ever-deeper communion with himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Since "[t]heology's method should be appropriate to its theo-dramatic subject matter", it naturally follows that doctrine that is the result of reflection upon this theodramatic subject matter and gives direction for continuing the theodrama should also be dramatic" (Vanhoozer:38; 2000:91; 2014b:28–29; 2016:228–229).

Second, comparing doctrine with drama is a natural comparison because both doctrine and God's relationship with humanity are dialogical (Vanhoozer, 2000:91; 2014b:68–72). As a God of communicative action, God dialogues with humanity, communicating with them by way of his speech acts through which he asserts things to them, directs them, promises things to them, expresses his feelings to them, and declares things to them. In doing so, God is encouraging people to participate in his mission for his glory by having them live in his loving presence and participate in his divine life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Humanity, on its part, lives in a dialogical relationship with God by responding to him with a spirit of filial receptiveness by obediently participating in his mission for his glory.

Third, comparing doctrine with drama appeals to our imagination (Vanhoozer, 2000:91, 94; 2014b:25). While imagination, as such, is "the power of forming mental images of what is not really present", a biblically informed imagination "is the ability to form mental images of what is *really* present . . . even though it cannot be perceived empirically with the senses" (Vanhoozer, 2005:416; see also Farlow, 2017:125–166). It is "the power of synoptic vision: the ability to synthesize heterogeneous elements into a unified whole . . . [it] is the ability to discover connections" (Vanhoozer, 2005:416, 281; 2016b:23–27, 133, 165, 177, 232; 2019:56, 108). As such, the imagination is "a cognitive[54] faculty for

[53] As noted earlier, this is not Vanhoozer's unifying theme that gives coherence to the various acts of the theodrama of Scripture but mine. Vanhoozer's unifying theme is the covenantal courtroom drama.

[54] Vanhoozer explains this as follows, "By 'cognitive' I simply mean what pertains to mental rather than bodily action". Citing White, 1990:184, he adds, "To imagine something is to think of it as possibly being so" (Vanhoozer, 2016b:26). Smith believes that the imagination is fundamentally noncognitive. He writes, "Because we are affective before we are cognitive (and even while we are cognitive), visions of the good get inscribed in us by means that are commensurate with our primarily affective, imaginative nature". He adds, "Rather than being pushed by beliefs, we are pulled by a *tel*os that we desire. It's not so much that we're intellectually convinced and then muster the willpower to pursue what we ought; rather, at a precognitive level, we are attracted to a vision of the good life that has been painted for us in stories and myths, images and icons. It is not primarily our minds that are captivated but rather our imaginations that are captured . . . . " (Smith, 2009:53–54). Vanhoozer believes that understanding the imagination as fundamentally noncognitive is too sharp a dichotomy. He writes, "I am less willing to distinguish thinking from imagining so sharply or to prioritize the latter [i.e., desire] over the former [i.e., thinking]. Although I

creating meaning"[55] that, as an integrative faculty, "engages the will and emotions as well as the mind (Vanhoozer, 2014c:99; 2016b:24, 166; 2019:107; 2005:12).[56] As an organ of meaning, the biblically informed imagination functions by metaphorically explaining the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, such as saying "God is my rock" or "the LORD is my shepherd". It also functions by eschatologically seeing something that is perfectly future as being partially present, such as the statement, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).[57] In this way, the biblically informed imagination is the ability to see things as they really are in Christ (Vanhoozer, 2014c:99–101). Consequently, the theodramatic imagination is the ability to see the drama of God's mission of intratrinitarian glorification on earth as in heaven and our participation in or performance of this drama of mutual glorification as a unified drama through our union with Christ through faith.

Fourth, comparing doctrine to drama is a constant reminder that the Christian life is filled with "tension and urgency" (Vanhoozer, 2000:91; 2014b:21; Balthasar, 1988:TDI:260–261).[58] Every day, we are confronted with situations, problems, and challenges new and old that require putting on Jesus Christ. They require embodying the Christian faith so that we can effectively participate in God's mission for his

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agree that 'what we love is a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of what we think human flourishing looks like,' I think this picture, like the imagination itself, is fundamentally cognitive, not non-cognitive, as Smith maintains "(Vanhoozer, 2016b:25). Having asserted that "[f]aith is the enduring ability to imagine God, the world and ourselves in the light of the biblical story of salvation", he sums up his key claims as follows, "(1) Only the imagination—the ability to grasp meaningful patterns or conceive unified wholes out of apparently unrelated elements—enables us to 'see' God and the kingdom of God at work in the world. (2) It is faith that enables this imagination—and faith comes by *hearing*, and hearing from the word of Christ (Rom 10:17)" (Vanhoozer, 2016b:17). Vanhoozer's understanding of the imagination as primarily a cognitive faculty is corroborated by Egan. He writes, "So, the imagination is the capacity to think of things as possibly being so; it is an intentional act of mind; . . . it is not distinct from rationality but rather a capacity that greatly enriches rational thinking" (Egan, 1992:43). Regarding the imagination as being a faculty concerned with possibility, Bailey writes, "The imagination perceives possible ways of being in the world, is captivated by other possibilities, and seeks to negotiate a space for life amid possibility." He adds, "The imaginative faculty moves us forward by facilitating three things: (1) an orienting vision *for* the world, (2) an aesthetic experience *of* the world, and (3) a poetic [i.e., dramatic] participation *in* the world" (Bailey, 2020:89–90, 102; see also Gould, 2019:106–110; Ordway, 2017:15–20). For a holistic understanding of the imagination as the eyes of the heart, see Searle, 2008. For the imagination granting a more textured access to reality than reductive materialism, see Tyson, 2019:36–41.

[55] C.S. Lewis compares reason and imagination as follows: "For me, reason is the natural organ of truth, imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition". In other words, metaphors and analogies are necessary to enable us to understand the meaning of our words. (Lewis, 1969:265; cf. Vanhoozer, 2014c:94).

[56] Vanhoozer adds, "Paul perhaps has the imagination in mind when, in Ephesians 1:18, he speaks of 'having the eyes of your hearts enlightened'. The Spirit alone can open the eyes of our heart, but we then have to make the effort to keep them open by maintaining a vital relationship with the object of our heart's desire: the Lord Jesus Christ'" (Vanhoozer, 2014c:99).

[57] Vanhoozer writes, "What Lewis calls 'good pretending' is not the fictive *what if* but the eschatological *what is*. Though the naked eye can't see it, the eyes of the heart see God's transferring saints from the old age to the new, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13)" (Vanhoozer, 2014c:100; 2016b:27). On Lewis' understanding of the imagination and his sacramental view of reality, see Williams, 2021:79–189.

[58] Drama illuminates human existence, according to von Balthasar (Balthasar, TDI:1988:259–268).

glory. This means that we often need to improvise creatively in these new situations to meet these challenges wisely and deal with problems in a way that is faithful to the authorial intent of God's divine discourse in Scripture.[59]

In addition, there is the tension of living in between the times, in the already and not yet. As we saw, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ launched the fulfilment of the eschatological goal of living in God's loving presence by participating in his life in Christ through the Spirit as an already reality, but also a not yet fulfilled reality. It is the tension between the already and not yet that propels the drama of God's mission for his glory of having us live in his presence by participating in his life toward its ultimate fulfilment in a new creation where God will be all in all. This dramatic tension includes the urgency of our own daily repentance and the call to others to repent and believe because the kingdom of heaven is near. Without this faith and repentance, there will be no entrance into this coming kingdom. Comparing doctrine to drama reminds us that in this dramatic tension "the Spirit uses Scripture to form interpreters into active actors in the theodrama [of Scripture]" (Vanhoozer, 2012:797).

Fifth, comparing doctrine to drama reminds us that reading and interpreting Scripture redemptive-historically not only includes the text of Scripture, but also the reader of Scripture for it shows how he figures in the story and is related to Christ in the history of redemption. As such, doctrine as drama bridges the gap between theory and practice (Vanhoozer, 2014b:4, 20, 33–37; 2016b:226–228). This conforms to what I wrote about the perlocutionary nature of speech acts. While an illocutionary speech act refers to the rhetorical force of an utterance or what it intends to accomplish, a perlocutionary speech act refers to the effect the illocutionary speech act has in the life of a person or community.[60] Accordingly, Scripture is not only a text but also a script that regulates God's continued communicative action through us as we seek to perform the script by participating in his redemptive mission for his glory (Vanhoozer, 2005:234–236; Carter and Wells, 2014:224–228; Balthasar, 1988:TDI:20).[61] It is precisely the fact that the script of Scripture regulates the church's performance of the theodrama of Scripture that distinguishes this ecclesial performance from Lindbeck's where the goals and interests of the interpreting community rule and regulate the church's performance (Vanhoozer, 2005:165–176). Thus, there is no

[59] In addition to having Scripture directing the church to improvise creatively in new situations so that it wisely meets new challenges and deals with new problems in a way that is faithful to the authorial intent of God's divine discourse in Scripture, the church has the "classic productions" or "masterpiece theater" of the ecumenical councils and the "classic productions" or "regional theater" of the confessional theology of their own denomination and those of other denominations (Vanhoozer, 2005:449–453; 2009:174–175; 2014b:147–149). On the relevance of doctrine and creeds, see Sayers, 1995; 2004:1–79.

[60] This means that comparing doctrine to drama does justice to the propositional content of Scripture (Vanhoozer, 2014b:246–249).

[61] Faced with objections that biblical interpretation is not about performing texts, Vanhoozer clarifies: "strictly speaking, *we do not perform the text/script but the world/theodrama that the text/script presupposes, entails, and implies*" (Vanhoozer, 2009:166).

need to place authorial discourse interpretation over against performance interpretation. We bring them together and place them side-by-side (Vanhoozer, 2005:184).[62]

### 3.3. Doctrine as dramatic direction

Scripture contains God's speech acts. Doctrine reconceptualises these speech acts into "thought-acts" or "mental habits". Through these we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action (Vanhoozer, 2005:90, 377–378; 2014b:25–27, 31–32; 2019:109–113, 132–136; Vander Lugt, 2016:13–14). As such, the purpose of these thought-acts or doctrinal habits is to draw us into the theodrama of redemption so that we participate in this drama, because the drama continues in the life of the church until Jesus Christ returns (Vanhoozer, 2014b:87–89).

Understanding doctrine as reconceptualising God's speech acts in Scripture into thought-acts or mental habits that imaginatively and creatively direct our participation in or performance of the ongoing theodrama in the world today highlights the pastoral function of doctrine. Doctrine was always meant to be more about training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth (Charry, 1997; Huijgen, 2019b:70; Vanhoozer, 2005:13–14; 2019:217). Doctrine as dramatic direction or as pastoral instruction in wisdom reminds us of the catechetical instruction in the early church where catechumens were not only taught the substance of the Christian faith but were also taught how this faith directs them to participate in the reality to which the substance referred. Then, when they were baptized, they were visibly and dramatically initiated into this reality—the drama of redemption—which served as a frame of reference for the rest of their lives (Vanhoozer, 2005:103).[63]

However, dramatic direction for participating in the drama of redemption is meant to lead to fitting participation or performance. First, it must comport with the whole drama of redemption as it has been communicated to us in Scripture, the script of the theodrama, which has its dramatic centre in Jesus Christ (Vanhoozer, 2005:258–259; 2009:179–181; 2014b:145–147). God communicates this whole theodrama as a differentiated wholeness through a variety of literary forms or genres. (Vanhoozer, 2005:272–276). These genres do not just function as literary classifications, but as "literary games" or rule-governed communicative social practices that engage reality in a way that is meant to achieve certain communicative goals and responses. As such, the canonical script of Scripture is like an "atlas" that

[62] Wolterstorff places authorial discourse interpretation over against performance interpretation (1995:171–182). For the performance of Scripture, see also Lash, 2005; Young, 1990. Wells does something similar by placing improvisation over against performance. However, when we understand improvisation as the improvisation of a transcript, performance of a transcript and improvisation of a transcript go hand in hand (Vanhoozer, 2005, 335; Wells, 2004:61–65).

[63] For the importance of character formation for theatrical formation, see Stanislavski, 1948; 1949; cf. Vander Lugt, 2016:33–36, 45; Vanhoozer, 2005:369–374; 2014a:118.

contains “a collection of maps” having “the same basic orientation” but reflecting different perspectives that provide “an interpretive framework” or a way of participating in the drama of redemption (Vanhoozer, 2005:295–297; 2016b:88–90, 100–101). The cultural-linguistic model of doctrine has us participating in the language game or rule-governed life of the church community in order to understand the meaning of the biblical narrative. The canon-linguistic model of doctrine that views doctrine as dramatic direction has us participate in the literary games (genres) or rule-governed communicative social practices of the canon in order to understand the meaning of the biblical narrative and have an appropriate response to it (Vanhoozer, 2005:213–215, 282–291). If we want to participate in God’s drama of redemption in a way that fits with the whole drama as it has been communicated to us in Scripture, we need to become apprentices to these diverse canonical practices or canonical maps and learn how they inform doctrine that directs us to participate fittingly in the theodrama of Scripture.

Second, dramatic direction for fitting participating in the drama of redemption not only must demonstrate faithfulness to the canonical text; it must also demonstrate fittingness to the contemporary context. Because the canonical script is living and active, it can do that by enabling us to make wise judgments that fittingly transpose the meaning of the text into a different cultural key. Moreover, because the canonical practices of Scripture and the drama of redemption communicated in Scripture are transcultural, they are relevant for everyone in every culture (Vanhoozer, 2005:313–314, 317–318; 2014b:199–204).

Fittingly transposing the meaning of the canonical text into a different cross-cultural key will involve the ability to improvise and creatively and imaginatively extend the meaning of the text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. Jesus creatively and imaginatively extended the meaning of the Old Testament and developed the theodramatic action and incorporated himself and his ministry into the theodrama. The apostle Paul creatively and imaginatively did the same with regard to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God (Vanhoozer, 2005:335–340, 388–389; 2009:172–174; 2014b:193–194; 2019:154–155; Wells, 2004:65–66, 150–151; Vander Lugt, 2016:72–73; cf. 69–78).[64] This does not lead to a “fusion” of

[64] For the importance of theodramatic availability, openness, and receptivity for creatively and imaginatively extending the meaning of the text, see Balthasar, 1991a:GLV:106, 112–113; 1990b:TDII:288; Vander Lugt, 2016:29–60. Vander Lugt rightfully states that this openness and receptivity needs to be an openness and receptivity “to the triune God, Scripture, the church, tradition, unbelievers, and local contexts that produces readiness for theodramatic performance” (Vander Lugt, 2016:44; cf. 47). In a case study on transsexuality, Vanhoozer concludes that transsexuality does not creatively and imaginatively extend the meaning of the text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in this new situation and reincorporate it into the theodrama while being both faithful to the canonical text and fitting in the contemporary context. As such, it is “bad improvisation in which, forgetting what happened in Act One (creation), one strikes out in one’s own technologically clever (but self-determined) direction, ontologically ad-libbing, laughing all the way to the organ bank. To perform sex reassignment surgery is to encourage the worst kind of playacting: hypocrisy. The irony, as with all sin, is that in trying to find oneself, one loses oneself. Those who seek to rewrite their roles make God a bit player in a drama that exchanges the gospel for

horizons, as Gadamer would have us believe, because transposing the meaning of the text into new contexts does not entail the "merging or mixing" of cultures, but the enrichment of each culture since each culture retains its particularity (Vanhoozer, 2005:352).

Fittingly transposing the meaning of the canonical text into a different cultural key will also entail being prophetic since often there are dissimilarities between the canonical text and the contemporary situation because many people in our contemporary culture participate in a different drama than the theodrama of Scripture. Fitting transposition protests against these competing dramas that work against the theodrama of Scripture by speaking out against them and not accommodating or capitulating to them. Moreover, fitting transposition will also prophetically protest against these competing dramas by faithfully and compellingly bearing witness to the eschatological resurrection life that has broken into this world in Christ and his Spirit. In doing so, the church participates in the prophetic ministry of Christ by being his eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet in this world, people and places where heaven and earth meet (Vanhoozer, 2005:356–359).

### 3.4. Doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice

As to the narrative nature of Scripture, I wrote earlier that narrative reconfigures our identity in terms of a biographical story with meaning and purpose because it is placed within the overarching narrative of Scripture. Because doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into thought-acts or mental habits through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action, doctrine reconfigures our narrative identity in terms of these thought-acts or mental habits. This means that our Christian identity and also our Christian practice is essentially theodramatic (Balthasar, 1988:TDI:645–648; cf. 481–643; 1990b:TDII:335–346; 1993:TDIII:149–259). Consequently "who we are is ultimately defined in terms of Jesus' person and work". We are united to Christ or in Christ and we have the task to increasingly become like Christ (Vanhoozer, 2005:392; 2015:147–171).

Doctrine is a mental habit that directs us in imaginatively and creatively understanding our identity in Christ.[65] For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity directs us to remember that God's being is a dynamic missional activity of love, life, and glorification between the Father, Son, and Spirit and that God's missional activity in the economic Trinity reveals his missional activity of love, life, and glorification in the immanent Trinity so that what happens in heaven is being done on earth (Vanhoozer, 2014b:73–75, 80–82, 89–90, 110; Vanhoozer, 2014a:3, 14–17, 20–21, 26–27; Balthasar,

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the pottage of self-determination" (Vanhoozer, 2009:196–197). In a note, he adds, "To be sure, all of us have sinned and have manifested a tendency to script-write our own lives. Transsexuals are not 'worse' sinners than anyone else, though the symptoms of their self-alienation may be more conspicuous" (Vanhoozer, 2009:214).

[65] The doctrines that follow in these two paragraphs are illustrations of how these doctrines imaginatively and creatively direct us in understanding some aspect of our identity in Christ.

1993:TDIII:505–535; 1998:TDV:61–109; 111–188; 1984:GLII:74–75).[66] The doctrine of creation directs us to remember that God created this world and humanity so that it and we would be able to share in his fellowship of love with his Son through the Holy Spirit and join him in his mission for his glory by living in his loving presence and participating in his life (Balthasar, 1998:TDV:425–429; 1982:GLI:618; cf. 605–618; 1991b:87–143). The doctrine of God's election of Israel directs us to remember that God chose Israel to share in his fellowship of love with his Son through the Spirit. We are to join him in his mission for his glory by living in his loving presence and participating in life, doing what Adam and Eve did not do, namely, spreading the blessing of living in God's loving presence and sharing in his life throughout the world by dealing with the chaos and disorder caused by the fall into sin (cf. Balthasar, 1993:TDIII:192–193; cf. 178–211).[67]

But doctrine is not only a mental habit that imaginatively and creatively directs us in understanding our identity in Christ. It is also a mental habit that imaginatively and creatively directs us to increasingly become what we are in Christ. As such, our Christian identity leads to Christian practice or performance that bears witness to what is in Christ (Vanhoozer, 2014b:*passim*; 2016b:46, 180–199; von Balthasar, 1982:GLI:28–29; 1989:GLIV:399–431).[68] For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity directs us to perform what is in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothing ourselves with Christ. This is so that we act out[69] the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth just as the Father, Son and

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[66] On the location of heaven, Vanhoozer comments, "If heaven is the place where God dwells, and if God can make his dwelling on earth, then we should not think of heaven and earth as entirely distinct. We should not think of heaven as an entirely remote place that has nothing to do with life on earth. Rather, heaven names the place where God's will is joyfully done. It is the future ('the age to come') for which we hope." And "Heaven and earth are not two regions on the same space-time continuum but two different dimensions that, because God is sovereign Creator, overlap and intersect" (Vanhoozer, 2014b:91–92, 93, 176).

[67] The drama of redemption is not a tragedy "because Jesus' life is not taken from him but freely laid down (John 10:17–18). Moreover, Jesus' death loses its sting when the Father vindicates him by raising him from the dead, the first step in putting all injustice to rights (1 Cor. 15:55)". Instead, it is a divine comedy because [c]omedy often turns social conventions on their heads; indeed, such comic inversion is often the focus of the play. The divine comedy of Christ's exchanging the form of God for the form of a slave (Phil. 2:5–8) represents the greatest inversion of all. The difference between comedy and tragedy is, in the final analysis, a matter of endings: tragedy begins well but ends badly; comedy begins with a complication but ends well—in this case, with every knee in heaven and on earth bending at, and every tongue confessing, the name of Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil. 2:10–11)" (Vanhoozer, 2014b:94–95). Cf. Adams claims that Christianity is "*tragi-comic:* grim realism that wins through to a happy ending" (Adams, 2014:217). Siding with Shakespeare, von Balthasar writes about the genre of the drama, "In accordance with the Christian principle of forgiving mercy, the dramatist causes the Good to predominate without feeling it necessary to reduce the totality of world events to some all-embracing formula. Just as, in his central plays, he takes up a position beyond tragedy and comedy, because the world he portrays is a mixture of both elements, so he also rises above justice and mercy by allowing both of them to persist, partly in each other and partly in opposition to each other. But all the time he is utterly certain that the highest good is to be found in forgiveness" (Balthasar, 1994:TDIV:478; cf. 413–478).

[68] Christian practice or performance that bears witness to what is in Christ is done under the direction and enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2014b:250–251).

[69] Putting on Christ is the fundamental issue in our acting out our part in God's drama of redemption. This is not mechanical acting nor hypocritical acting, but living out our true identity in Christ through the Holy Spirit. "Christ is more than a costume, more than something that Christians hide behind. Nor is Christ an external (moral) example

Spirit did. That is, we continue to act out the perfection of their eternal life and do heaven on earth as the author of the drama, the leading actor in the drama, and the leading director in the drama do. The doctrines of Christ and salvation direct us to perform what is in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothing ourselves with him. We act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth by participating in Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king through being cruciform and victorious agents of reconciliation and renewal in this world. The doctrine of the church directs us to perform what is in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothing ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and doing heaven on earth by being an interactive theatre of the gospel, bearing witness to the reality of God in this world and embodying hope for the world (Vanhoozer, 2014b:139–206; 2019:137–143; Balthasar, 1988:TDI:119; cf. 1994:TDIV:361–423; 1998:TDV:118–141; 1989:GLIV:32–484; 507–526, 543).

Because doctrine is the thought-act or mental habit that directs us in understanding our identity in Christ and performing our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothing ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth, doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that helps us to become spiritually fit by inhabiting God's drama of redemption and training our thinking and imagination in such a way that we see this world and our task in it in eschatological terms, that is, in terms of what God has done in Christ and is doing in Christ (Vanhoozer, 2005:371–377). Accordingly, doctrine is a spiritual discipline that helps us cultivate the mind of Christ through faith so that Christ generates his own filial dependence and responsiveness of faith in us. He grants us his mind or moral attitude through the Holy Spirit so that with great theodramatic vision we know who we are and what we have to do. We know of what story we are a part, just like Christ, who, with great theodramatic vision, knew who he was and what he had to do because he knew of what story he was a part (Vanhoozer, 2009:171; 2014b:188–190; MacIntyre, 2007:216).

### 3.5. Conclusion

I began this section on the nature of doctrine by stating that if we want to design a model that clearly communicates the gospel and properly shapes our Christian identity and practice, it will be beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of doctrine because doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech

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that disciples must emulate. On the contrary, . . . disciples act out only what is first inside them. To 'put on' Christ is to acknowledge that the life of Christ has been conceived within us. In acting out Christ we are, through the Spirit, letting Christ live in and through our lives." (Vanhoozer, 2014b:136–137; cf. 115–138; 2019:217–221). The biblical concept of "imitating Christ" needs to be understood in this light (Vanhoozer: 2014b:123–125; Habets, 2010:273). For the dynamic interplay between formation as availability, openness, receptivity and performance as fitting participation in the theodrama of Scripture, see Vander Lugt, 2016:29–60.

acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. I am now in a position to draw some conclusions.

First, doctrine as grammar reminds us that doctrine is for the sake of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative.

Second, doctrine as drama reminds us that doctrine is the result of reflection upon the theodramatic nature of Scripture that appeals to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations.

Third, doctrine as dramatic direction reminds us that doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script of the theodrama and fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama.

Fourth, doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice remind us that doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that prompts us imaginatively and creatively to understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothing ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth.

Understanding doctrine as grammar, as drama, dramatic direction, and a form of spiritual formation has the following implications for the communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. First, because doctrine is for the sake of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative, our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be for the sake of the church's performance of the gospel.

Second, because doctrine is the result of reflection upon the theodramatic nature of Scripture that appeals to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations, our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should appeal to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations.

Third, because doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the canonical text of Scripture and fittingly extends the meaning of this canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama, our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should always be normed by the canonical practices of Scripture as well as creatively and imaginatively incorporate our cultural situation into the biblical narrative.

Fourth, because doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that prompts us imaginatively and creatively to understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and cloth ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth, our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should cultivate bearing witness to what is in Christ.

## 4. The nature of structure

If we want to design a model that helps us to clearly communicate the gospel and properly shape our Christian identity and practice, it is not only beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of Scripture, the nature of hermeneutics, and the nature of doctrine. It will also be beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of structure. To come to this good understanding, I will focus on the pedagogical nature of structure.

### 4.1. The pedagogical nature of structure

We saw earlier that understanding doctrine as reconceptualising God's speech acts in Scripture into thought-acts or mental habits that imaginatively and creatively direct our participation in or performance of the ongoing theodrama in the world today highlights the pastoral function of doctrine. I added that doctrine was always meant to be more about training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth.

The same can be said about the nature of the structure of a systematic theology. It organizes the various doctrines in a certain order into a coherent whole in a communicative effective or pedagogical manner for the sake of the spiritual formation of the members of the church. Until the time of the 19th century, this was always in varying degrees the case in the history of the church, even though not all organization of doctrine during that time can be characterized as systematic theology.[70] This organization of smaller parts into a coherent whole in a communicative effective or pedagogical manner can already be seen in the finalizing of the canon. Heide writes, "The process of inclusion or exclusion involved a great deal more than simply deciding the authorship or date of a particular text. It also included fitting the text into the whole of the canon so that the works might function as a unit in their witness to the gospel." He adds, "While this is something quite different from putting together a whole/complete system of doctrines in the modern (i.e., Hegelian) sense, it nevertheless demonstrates a concern for orderliness and consistency in the testimony." (Heide, 2012:14).

This pedagogical concern for orderliness and consistency between Scripture as a whole and its various parts can also be seen in the usage of the *regula fidei* or rule of faith. As I wrote earlier, this rule of faith served as a "horizon of interpretive preunderstanding" guiding the church in its interpretation of Scripture (Green, 2011:77–80; Swain, 2011:111; cf. Gadamer, 2004:289–296; 302; 311–318; 384; 464–

[70] Heide thinks this begins earlier during the time of the Enlightenment (Heide, 2012:1–7).

465). As such, it clarified the scope and limit of the message of Scripture, pointing to what God does in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit as its narrative centre. Accordingly, when confronted with Gnostics who inappropriately used Scripture by taking the various parts they used to support their teachings out of context of the whole of Scripture, Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 202) appealed to this rule of faith as a guide to correctly understanding the meaning of Scripture (Irenaeus, 1996:326–332 [I.8.1; I.9.2, 3; I.10.1–3]). "While it is true that the rule-of-faith was not a written document or a formal formulation of doctrine, it does appear to contain the seeds of doctrinal formulation and certainly serves in a manner similar to the later doctrinal formulations (e.g., the creeds) used to demarcate heresy" (Heide, 2012:23). Theological handbooks continued to manifest this pedagogical concern for orderliness and coherence for the sake of the spiritual formation of the members of the church.[71]

The structure of a systematic theology, therefore, organizes the various doctrines of Scripture into a coherent whole in a communicatively effective or pedagogical manner for the sake of the spiritual formation of the members of the church. Burger summarizes this pedagogical function of structure aptly when he writes:

> Themes are selected, these themes are put together in a certain order, relations are made between these themes . . . This is what we always do when we explain the gospel to someone else . . . in a way that communicates the message effectively. We do the same in education, but also in systematic theology . . . putting theological themes together in a certain structured way . . . We always have a certain point of view from which we select and order theological themes, choosing words and images that fit our purposes. This is done in response to certain questions, which are

[71] For the pedagogical concern for orderliness and coherence in the way Origen (185–254) systematically responded to the challenges of the heretical teachings of his time, as well as the way he suggested answers to questions that the rule of faith did not provide when members of the church read Scripture within the light of the questions their context posed, see Heide, 2012:27; Reeling Brouwer, 2009:40–42; cf. Origen, 1994:239. For Melanchthon (1497–1560) pedagogically structuring his orderly and systematic account of the Christian faith around the themes of sin, law, grace, and the gospel, see Melanchthon, 2014:7, 13; Reeling Brouwer, 2009:196. For Calvin organizing doctrine into a coherent whole in a communicative effective or pedagogical manner because doctrine is meant to spiritually form members of the church in wisdom, see Calvin, 1960:I:4). While in the first edition of the *Institutes* Calvin followed the Lutheran lead of considering the themes of sin, law, grace, and the gospel to be central to the Christian experience and thus the integrative centre of an orderly account of the Christian faith, the later editions began with the knowledge of God and made this the integrative centre of the *Institutes* (Reeling Brouwer, 2009:212–214, 216, 220). In the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin pedagogically uses the Apostles' Creed to further unpack this knowledge of God as the integrative centre of his orderly account of the Christian faith. For this reason, in book one, he focuses on the knowledge of God the creator; in book two, on the knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ; in book three, on the way in which we receive the grace in Christ; and in book four, on the external means by which God invites us into the society of Christ (Calvin, 1960:I:xi-xvii). Each of the titles of books two, three, and four contain the name "Christ" and the title of the first does not, and that too is done for pedagogical reasons. Calvin intentionally wanted his readers to realize that their knowledge of God the creator would do them no good unless faith in Christ was added to this knowledge so that their knowledge of God becomes the knowledge of the eternal Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who has become their God and Father in Jesus Christ (Calvin, 1960:II:340-342; Reeling Brouwer, 2009:227, 232). Moreover, Calvin pedagogically makes the themes of sin, law, and gospel part of the knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ and not the integrative centre of the Christian faith as a whole (Calvin, 1960:II:348-423; Reeling Brouwer, 2009:229).

being asked in our context (Burger, 2015:269).

### 4.2. Conclusion

I began this section on the nature of structure by stating that if we want to design a model that clearly communicates the gospel and properly shapes our Christian identity and practice, it will be beneficial to have a good understanding of the nature of structure. The structure of our systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. I am now in a position to draw a conclusion. The pedagogical nature of structure reminds us that a theodramatic systematic theology should be designed in such a way that it trains us more in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth.

Understanding structure as the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice has the following implication for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. Because a theodramatic systematic theology should be designed in such a way that it trains us more in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth, our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be more for the training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the question of how certain design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology can give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. To answer this question, I analyzed how the nature of Scripture, the nature of hermeneutics, the nature of doctrine, and the nature of structure shape our communication of the gospel and shape our Christian identity and practice. Based on this analysis I can conclude that a theodramatic model of systematic theology can give direction to our communication of the gospel and shape of our Christian identity and practice so that it helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture if its design includes the following characteristics.

First, because communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity and practice is about fostering communion with God by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, it should have participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre.

Second, since the gospel we communicate and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice concerns the announcement of the new creation that is present in Christ because of his victory over sin, death, and the devil and that is already breaking forth into this broken present through the Holy Spirit, it

should stress the eschatological reality of our participation in this new creation today already through faith and the Holy Spirit.

Third, since the gospel we communicate and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice involves participating in God's drama of redemption by having us live in his loving presence and participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, it should cultivate participation in or performance of this redemptive drama.

Fourth, since the gospel we communicate and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice involves Jesus seeing his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel, it should be redemptive-historical in scope.

Fifth, because in our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice we are creatures limited by time, history, body, and finitude, it needs to highlight that our understanding will always be a subjective and limited interpretation of reality.

Sixth, because the gospel we communicate and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice involve God breaking open our self-enclosed fallen mindset and relocating our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renewing our understanding and interpretation, it needs to emphasize the fundamental importance of receiving the mind of Christ for our understanding and interpretation and not epistemological certainty.

Seventh, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice involves understanding and interpreting Scripture, it needs to foster becoming good readers of Scripture.

Eighth, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice are for the sake of the church's performance of the gospel, it should promote this ecclesial performance of the gospel.

Ninth, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should appeal to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations, it should encourage this creative and imaginative improvisation.

Tenth, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should always be normed by the canonical practices of Scripture as well as creatively and imaginatively incorporate our cultural situation into the biblical narrative, it should give direction to how we can effectively communicate the gospel and shape our Christian identity in this manner.

Eleventh, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice is ultimately about bearing witness to what is in Christ, it should prompt us to imaginatively and

creatively understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothe ourselves with him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth.

Twelfth, because our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice is more for training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth, it should train us in this wisdom and life with God.

The contours of this theodramatic systematic theology will be developed in chapter six of this study. How the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture will be further developed in chapter seven of this study. I now turn to an analysis of Michael Horton's systematic theology to determine how the structural design of his systematic theology gives direction to his communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice.

# CHAPTER THREE: THE STRUCTURAL DESIGN OF MICHAEL HORTON'S SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture? The second question that arises from this overarching question is: How does the structure design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice?

To answer this question, I will first introduce Michael Horton and explain why I chose him for my study. Second, I will use Horton's doctrine of the covenant to analyze the covenant structure of his theology. Third, I will use the design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology developed in the previous chapter as a tool to continue to analyze Horton' theology. Fourth, I will outline consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Michael Horton

Michael Horton was born on May 11, 1964. He was raised in an Arminian, dispensational setting and began to embrace Reformed theology while he was in high school in part due to the profound influence of the book of Romans in his life.[1] He received his B.A. at Biola University, his M.A. at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California where he studied under Meredith Kline, and his Ph.D. from the University of Coventry and Wycliffe Hall in Oxford, where he did his doctoral research under the supervision of Alister McGrath on the Puritan Thomas Goodwin. He completed a post-doctoral research fellowship at Yale University Divinity School from 1996 to 1998. In 2016, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania. Horton is founder and editor-in-chief of the White Horse Inn, an internationally syndicated radio broadcast that is part of an organization Horton began in the late 1980s called Christians United for Reformation (CURE) with the purpose of "remind[ing] American evangelicals of their biblical roots and the rich faith and practice recovered during the Protestant Reformation that had been largely abandoned in the mad dash to

[1] Horton writes, "The year I was twelve, things began to change in my life—not all at once, but gradually. I had been involved in family devotions and Bible reading, but suddenly, the Bible sprang to life for me." He continues, "The Book of Romans began to shatter my earlier notions about reality. Every time I read from Romans I found myself searching for a deeper understanding of God's purpose and grace" (Horton, 1986:13–14).

relevance." This organization also publishes a magazine called *Modern Reformation*, of which Horton is editor-in-chief. Since 1998, Horton has been the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary. He is also an associate pastor of Christ United Reformed Church (affiliated with the United Reformed Churches in North America) in Santee, California (Hastie, 2008; Parsons, 2009; Westminster Seminary California; White Horse Inn).

### 1.2. Why Michael Horton?

Michael Horton's theology was chosen for this study for the following reasons. First, Horton is a federal theologian, even though he criticizes this theology on certain points and seeks to reformulate it. This theology uses the concept of the covenant as its integrative centre (Horton 2006a:13–14; Macleod 1993:214). By contrast, my study uses the concept of participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. Since this study seeks to investigate how outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre can incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants, Horton's theology is suitable for a comparative analysis.

Second, Horton's dogmatic studies and systematic theology clearly seek to contrast the concepts of a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology (2005a:10–16; 2005b:107–132; 2007a:153–215; 2011a:602–619). Rather than affirming God's ontological unity with the world and our ontological participation in the life of the Trinity, he sees God's unity with the world as a covenantal or ethical unity, since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of their ontological distance (Horton, 2005a:84; 2006a:10, 29). Since this study seeks to incorporate a covenant ontology within the more foundational framework of a participatory ontology, Horton's theology is suitable to help us investigate whether these two ontologies are mutually exclusive or intimately intertwined.

Third, Horton extensively puts post-Reformation federal scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in dialogue with current biblical studies, systematic theology, and philosophical theology. He does so because he considers these post-Reformation federal scholastics to be good conversation partners for his interaction with modern theology, since Protestant scholasticism knew its place in academic and ecclesiastical discourse because "for the most part [it] represents the period of refinement and systematization that ordinarily follows periods of discovery" consolidating the ideas of the Reformation "as an ecclesiastical form of life and thought" with its confessions, liturgies, and church orders (Horton, 2002c:3; 2011a:31). Horton's goal "is not to repristinate the achievements of these classic systems of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but to harvest some of [their] basic insights" to engage a dislocated, modern theology that has become increasingly fragmented and unsure of its location in academic (or even ecclesiastical) discourse as a result of the doubt and criticism in the wake of

deconstruction (Horton, 2002c:3). Moreover, he believes that a postmodern environment that has left modern foundationalism behind is open to confessional covenant theology (Horton, 2002c:4).

Since this study seeks to investigate how outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre can incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our *secular* culture, an analysis of Horton's theology should prove to be beneficial to determine whether post-Reformation federal scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century are the most fitting conversation partners to adequately engage our secular culture or whether a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants is a more fitting conversation partner.

## 2. The covenant structure of Horton's theology

Horton is a covenant theologian who uses the doctrine of the covenant as the integrative centre of his theology. To understand how this doctrine functions as the integrative centre of his theology, I will first analyze the law/gospel distinction that permeates his covenant theology. Second, I will analyze the three covenants in his theology. Third, I will analyze the covenant ontology of his covenant theology. Fourth, I will analyze the essence/energies distinction undergirding Horton's covenant theology.

### 2.1. The law-gospel distinction in Horton's covenant theology

Horton's covenant theology makes a sharp dogmatic distinction between law and gospel. "When we speak of the distinction between law and gospel," Horton explains, ". . . we are referring to different illocutionary stances that run throughout all of the Scriptures—everything in both Testaments that is in the form of either an *obligatory command* or a *saving promise* in Christ". "The law functions differently," he continues, "depending on the covenant in which it is operative. In a covenant of works (a law-covenant), law prescribes what is to be performed, personally and perfectly, on penalty of death." However, "[i]n a covenant of grace, law has no power to condemn, since its stipulations have been fulfilled (personally and perfectly) and its penalties for violation have been borne in our place by our covenant head, Jesus Christ". Even though the law is also a guide for our life of thankfulness, "it must first cut off all hope of life by our personal obedience". Thus, while law and gospel are not inherently antithetical, "with respect to the question as to how sinners may be justified before God, law and gospel are . . . antithetical principles" (Horton, 2011a:137–138, 395–396; cf. 429, 755; 1993:21, 269–270; 1994:109–114; 1996:131, 135; 1998a:203–204; 1998b:425; cf. 77–78, 225, 236, 268–272, 279, 296, 345; 2002c:136, 195; 2002a:66, 70–71, 74, 151, 155; 2002b:40–41; 2005a:102, 196; 2006a:53; 2007a:80–101,

148–152; 2009a:131, 2010a; 2011c:165, 225; 2016b:128–129; 2016d:86–89; 2018a:282–298). This sharp contrast is necessary as a demonstration of God's holiness and justice and to protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification (Horton, 2005a:133; 2006a:84; 2007a:64, 120).

### 2.2. The three covenants in Horton's covenant theology

Horton's covenant theology operates with federal theology's distinction between three covenants: the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and the covenant of redemption.[2] To discern how he understands these covenants, I will first analyze the covenant of works. Second, I will analyze the covenant of grace. Third, I will analyze the covenant of redemption.

#### 2.2.1 The covenant of works

Because law and gospel stand in antithetical dogmatic relationship to each other with regard to how we are justified, Horton also places the covenant of works in an antithetical relationship to the covenant of grace (Horton, 2006a:35–50; 2006c:49–51; 2007a:11–36; 2007b:211–221; 2011a:137–138, 418, 420, 439–440, 463, 609, 617, 716, 789; 2018a:298–310)[3]. Horton prefers to call this covenant of works a covenant of creation because God sovereignly ordered his relationship with creation and humanity covenantally by his dynamic and interactive speech, on the one hand, and the response of creation and humanity in utter dependence upon him, on the other hand (Horton, 2011a:332–334; cf. 138, 385, 415–423; 446, 541, 575; 2005a:66–76; 2006a:10).[4] This covenant of works, not added to creation, but inherent and essential to it, can be seen in the fact that Adam was created in the image of God (Horton, 2011a:332, 380–381; 2006a:10).[5] For Horton this means that Adam was created to be obedient and given dominion over creation "to lead the whole creation into God's everlasting shalom, signified and sealed by the Tree of Life" (Horton, 2011a:380–381, 384, 386–391, 397; 2005a:79–80, 94; 2008a:290–291; 2013c:15; cf. Kline, 2006:19, 33–41, 107–117). Thus, the "principle of inheritance" is the principle of law performance (Horton, 2006a:31, 88, 176; 2007a:20, 24, 97; 2013a:23–24; 2018b:140, 436). This everlasting shalom or eschatological rest will be a higher quality of life than the life God created in the Garden because what was created was not a goal for its own sake. On the contrary, "[c]reation was the stage—the 'beautiful theater'—for God's drama, not an end in itself. Life in the garden was not intended to simply go on in perpetuity but was merely the point of departure for the great march of creation behind God's vice-regent into the everlasting life of God's own Sabbath-rest" (Horton, 2011a:386; cf. 2005a:79–80; 2006a:106;

[2] For this section, I thankfully made use of Kim, 2013:116–220.
[3] For the dogmatic use of the law and gospel distinction as two ways of being saved, see Renihan, 2018:17–67. He distinguishes this dogmatic use of this distinction from the historical use as "referring to two historical time periods, the Old and the New Testaments (Renihan, 2018:19).
[4] He also prefers this term because "it is the least controversial and most broadly useful" (Horton, 2006a:83).
[5] Thus, for Horton, the covenant of works does not begin with the so-called probationary command in Gen. 2:16–17 but is inherent in the act of creation itself. Moreover, because human existence is intrinsically covenantal, being human "is ultimately a narrative-ethical rather than a metaphysical-ontological question" (Horton, 2005a:94).

2011a:403–404, 419–420, 441, 906; 2011d:122–123, 138, 145–146, 446, 452–458).[6] In leading the whole creation into God's own Sabbath rest, Adam was meant to act as the covenantal or federal head of humanity, earning not only his right to enter into this rest, but also the right for all his posterity (Horton, 2011a:415, 421, 688; 2005a:129). In other words, his obedience would be imputed to them. Conversely, also his disobedience and the effects of his disobedience would be imputed to them (Horton, 2011a:424; 2005b:xii, 53; 2011e:151). As the image of God, Adam did not need any grace to be able to obey God and fulfill his covenant commission as the covenantal head of the human race because he had been created in a state of integrity (Horton, 2011a:411, 424; 2005a:83–84, 94, 100; 2006a:54; 2006c:49; 2009b:316). Thus, because of the sharp contrast between law and grace as a reflection of God's holiness and justice, law precedes grace in the meritorious covenant of creation/works.[7] This covenant of works is still in effect today, and humanity can know the reality of this covenant because the law is written on their consciences (Horton, 2011a:138, 140–142, 387, 979; 2006a:92–93, 118, 191; 2007a:35, 88, 92, 2008a:125, 209; 2008b:261; 2009a:253; 2011c:237; 2016b:84–85, 90; 2018a:62, 295; 2018b:63, 75, 136–137).

Because law and gospel stand in a dogmatic antithetical relationship to each other with regard to how sinners are justified before God and inherit eternal life, Horton also considers the Mosaic covenant or covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai in some sense to be a covenant of works with the same principle of inheritance, viz. law performance. Drawing on the studies of G.E. Mendenhall and Meredith Kline, who both understand biblical covenants against the background of a certain phase of ancient Near Eastern international politics,[8] Horton asserts that in Scripture (e.g., Galatians 4:21–31) "two different types of covenants form distinct riverbeds cutting synchronically through the same biblical history: a purely promissory oath on God's part and a conditional suzerainty-vassal relationship on the other" (Horton, 2005a:150; cf., vii-x; 2002b:32–33; 2006a:36; cf. 35–50; 2007a:11–36, 80–101; 2011a:44–45, 151–152; 2013c:16–28).[9] Consequently, "'Law' refers to any command, from Genesis to Revelation [while] Gospel refers to any place in either testament where the promise of salvation by grace alone through faith alone is

[6] Because the goal of redemption is not simply restoration, but consummation, Horton asserts that eschatology precedes soteriology (Horton, 2005a:79–80, 220).
[7] Horton is also arguing against Barth's "grace precedes law" and Roman Catholicism's "grace perfects nature" (Horton, 2011a:336; Kim 125).
[8] For an insightful article into understanding biblical covenants against the background of a certain phase of ancient Near Eastern international politics, see Van Bekkum, 2017.
[9] Horton uses Hittite suzerainty treaties in particular as a template to help interpret biblical covenants. Thus, he writes, "It is not surprising then that God adapted the international treaty as the template for his relationship to creatures" (Horton, 2006a:29; cf. 23–34; 2007a:13; 2011a:44, 151, 424, 782–283). However, he also makes the following concession, " . . . it is probably unwise to make the law-covenant/promise-covenant too heavily dependent on formal similarities with ancient Near Eastern treaties. Regardless of parallels, only the exegesis of particular covenants in Scripture can determine its basis and terms" (Horton, 2006a:45).

found" (Horton, 2004:21; 2011a:137, 665).[10] The Sinai covenant is a conditional suzerainty law covenant as Israel's national oath of allegiance clearly illustrates. "The land was *given* to Israel," Horton writes, "but for the purpose of fulfilling its covenant vocation. Remaining in the land is therefore conditional on Israel's personal performance [as a nation] of the stipulations that the people swore at Sinai" (Horton, 2007a:15; 2006a:20; 2011a:154, 420, 440–441, 492, 539, 778; 2011a:440; 2011b:100; 2013c:15).[11] The conditional language of this law performance covenant is also clearly illustrated by the constant reminder that if Israel would do what God commanded, it would live, but if it failed to do this, it would die (e.g., Lev. 18:5; Dt. 4:1). In this sense, the Mosaic covenant is essentially a republication of the covenant of creation/works God made with Adam in the Garden (Horton, 2002c:133; 2005a:120–121, 151, 159; 2005a: xii, 120, 151, 159; 2006a:31–33, 97; 2007a:13–15, 17, 97; 2011a:420, 541, 712, 778; 2018b:57–95).[12] Because Israel failed as a nation in fulfilling its covenant vocation, Israel's history primarily has a revelatory function, viz. revealing our human sinfulness (Horton, 2011a:440–443). However, because Israelite believers were individually justified by faith, Israel's history also had a typological function, viz. prefiguring salvation in the Jesus Christ (Horton, 2006a:74; cf. Burger, 2018a:6).

### 2.2.2. The covenant of grace

While the covenant of works is a conditional covenant comparable to ancient Near Eastern suzerainty-vassal treaties where a suzerain places conditions upon a vassal, the covenant of grace is an unconditional promissory land covenant comparable to ancient Near Eastern royal grant or gift covenants where the vassals are the beneficiaries of an inheritance because of a victory of the suzerain (Horton, 2011a:537; 779). In this overarching covenant of grace, Christ, as the last Adam, fulfils the principle of personal law performance of the covenant of creation/works, which Adam failed to do, and earns the inheritance of the

[10] To fail to see and adhere to this law-gospel hermeneutic is to confuse law and gospel (Horton, 2008a:107–119, 122, 124, 157, 247, 250;2009a:35, 210;2011a:439; 2011e:159, 214, 226, 260; 2011c:227; 2016b:129; 2016d:272, 285, 2018b:94, 97). It is also to confuse what God has done and what we do, as Horton writes, "So the gospel is something we *hear* [about what God has done]; the law is something we *do* because of it (Horton, 2016d:283; 2004:21).

[11] Horton distinguishes between Old Testament believers being individually justified by faith and remaining in the land corporately as a nation through works. He writes, "So while it is true that Old Testament saints were justified by faith according to the Abrahamic promise, the theocracy itself was to be maintained and vindicated by strict adherence to the Torah" (Horton, 2006a:74–75; cf. 50; cf. Kline, 2006:109). In making this distinction, the Sinai covenant is essentially two-layered, one layer belonging to the covenant of grace and pertaining to personal salvation and the other layer belonging to the covenant of creation/works and pertaining to staying in the land as a nation. He considers the latter to be a form of corporate covenant nomism (Horton, 2007a:50; 2013c:17–18).

[12] Horton sees this continuity between the covenant of creation and the Sinai covenant confirmed in Hosea 6:7. He further sees continuity between the two covenants in the fact that both Adam and Israel had similar functions in the history of redemption. "Since Israel was a theocracy typological of the eschatological Paradise of God, its national existence was a repetition of the covenant of creation . . . " Horton writes. "Israel was called to see itself as a new theocratic garden of God's presence and as a new creation in the sense of representing humanity before God—all of this typological of the true Israel, the faithful Adam, who is also the true heavenly temple and everlasting Sabbath of God" (Horton, 2011a:419–420). For some discontinuities between the covenant of creation and the Sinai covenant, see Horton, 2006a:32–33.

eternal Sabbath rest by satisfying God's justice with his perfect obedience and sacrifice as our perfect Mediator.[13] As a result, the principle of personal law performance is replaced by the principle of faith (Horton, 2005a:220, 226–227, 239; 2006a:105; 2007a:20, 24, 97; 2018b:140, 436).This overarching covenant of grace is announced to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin as the so-called *protoevangelion* or promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15 (Horton, 2011a:45, 152–153, 2006a:68, 74, 102, 105). This promise is then formally ratified by God in history with Abraham by a unilateral oath as an unconditional royal grant covenant for him and his descendants (Horton, 2011a:778–781; 2002b:32; 2006a:40–42, 78).[14] This covenant with Abraham is then renewed with David also in the form of a unilateral, unconditional promise from God's side (Horton, 2011a:447; 2006a:44–50, 56–57, 73–76).[15] These promises made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, and David are then fulfilled in the promissory, unconditional royal grant new covenant made with all believers, God's last will or testament, promised by the prophets and inaugurated by Christ's death (Horton, 2011a:45, 153, 538, 541; 2006a:51–76).[16] When those in this covenant of grace believe in Christ, the active and passive obedience of Christ is imputed to them (Horton, 2006a:71, 76, 2007a:102–125; 2011a:587–647; 2011b:98–105; 2018b:321–366, 397–493).Because the demands of the

[13] Meredith Kline wrote, "Moreover, the parallel which Scripture tells us exists between the two Adams would require the conclusion that if the first Adam could not earn anything, neither could the second. But, if the obedience of Jesus has no meritorious value, the foundation of the gospel is gone. If Jesus' passive obedience has no merit, there has been no satisfaction made for our sins. If Jesus' active obedience has no merit, there is no righteous accomplishment to be imputed to us" (Kline, 1994; 2006:138). Horton expresses the same sentiment when he writes, "It is in the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works that God's glory, the original rectitude of humanity in creation, and the imputation of Christ's active as well as passive obedience can be maintained (Horton, 2006a:87).

[14] While from the human side, God's covenant with Abraham belongs to the royal grant type covenants; from God's side, it is a suzerain type covenant. Horton writes, "It is as if from the divine side, the covenant made with Abraham is a suzerainty treaty in which God swears unilaterally to personally perform all of the conditions and suffer all of the curses for its violation, but from the human side, the same covenant is a royal grant, an inheritance bestowed freely and in utter graciousness on the basis of the Great King's performance" (Horton, 2006a:41–42). While there are so-called conditions in this covenant of grace with Abraham, the fulfilment of these stipulations is not necessary to enjoy the salvific blessings of this covenant. For instance, concerning the stipulation of circumcision, Horton writes, "[T]his rite [of circumcision] is not treated as a condition of inheritance but as a sign and seal of the inheritance for the heir who is already entitled to it" (Horton, 2006a:42). Concerning the stipulation that Abraham offers up his son Isaac, Horton writes, "[T]his [obedience of Abraham] is not the basis of Abraham's salvation, but the means through which that blessing [i.e. the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham] comes to Abraham's heirs" (Horton, 2006a:45). Moreover, Horton considers Abraham's obedience to be "typological of Christ, who would merit by his obedience the reward of everlasting life" (Horton, 2006a:45). Thus, Abraham's obedience does not pertain to his own personal salvation (Kim, 2013:175–176).

[15] Because the Davidic covenant was made within the Sinai covenant, Horton writes, "The Sinai covenant was something each family participated in, while the covenant with David (like that with Abraham and Noah) was something they heard about—a pact that had been made in their interest but without their partnership (Horton, 2006a:48).

[16] While the new covenant is a royal grant covenant, according to Horton, it does contain conditions that need to be met for the final salvation of believers. However, these conditions are not the basis for entering into the eternal Sabbath rest, but the fruit of having received a new heart by the Holy Spirit. Thus, for Horton, the new covenant is both unconditional and conditional. It is unconditional in its essence, but conditional in its administration (Horton, 2006a:182; cf. 173–194; 2011a:575–586, 615–619, 653–680; 2011e:150–154, 156–160; 2011c:152; cf. 150–153; 2007a:148–152, 263–266; 2009:330–336). These conditions of the new covenant are the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments written on our consciences (Horton, 2006a:178).

covenant of works are also fulfilled by Christ, with the inauguration of the new covenant made with all believers the old or Sinai covenant with Israel has become obsolete (Horton, 2006a:59; 2009b:327; 2011a:152, 447, 796, 862, 948).[17]

### 2.2.3. The covenant of redemption

Horton defines the covenant of redemption as "an eternal pact between the persons of the Trinity. The Father elects a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit" (Horton, 2006:78; cf. Horton, 2005a:xi, 66; 2005b:46–48; 2006a:14, 16, 19, 35, 45, 77–82, 87–88, 134; 2007a:136–139; 2011a:45, 141, 236, 250, 303, 309, 321, 446, 486–487, 510–511, 518, 558, 575, 566, 587, 615–616, 644, 717–718, 854, 870).[18] He asserts that if we hold to the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of unconditional election, "it is unclear what objection could be raised in principle to describing this divine decree in terms of the concept of an eternal covenant between the persons of the Godhead" (Horton, 2006a:79). Moreover, he believes that a covenant of redemption is implied when in the New Testament "the Son is represented (particularly in the fourth Gospel) as having been given a people by the Father (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 4–10; Eph. 1:4–12; Heb.2:13; citing Isa. 8:18) who are called and kept by the Holy Spirit for the consummation of the new creation (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:11–13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:5)". Furthermore, he believes that a covenant of redemption is also implied by the fact that "the Son's self-giving and the Spirit's regenerative work were the execution of the Father's eternal plan". He sees this confirmed in the fact that "Christ himself is spoken of as 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8 KJV)" (Horton, 2006a:79–80). The pre-temporal intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption upholds the sovereign grace of God in bringing his elect to salvation in the history of redemption. As such, it is the basis for the temporal covenant of grace and Christ's fulfilment of the covenant of works (Horton, 2006a:105, 109, 182, 185).

## 2.3. The covenant ontology of Horton's covenant theology

As the study of reality, ontology deals with questions like, "What is reality?" and "What is the nature of the God/world relationship?" Horton describes the nature of reality and the nature of the God/world

[17] Because of Israel's typological function, God's covenant with Israel as a national entity is a passing phenomenon, an interlude or a parenthesis in God's redemptive history, that provided "the scaffolding for the building of the true and everlasting temple" (Horton, 2006a:47; 69; 2016c:320; see also 2011a:152–153, 337, 384, 420, 448, 493, 528, 537, 539, 959, 986; 2018b:81). However, aware of the danger of supercessionism, Horton does not consider the church to be a replacement of Israel, but rather the "fulfill[ment] [of] the promise God made to Abraham that in him and his seed all the nations would be blessed" (Horton, 2011a:730). He also believes that Romans 11 seems to argue for an extensive ingrafting of Jews into the church (Horton, 2011a:945–950).

[18] While the covenant of grace is based on the pretemporal intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption for the sake of the salvation of the elect, this covenant of grace is made with believers and their children. "Not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect: the Israel below is a larger class than the Israel above" (Horton, 2006a:182). However, "[i]t is possible to be in the covenant externally but not to be actually united to Christ through faith" (Horton, 2006a:185).

relationship as a covenant ontology. To discern how Horton understands this covenant ontology, I will first analyze the philosophical context of his ontology. Second, I will analyze the heart of this ontology.

### 2.3.1. The philosophical context of Horton's covenant ontology

Drawing on Paul Tillich's (1886–1965) typology of ontology and adding his own, Horton distinguishes between three ontological grand narratives: "overcoming estrangement" (hyper-immanence), "the stranger we never meet" (hyper-transcendence), and "meeting a stranger". The first ontological narrative, represented, e.g., in Platonism, Gnosticism, mysticism, and process theologies, tends to erase "the infinite qualitative distinction between God and creatures". While its starting point lies in a strong dualism between God and the world, "the goal is to reestablish the unity of all reality". Rather than God entering into the world he has made, "all of reality *emanates* from this divine principle of unity like the rays of the sun".[19] Consequently, redemption is essentially a form of inner self-actualization or overcoming estrangement by ontological participation in the life of the divine through the spark of divinity within you (Horton, 2011a:36; cf. 36–39; 2005a:4–6; 2005b:110–112; 2007a:153–170).

The second ontological narrative, represented by atheism and deism, either makes God a projection of our psychological needs or someone who is not actively involved in history or nature. Accordingly, God, either existent or non-existent, is the stranger we never meet. Both ontological grand narratives share a univocal understanding of being, i.e., "there is only one kind of reality or existence". In the pantheistic version of the "overcoming estrangement model", the spiritual world is real while the physical world is "a weak projection of an eternal (real) world". In the atheistic version of "the stranger we never meet", the physical world is real while the spiritual world is a weak projection originating from the needy physical world. Neither ontological grand narrative allows for a personal God "who transcends creaturely reality yet enters freely into relationship with it"; nor does either ontological grand narrative allow for "the personal intervention of God in nature and history". As such, both ontologies protect and affirm human autonomy. In doing so, they avoid God as the stranger (Horton, 2011a:40; cf. 39–41; 2005a:6–9; 2005b:112–115).

In contrast to these two deficient ontological grand narratives, Horton places his third ontological grand narrative of "meeting a stranger". God is a stranger in a positive and negative sense. In a positive sense, God is a stranger because, as a God who is holy, he "is *qualitatively* distinct from creation—not just more than, but different from, his creatures". As a result of this ontological difference, creation is God's good gift to humanity that is dependent upon him, while God is and remains sovereign over his creation. In a negative sense, God is a stranger because he is *ethically* distinct from his creation. This ethical difference is the result of humanity's fall into sin. Consequently, God is "morally *opposed* to us"

[19] Unless otherwise noted, all italics in citations are by the author of the citation.

and we are estranged from him. Redemption, therefore, is not achieved through inner self-actualization by human ascent, but through the descent of the Word of God in Christ Jesus. The ontological implications of Horton's grand narrative of "meeting a stranger" are that the God-world relationship is not framed as an ontological union or participation in the being of God, i.e., an ontology of mutual indwelling, but as a covenantal union or having a legal/ethical union with God by virtue of the covenant. This covenantal union is not something added to creation, but intrinsic to our being created in the image of God (cf. Kline, 2006:14–21). Horton refers to this legal union and ethical union as a covenantal ontology,[20] distinguishing it from a participatory ontology (Horton, 2011a:42; cf. 41–42, 384; 2005a:10–16, 84; 2005b:115–123; 2007a:3, 7, 153–156, 181–215; cf. 216–310; 2017c:29, 34).[21]

### 2.3.2. The heart of Horton's covenant ontology

The heart of Horton's covenantal ontology is the doctrine of justification (Horton, 2007a:1–2, 139, 143, 147, 198–199). Desiring to secure the *extra nos* character of our justification and to combat the charge that the Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification opens it to the charge of a legal fiction, i.e., that a believer is declared to be righteous when he in fact has not undergone a righteous transformation, Horton believes that his revised understanding of the doctrine of justification as the heart of his ontology can better secure the *extra nos* character of our justification and deal with this charge of legal fiction than the classical understanding of this doctrine, without sacrificing Reformed insights or being influenced by medieval participatory metaphysics, such as the classic understanding of regeneration preceding faith through the infusion of a new habit or the principle of new life (Horton, 2011a:573, 595, 599, 606, 608–612, 669; 708; 2011d:286; 2007a:146–147, 176, 191–198, 216–242, 256–263).[22] In order to make his covenantal ontology achieve these apologetic purposes, Horton makes God's judicial verdict of justification, announced[23] in the effectual call,[24] the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis* or

[20] McCormack describes covenantal ontology as "an ontology of correspondence", i.e. the correspondence of our will to the will or intention of God (McCormack, 2004:115; cf. Horton, 2011a:90, 161, 389, 510, 674, 771).
[21] Horton does speak of a covenantal form of participation when he writes, "Just as the covenant of creation included every person 'in Adam,' and the covenant of grace includes all of the elect 'in Christ,' so also all things hold together (participate) in Christ, yet in different ways." He adds, "The proper antithesis is therefore not between participation and covenant, but between different accounts of both" (Horton, 2007a:164–165; cf. 129–152, 168, 200).
[22] Horton asserts that the infusion of habits involves the infusion of a divine substance leading to the fusion of the divine and the creature (2007a:111; 2011a:393, 764). Because the terminology of infused habits opens the door for a non-forensic source of justification that obscures the *extra nos* basis of justification, he believes the terminology of infused habits should be abandoned (2007a:197). Replacing a causal ontology with a communicative ontology would enable this to take place (Horton, 2007a:217).
[23] About the semantic content of the effectual call, Horton writes, "The Word that is spoken in effectual calling is not only a discourse about justification but *is* God's announcement of the justification of the sinner, received by faith" (Horton, 2007a:203).
[24] Horton understands effectual calling as the "Spirit's sovereign work of raising those who are spiritually dead to life in Christ through the announcement of the gospel" (Horton, 2011a:572).

order of salvation[25] (Horton, 2011a:588, 597, 610–612, 710, 708; 2007a:129, 138–139, 143, 147–148, 198, 201, 203, 216–217, 247, 264; 2013c:182–187; 2018a:209, 219).[26] Horton illustrates this as follows: "I am suggesting that we view all the items in the Pauline *ordo* as constituting one train, running on the same track, with justification as the engine that pulls adoption, new birth, sanctification, and glorification in tow". He adds, "This means that we never leave the forensic domain even when we are addressing other topics in the *ordo* besides justification proper. Although there is more to the new birth, sanctification, and glorification than the forensic, all of it is forensically charged" (Horton, 2011a:708; cf. 575, 597, 610–612, 677, 706, 710; 2007a:139, 143, 147–148, 198, 216, 292–293; 2012:91, 93; 2013a:184; 2018a:273; 2018b:361, 470–471, 493).[27]

Drawing on the work of Kevin Vanhoozer and speech act theory, Horton asserts that this judicial verdict of justification, announced in the effectual call, occurs when the Father speaks in the Son through the Spirit or God's illocutionary act of justification is combined with the perluctionary work of the Holy Spirit issuing forth into repentance and faith. In other words, God's declaration "creates the reality it declares" and is constitutive of what it declares (Horton, 2007a:135, 138, 198, 201–203, 220–230, 240; 2011a:610–611, 645, 649, 892; 2018b:361).[28] The charge of legal fiction no longer applies, then, because God's declaration of righteousness is a judicial verdict that generates transformative change although the transformative change is not part of God's declaration of righteousness (Horton, 2007a:139, 189–204, 243–246, 250; 2011a:620, 646; cf. 620–647; 2018b:361).[29] Moreover, Horton has also eliminated the

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[25] Horton defines the *ordo salutis* as follows: "The Latin phrase *ordo salutis* means 'the order of salvation' and refers to how the Spirit applies the benefits of Christ to individuals" (Horton, 2011a:312, 535, 536, 591, 998).
[26] A few times, Horton makes union with Christ precede justification (Horton, 2011a:587, 622; 2018b:470–471).
[27] Horton believes that there is a "schizophrenic tendency" in Protestant soteriology with its use of a forensic ontology in answering the problem of our guilt and a participatory ontology (e.g., infused habits) in answering the problem of our corruption. Thus, he writes, "If the tendency in Roman Catholicism and Orthodox theologies is to confuse justification and sanctification, the tendency in Protestant theologies is sometimes to treat these two events more like two trains running on parallel tracks." "In the latter case," Horton continues, "justification is seen as the answer to one soteriological problem (viz., guilt), and inner renewal (regeneration and sanctification) is seen as the answer to a different one (viz., corruption)." He concludes, "I have already indicated why I think this problem is motivated by a schizophrenic tendency to allow a thoroughgoing forensicism with respect to justification while presupposing a different ontology as the basis for other elements in the *ordo*" (Horton, 2007a:301–302; cf. 216). He articulates the same concern when he writes, "*The danger of the second move* [i.e. distinguishing regeneration from effectual calling through the Word], *however, was that justification and regeneration/sanctification were given different ontological fields of discourse that allowed them to drift apart like tectonic plates*" (Horton, 2007a:236).
[28] The expression is from Bruce McCormack (McCormack, 2004:107). Horton writes, "[J]ustification is not simply one doctrine among others; it is the Word that creates a living union between Christ, the believer, and the communion of saints" (Horton, 2007a:138)
[29] To illustrate the difference between primary and secondary causality, Horton writes, "In effectual calling, the Spirit grants the faith to receive Christ for justification and for sanctification, but analogous to God's performative utterance in creation, it is the forensic verdict ('Let there be!') that evokes the inner renewal that yields the fruit of the Spirit ('Let the earth bring forth . . . ')" (Horton, 2012:91; cf. 2007a:203; 2011a:159, 575, 621, 662–663; 2014c:127–149). According to Horton, "[j]ustification is the fiat declaration, 'Let there be righteousness!'" (Horton, 2011a:621). For God's declaration of justification being a speech act analogous to the act of creation *ex nihilo*, see Horton, 2007a:2003; 2011a:326, 611, 621, 645, 753.

concept of the infusion of habits because it is no longer necessary. In addition, he has made regeneration and effectual calling synonymous (Horton, 2007a:197; cf. 195–204; 240–242; cf. 232–239; 2011a:610; cf. 608–612, 669–670; 573; cf. 572–575). Furthermore, because God's judicial verdict of justification is the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis* or order of salvation, Horton makes a distinction between what he considers the 'gospel' and the 'effects' of the gospel.[30]

Horton wants to make his covenantal ontology a rival paradigm to a participatory ontology. "Covenant is not something added to a metaphysics and ontology derived from some other source", he writes, "but generates a worldview of its own. Covenant is not simply a theme, but an ontological paradigm in its own right" (Horton, 2007a:3; cf. 153–155, 160–165, 180; 2011a:777; Michelson, 2018:408; cf. 391, 395). As a rival paradigm, it not only deals better with the charge that the doctrine of justification by faith is a legal fiction, but it also protects the church against the risk of pantheistic and panentheistic mysticism associated with the ontological participatory model (Horton, 2011a:36–39, 57, 102, 233, 237, 612, 615, 690–692; 2011d:30, 330; 2005a:11, 27; 2005b:129, 131–132; 2007a:214).

### 2.4. The essence-energies distinction undergirding Horton's covenant theology

Eastern Orthodox theology is well known for its distinction between the essence of God and the energies of God.[31] This distinction is considered to the most important distinguishing feature that distinguishes Eastern theology from Western theology (Bradshaw, 2004:xi). While some early church fathers used this distinction, it "received its classical formulation in the works of Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) (Bintsarovskyi, 2019:14). "Seeking to give a theological account of the experience of monks who claimed to contemplate the uncreated divine light, Gregory postulated a distinction between God's essence, which always remains inaccessible and imparticipable, and God's uncreated energies, in which the saints do participate", Bintsarovskyi explains (2019:14–15). Distinguished from the essence of God, these uncreated energies are considered to be the "things around God" through which he manifests himself in this world and which can be apprehended by us.[32]

Horton regrets that Western theology has usually used only two categories to describe reality. Either something belongs to the category of God's essence or it belongs to the category of creation. Eastern theology, however, has the third category of God's energies, which Horton, following Palamas, compares to the rays of the sun. He writes, "The sun's rays are not the sun itself, but they are also not the

[30] Horton writes, "The Gospel produces new life, new experiences, and a new obedience, but too often we confuse the fruit or effects with the Gospel itself. Nothing that happens within us is, properly speaking, 'Gospel,' but it is the Gospel's effect" (Horton, 2014b; 2016d:76–79). In addition to "properly speaking", he also uses the distinction of the broader and narrower sense of the gospel (Horton, 2016d:77–79).
[31] For this section, I made thankful use of Bintsarovskyi, 2019:13–35.
[32] For a genealogy of the usage of the term ἐνέργειαν in Greek philosophy and how the Christian tradition received and interpreted it, see Bradshaw, 2004; 2013:27–49.

ground that is warmed by the sun. Rather, they are the shining forth or effulgence of the sun." He adds, "Similarly, God's energies (*energeia*) are neither God's essence (*ousia*) nor a created effect but are God's knowledge, power, and grace directed toward creatures" (Horton, 2011a:130; cf. 52, 228, 237, 613, 690, 817; 2007a:212, 268, 270; 2008c:137).[33] Horton considers this distinction to be comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about the fact that we know God not in his essence, but in his works. Thus, he writes, "God's works are neither God's essence nor merely the created effect of his action, but God's effective agency, . . . [or] God's workings. God's act of creating the world by his Word is neither an emanation of God's being nor itself part of creation. Rather, it is God's activity" (Horton, 2011a:130, 574, 690; 2005a:117; 2007a:212, 231, 274–275). Horton also considers the distinction to be comparable to the Reformed epistemological distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology and the contrast the Reformers made between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. "Eastern Orthodoxy", Horton writes, "has appealed to Exodus 33 for its distinction between the revelation of God in his essence (inaccessible glory) and in his energies (gracious acts), just as the Reformers did for their contrast between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross, and as their heirs did for the further distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology" (Horton, 2011a:131).[34] Because of these and other resemblances between Eastern Orthodox and Reformed theology—even though significant differences remain—Horton believes that the essence-energies distinction is where the two theological traditions intersect (Horton, 2011a:613; 2007a:212, 214).[35] Thus, Horton claims that Reformed theology, while not explicitly mentioning it, presupposes this distinction. Accordingly, he considers this distinction to be indispensable to Reformed theology, as it forms "the necessary metaphysical underpinning of many ideas and doctrines" (Bintsarovskyi, 2019:31; cf. Horton, 2011a:612).

### 2.5. Conclusion

Using Horton's doctrine of the covenant to analyze the covenant structure of his theology, we have seen that, in order to demonstrate God's holiness and to protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification, Horton's covenant theology considers law and gospel to be inherently antithetical with regard to how we are justified and inherit eternal life. We also saw that Horton's covenant theology operates with federal theology's distinction between three covenants: the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and the

[33] In addition to speaking about God's essence, Horton speaks about God's "hidden essence" (Horton, 2011a:45, 52, 111, 123, 131, 234, 363, 373), God's "being" (Horton, 2011a:43, 54, 130, 225, 234, 237, 241, 252, 256, 327, 340, 604, 690, 978, 991), and God's "nature" (Horton, 2011a:241, 331, 323, 505). He uses these expressions interchangeably.

[34] Horton implies that this is what Calvin also meant when he wrote: "Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us *not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us*: so that this recognition of him consists *more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation*" (Horton, 2011a:50, emphasis added by Horton; cf. 50–52).

[35] Horton outlines areas of agreement and disagreement with the Orthodox tradition in 2004:115–143. However, as the title of his contribution to this book suggests, he ultimately considers the traditions to be incompatible.

covenant of redemption. Because law and gospel stand in antithetical relationship to each other in connection with justification, Horton also places the covenant of works in an antithetical relationship to the covenant of grace, so that God's fundamental relationship with Adam was a relationship of earning the right for himself and his posterity to enter eternal life. Because law and gospel stand in antithetical relationship to each other with regard to how sinners are justified before God and inherit eternal life, Horton also considers the Mosaic covenant or covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai in some sense to be a covenant of works.

Antithetical to this covenant of creation or works with regard to how we are justified and earn eternal life is the covenant of grace. This covenant is an unconditional covenant that promises eternal life for all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. This overarching covenant of grace holds all the other individual gracious covenants together and continues to advance towards its fulfilment in the new creation. This covenant of grace is undergirded by the intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the sake of the salvation of the elect, which upholds the sovereign grace of God in bringing his elect to salvation in the history of redemption. As such, it is the basis for the covenant of grace and Christ's fulfilment of the covenant of works.

Moreover, we saw that Horton considers the fundamental ontological relationship of God with humanity to be a legal/ethical union with God. Horton describes his covenant ontology as "meeting a stranger". He contrasts his model with two other ontological models, viz. the hyper-immanent Platonic/mystical model of "overcoming estrangement" and the hyper-transcendent atheistic/deistic model of "the stranger we never meet".

The heart of this covenant ontology is the doctrine of justification. Horton views this as the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis* or order of salvation, in order to be better prepared to deal with the charge of justification being a legal fiction. Thus, he avoids being influenced by medieval participatory metaphysics, such as the infusion of a new habit, and protects the church against the risk of pantheistic and panentheistic mysticism associated with a participatory ontological paradigm.

Furthermore, we saw that Horton considers the Greek Orthodox distinction between the essence and energies of God to be implied by Reformed theology with its distinctions between not knowing God in his essence but knowing him in his works, archetype and ectype theology, a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. Thus, he metaphysically undergirds his covenant theology with this distinction between the essence and energies of God.

**3. The design features of my theodramatic model of systematic theology and Horton's theology**

In the previous chapter, I analyzed four design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology. In this model, I analyzed how the nature of Scripture shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice because Scripture contains the faith we communicate and shapes our

Christian identity and practice. I also analyzed how the nature of hermeneutics shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity, because the gospel needs to be understood and interpreted. Moreover, I analyzed how the nature of doctrine shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice, because doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits," through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. Furthermore, I analyzed how the nature of structure shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice because the structure of systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and shaping our Christian identity and practice. I concluded the chapter with an outline of the design of a theodramatic model of systematic theology that can give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in such a way that it helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture.

I will use the design features of this model as a tool to continue to analyze the design of Horton's theology.[36] First, I will focus on the nature of Scripture and Horton's theology. Second, I will focus on the nature of hermeneutics and Horton's theology. Third, I will focus on the nature of doctrine and Horton's theology. Fourth, I will focus on the nature of structure and Horton's theology.

### 3.1. The nature of Scripture and Horton's theology

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the nature of Scripture as being narrative, redemptive-historical, theodramatic, and theological. Thus, I first will analyze Horton's theology through the lens of this fourfold nature of Scripture.

#### 3.1.1. The narrative nature of Scripture and Horton's theology

The narrative approach to reading Scripture reminds us that while Scripture contains many different books with separate narratives, these different books with their separate narratives are blended into a rich intertextual whole to articulate a theological worldview that runs through Scripture. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology that can give direction to our communication of the gospel and shape our Christian identity and practice, this theological worldview should stress the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of this new creation today already through faith and the Holy Spirit.

Horton also has a narrative approach to reading Scripture, for he considers that Christianity is "the greatest story ever told" that "interprets all other stories" because it has its origin, not in philosophy,

[36] This is not an exercise in *eisegesis* where I find in his work what I first put into it, but a true exercise in *exegesis* where I analyze his work using these four aspects as an analytical tool.

but revelation (14, 17).[37] To help us understand Horton's narrative approach to reading Scripture, I will first analyze the narrative plot that guides his reading of Scripture. Second, I will analyze the centre and telos of this narrative plot.

#### 3.1.1.1. The narrative plot of Horton's theology

The narrative plot that guides Horton's reading of Scripture is the worldview story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (Horton, 2006a:13; 2009a:171; 2010a:35; 2011a:17, 59; 2011c:169). God freely created a world as a cosmic temple through his personal, living speech that reflects his glory. He created human beings in his image as communicative beings who can respond to his living speech and live in a covenant of works with him as his kings, priests, and prophets, reflecting his glory as they bear witness to him and his works. God gave them the task to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth and lead creation into the eschatological reward of God's Sabbath (2005a:66–119; 2011a:331–334, 379–381, 396–406).

Humanity, however, fell into sin by following Satan's advice instead of listening to God. Because Adam was the head of the human race and represented all of humanity and creation, in him the whole human race sinned and suffered the consequences of his sin. Yet, God promised a victory over Satan so that history could continue to move to the eternal Sabbath rest through the outworking of the covenant of grace with his covenants with Abraham, Israel, David, and the promise of a new covenant (Horton, 2005a:121–155; 2011a:408–416, 423–434, 437–439–442, 447, 541–542).

When Israel failed to reflect God's glory by bearing witness to him and his works as kings, priests, and prophets, God sent his own Son into the world to reflect his glory by bearing witness to him and his works as prophet, priest, and king and to inaugurate the new covenant. As the head and mediator of the covenant of grace, Christ inaugurated the new covenant by fulfilling the conditions of the covenant of works for elect sinners with his active obedience through perfectly fulfilling the obedience of the law required in this covenant, while with his passive obedience Christ dealt with the sanction of the covenant of works by bearing the curse of the law and satisfying God's justice for them. Moreover, he defeated Satan and his demonic powers, fulfilling the promise made in the covenant of grace (Horton, 2005a:159–270; 2011a:446–467, 483–520).

When Christ arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and poured out his Spirit, he began his eschatological reign of grace as prophet, priest, and king in the new covenant through applying the benefits of salvation—justification, adoption, sanctification—to his new covenant church through his

[37] Horton speaks of the Christian story being a meganarrative, not a metanarrative, not only because its origin is in revelation and not philosophy, but also because "metanarratives give rise to ideologies, which claim the world's allegiance even, if necessary, through violence. The heart of the Christian narrative, however, is the gospel—the good news concerning God's saving love and mercy in Jesus Christ" (Horton, 2011a:17).

Word and Spirit by effectually calling people and uniting them through faith to himself. (Horton, 2006a:551–687).

When Christ returns in glory, he will reign in glory by judging the living and the dead. Moreover, he will usher in the eternal Sabbath rest in the kingdom of God where humanity and creation will be elevated by being glorified or transfigured[38] into the likeness of the resurrected and glorified Christ (Horton, 2005a:242–270; 2007a:267–307; 2011a:984–990; 2017b:284–288).

#### 3.1.1.2. The centre and telos of Horton's narrative plot

The centre and telos of Horton's narrative plot is the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ breaking forth from the age to come into the present. Becoming a partaker of the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ is the goal of creation and thus the telos of the biblical narrative. Horton's understanding of the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ and the goal of creation is connected to his understanding of Adam being created in the image of God.

When I discussed Horton's understanding of the covenant works within his covenant ontology, I mentioned that, for Horton, Adam being created in the image of God means that Adam was created to be obedient and given dominion over creation "to lead the whole creation into God's everlasting shalom, signified and sealed by the Tree of Life" (Horton, 2011a:380–381). Moreover, I noted that this everlasting shalom or eschatological rest will be a higher quality of life than the life God created in the Garden because what was created was not a goal for its own sake. On the contrary, "Life in the garden was not intended to simply go on in perpetuity but was merely the point of departure for the great march of creation behind God's vice-regent into the everlasting life of God's own Sabbath-rest" (Horton, 2011a:386).

As the second Adam, Christ "undoes the curse of the first Adam and fulfills the *covenant of creation* for his elect, thereby winning the right to be not only the risen head but the resurrection-life-giving Lord" (Horton, 2011a:446). It is especially his resurrection that validates that the eschatological life of the future has broken into the historical present (Horton, 2002c:116). Christ's ascension into heaven grounds the significance of eschatology by reminding us that we are now already seated with Christ in the heavenly places while we do not yet see him face to face. It grounds the significance of the pneumatology by reminding us that the Spirit is the one who now mediates the presence of Christ through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Finally, it grounds the significance of ecclesiology by reminding us that the church is a pilgrim community on its way to the new heaven and new earth (Horton, 2011a:534–535). Because the goal of redemption is not simply restoration, but consummation, Horton asserts that eschatology precedes soteriology (Horton, 2005a:79–80, 220).

[38] Following others, Horton refers to this transfiguration as deification or *theosis* (2007a:267–269, 272, 284, 302, 306, 308; 2017b:285–286; 2018a:49, 52, 208, 250, 364; 2018b:488–493).

The eschatological resurrection life of the future that is breaking into the historical present is also tied to Horton's understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God. He sees the roots of this concept in the Old Testament where God is depicted as the king of all the earth and the people of Israel are portrayed as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Horton, 2011a:539). The concept of the kingdom of God, according to Horton, "issues chiefly in remission of sins, the new creation, and the new relationship to God (fatherhood-sons), and these are all thoroughly eschatological, not abstract and static concepts" (Horton, 2011a:538).

When Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom, he was announcing the arrival of the new covenant (Horton, 2011a:539, 542). Unlike the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, which was a reign of law, the kingdom of God in the New Testament is a reign of grace in which Christ applies the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through the Spirit creating a new covenant community or church. He applies these benefits of his redemptive work in his threefold office as prophet, priest, and king. As prophet, he confronts his people with the law and the gospel, as priest, he intercedes for his people, and as king, he rules all things through his Word and Spirit. In this new covenant community or church that Christ creates in this manner, the kingdom of God is already truly present, but not yet fully present in its consummated form (Horton, 2011a:235, 237, 541; 529–547; cf. 551–903; 2011d:221–228; 2005a:264–270; 2008c:1–13; 1998a:129–144; 2002a:61–79; 2016b:68–71).

Horton distinguishes between the way Christ rules in the church and the way he does in the world. He bases this distinction on the difference between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission, as well as well as the antithetical relationship between law and gospel with regard to how sinners are justified before God and inherit eternal life. The cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and exercise dominion over the earth through the cultural activity of pursuing one's vocation is the law that was given to all humanity in the covenant of creation and is enabled by God's general revelation or natural law through his common grace. The Great Commission or cultic mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and exercise dominion over the earth was given in the covenant of grace to the church after humanity's fall into sin with God's gospel promise of a Saviour and is enabled through special grace. The church fulfills this commission by announcing the fulfilment of this promise through God gathering a church for himself from all the nations of the world by the Word and the sacraments and, in this way, spreading the kingdom or rule of God (Horton, 2006a:111–126; 2011a:712–715, 719, 728; 2009a:161–165; 2011c:62–64).

### 3.1.2. The redemptive-historical nature of Scripture and Horton's theology

We saw that the redemptive-historical approach to reading Scripture reminds us that because Jesus saw his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel, the redemptive-historical unity of Scripture lies in the progressive unfolding of the history of redemption in Christ. This means that, since

Jesus saw his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's history with Israel, we need to realize in our communication of the gospel that we can read Scripture backwards as Jesus did and, by implication, also forward as pointing to Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil through his death and resurrection.

Horton also has a redemptive-historical approach to reading Scripture, for he considers that the redemptive-historical unity of Scripture lies in the progressive unfolding of the history of redemption in Christ. To help us discern Horton's understanding of the redemptive-historical nature of Scripture, I will analyze his redemptive-historical method of biblical interpretation.

#### 3.1.2.1 Horton's redemptive-historical method of biblical interpretation

Horton's covenant ontology undergirded by his distinction between God's essence and God's energies leads him to adopt the redemptive-historical method of biblical interpretation. By redemptive-historical Horton means "the organic unfolding of the divine plan in its execution through word (announcement), act (accomplishment), and word (interpretation)". This makes revelation "the servant of redemption" as it "exegetes divine action and human response in actual historical contexts". Horton also considers his redemptive-historical method of biblical interpretation to be eschatological. By eschatological Horton means that the character of redemptive history does not progress in "a straight line of horizontal development . . . [but] unfolds through apocalyptic 'irruptions' in the fabric of ordinary history, particularly (though not exclusively) connected with the people of Israel". Thus, "God's work progresses on the vertical as well as the horizontal plane". Consequently, he refers to his method of biblical interpretation as the redemptive-historical method of biblical interpretation (Horton, 2002c:5–6).

Reading and interpreting Scripture in a redemptive-historical/eschatological manner is a constant reminder that theology should always be a theology of the cross, i.e., the eschatological new creational goal of the kingdom of God is not yet fully realized, and not a theology of glory, i.e., a fully realized eschatology. Moreover, it assumes that revelation primarily comes through proclamation and hearing, not manifestation and vision (Horton, 2002c:5; 2003:136; 2006d:*passim*). Horton relates seeing to "seizing, grasping, dissecting, comprehending, mastering, and possessing its object", while he relates hearing to placing ourselves "at the disposal of the covenant Lord, submitting to his Word" (Horton, 2011a:81, 85; cf. 81–94; 1996:171–194).

According to Horton, the redemptive-historical/eschatological approach to biblical interpretation, with its emphasis on God's acts in history, is superior to "a Platonizing version of Christian theology" (Horton, 2002c:7). This "Platonizing version" is generally "ontological and cosmological in nature," with an ontological dualism between the eternal realm of the unchanging forms and the temporal realm of the changing appearances. This ontological dualism, in turn, leads to an epistemological dualism "in which the knowing subject seeks to transcend the realm of appearances (i.e. time and space) and contemplate the eternal ideas by means of recollection" (Horton, 2002c:31). Over against this ontological dualism, Horton

places his eschatological dualism: "Against Plato's irrepressible 'two worlds,' accentuated again in Kant, appears Paul's 'two ages.' Ontological dualism is replaced with eschatological dualism. Instead of the 'true world' of eternal perfection versus the 'apparent world' of temporal change we find 'this present age' and 'the age to come.'" (Horton, 2002c:32; cf. 211–212).

### 3.1.3. The theodramatic nature of Scripture and Horton's theology

The theodramatic approach to reading Scripture reminds us that the narrative structure of Scripture is theodramatic, i.e., Scripture is a drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology this means that it should cultivate participation in or performance of this redemptive drama.

Horton also has a theodramatic approach to reading Scripture, for he too considers Scripture to be drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something. To help us discern how Horton understands the theodramatic nature of Scripture and our participation in this redemptive drama, I will first analyze the covenant context of the drama. Second, I will analyze the cultivation of our participation in the drama.

#### 3.1.3.1. The covenant context of the drama

As previously discussed, Horton frames his understanding of the God-world relationship not as an ontological union or participation in God, i.e., an ontology of mutual indwelling, but as a covenantal union or as having a legal/ethical union with God by virtue of the covenant. So, it should not surprise us that he considers "covenant" to be the context or "architectonic structure, a matrix of beams and pillars" of God's counterdrama of redemption (Horton, 2006a:13; 2002c:12; 2005a:vii; 2005b:128; 2007a:2–3). He summarizes this counterdrama as follows:

> It speaks of the triune God who existed eternally before creation and of ourselves as characters in his unfolding plot. Created in God's image yet fallen into sin, we have our identity shaped by the movement of this dramatic story from promise to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This drama also has its powerful props, such as preaching, baptism, and the Supper—the means by which we are no longer spectators but are actually included in the cast. Having exchanged our rags for the riches of Christ's righteousness, we now find our identity "in Christ." Instead of God being a supporting actor in our life story, we become part of the cast that the Spirit is recruiting for God's drama. (Horton, 2011a:19; cf. 2002c:92; 2002a:10–17, 128; 2005a:xiii; 2007a:6; 2008:ix; 2011a:14–19; 2011d:14–18).

He adds:

> The Christian faith is, first and foremost, an unfolding *drama*. Geerhardus Vos observed, "The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest." This story that runs from Genesis to Revelation, centering on Christ, not only richly informs our mind; it captivates the heart and the imagination, animating and motivating our action in the world. When history seems to come to a standstill in sin, guilt, and death, the prophets direct God's people to God's fulfillment of his promise in a new covenant (Horton, 2011a:19).

Scripture is the authoritative script of the drama that scripts our lives to incorporate us into God's counterdrama and having our lives rescripted by it (Horton, 2002c:171, 178; 2002a:33–45; 2003:114; 2011a:24, 26, 32, 161–162, 373, 643, 660).

#### 3.1.3.2. The cultivation of our participation in the drama

The primary means by which our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama of redemption is cultivated is in the Sunday worship services. In the Sunday worship service, the covenantal drama is liturgically enacted in a dialectical and dialogical manner in which "theology and praxis, the individual and communal solidarity, history and eschatology, transcendence and immanence, come together dramatically". In this liturgy, God performatively speaks through his greeting of grace and peace, the reading of the law, the pronouncing of absolution, the sermon, and the benediction, while the people respond with singing, confession, and prayer. This dialectical and dialogical covenantal renewal service in which God's covenantal drama is enacted "offers the only service in which God promises to make the new creation a reality among his people" (Horton, 2002c:265, 269; 2002a:33–92).

In this covenantal renewal service, God also gives his people the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as performative signs and seals of his goodwill towards them and testimonies of the promises of his grace, in addition to the proclamation of the Word through which he strengthens them in their faith. Baptism is a sign and seal of believers and their children being "incorporated into the divine drama, rescripted from 'strangers and aliens' into 'the people of God,' grafted onto Jesus Christ as their life-giving vine". The Lord's Supper likewise is a sign and seal of their communion with Christ and their incorporation into God's drama of redemption that is in progress. However, these visible signs and seals have only a proclamatory function and are never "the backdoor to a theology of vision and manifestation" (Horton, 2002c:270). When members of the covenant community use these sacraments in faith by putting on Jesus Christ, they participate in the reality that is signed and sealed and take up their new role in God's drama of redemption (Horton, 2002c:271; 2002a:93–124).[39]

In addition to the preaching and the sacraments, God gives his people the means of church order and discipline to keep them faithful to the script of the drama. Church discipline is meant "to correct bad performances through good coaching". When a church or individual continues to refuse to participate in

[39] The church's forms and methods are not entirely left up to the church's discretion but are regulated by Scripture. This is known as the regulative principle. This principle entails that "only what Christ commands is obligatory for faith, practice, and church worship". Horton explains what this involves as follows: "For example, *elements* of worship include preaching, the administration of the sacraments, the prayers, offerings, singing, confession of sin and declaration of pardon, and the benediction. The order of these elements, the wearing of a gown, the frequency of Communion, the specific details concerning the election of officers, and the hours set for public worship are *circumstances*" (Horton, 2011a:878; 2002a:141–162). Horton emphasizes that the church's weekly public ministry needs to be supplemented and supported by ordinary family and private devotions of prayer, singing, instruction, and Bible reading (Horton, 2014d:181; 2009a:156; Peterson, 2014:6–7).

this script, it or they write themselves out of the drama. Upon repentance, they are rewritten into the drama. Church discipline "enables the drama to continue without disintegrating into scattered performances". Moreover, it enables outsiders to see that the church "is in fact the transformative-performative production that *God* has performed in history" (Horton, 2002c:272).

### 3.1.4. The theological nature of Scripture and Horton's theology

The theological approach to reading Scripture reminds us that Scripture is the Spirit's instrument in which God himself is communicatively present. Through Scripture, the church is called to listen and respond to the voice of God in the obedience of faith because this God desires communion with those he has created by having them participate in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the theological approach to reading Scripture is a practice of the church that draws on earlier, premodern theological interpretations of Scripture and reads Scripture in communion with those who have read it before. In addition, it has as its goal the formation of the moral character of the reader so that he grows in his love for God and his neighbour. A theodramatic model of systematic theology that can give direction to our communication of the gospel and shape of our Christian identity and practice so that it helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture, then, should have ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre. This is the fundamental relationship of God with humanity.

Horton also has a theological approach to reading Scripture. However, instead of having ontological participation in the life of God as its integrative centre, he has God's covenant with humanity as its integrative centre, since he considers this to be the fundamental ontological relationship of God with humanity. To understand Horton's theological reading of Scripture, I will analyze his understanding of the canon of Scripture.

#### 3.1.4.1. Horton's understanding of the canon of Scripture

Horton considers Scripture to be the church's authoritative canon that comes from the Father, has the Son as its content, and the Holy Spirit as its perfecting agency (Horton, 2011a:156–157. Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that comes from the Father because Scripture is the Father's means of grace through which he speaks to have his people respond in faith (Horton, 2011a:120, 154, 157). Drawing on Meredith Kline, Horton asserts that the canon of Scripture is a covenant document whose form and content (e.g., historical prologues, stipulations, and sanctions) is modelled after ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties (2006a:132; 2011a:210). Accordingly, this canon is closed to revision by the vassals or God's people, while it is open to revision or fulfilment by the suzerain or God (2006a:134).[40] Through

[40] Horton approvingly cites Kline who writes, "Another corollary of covenantal canonicity is that the Old Testament is not the canon of the Christian church. From a strictly legal standpoint, the Old Testament viewed in its identity as the historical treaty by which God ordered the life of pre-messianic Israel belongs to the church's historical archives

this covenant canon, the Father not only creates a people for himself by his locution or speech but also regulates and rules their faith and practice. As such, the canon belongs to the church. This covenant canon is inspired in its form as well as its content. Accordingly, it is inerrant in its original autographs (Horton, 2011a:152, 160–161, 173, 180)

Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that has the Son as its content because it has Christ's person and work as its centre as the mediator of the covenant of grace. This one covenant of grace, while one in substance, is administered in the Old and the New Testament. Consequently, Horton considers Israel to be a typological theocracy offering typological sacrifices pointing to the person and work of Christ (Horton, 2011a:153, 156–157). This also leads him to consider Israel's corporate history as a parenthesis in the history of redemption that primarily has a revelatory function of revealing our human sinfulness (Horton, 2011a:440–443; cf. 152–153, 337, 384, 420, 448, 493, 528, 537, 539, 959, 986; 2006a:47, 69; 2016c:320; 2018b:81).

Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that has the Spirit as its perfecting agency because it is "the primary means of grace, through which the Spirit applies redemption to sinners in the present". Horton asserts that "[a]s the Spirit hovered over the waters in creation to prepare a place for the covenant partner, and 'overshadow[ed]' Mary so that she would conceive the incarnate Son, the same Spirit breathed out these texts—and illumines hearers now to receive them as the Word of God" (Horton, 2011a:156, 157).

### 3.1.5. Conclusion

In this section, I analyzed Horton's theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture. Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the narrative nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton also has a narrative approach to reading Scripture that has the narrative plot of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Central to this narrative plot is the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ breaking forth into the present through the Holy Spirit. This resurrection life of God's new creation is the everlasting life of God's own Sabbath rest that is the telos of God's creation. According to Horton, Adam needed to earn this resurrection life of God's new creation or Sabbath rest for himself and all his posterity because he was created in the image of God to lead humanity and all of creation into the eternal Sabbath rest. Horton refers to the resurrection life of God's new creation, which is breaking into the broken present, as the kingdom or rule of God breaking forth into history as the result of Christ applying the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through the Spirit creating a new covenant community or church. He distinguishes this kingdom or rule of Christ from the way he rules in the world.

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rather than to its constitution" (Horton, 2006a:134). This does not, however, make the Old Testament any less authoritative than the New Testament.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the redemptive-historical nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton also has a redemptive-historical approach to reading Scripture, which he refers to as the redemptive-historical/eschatological approach. This approach is a constant reminder that theology should always be a theology of the cross and assumes that revelation primarily comes through proclamation and hearing.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theodramatic nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton also has a theodramatic approach to reading Scripture. Because the integrative centre of Horton's theology is a covenant ontology, he understands God's counterdrama of redemption as a covenantal drama that scripts our lives with a view to incorporating us into God's counterdrama and have our lives rescripted by it. Our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama of redemption is primarily cultivated in the Sunday worship services where the covenantal drama is liturgically enacted in a dialectical and dialogical manner. God speaks to his people in Word and sacrament and his people respond with singing, confession, and prayer. This primary means of spiritual formation relocates our identity from the narratives of this passing age in God's counterdrama so that the church can thankfully perform this drama during the week and make the church a theatre of God's grace and a witness of genuine human existence that offers hope to the world.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theological nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton also has a theological approach to reading Scripture. Horton considers Scripture to be the church's authoritative canon that comes from the Father, has the Son as its content, and the Holy Spirit as its perfecting agency. Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that comes from the Father because Scripture is the Father's means of grace through which he speaks to have his people respond in faith. Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that has the Son as its content because it has Christ's person and work as its centre as the mediator of the covenant of grace. Scripture is the church's authoritative canon that has the Spirit as its perfecting agency because it is the primary means the Spirit uses to apply the benefits of salvation to us.

### 3.2. The nature of hermeneutics and Horton's theology

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how the nature of hermeneutics shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity because the gospel needs to be understood and interpreted. I focused on hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation, hermeneutics and the mind of Christ, and hermeneutics and the nature of language. Thus, having analyzed Horton's theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture, I will now analyze his theology through the lens of this threefold nature of hermeneutics, viz. hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation, hermeneutics and the mind of Christ, and hermeneutics and the use of language.

### 3.2.1. Hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation and Horton's theology

We saw that hermeneutics, as the art of understanding and interpretation, reminds us that understanding and interpreting the gospel is not the skill of obtaining epistemological certainty scientifically. It is rather the art of realizing how our subjectivity and context play a role in our linguistic analysis and interpretation of Scripture. Through hermeneutics we understand how God uses Scripture and is actively present in Scripture to call us to listen and respond to his voice in the obedience of faith. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology this means that because God is active within the ontological factors of time and history, body and finitude, in the process of our understanding and interpretation of the gospel, we need to realize in our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity that we do not have a God's eye view of reality and that our understanding will always be a subjective and limited interpretation of reality.

While Horton defines hermeneutics as "the study and practice of interpretation", he does believe that this study and practice include subjective factors (Horton, 2011a:995). Thus, he writes, "Like any science, theology is not free to determine its own content and shape but is constrained by reality. No less than genetics or astronomy, theology involves subjectivity (i.e., the act of interpreting from one's own background and presuppositions) while aiming at objective reality" (Horton, 2011a:30).

Moreover, Horton agrees with Gadamer that we are not disengaged selves who experience a value-neutral world on which we impose meaning, but we are engaged selves who are shaped by the stream of history in which we are embedded since our birth. Consequently, a text never speaks for itself, but we bring our prejudice or preunderstanding as we seek to understand. Accordingly, interpreting a text will involve a hermeneutical circle or spiral in which the parts clarify the whole and the whole clarifies the parts (Horton, 2002c:149–151). However, given his definition of hermeneutics, his emphasis is primarily on the study and practice of interpretation. To help us understand what this entails, we will focus on Horton's analogical mode of theological discourse.

#### 3.2.1.1. The analogical mode of theological discourse

Horton's covenant ontology, undergirded by his distinction between God's essence and God's energies, leads him to adopt the analogical mode of theological discourse because "[a] covenantal ontology requires a covenantal epistemology" (Horton, 2011a:54; 2005a:16–20). Horton considers the heart of this epistemology to be the analogical mode of theological discourse. This analogical mode of discourse gives us ectypal theology, not archetypal. The latter is absolute knowledge and is identical with God's being or essence; the former is finite knowledge that belongs to his creatures (Horton, 2005a:16–18; 2003:136; 2011a:54, 77–79, 128–129, 210). Analogical thinking identifies certain aspects of the unknown in terms of the known (Horton, 2002c:8).

Following John Calvin, Horton believes that this is how God accommodates his revelation to our human weakness (Horton, 2002c:8; cf. 184–191; 2011:129). Accordingly, the analogical mode of theological discourse "is appropriate but approximate allowing us to make assertions concerning God's being and action without allowing access to the inner life (i.e., 'hiddenness') of God". We do not need access to "inner essence" of God because our concern is with "God's revealed character, intentions, and actions made explicit in Christ". Moreover, we cannot have access to this inner essence of God because "[God's] essence can never be known in this life, or in the next" (Horton, 2007a:282; 2002c:190; cf. 2011a:131, 603, 694; 2017b:25; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:33).

### 3.2.2. Hermeneutics and the mind of Christ and Horton's theology

We saw that hermeneutics and the mind of Christ remind us that our understanding and interpreting of the gospel needs to be seen in the light of sin and salvation. With the fall into sin, our *nous* or mindset became turned in on itself and self-enclosed so that our understanding and interpretation became futile and darkened. With salvation in Christ, God breaks open our enclosed selves by relocating our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renewing our understanding by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ, enabling us to understand and interpret the gospel with the perspective of the mind of Christ.

For a theodramatic model of systematic theology this means that because our fallen *nous* or mindset is turned in on itself and self-enclosed, we must realize that God needs to break it open by relocating our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renewing our understanding and interpretation by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ. We are thus able to understand and interpret the gospel and have our Christian identity and practice shaped with the perspective of the mind of Christ. Our focus in communicating the gospel and having our Christian identity and practice properly shaped should not be on gaining epistemological certainty, but on acquiring the mind of Christ through being ontologically united with Christ through faith and the Holy Spirit.

We also saw that Horton's covenant ontology is an ontology of a legal and ethical correspondence to the will of God. Because this will of God is found primarily in Scripture, Horton's covenant epistemology not only leads him to adopt the analogical mode of theological discourse; it also leads him to adopt a hermeneutic that primarily focuses on the study and practice of interpreting this analogical mode of theological discourse in Scripture and on understanding the meaning of this discourse for us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Horton, 2002c:181–219). This interpretation and understanding is not characterized by gaining epistemological certainty. On the contrary, "[t]he demand for absolute epistemic certainty not only is idolatrous in its illicit demand for archetypal knowledge that belongs to God alone; it also reflects an overrealized eschatology—that is, a premature announcement that the consummation has arrived (Horton, 2011a:91). Moreover, faith is not "an immediate certainty,

like the knowledge of logical, geometrical, or mathematical axioms or of sense experience. . . . Faith is clinging to Christ" (Horton, 2011a:585).

While the term "the mind of Christ" is virtually absent in Horton's theology and he does not speak about our subject being ontologically relocated in the risen and ascended Christ, he does speak about the Holy Spirit indwelling believers (Horton, 2017b:*passim*[41]). Moreover, he also speaks about the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit (Horton, 2017b:151, 260, 276). This implies that while the concept of the mind of Christ is not Horton's hermeneutical starting point, it does function once he has embarked on his hermeneutical journey.

### 3.2.3. Hermeneutics and the use of language

Hermeneutics and the nature of language remind us that understanding and interpreting the gospel involves recognizing the rules of the "language game" or intent of God's speech acts as he communicates through the various genres of Scripture. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means that we need to realize in our communication of the gospel and in our shaping of our Christian identity and practice that understanding and interpreting Scripture involves becoming good readers of Scripture.

Horton also believes that hermeneutics and the nature of language remind us that understanding and interpreting the gospel involves recognizing the rules of the "language game" or intent of God's speech acts as he communicates through the various genres of Scripture. To understand what this entails for him, we will focus on his understanding of God's speech acts as covenantal discourse.

#### 3.2.3.1. God's speech acts as covenantal discourse

Horton asserts that God literally acts in history through his energies of his Word and Spirit (Horton, 2011a:130, 159, 237, 612, 690; 2007a:211–215, 231, 268–270, 274–275, 2008c:133; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:32). Because speech is a subset of action, appropriating the speech act theory I outlined in the previous chapter, Horton asserts that God also speaks (Horton, 2011a:117–122). Thus, revelation is a divine communicative action that comes from the outside and through which God reveals himself. This divine activity—or God's workings—is not a manifestation of God's essence nor simply the effects of his action, but the manifestation of his energies or "energetic Word" and Spirit in this world through which he "words" us (Horton, 2011a:129–132, 136, 154, 159, 164, 166, 166, 181, 574, 751, 753, 758; 2007a:302; 2008c:101; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:32).

Because God has bound himself to his covenant people through his covenant speech, they are entitled to believe that he speaks to them and that they can interpret what he has said. Showing ecumenical openness, Horton makes use of the hermeneutical insights of others. Drawing on the hermeneutically sensitive insights of Nicolas Wolterstorff regarding divine speech, Horton believes that

[41] The Kindle edition of this book listed no fewer than 81 references

God's covenant community is justified in believing that God speaks to them through the medium of the text of Scripture, because God has appropriated and accepted the words of humans as his own words. Moreover, drawing on John Calvin's understanding of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, Horton writes that God's covenant community is persuaded that God speaks through the medium of the Scriptures because the Holy Spirit convinces them that he has done and is doing so (Horton, 2002c:144).

Having agreed with Wolterstorff that God's covenant community is justified in believing that God speaks to them through the medium of the text of Scriptures, because he has appropriated and accepted the words of humans as his own words, Horton also agrees with his authorial discourse interpretation as the best method to understand the meaning of a text. This entails that we approach Scripture as a unified whole allowing God to interpret his divine discourse according to the analogy of faith through the linguistic structure of the text (Horton, 2002c:156–164). This means that the literal sense of the text has priority over other senses. Moreover, it means that we do not try to make Scripture relevant to our experience, but our experience relevant to Scripture. Thus, "the priority of the horizon of the text (at least in determining the textual sense) circumvents 'the fusion of horizons'" (Horton, 2002c:165).

Because Scripture is God's speech, it is self-authenticating, giving itself divine authority and constituting itself as canon or normative rule "for the proper invocation of God's name for salvation and true worship" (Horton, 2011a:151). It is the covenant, according to Horton, that "constitutes the biblical canon as canon" (Horton, 2002c:178; 2011a:155). Scripture does "not simply contain a covenant or covenants, but as a whole can be said to constitute the covenant document itself" (Horton, 2002c:207, 180; 2011a:152–153). This canon or covenant document is essentially perspicuous or clear as well as sufficient (Horton, 2002c:177; 2011a:196–198; cf. 186, 195, 198). It is verbally, completely, and organically inspired by God with the Father as its locutionary source, the Son as its illocutionary content, and the Holy Spirit as its perluctionary effecting agency (Horton, 2011a:156–166). In the original manuscripts, it is also inerrant "in all their real affirmations" (Horton, 2002c:177; cf. 173–181). The figural interpretation of promise and fulfilment is an extension of the literal interpretation of Scripture, giving a fuller sense to this literal interpretation (Horton, 2002c:177–180; 2016b:77–79).

It is through this accommodated, analogical divine discourse that God encounters his covenant community. He lays his claim upon them, unilaterally constituting them as his covenant people. He summons them to respond to his divine address in faith and incorporates them into his redemptive-historical/eschatological drama through this response of faith. Accordingly, God's covenant community receives the meaning of its life from God instead of trying to create this meaning on its own, because the text of Scripture first interprets it instead of the covenant community first interpreting the text (Horton, 2002c:183, 191–206, 218). While the meaning of the text of Scripture can be grasped without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, true understanding of this text cannot. This illumination is not given in

addition to Scripture as a secondary source alongside Scripture, but is given from within Scripture as it "unites us to Christ, the *res* of scripture so that we inevitably hear the voice of mere mortals *as* the voice of the Shepherd himself". Accordingly, Scripture and the Spirit are united in bringing Christ to the covenant community (Horton, 2002c:210). While the Spirit through Scripture is the ultimate norm for true understanding, the Spirit also works with the interpretative community or tradition in coming to this true understanding. However, the "*sensus communis*" of the interpretive community arises out of the "*sensus literalis*" of Scripture and not the reverse (Horton, 2002c:216; cf. 215–219).

Horton considers practical preaching, as the primary means of communicating the gospel, to be truly practical when it encourages the listeners to become good readers of Scripture by having their lives rescripted by this covenantal discourse of God's speech acts (Horton, 2002a:51–60, 69–80; 2008a:129–133, 142–148).

### 3.2.4. Conclusion

Because the gospel needs to be understood and interpreted, I used the threefold nature of hermeneutics as outlined in the design of my theodramatic model of systematic theology as a tool to analyze the design of Horton's theology.

First, analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation, we saw that Horton defines hermeneutics as the study and practice of interpretation. Horton believes that this study and practice includes subjective factors with which we bring our preunderstanding to the text as we are shaped by the stream of history in which we are embedded since our birth. Given his definition of hermeneutics, his emphasis is primarily on the study and practice of interpretation. I illustrated this with his understanding of the analogical mode of theological discourse, which gives us an ectypal theology and not an archetypal. Because we know God not in his essence, but in his works, our knowledge of God is always analogical knowledge of God.

Second, analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of hermeneutics and the mind of Christ, we saw that while his theology is not characterized by gaining epistemological certainty, neither is it is characterized by acquiring the mind of Christ through being ontologically united with Christ through faith and the Holy Spirit. This implied that soteriology is not Horton's hermeneutical starting point, but epistemology is.

Third, analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of hermeneutics and the use of language, we saw that for him understanding and interpreting the gospel involves recognizing the rules of the "language game" or intent of God's speech acts as he communicates through the various genres of Scripture. I illustrated this with his understanding of God's speech acts as covenantal discourse through which God encounters his covenant community, laying his claim upon them, unilaterally constituting them as his

covenant people, summoning them to respond to his divine address in faith, and incorporating them into his redemptive-historical/eschatological drama through this response of faith.

### 3.3. The nature of doctrine and Horton's theology

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how the nature of doctrine shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity. Doctrine reconceptualizes the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. I focused on doctrine as grammar, doctrine and drama, doctrine as dramatic direction, and doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice. Thus, having analyzed Horton's theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture and the lens of the threefold nature of hermeneutics, I will now analyze his theology through the lens of this fourfold nature of doctrine.

#### 3.3.1. Doctrine as grammar and Horton's theology

We saw that doctrine as grammar reminds us that doctrine is for the sake of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be for the sake of the church's performance of the gospel.

Horton also understands doctrine as grammar. To help us understand what this entails, I will focus on his understanding of doctrine as the grammar of faith in a covenantal model of doctrine.

##### 3.3.1.1 Doctrine as the grammar of faith in a covenantal model of doctrine

Horton considers that doctrine summarizes the accomplishments of God in the unfolding drama of redemption and gives meaning to them by defining and refining our understanding of these accomplishments. He compares this defining and refining of our understanding to the grammar of learning a new language through which we interpret reality and our lives in this world. Thus, doctrine is the grammar of the language game of the Christian faith that teaches us the vocabulary and rules of the Christian faith (Horton, 2011a:20–22).

Horton has difficulties with cognitive-propositionalist theories of doctrine because they tend "to reduce faith to *doctrine*, understood as propositional statements". He has similar difficulties with experiential-expressivist theories of doctrine because they tend "to reduce faith to *doxology*, which erupts from within the self's own religious experience". He also has difficulties with the cultural-linguistic model of doctrine because "it gives pride of place to ecclesial practice (*discipleship*)". Moreover, he has difficulties with narrative models of doctrine because they tend to reduce faith to the unfolding dramatic narrative of redemption (Horton, 2011a:209).

Over against these reductionist theories of doctrine, Horton places a covenantal model of doctrine, i.e., a model in which God is qualitatively distinct from creatures, God's revelation comes to us from outside ourselves, and Scripture is God's authoritative norm (Horton, 2011a:210).

With this model, he seeks to integrate each of these above-mentioned emphases. First, because God reveals what he is like in real history, "doctrine grows out of the biblical *drama*". Second, because God teaches us how he acts through the use of verbs, "the drama yields [the nouns of] specific *doctrine*". Thus, doctrine tells us "what the drama means for us". Third, "[w]hen God writes us into the script by interpreting what it means for us, we are not just astonished; we are overwhelmed with gratitude" which leads to doxology or praise and worship through which we internalize the drama. Fourth, "[l]iving in this drama, informed by the doctrine, and shaped by the experience of true worship, we are able to live out our part in the story wherever God has placed us" as doxology leads to discipleship (Horton, 2016b:17–18; 2011a:210–219).

### 3.3.2. Doctrine and drama and Horton's theology

We saw that doctrine as drama reminds us that doctrine is the result of reflection upon the theodramatic nature of Scripture that appeals to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should appeal to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations. We saw that while imagination, as such, is "the power of forming mental images of what is not really present", theodramatic imagination "is the ability to form mental images of what is *really* present . . . even though it cannot be perceived empirically with the senses" (Vanhoozer, 2005b:416). Thus, theodramatic imagination is the ability to connect to the greater context in which we live and to the transcendent reality in which we participate.

While Horton does not use the term "theodramatic imagination", the concept is certainly present in his theology.[42] First, I will focus on how this concept is present in Horton's theology. Second, I will focus on Horton's understanding of theology as wisdom for invocation.

#### 3.3.2.1 Theodramatic imagination in Horton's theology

I wrote above that the gospel concerns the announcement of the resurrection life of God's new creation that is present in Christ because of his victory over sin, death, and the devil, which is already breaking forth into this broken present through the Holy Spirit. We then saw that Horton stresses the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of this new creation today already through faith and the Holy Spirit (Horton, 2002c:116–117). We also saw that he connects the eschatological resurrection life of

[42] For the relation between theodramatic imagination and the mind of Christ, see Vanhoozer, 2015:147–171.

the future that is breaking into the historical present to the concept of the kingdom of God in which Christ applies the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through his Word and Spirit. This creates a new covenant community or church where Christ's reign in grace is already truly present, but not yet fully present in its consummated form (Horton, 2011a:235, 237, 541; 529–547; cf. 551–903; 2011d:221–228; 2005a:264–270; 2008c:1–13; 1998a:129–144; 2002a:61–79; 2016b:68–71).

Moreover, we saw that the concept of theodramatic imagination is present in his understanding that the narrative structure of Scripture is theodramatic, i.e., Scripture is a drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something.

Furthermore, we saw the concept of theodramatic imagination present in Horton's understanding of the sacrament of baptism as a sign and seal of our incorporation into God's drama of redemption. He sees us being rescripted as performers of this drama and his understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a sign and seal of our communion with Christ and our incorporation into God's drama of redemption. We saw the same with his understanding of the sacramental presence of Christ in the preaching (Horton, 2002a:93–124).

#### 3.3.2.2. Theology as wisdom for invocation

Because the term "theodramatic imagination" is not present in Horton's theology, he also does not make a verbal appeal to this imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations. However, Horton does speak about theology as wisdom (*sapientia*) because it is "oriented toward a proper *relationship*—with God and with each other". This makes theology "chiefly wisdom *concerning Christ*", based on revealed doctrines and practices that shape our interpretation of reality for "invoking the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit, for salvation and life" (Horton, 2011a:104–105, 110).

### 3.3.3. Doctrine as dramatic direction and Horton's theology

Doctrine as dramatic direction reminds us that doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script of the theodrama. We fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should always be normed by the canonical practices of Scripture. It should creatively and imaginatively incorporate our cultural situation into the biblical narrative.

We saw that Horton considers doctrine to summarize the accomplishments of God in the unfolding drama of redemption and to give meaning to them by defining and refining our understanding of these accomplishments. In doing so, he compares this defining and refining of our understanding to the

grammar of learning a new language through which we interpret reality and our lives in this world.[43] However, he does not extend the meaning of the metaphor of doctrine as grammar to include its function of reminding us that doctrine is for the sake of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative.

Consequently, for Horton doctrine as grammar is more of an interpretive lens through which we interpret reality and our lives in this world than it is dramatic direction that reminds us that doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script of the theodrama and fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama.

Horton does, however, believe that our Christian identity and practice should always be normed by the canonical practices of Scripture. To help us understand what this means for him, I will focus on what he writes about God's counterdrama and the metanarratives of this passing age.

#### 3.3.3.1. God's counterdrama of redemption and the metanarratives of this passing age

Because God's counterdrama of redemption shapes a specific covenant praxis or culture this specific covenant culture should never accommodate to the culture of the metanarratives of this passing age in an attempt to make it "conceptually accessible and relevant to contemporary culture".[44] Instead it should confront and challenge the presuppositions of this culture by performing the script of God's counterdrama on the stage of the history of this world. In doing so, "the drama of redemption unfolds as a play-within-a-play". While the drama of world history may seem to be the most significant drama, the play-within-a-play is essentially the most significant drama that "ends up becoming the all-encompassing divine drama that seeps the entire natural creation and its history into its action and plot". Theology is thus a theology for pilgrims on the way (Horton, 2002c:14, 45; 2011a:13, 91; cf. 201–205; 1990b:21–31; 1990a:123–150; 1990c:243–251; 1991: *passim*; 1992b:327–353; 1994: *passim*; 1995: *passim*; 1996:*passim*; 2002a:43–45, 211–241; 2006d: *passim*; 2008a: *passim*; 2009a:191–218; 2010a: *passim*; *2014a:passim*).

Moreover, knowledge of God's counterdrama leads to discipleship that relocates our identity from the narratives of this passing age in God's counterdrama so that we become players in this

[43] Learning a new language can be considered to belong to hermeneutically having the mind of Christ.

[44] Factors that contribute to making God's countercultural metanarrative conceptually accessible and culturally relevant include being focused more "on our own personal experience, rather than what God has done for us in history", efforts "to translate the gospel into contemporary language", seeing "the inward transforming work of the Spirit as the key element of Christianity" rather than the external announcement of "the objective facts of the gospel in history", and confusing law and gospel by beginning to speak to others "about *living* the gospel, *doing* the gospel, even *being* the gospel" without first having them experience "the trauma of God's holiness" through the law that condemns us and then God's liberating grace of justification through faith in Christ (Horton, 2008a:18, 152, 240; cf. 124–148; 2014d:120; 2016d:272; 2017a:35–38; 2011c:27; 2017c:27–32; Frame, 2011:28–47).

counterdrama who bear witness "to the Word made flesh for our salvation" (Horton, 2011a:20–21; cf. 2011c:133–160; 2016b:17–21). Thus, God's covenantal counterdrama of redemption, which is liturgically enacted in the Sunday worship service, the church thankfully performs during the week in the various concrete contexts of the members of the church, making the church a theatre of God's grace and the "counterdrama of genuine human existence and community" that offers hope to this world (Horton, 2002c:274; cf. 273, 275).

### 3.3.4. Doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice and Horton's theology

Doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice remind us that doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that prompts us imaginatively and creatively to understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothe ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and perform heaven on earth. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should cultivate bearing witness to what is in Christ.

Horton also believes that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should cultivate bearing witness to what is in Christ. He describes this bearing witness to what is in Christ as bearing witness to the inbreaking of the kingdom of Christ in this world. Thus, he writes, "Descending into our history, he [i.e. Christ] has forever transformed it, opening up a fissure in that history of death by his resurrection. By his Spirit, Christ keeps that fissure opened for the proclamation of the gospel, so that our lives even now become united to the new history of everlasting joy that he has already entered as our pioneer." And he adds, "It is neither the ascent of the soul nor the gradual ascent of humanity toward a better world but the in-breaking of the kingdom of Christ to which the church bears witness. Christ has redefined history for us and for the whole earth" (Horton, 2011c:297–298). Elsewhere, he writes, "The calling of the church is not to witness to its own piety or to transform the world into Christ's holy kingdom. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'The intention of the preacher is not to improve the world, but to summon it to belief in Jesus Christ and to bear witness to the reconciliation which has been accomplished through Him and His dominion'" (Horton, 2011a:868).[45]

However, Horton understands God's fundamental relationship with humanity to be an ontology of correspondence, i.e., a legal and ethical correspondence to the will of God, and not an ontology of participation, i.e., an ontological dwelling in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Bearing witness to what is in Christ is fundamentally a bearing witness to this ethical and legal correspondence to the will of God that is breaking into this world by way of our union with Christ through the Holy Spirit and not our ontological participation in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

[45] When we bear witness to what is in Christ, this can be the consequence of having the mind of Christ.

### 3.3.5. Conclusion

Doctrine shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice. Doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. I used the fourfold nature of doctrine as outlined in the design of my theodramatic model of systematic theology as a tool to analyze the design of Horton's theology.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of doctrine as grammar, we saw that doctrine is the grammar of the language game of the Christian faith that teaches us the vocabulary and rules of the Christian faith. Doctrine arises out of the biblical drama and tells us what the drama means for us by writing us into the script of the drama, which, in turn, leads to a life of doxology and discipleship. Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of doctrine and drama, we saw that while Horton does not use the term "theodramatic imagination", the concept is certainly present in his theology. We noted its stress on the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of this new creation or kingdom of God today already through faith and the Holy Spirit. We also noted his emphasis on Scripture as a drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something, his understanding of preaching that does the same, his understanding of the sacrament of baptism as sign and seal of our incorporation into God's drama of redemption and our being rescripted as performers of this drama, and his understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a sign and seal of our communion with Christ and our incorporation into God's drama of redemption. While Horton does not make a verbal appeal to theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations, he does speak about theology as wisdom concerning Christ that shapes our understanding of reality for invoking the name of the Lord for salvation and life.[46]

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of doctrine as dramatic direction, we saw that he does not extend the meaning of the metaphor of doctrine as grammar to doctrine as dramatic direction for the sake of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative. Consequently, for Horton doctrine is more of an interpretive lens through which we interpret reality and our lives in this world. It is not for him dramatic direction for our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script of the theodrama. It does not fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. Horton does, however, believe that our Christian identity and practice should always be normed by the canonical practices of Scripture, so that our identity is relocated from the narratives of this passing age

[46] Since in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), having our understanding shaped by the wisdom of Christ is the result of having the mind of Christ.

into God's counterdrama that confronts and challenges the presuppositions of our culture, thus making the church a theatre of God's grace that bears witness to genuine human existence which offers hope to this world.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice, we saw that bearing witness to what is in Christ for Horton means bearing witness to the in-breaking of the kingdom of Christ in this world. However, he understands God's fundamental relationship with humanity to be an ontology of correspondence. Bearing witness to what is in Christ is fundamentally a bearing witness to our ethical and legal correspondence to the will of God that is breaking into this world through our union with Christ by the Holy Spirit and not our ontological participation in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

### 3.4. The nature of structure and Horton's theology

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how the nature of structure shapes our communication of the gospel and our Christian identity and practice. The structure of systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. Thus, having analyzed Horton's theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture, the lens of the threefold nature of hermeneutics, and the lens of the fourfold nature of doctrine. I will now analyze his theology through the lens of the nature of structure.

The pedagogical nature of structure reminds us that a theodramatic systematic theology should be designed in such a way that it trains us more in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth. For a theodramatic model of systematic theology, this means that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be more for the training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth.

Horton also believes that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be more for the training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth. Earlier I noted that Horton considers theology to be "chiefly wisdom *concerning Christ*" (*sapientia*), based on revealed doctrines and practices that shape our interpretation of reality for "invoking the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit, for salvation and life" (Horton, 2011a:80, 104–105, 110). Because the subject matter of theology is the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ that is redemptive-historically/eschatologically breaking forth into the present through the Holy Spirit, Horton pedagogically arranges the structure of his sapiential systematic theology redemptive-historically. Because the integrative centre of his theology is the concept of the covenant, he integrates the redemptive-historical

structure of his theology around this integrative centre.[47] This leads to the following structure of Horton's systematic theology: the covenant maker as the God who lives, the covenant partner as the God who creates, the covenant mediator as the God who rescues, the covenant blessings as the God who reigns in grace, and the covenant's consummation as the God who reigns in glory (cf. Horton, 2002c:17; 2011a).[48] I will outline the main tenets of each of these topics consecutively.[49]

### 3.4.1. The covenant maker as the God who lives

While there is an essential unity in the covenant maker as the God who lives, he exists in a plurality of persons who covenantally live in each other and thus know themselves in and through the other. This is also manifested in the covenant of redemption in which "the Father, the Son, and the Spirit . . . turn toward us, with a purpose to create, redeem, and gather a church for everlasting fellowship". Accordingly, "all of God's purposes are understood in terms of" this covenant of redemption. All things proceed from the Father in the Son and through the Spirit. As a result, the works of the Trinity in the world (economic Trinity) analogically reveal the inner life of the Trinity (immanent Trinity). The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (Horton, 2011a:309; 2019:118; cf. 273–306; 2011d:89–105; 1998a:52–55; 2016b:39–52).

### 3.4.2. The covenant partner as the God who creates

The covenant partner as the God who creates is the God who sovereignly predestines because he is the God who is sovereign over everything that happens in the Son through the Spirit. God's predestination includes election and reprobation. His election is unconditional (Horton, 2011a:309–323; 1986:44–66, 82–87; 2011b:53–79).

As the God who sovereignly predestines, God is the God who freely creates *ex nihilo* and covenantally, i.e., legally and ethically, ordering creation for his glory through his living and creative speech or energies in a continual dialectic of gift, gratitude, and obedience. As the Father eternally speaks forth the Son in the Spirit, so he speaks the world into existence through the Son in the Spirit, making

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[47] Horton combines these two aspects of his theology in the title of the first volume of his dogmatic studies: *Covenant and eschatology: the divine drama* (2002c). In the second volume of this series, he writes that God's covenantal relationship with humanity serves as a "hermeneutical guide" for systematic theology (Horton, 2005a:vii).

[48] Horton uses the five verbs in the surface structure of this systematic theology because, together with Walter Brueggemann, he believes that "strong verbs give rise to stable nouns." He adds, "This is another way of saying that the drama gives rise to particular doctrines" (Horton, 2011a:225; cf. Brueggemann, 1997:145–266). Horton compares systematic theology to "the box top of a jigsaw puzzle" that shows how the various pieces fit together or "a street map, pointing out the logical connection between various doctrines spread throughout Scripture" (Horton, 2011a:27, 29).

[49] This section serves a twofold purpose. First, it analyzes his theology through the lens of the nature of structure. Second, it reconstructs his theology after my analysis of his theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture, the lens of the threefold nature of hermeneutics, and the lens of the fourfold nature of doctrine.

creation an analogy and theatre of the inner trinitarian communion (Horton, 2011a:332; cf. 324–349; 2011d:107–110; 2005a:69–76, 85; cf. 66–87).

The God who creates is also the God of providence who not only works upon creation and history but also within it in Christ through the Holy Spirit, covenantally sustaining and governing it with his energies. God's providence is part of his common grace through which he restrains sin, restrains his wrath, and is good to all, giving gifts and abilities to humanity in Christ through the Holy Spirit thus enabling life to flourish on this earth (Horton, 2011a:350–372; 2011d:110–116; 2017b:54, 58; cf. 47–80).

Creation is a cosmic temple reflecting the glory of God because he dwells in it with his Spirit. Created in the image of God, humans are miniature temples where God dwells with his Spirit. "[T]he image of God (*imago dei*) is not something *in* us . . . but something *between* us and God that constitutes a covenantal relationship. . . . We have been created . . . with a special commission, for a special relationship [or covenant] with God". This covenant of creation is a covenant of works because it promised Adam and his posterity the right to the inheritance of eternal life if he would not transgress the probationary command by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Horton, 2011a:381, 384, 386; cf. 373–407, 421, 425, 440–442, 688; 2011d:116–129, 131–141; 2008c:260–265; 2006a:83–94; 2005a:91–121, 128–133, 151–151, 159–160; 1986:21–31; 2016b:82–85).

Created to be an obedient prophetic witness of God and his works as keepers of God's covenant, Adam and Eve became false witnesses to God and his works and broke God's covenant of creation in disobedience that resulted in the breakdown of the covenantal fabric of life.[50] Because Adam was the head of the human race and represented all of humanity and creation, his false witness and false representation had bearing not only on his relation to God but also on his relation to the whole human race and all of creation. In Adam, as the representative head of the human race, every human being also participated in his sin and thus is guilty with him for his sin and corrupted with him by his sin.

Instead of immediately confirming the human race in everlasting death, God graciously delayed the consummation of history by promising victory over Satan so that history could continue to move to the eternal Sabbath rest. God calls Abraham and renews his promise of victory over Satan and universal blessing in him. God's call to and his relationship with Abraham is continued in his relationship with Israel. This relationship with Israel recapitulates God's relationship with Adam and Eve. As God promised victory over Satan so that history could continue to move to the eternal Sabbath rest, so God promises the making of a new covenant with Israel so that history could continue to move to the eternal Sabbath rest (Horton, 2011a:408–443; 2011d:131–157; 2005a:120–155; 1986:32–43; 2006a:9; 2011b:35–52; 2016b:85–97).

[50] About the first sin, Horton writes, "Adam's first sin was not in eating the forbidden fruit but in allowing the false witness to become a resident of the garden in the first place" (Horton, 2011a:410).

God unconditionally promises to uphold creation with his common grace in his covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures. However, this is not a redemptive covenant, but a covenant of law that enables believers and unbelievers to fulfil the cultural mandate and engage in cultural activity (Horton, 2006a:114–128; 2011a:364–368, 712–715, 925–927; 2008d:45–65; 2009a:245–266; 2011c:210–246, 282).[51]

### 3.4.3. The covenant mediator as the God who rescues

The covenant mediator as the God who rescues is the person of Christ in whom "[a]ll of God's covenantal purposes converge". As the eternal ontological Son who would take on our humanity, he "is the eternal Mediator of the *covenant of redemption*". As the second Adam and true Israel, he "undoes the curse of the first Adam and fulfills the *covenant of creation* for his elect, thereby winning the right to be not only the risen head but the resurrection-life-giving Lord". As the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ, he "is the mediatorial head" of the covenant of grace. As the son of David, he is the messianic Savior who fulfills the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, who will unite all God's people in an eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace. As the servant of the Lord, he fulfills "Israel's corporate office of covenant servant" and secures their redemption promised in the covenant of grace through his obedience and suffering (Horton, 2011a:446, 455; cf. 447–452; 455–457; 2011d:164–166, 168–170).

The person of Jesus Christ, through whom God rescues, has a threefold office. As a prophet of God's covenant lawsuit, Christ speaks and actuates God's covenant blessings and curses into history by confronting Israel with the law and gospel (Horton, 2011a:483–486; 2011d:183–186; 2005a:209–219). As priest, he represents the elect—in covenant solidarity and as a living sacrifice of active obedience to God's covenant will—in the eternal covenant of redemption, being born under the law of creation and its recapitulation at Sinai to redeem those under the dominion of sin and the curse of the law (2011d:192–196; 2005a:219–232). As an everlasting priest, Jesus is a mediator of the better covenant of God's unchangeable oath to Abraham, rather than the Levitical priesthood of the Mosaic covenant which depended "on the obedience and mediation of sinful human beings" (Horton, 2011a:487; 2011d:186–187; 2005a:232–234). With his blood of the covenant, as their substitute, Christ made satisfaction for the sins of God's elect, bearing their judicial sentence in their place and propitiating the wrath of God to reconcile them to God and usher in the new covenant. This satisfaction of God's justice is the legal basis that

[51] Since the fall into sin, this cultural activity belongs to the common or secular realm and pertains to the temporal, not the eternal, while the cultic mandate belongs to the sacred realm and pertains to the eternal. These two realms exist parallel to or alongside each other. As a result, Christians are dual citizens, fulfilling their cultural vocation in the common kingdom in a common way, like unbelievers, with the natural law as their source of revelation and fulfilling their cultic vocation in the sacred kingdom in a special way with Scripture as their source of revelation (Horton, 1995:91; Horton, 2006a:114–115; 2008b:252–266; cf. Kline, 2006:66–67, 153–160).

"Christ's victory over death, hell, and Satan is possible" (Horton, 2019:121; cf. 54; 2011b:81, 84–85, 90; 2011a:492–500; 2011d:196–208; 2005a:234–239).

As the eternal Son of God, Christ already exercises his kingship in creation by being the source of creation. He continues to exercise his kingship in redemption. Christ publicly displayed his royal office of king with his defeat of Satan and his demonic powers by his death, fulfilling the promise made in the covenant of grace. He continued to display this royal office with his triumphant resurrection from the dead by being the source, head, and mediator of a new creation within this old creation as the anticipation of the renewal of the whole earth (Horton, 2011a:525–526; cf. 500–501, 521–529; 2011d:187–189, 206–207, 213–221; 2005a:242–264; 1986:96–100; 1998a:105–127).

Christ continues to exercise his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king after his ascension into heaven. From heaven, Christ continues his office as prophet by confronting his people with the law and the gospel, his office of priest by interceding for his people, and his office of king by ruling all things through his Word and Spirit (Horton, 2011a:529–547; 2011d:221–228; 2005a:264–270; 2008c:1–13; 1998a:129–144; 2002a:61–79; 2016b:68–71).

### 3.4.4. The covenant blessings as the God who reigns in grace

The God who reigns in grace is the God who effectually calls people to be saints through the Holy Spirit and regenerates those whom the Father chose in eternity into union with Christ through faith in him by the preaching of the gospel. Union with Christ "is a way of speaking about the way in which believers share in Christ in eternity (by election), in past history (by redemption), in the present (by effectual calling, justification, and sanctification), and in the future (by glorification)". However, "our subjective inclusion in Christ occurs when the Spirit calls us effectually to Christ and gives us the faith to cling to him for all of his riches". This mystical, legal, organic union with Christ is the matrix or proper habitat of the *ordo salutis* or order of salvation.[52] We cannot be united to Christ's essence. We can only be united to his energies. In this way, we participate in the fellowship of the Trinity and become partakers of the divine nature (Horton, 2011a:587; cf. 587–619, 673–674, 700; 2011d:271–278; 2018b:366, 447; cf. 447–493; 2007a:121–152, 181–215, 285, 302; cf. 272–307; 1992a:107–115).

The God who reigns in grace by uniting believers to Jesus Christ does so by justifying them through faith, imputing the active and passive obedience of Christ to them. Because God's declaration of justification by faith creates the reality it declares, this declarative verdict of God is the basis or generative source of all the transformative aspects of our union with Christ. As those who are justified by faith in

[52] With the expressions "matrix" and "proper habitat", Horton means that "union with Christ is not a 'moment' in the *ordo salutis* like election, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification but is a more general way of speaking about all of our spiritual blessings being found in Christ rather than in ourselves". Horton asserts that this is also Calvin's understanding of union with Christ (Horton, 2012:90).

Christ, we are also adopted as holy and righteous sons of God in Christ who are legally entitled to his eschatological inheritance. As God's adopted sons, we are daily called to put on Christ through faith so that we are increasingly conformed to his image (Horton, 2011a:620–647; 2011d:279–301; 2011b:86–88, 93–95, 98–105, 159–162, 293; 2012a:88–94; cf. 72–88; 2018b; 2007a:102–125; 1996:89–94).

Because union with Christ in the covenant of grace is the application in time of the eternal covenant of redemption secured by Christ's finished work, the God who reigns in grace through uniting believers to Jesus Christ by justifying them through faith also sanctifies them and enables them to persevere in the faith. As we work out our salvation according to the standard of God's moral law, we always need to hear the law's condemnation of trying to seek our salvation in keeping this moral law. At the same time, we always need to hear the gospel's assurance of our justification and sanctification in Christ. God will enable those he has chosen in Christ, redeemed in Christ, and effectually called into union with Christ to persevere to the fullness of the eschatological life of glorification in Christ (Horton, 2011a:648–687; cf. 615–619; 2011d:303–324; 2007a:80–101, 243–266; 1986:121–129, 130–140; 1996:161–163; 2011b:115–150; 2016b:157–168).

The doctrine of glorification, as the other transformative aspects of our union with Christ, also finds its ground in the doctrine of justification. Whereas Adam failed to earn the reward of eternal life, Jesus Christ, "[a]s the Last Adam and True Israel, . . . joyfully embraced his calling, fulfilled his trial, bore our debts, and entered the glory of the everlasting Sabbath day in triumphal procession as our representative head". What is already true for our covenant head is also true for those who are in Christ through faith. However, while they are already glorified in Christ their covenant head, this reality will be experienced in its fullness on the day of the resurrection of the body, which is at the same time the Day of Judgment (Horton, 2011a:688; cf. 688–710; 2011d:325–341; 2016c:390; 2017b:45, 284–288; 2007a:267–307).

The God who reigns in grace works out the grace of his salvation in the church. Scripture describes the character and task of the church with several different metaphors that are all rooted in the church's covenantal relationship with God in Christ through his Spirit. The church is the servant of the covenant Lord, the chosen missionary people of God, the remnant of the covenant of grace, the family of God, the bride of Christ, the universal city of God, the Israel of God, and the body of Christ (Horton, 2011a:711–750; 1986:108–120; 1994:169–185; 1995:45–51, 189–204; 1998a:175–198; 2011c:35–80, 210–246; 2016c:363–384; 2017b:289–321).

The God who reigns in grace, working out his salvation in the church, creates the new creation of his church through his redemptive speech. While God is sacramentally present with his covenant people in the preaching of the Word, he is not sacramentally present with them in the same way, because the word of the covenant law silences and convicts while the word of the covenant gospel justifies and

renews (Horton, 2002c:269; 2011a:753, 763, 755; cf. 751–787; 2011d:343–366; 2008c:37–98; 1996;134–139; 1998a:199–215; 2002a:10–17, 61–90, 229; 2016a:313–322).

The God who reigns in grace gives his people the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in addition to the proclamation of the Word as signs and seals of his goodwill towards them through which he strengthens them in their faith. Because the substance of our covenantal union with the mediator of the covenant of grace is the same in both the old and new covenants, children belong to the covenant of grace in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. However, those who have not yet been united to Christ through faith are related to the covenant only externally and are thus circumcised and baptized "*unto* repentance and faith". Baptism remains effectual for those who reject God's goodwill towards them in Christ. But this effect will not be the effect of God's mercy and life, but rather his judgement and death (Horton, 2002c:270; cf. 265–276; 2011a:763, 789, 794; cf. 788–798; 2011d:367–378; 2008c:99–152; 2002a:93–109). As a sign and seal of God's goodwill towards us in Christ, the Lord's Supper communicates Christ and all his benefits to us by faith, through "the energies of [his] life-giving flesh," enabling us to be mysteriously nourished with Christ's body and blood through the Holy Spirit, while at the same time giving us a foretaste of the eschatological marriage feast of the Lamb (Horton, 2011a:816; cf. 798–827; 2011d:374–386; 2007a:11–36; 2008c:99–152; 1996:139–142; 2002a:111–122).[53]

Because God reigns in grace in the church by working out his salvation through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, the church is "not an aggregate of individuals who have determined to form such a society", but rather is the covenant assembly that "is summoned, gathered, and called out by God's electing, redeeming, justifying, and renewing grace". Accordingly, the church finds its catholicity and unity in fellowship with this triune God, and this catholicity and unity is evident wherever the Word is faithfully proclaimed and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's command. The covenant model of the church locates the holiness of the church not in the institution of the church or the members of the church, but in Christ, the head of the covenant of grace. The covenant model of church "favors a connectional polity or form of government" that is neither hierarchical nor democratic, but presbyterial, i.e., ruled by the broader assembly of elders who represent the Lord (Horton, 2011a:828, 854; cf. 828–871; 2011d:393–410; 2008c:190–220; 2002a:141–187; 2013b:129–134; 2016a:322–333).

From a covenantal perspective, the church finds its apostolicity in conformity to the apostles' teaching and practice. The extraordinary ministry of the apostles and prophets is now continued through the ordinary ministry of pastors and teachers who equip the members of the congregation for works of service as prophets, priests, and kings. Extraordinary gifts, such as the gift of healing and speaking in

[53] Horton asserts that the view that the Spirit communicates the energies of Christ's life-giving flesh is also Calvin's position (Horton, 2008c;133; 2011a:816–818; 2).

tongues as signposts and confirmations of the arrival of God's eschatological kingdom, have ceased because the foundation of the church has been laid. Through the faithful execution of the marks of the church—the faithful preaching of the gospel, the faithful administration of the sacrament, and the faithful administration of church discipline—the church fulfills its mission in the world by opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven through the keys of the kingdom. Thus, the marks of the church are the mission of the church (Horton, 2011a:872–903; 2011d:387–419; 2008c:221–256; 2011c:165–178, 189–199; 2013b:134–146; 2016a:333–338).

### 3.4.5. The covenant's consummation as the God who reigns in glory

The God who reigns in glory does so by consummating his covenant with his people as he brings them into the dwelling place of their eternal Sabbath rest immediately when they die and into the fullness of the dwelling place of this Sabbath rest when they are raised from the dead with glorified bodies like Jesus Christ (Horton, 2011a:906–918; 2011d:421–425; 2016b:148–150). God will reign in glory when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven and judges the living and the dead. This may very well be preceded by a widespread reingrafting of Jews into the church (Horton, 2011a:949; cf. 919–956; 2011d:421–446; 1998a:142–148, 217–240; 2006a:131–132; 2016c:389–391; 2016b:150–156). Moreover, he reigns in glory by cleansing the earth and ushering in a new heaven and new earth where everything will be holy to the Lord. He will reign in glory enthroned in the midst of his people in the eternal Sabbath rest (Horton, 2011a:957–990; 2011d:446–458; 2008c:259–307; 1998a:149–154, 217–240; 2016b:150–156).

### 3.4.6. Conclusion

The structure of systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form we give to our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. I analyzed how the nature of structure shapes Horton's communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice should be more for the training in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth. Because the subject matter of theology is the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ that is redemptive-historically/eschatologically breaking forth into the present through the Holy Spirit, Horton pedagogically arranges the structure of his systematic theology redemptive-historically. Because the integrative centre of his theology is the concept of the covenant, he integrates the redemptive-historical structure of his theology around this integrative centre. This leads to the following structure of Horton's systematic theology: the covenant maker as the God who lives, the covenant partner as the God who creates, the covenant mediator as the God who rescues, the covenant blessings as the God who reigns in grace, and the covenant's consummation as the God who reigns in glory.

## 4. Consequences[54] the design[55] of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice.[56]

Having analyzed Horton's theology through the lens of the fourfold nature of Scripture, the lens of the threefold nature of hermeneutics, the lens of the fourfold nature of doctrine, and the lens of the nature of structure, I will now outline consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. First, I will outline consequences of the design of his theology for our communication of the gospel. Second, I will outline consequences for the shape of our Christian identity and practice.

### 4.1. Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel

To help us understand consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel, I will focus first on the consequence the design of his theology can have for the relationship between a legal/ethical participation in the life of God and ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God. Second, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for our knowledge of God's nature or being. Third, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating the nature of our image of God. Fourth, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating the foundational nature of our relationship with God and creation. Fifth, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating our knowledge of sin and salvation. Sixth, I will focus on the consequence of the individualizing impact of the design of his theology. Seventh, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating the structure of salvation. Eighth, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating the nature of the kingdom of God. Ninth, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating God's relationship with Israel. Tenth, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for communicating the nature of the new covenant.

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[54] While this section focuses on negative consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel, there are positive consequences as well. I highlighted these positive consequences with the use of the adverb "rightfully".

[55] Since the structure of a systematic theology organizes the various doctrines of Scripture into a coherent whole in a communicative effective or pedagogical manner for the sake of the spiritual formation of the members of the church, the word "design" is used in this study to include both form as well as content.

[56] In the previous chapter (3.3 and 3.4), I noted that doctrine as dramatic direction reminds us that doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script of the theodrama and fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. I also noted that doctrine and the formation of Christian identity and practice remind us that doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that prompts us imaginatively and creatively to understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ and clothe ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth.

### 4.1.1. Legal/ethical and ontological participation in the life of God

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that he describes his covenant ontology as "meeting a stranger" and contrasts his model with two other ontological models viz. the hyper-immanent Platonic/mystical model of "overcoming estrangement" and the hyper-transcendent atheistic/deistic model of "the stranger we never meet". His covenantal ontology of "meeting a stranger" is fundamentally a legal/ethical union with God. In contrasting his covenant ontology of "meeting a stranger" with "overcoming estrangement", he makes his covenantal ontology a rival paradigm to a participatory ontology. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel that contrasts a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology in which a legal/ethical participation in the life of God and an ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God are mutually exclusive.

### 4.1.2 Knowledge of God's nature or being

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that Horton metaphysically undergirds his covenant ontology with the distinction between the essence and energies of God. Analyzing his theology through the lens of hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation, we saw that this covenant ontology undergirded by his distinction between God's essence and God's energies led him to rightfully adopt the analogical mode of theological discourse. However, because we know God not in his essence, but only in his works, and because our knowledge of God is always analogical, we can never have any knowledge of God's essence, i.e., his being or nature. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which we only have knowledge of God's works, but never knowledge of his nature or being.

### 4.1.3. The nature of our image of God

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that because of the sharp contrast between law and grace as a reflection of God's holiness and justice, law precedes grace in the meritorious covenant of creation/works. We saw that in the overarching covenant of grace, Christ, as the last Adam, would earn the inheritance of the eternal Sabbath rest by fulfilling the covenant of creation/works and satisfying God's justice with his perfect obedience and sacrifice as our perfect Mediator.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that with his blood of the covenant, as their substitute, Christ made satisfaction for the sins of God's elect, bearing their judicial sentence in their place and propitiating the wrath of God to reconcile them to God and usher in the new covenant. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which the nature of our image of God begins with God being a God of law and justice and then being a God of mercy and grace (Burger, 2015:274–277).

### 4.1.4. The foundational nature of our relationship with God and creation

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that his theology has God's covenant with humanity as its integrative centre, which he considers to be a legal/ethical union with God. In this legal/ethical covenantal union with God, Horton operates with a covenant of works in which Adam's relationship with God and creation is fundamentally a relationship of being obedient to God's law. Moreover, this legal/ethical covenantal relationship regulated by God's law is characterized by earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner.[57] This covenant of works is still in effect today and humanity can know the reality of this covenant because they are wired to know its reality through the voice of conscience, their longing for eternal life, and their daily experience of the benefits of God's common grace. Thus, a consequence of the design of his theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which humanity's foundational relationship with God and creation is characterized by earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner (cf. Burger, 2017f:24).

### 4.1.5. Our knowledge of sin and salvation

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that to demonstrate God's holiness and justice and to protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification, his covenant theology makes a sharp distinction between law and gospel. While these two principles are not inherently antithetical, they are antithetical with regard to how we are justified and inherit eternal life. This sharp antithetical relationship between law and gospel with regard to how we are justified and inherit eternal life leads Horton to assert that the law alone tells us that we are sinners, while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved.

In a discussion with Tim Keller, Horton illustrates what he means. "The power of the gospel comes in two movements," Keller says. "It first says, 'I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe,' but then quickly follows with, 'I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope.' . . . But shouldn't we say that it is the law that handles that first movement, not the gospel?" Horton adds, "Keller rightly emphasizes that idolatry is the common denominator of these sins. Yet the first work that needs to be done here is a penetrating and soul-searching 'first use' of the law — to expose our sin and show our need for Christ. The law reveals our idolatry, and the gospel proclaims freedom from its condemnation and power. The gospel needs the law to do its job" (Horton, 2016d:89). Thus, a consequence of the design

[57] Because the foundational nature of our relationship with God and creation is determined by the covenant of works, so this covenant of works also determines Horton's understanding of the work of Christ because Christ perfectly does what Adam failed to do (Burger, 2017f:11, 13). This will be further explained and evaluated in the next chapter.

of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which we always first need to be confronted with the law and then the gospel, because the law alone tells us that we are sinners, while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved.

#### 4.1.6. The individualizing impact of the emphasis on the problem of our guilt

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theodramatic nature of doctrine, we saw that Horton rightfully stresses the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of God's new creation today already through faith and the Holy Spirit. We also saw that he rightfully connects the eschatological resurrection life of the future that is breaking into the historical present to the concept of the kingdom of God in which Christ applies the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through his Word and Spirit, creating a new covenant community or church where Christ's reign in grace is already truly present, but not yet fully present in its consummated form.

However, analyzing his theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that the heart of Horton's covenantal ontology is the doctrine of justification, which deals with the problem of our guilt. We also saw that Horton rightfully stresses that Christ made satisfaction for the personal sins of God's elect with his blood of the covenant, as their substitute, bearing their judicial sentence in their place and propitiating the wrath of God to reconcile them to God and usher in the new covenant. Moreover, we saw that Horton considers God's justification of sinners through faith to essentially be the gospel.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that he makes God's judicial verdict of justification the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis* or order of salvation. Thus, while the design of Horton's theology does rightfully stress the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of God's new creation today already through faith and the Holy Spirit, because he views the gospel as essentially synonymous with justification by faith, a consequence of the design of his theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel that focuses on the individual and narrows the gospel and the use of the word "gospel" to the forgiveness of sins.[58]

#### 4.1.7. The twofold soteriological structure of earning and applying benefits of salvation

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the narrative nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton considers the resurrection life of God's new creation that is breaking forth into the broken present as the kingdom or rule of God breaking forth into history as the result of Christ applying the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through the Spirit creating a new covenant community or church.

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the nature of structure, we saw that Horton pedagogically arranged the structure of his sapiential systematic theology redemptive-historically in such

[58] The influence of the sacrament of penance on the individualizing impact of the emphasis on the problem of our guilt will be analyzed in the next chapter.

a way that, after dealing with the covenant mediator as the God who rescues, he distributes the covenant blessings as the God who reigns in grace by applying the benefits the covenant mediator earns to believers in a certain logical order (*ordo salutis*). Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel with a twofold soteriological structure in which Christ, on the one hand, earns benefits for believers while, on the other hand, he applies those benefits to them through the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, can lead to Christians being thrown back on themselves wondering whether the benefits of salvation are for them or not (cf. Burger, 2017c:25–26, 35).

#### 4.1.8. The nature of the kingdom of God

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the narrative nature of Scripture, we saw that the eschatological resurrection life of the future that is breaking into the historical present is tied to his understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God. When Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom, he was announcing the arrival of the new covenant where he now reigns in grace as he applies the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through the Spirit, creating a new covenant community or church. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which the kingdom of God primarily entails the rule of Christ, which is already present on this earth, although not in its consummated form.

#### 4.1.9. The Mosaic covenant and God's relationship with Israel

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that Horton's covenant ontology operates with federal theology's distinction between three covenants: the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and the covenant of redemption. Because law and gospel stand in antithetical relationship to each other with regard to how sinners are justified before God and inherit eternal life, Horton considers the Mosaic covenant or covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai in some sense to be a covenant of works. Because God gave Israel the land of Canaan to fulfill its covenant vocation, remaining in the land was conditional on Israel's obedience to the stipulations of the Sinai covenant. In this sense, the Mosaic covenant is essentially a republication of the covenant of creation/works God made with Adam in the Garden. Because Israel failed in its covenant vocation, its history primarily reveals our human sinfulness.

Moreover, God's covenant with Israel as a national entity is a passing phenomenon or parenthesis in God's redemptive history. Burger has written, "[W]ithin the threefold scheme of federal theology, Israel is easily forgotten. The law was already given to Adam before the fall, and the covenant of grace already began in Genesis 3. As a consequence, the history of Israel does not really add something and can be missed." However, he adds, "The other possibility is that the covenant of Israel is understood as a republication of the covenant of works. Now, it becomes difficult to understand the existence of Israel as the consequence of the covenant of the promise and of grace made with Abraham. Israel only functions as

the dark background of the new covenant" (Burger, 2017f:21; 2018a:6-9; 2019:272, 299). Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which God's concrete dealing with Israel as a nation can easily be missed. Furthermore, it appears to be difficult to understand the existence of Israel as the consequence of the covenant God made with Abraham.

#### 4.1.10. The nature of the new covenant

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that his theology operates with a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption in which the Father elects a people in the Son to be brought to faith through the Spirit. We also saw that his theology considers the covenant of grace to be unconditional in its essence, but conditional in its administration. Analyzing Horton's theology through the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that he considers those who have not yet been united to Christ through faith to be only externally related to the new covenant. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a communication of a gospel in which the nature of the new covenant is governed by God's decretal election.

### 4.2. Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for the shape of our Christian identity and practice

To help us understand consequences of the design of Horton's theology for the shape of our Christian identity and practice, I will focus on identity first and then on practice.

#### 4.2.1. Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for the shape of our Christian identity

To help us understand consequences of the design of Horton's theology for the shape of our Christian identity, I first will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for the nature of our self-image. Second, I will comment on the nature of our Christian identity of union with Christ. Third, I will consider the consequence the design of his theology can have for the generative source of our Christian identity

##### 4.2.1.1. The nature of our self-image

When I outlined a consequence of the design of Horton's theology for his communication of the gospel in section 4.1.6, we saw that the design of his theology rightfully stresses the eschatological reality of our participation in the resurrection life of God's new creation, already today through faith and the Holy Spirit. However, it lays more stress on our guilt and the removal of this guilt, so that a consequence of the design of his theology is that it communicates a gospel that focuses on the individual and functionally narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins.

This consequence of the design of his theology for his communication of the gospel also has a consequence for the nature of our self-image. As his theology communicates a gospel that focuses on the individual and narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins, it also fosters a self-image that focuses on one's guilt and the deserving of God's wrath. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can shape the nature of our self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image.

#### 4.2.1.2 The nature of union with Christ and our Christian identity

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theological nature of Scripture, we saw that God's fundamental relationship with humanity is an ontology of correspondence, i.e., the correspondence of our will to the will or intention of God.

Analyzing his theology through the lens of the nature of structure, we saw that Horton pedagogically arranged the structure of his sapiential systematic theology redemptive-historically in such a way that the God who reigns in grace is the God who does so through legally uniting believers to Christ through justification by faith and vitally uniting them to Christ through sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

However, because the divine energies of God that emanate from his essence are distinguished from his essence as the rays of the sun are distinguished from the essence of the sun, we cannot be united to God's essence, but only to his energies. Accordingly, Christ does not dwell in us essentially, but only by the energy of his Spirit. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can shape the nature of our Christian identity through our union with Christ in such a way that we only have an outward or extrinsic union with Christ.

#### 4.2.1.3. The generative source of our Christian identity

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the narrative nature of Scripture, we saw that for Horton, rightfully, the resurrection life of God's new creation in Christ that is breaking forth into the present through the Holy Spirit is central to the Christian story. Analyzing his theology through the lens of the theodramatic nature of Scripture and the lens of the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that the heart of Horton's covenant ontology is the doctrine of justification. Analyzing his theology through the lens of his doctrine of the covenant, we saw that while union with Christ is the matrix or proper habitat of the *ordo salutis,* justification is the forensic basis of this union and the generative source of the whole order of salvation or the resurrection life of God's new creation that is breaking forth into the present through the Holy Spirit. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can shape our Christian identity by constantly having us look to our justification as the source of our transformation instead of looking to our union with Christ as the source, while this declaration appears to have no forensic basis.

### 4.2.2. Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for the shape of our Christian practice

To help us understand consequences of the design of Horton's theology for the shape of our Christian practice, I first will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality. Second, I will focus on the consequence the design of his theology can have for the practice of Christian cultural engagement.

#### 4.2.2.1. The practice of spiritual formation through the spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theodramatic nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton rightfully considers Scripture to be drama that inserts us into its action and demands that we say or do something. Moreover, he rightfully considers the primary means by which our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama of redemption is cultivated to be the Sunday worship services. There this covenantal drama is liturgically enacted as God performatively speaks through his greeting of grace and peace, the reading of the law, the pronouncing of absolution, the sermon, the administration of the sacraments, and the benediction. The people respond with singing, confession, and prayer. Horton also rightfully emphasizes that the church's weekly public ministry needs to be supplemented and supported by ordinary private and family devotions of prayer, singing, instruction and Bible reading.

However, according to Horton, when we supplement the church's weekly public ministry and the ordinary private and family devotions of prayer, singing, instruction, and Bible reading with spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality, such as being silent before God, we may tend to focus our attention on what is happening within us rather than what happened for us outside of ourselves. Consequently, he writes, "Instead of drawing us outside of ourselves, this trajectory [of spiritual disciplines] takes us deeper into ourselves, clinging to what is happening within us rather than what happened for us, outside of us, two thousand years ago." He adds, "The most important, most real, most lasting work is not accomplished in the depths of our heart but in the depth of history, under Pontius Pilate. It is precisely because of that accomplishment that we have every reason to meditate on the riches of our inheritance each day. And because of Christ's work outside of us, in history, we are not only justified but are being transformed from the inside out (Horton, 2009a:158; 2008a:151–152)[59]. Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a discouragement of the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality as a means of cultivating our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama/drama of redemption.

[59] See also what we cited earlier: "Nothing that happens within us is, properly speaking, 'Gospel,' but it is the Gospel's effect" (Horton, 2014b; 2016d:76–79).

#### 4.2.2.2. The practice of Christian cultural engagement

Analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the theological nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton's covenant ontology considers law and gospel to be inherently antithetical with regard to how we are justified and inherit eternal life. Analyzing his theology through the lens of the narrative nature of Scripture, we saw that Horton distinguishes the way Christ rules in the church and the way he does in the world. Consequently, cultural activity belongs to the common or secular realm and pertains to the temporal, while the cultic mandate belongs to the sacred realm and pertains to the eternal. Moreover, we saw that because the church's calling to be a missionary people was given in the covenant of grace and is enabled through saving grace and special revelation, this calling needs to be distinguished from the church's cultural calling in society, which is given in the covenant of creation and is enabled through common grace and general revelation.

Furthermore, analyzing Horton's theology through the lens of the pedagogical nature of structure, we saw that the church fulfills its mission in the world by opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven through the keys of the kingdom through the faithful execution of the marks of the church, viz. the faithful preaching of the gospel, the faithful administration of the sacrament, and the faithful administration of church discipline. Consequently, Horton considers the marks of the church to be the mission of the church.

This leads to a practice where Christians fulfill their cultural vocation in the common kingdom in a common way, like unbelievers, with the natural law as their source of revelation, while they fulfill their cultic vocation in the sacred kingdom in a special way with Scripture as their source of revelation.

Moreover, because our vocations outside the church have bearing only on the temporal, not the eternal, they are considered "creation" work and not "kingdom" work. (Horton, 2010b).[60] Furthermore, this view leads to a practice where Christians should not try to apply the gospel to social issues because societal issues require temporal solutions.[61] In addition, it leads to a practice where the church should also not try to make disciples by being a people who are active in the world by embodying the gospel, because this so easily distracts from the church as a place where Christ is the active party, forgiving and renewing sinners.[62]

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[60] Horton does not believe there should be "Christian" institutions nor "Christian" vocations (Horton, 2010b; 2006b.; 2014a:228; however, cf. 2011a). In fact, he asserts that "Christianity is not a culture . . . [but] a system of truth claims" (Horton, 2008e:26; 1994:32–35). Elsewhere he writes, "We do not need more 'Christian' influence in Washington, . . . Rather, we need more Christianity in the churches and a more secular (though not secularist) influence in all areas of culture by Christians freed to pursue their secular vocations . . . . " (Horton, 2008b:264).

[61] Horton asserts that applying the gospel to social issues trivializes it, for "the Gospel is not the answer to everything" because societal issues "are temporal problems demanding temporal solutions" (Horton, 1994:202; 1994:61).

[62] Horton also considers being a missional church through missional engagement with society by embodying the gospel a form of mission creep. He defines mission creep as "the expansion of a project or mission beyond its

Thus, a consequence of the design of Horton's theology is that it can lead to a compartmentalization of the Christian life by driving a wedge between activities in the common and the sacred realm.

### 4.3. Conclusion

Because the second question that arises from our overarching research question concerns how the structural design of Michael Horton's systematic theology gives direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice, I outlined consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for both of these areas.

With regard to the consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel, we saw that the design of his theology can lead to a communication of a gospel that contrasts a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology in which a legal/ethical participation in the life of God and an ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God are considered to be mutually exclusive; a gospel in which we only have knowledge of God's works, but never knowledge of his nature or being; a gospel in which humanity's foundational relationship with God and creation is fundamentally characterized by earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner; a gospel in which the law alone tells us that we are sinners, while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved; a gospel in which the nature of our image of God begins with God being a God of law and justice and then being a God of mercy and grace; a gospel that focuses on the individual and narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins; a gospel with a twofold soteriological structure in which Christ, on the one hand, earns benefits for believers while, on the other hand, he applies those benefits to them through the Holy Spirit; a gospel in which the kingdom of God primarily refers to the rule of Christ; and a gospel in which God's concrete dealing with Israel as a nation can easily be missed and it difficult to understand the existence of Israel as the consequence of the covenant God made with Abraham.

With regard to the shaping of our Christian identity, we saw that the design of his theology can shape the nature of our self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image. It can shape the nature of our Christian identity of our union with Christ as an outward or extrinsic union with Christ and result in having us constantly look to our justification as the source of our transformation.

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original goals, often after initial successes" (Horton, 2011c:8; cf. 247–293. Furthermore, failing to distinguish between the church's cultural calling in the covenant of creation or works through common grace and general revelation and the church's calling to be a missionary people in the covenant of grace enabled through saving grace and special revelation is, in Horton's view, a confusion of kingdoms, Christ and culture, general and special revelation, and law and gospel (Horton, 1994:107–127:2006a:17, 121–128; 2008a:114, 124, 157, 206; 2009a:253–254, 263; cf. 245–266; 2011c:84, 86, 100, 118, 212, 226–228, 238, 2458, 271, 286).

As for the shape of our Christian practice, we saw that the design of his theology can lead to a discouragement of the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality as a means of cultivating our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama drama of redemption. And it can lead to a compartmentalization of the Christian life by driving a wedge between activities in the common and the sacred realm.

## 5. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking: how does the structure design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. I answered this question by introducing Michael Horton and explaining why I chose him for my study. I then used Horton's doctrine of the covenant to analyze the covenant structure of his theology. Moreover, I used the design features of my theodramatic model of systematic theology developed in the previous chapter as a tool to continue to analyze his theology. I then outlined consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice.

In the next chapter, I will investigate to what extent the consequences of the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice are the result of systemic problems in Horton's federal theology. To determine this, I need to analyze and evaluate his federal theology.

## CHAPTER FOUR: AN EVALUATION OF HORTON'S FEDERAL THEOLOGY

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture? The third question that arises from our overarching question is: To what extent are the consequences of the design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice the result of systemic problems in his federal theology? To answer this question, I will first evaluate Horton's model of federal theology. Second, I will draw out the implications of this evaluation for Horton's communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. Third, I will draw an overall conclusion.

### 1. An evaluation of Horton's federal theology

In order to determine to what extent the consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice are the result of systemic problems in his federal theology, I will first investigate whether the word "covenant" (Hebrew, *bĕrît*) is synonymous with "relationship". Second, I will investigate why, on Horton's view, relationality is not considered to be part of creation, but something that needed to be added by the voluntary act of free subjects so that God's relationship with humanity needs to be understood in terms of two contracting parties. Third, I will investigate and evaluate the exegetical support offered for the existence of the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Fourth, I will investigate and evaluate the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of works. Fifth, I will investigate and evaluate the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of grace. Sixth, I will investigate and evaluate Horton's understanding of the essence-energies distinction. Seventh, I will investigate and evaluate his understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis*. Eighth, I will investigate and evaluate his two-kingdom theology.

#### 1.1. The meaning of the word *bĕrît*

Federal theology has been defined as a "system of theology in which the relationship between God and humanity is described in covenantal terms" (McGowan, 2016:9; cf. Macleod, 1993:215; Van Asselt, 2012:65–84; Weir, 1990:3–5).[1] The Westminster Confession of Faith refers to this relationship between

[1] For limited introductions into federal theology, see Allen, 2010:34–53; Macleod, 1993:214–218; McGowen, 2016:9–21; Osterhaven, 2017:523–526; Rhodes, 2013; Wright, 2019:33–43. For more comprehensive studies, see Belcher, 2020b; Golding, 2004; Lillback, 2001; Strehle, 1988; Vos, 1980:234–267; Waters, Reid, and Muether, 2020; Weir, 1990; Woolsey, 2012. Allen helpfully notes that "the doctrine of the covenant was viewed not only as

God and humanity described in covenantal terms as a "voluntary condescension" of God that made this relationship possible (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:923).

Thus, federal theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries operates with a synonymous understanding of "covenant" and "relationship" when it has to do with a relationship between two human parties or a relationship between God and humanity. Since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, other federal theologians also operate with this synonymous understanding of "covenant" and "relationship". Herman Bavinck, for instance, writes, "In Scripture 'covenant' is the fixed form in which the relation of God to his people is depicted and presented" (Bavinck, 2004:II:568). Louis Berkhof is of the same opinion and anchors this synonymous understanding of "covenant" and "relationship" within the life of the Trinity. For instance, he writes, " . . . the archetype of all covenant life is found in the trinitarian being of God, and what is seen among men is but a faint copy (ectype) of this" (Berkhof, 1996:263–64; Bavinck, 2006:III:214; Letham, 2019:437). Horton too understands a covenant between God and humanity as synonymous with "relationship," because he defines covenant as "a union based on an oath" or "a relationship under sanctions" (Horton, 2011:44; 2006a:10; 2016b:83; see also Bartholomew, 1995:13–14, 18, 21–29; Bartholomew and Goheen, 2004:24–25, 50–51, 55–56, 72, Brown and Keele, 2017:location 237; De Graaf, 1977:23, 36; 2010:33–36; de Jong, 2002:89–92; DeYoung, 2020:589; Frame, 2013:17–20; Goheen, 2011:34–36, 43; Hyde, 2010:52; Jones, 2020:35–36; cf. 33–44, 72; Packer, 1993:87; 2012:3; Robertson, 1980:3–15; Schilder, 1932:187–188; 1946:66; Schreiner, 2017:13–14; Smith, 2003:49–53; Stam, 1999:29–30; VanDrunen, 2014:84; Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:394; Vanhoozer, 2005:135–137; 2010:68, 442–444; 2014a:18; 2014b:101; Van Til, 1991:240; Ward, 2003:17; Williams, 2005:44–46, 143, 236). In fact, for Horton "covenant" is "not simply a metaphor for a relationship but *is* the relationship between God and creation" (Horton, 2011a:426). Also, for Horton, the archetype of all covenantal life is found in the life of the Trinity. Thus, he writes "God's very existence is covenantal: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in unceasing devotion to each other, reaching outward beyond the Godhead to create a community of creatures serving as a giant analogy of the Godhead's relationship" (Horton, 2006a:10; see also Smith, 2003:49–53; Van Til, 1991:240).

The concept of covenant as a relationship between God and humanity functions as the integrative centre of federal theology. This can be seen in the three central covenants that typically make up the structure of this system of theology: the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.[2] Accordingly, all God's actions must be understood within a covenantal

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an organizing principle for uniting Old and New Covenant, but also as an anthropological principle to relate creation, sin, and redemption" (Allen, 2010:39). For an annotated bibliography of Reformed reflection on the covenant, see Muether, 2020:599–622.

[2] The word "typically" is used intentionally. Allen writes, "In due course, the 'federal theology' typically (though not unanimously) acknowledged the presence of three covenants within Holy Scripture" (Allen, 2010:40).

framework. This is also how the concept of covenant functions in Horton's systematic theology. For Horton the architectonic structure of covenant ties together "ecclesiology (the context of the covenant), theology proper (the covenant maker), anthropology (the covenant partner), Christology (the covenant mediator), soteriology (the covenant blessings), eschatology (the covenant's consummation)" (Horton, 2002c:17; 2006a:13–14).

However, the view that the Hebrew word for "covenant" (*bĕrît*)[3] is synonymous with "relationship" has been rightly challenged.[4] What is more, in some cases "the making of a covenant seems to presuppose an existing relationship" (Hugenberger, 1994:169).[5] McKenzie concludes, "Broadly, the word [*bĕrît*] refers to an arrangement of some kind between two or more parties. But the exact nature of the arrangement is not always clear" (McKenzie, 2000:3; Kalluveettil, 1982:90–91; McCarthy, 1981:11; Williamson, 2007:35). Burger writes, "A *berit* confers to a relationship a formal, regulated status; it regulates, shapes, or directs that relationship". He adds, "A *berit* involves obligations for one or both parties in the relationship. Exegesis should determine which obligations exist and to whom they pertain" (Burger, 2019:274). Consequently, the context in which the word is used should be decisive for its meaning (Burger, 2018:10; 2019:273; McConville, 1997:747; Van Bekkum, 2017).

Thus, a first systemic problem with Horton's federal theology is that the word *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship" as his theology presupposes.

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[3] Those who have counted the total number of occurrences of *bĕrît* in the Hebrew Old Testament differ slightly in their conclusion (286 Williamson, 2007:35; 287 Kutsch, 1997:I-257; 288 Gentry and Wellum, 2018:288). By and large, *bĕrît* is translated with *diathēkē* in the Septuagint. The New Testament follows this practice where it occurs "only some thirty-three times, almost half of which occur in OT quotations" (Williamson, 2003:420). Williamson writes, "Strictly speaking, this refers to a promissory obligation, and is commonly used in ancient Greek literature of a last will or testament, rather than some kind of formal agreement or treaty—for which *synthēkē* might seem the more appropriate term." He explains that because *synthēkē* implies a mutual initiative whereas *diathēkē* a unilateral initiative, the biblical authors may have preferred the latter word to the former for their translation of *bĕrît*" (Williamson, 2007:37). The etymology of *bĕrît* is unclear. Even if it was clear, determining the meaning of a word based on the etymology of a word may lead nowhere because the etymology "may have absolutely no bearing on the semantic function of the word as used by subsequent speakers and authors (in this case, those who authored and compiled the Old Testament)" (Williamson, 2007:37; cf. Barr, 1977:23–38; McConville, 1997:747; Nicholson, 1986:99).

[4] E. Kutsch argues that *bĕrît* does "not indicate a 'relationship,' but is the 'determination,' 'obligation,' accepted by the subject of the *bĕrît.* . . . The subject of the *bĕrît* places another, the one with whom a *bĕrît* is 'cut,' under obligation." He adds, "It is theologically significant that the OT does not know of a reciprocal *bĕrît* that pairs God and people—a *bĕrît* in which both God and people accept mutually enforceable responsibilities" (Kutsch, 1997:258–259, 264). Others have criticized Kutsch for overstating his case (Barr, 1977:24–25, 37; Hugenberger, 1994:170; Kwakkel, 2009:119–120, 125–126, 129; McCarthy, 1981:16–22; Nicholson, 1986:104–109). Barr wonders whether Kutsch's research in this area "seems dominated by a strong sense of the opposition between grace and law, promise and law" (Barr, 1977:37).

[5] While Hugenberger criticizes making *bĕrît* synonymous with "relationship", he does consider "relationship" to be the predominant sense of *bĕrît,* while he considers "a shared commitment to a stipulated course of action" to be a less frequent sense of the word (Hugenberger, 1994:171–173). The fact that *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship" does not mean that making a *bĕrît* can never be synonymous with initiating a relationship, but this is not the usual use of *bĕrît* (Burger, 2019:274; 2017f:22-24; 2018a:10; Kwakkel, 2009:128).

### 1.2. Relationality and creation

Federal theology asserts that since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of the distinction between the Creator and the creature and their metaphysical distance, God voluntarily condescends and establishes a covenant relationship with them. As a result, God's fundamental relationship with humanity needs to be secured with a covenant (Bavinck 2004:II:568–572; Berkhof 1996:215; Oliphint, 2012:111; Fesko 2014:138; cf. Stek 1994:12–16; Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:923–924).[6] Horton also does not consider that there could be any "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of the distinction between the Creator and the creature and their metaphysical distance. However, instead of seeing the covenant relationship as added to created reality, he makes it part of created reality itself because God constituted Adam and Eve as covenant beings by voluntarily creating them in his image, with the commission to lead all of creation into the eschatological reward of God's Sabbath rest (Horton, 2011a:381, 384, 421, 425, 440–442, 688; 2006a:10, 83–84)[7].

The idea that God's fundamental relationship with humanity needs to be secured with a covenant can best be understood against the background of late medieval nominalist covenant theology and the political and social thought that resulted in social contract theory. Nominalism makes use of the distinction between *potentia absoluta,* i.e., what God can theoretically do because of his absolute power, and *potentia ordinata,* what God in actual fact does and will do because he has determined to act—and revealed that is going to act—in a certain manner.

Accordingly, history is a dialectic between God's absolute power and his ordained power. The key to understanding this dialectic of causation is a covenant or contract God has made with creation and a covenant or contract he has made with the church. In the former covenant God binds or restricts his absolute power and obliges himself covenantally "to uphold his created universe and the laws that govern it, in spite of their contingent nature or the sinfulness of man. This is in the area of natural causation." In the latter covenant, "God commits himself to a process of salvation which, in spite of its contingent nature or the basic unacceptability of man, he will uphold. This is in the area of theological causation" (Courtenay, 1971:117).

With regard to the relationship between merit to grace and eternal life in the covenant made with the church in nominalist theology, a person does not merit the grace of eternal life based on his innate natural powers or the innate power of a good work, but a person merits grace and eternal life based on God's covenant promises. A person "who does what is in him can trust God's [covenant] promises"

[6] Bavinck writes, "Among rational and moral creatures all higher life takes the form of a covenant" (Bavinck, 2004:II:568; cf. Burger, 2017f:8).

[7] As we saw in the previous chapter, for Horton "covenant" is "not simply a metaphor for a relationship but *is* the relationship between God and creation" (Horton, 2011a:426).

(Courtenay, 1971:118; cf. 110).[8] This dialectic between God's absolute power and his ordained power in the order of salvation was meant to protect both God's sovereignty as well his trustworthiness (Woolsey, 2012:197). However, because only a person who did his best or did what was in him (*facere quod in se est*) could trust God's covenant promises with regard to the grace of eternal life, this nominalist covenant theology is essentially semi-Pelagian (Burger, 2017f:4; Courtenay, 1971:102–110; Woolsey, 2012:198). Nevertheless, even though this nominalist covenant theology served semi-Pelagian interests, the continuity between this late medieval covenant theology and Reformed covenant theology is clear (Burger, 2017f:3-8; Irons, 2000:256–265; Lillback, 2001:46–55; Strehle, 1988:6–82, Woolsey, 2012:194–2000). [9]

Political and societal structures also influenced the development of this theology as these structures were conducive in shaping people's understanding of covenant theology. Burger writes, "The doctrine of the covenant developed in a voluntarist climate, in which many important relationships were understood as covenantal. Relationality was considered an extra, added by a voluntary act of free subjects" (Burger, 2017f:19-20).[10] For instance, in the medieval feudal economy, a landowner protected his interests and those of his renters by entering into feudal covenants that were legally binding. Just as a soldier's oath of allegiance in those days was referred to as a *sacramentum*, so a feudal covenant was also referred to as a *sacramentum*. Thus, it should not surprise us that a feudal covenant "would develop theological implications" (Lillback, 2001:31; Reeling Brouwer, 1986:161–173; 2010:199–203). What is true for economic life was also true for political life. Whereas landowners and renters entered into covenants, so also political life was seen in the context of a covenant where the king and the people were covenantally bound to one another in a social contract.[11] What was true for the covenantal relationship between the king and his subjects was also true for the relationship between God and the members of the

[8] For the medieval concept of merit, see McGrath, 2005:138–150. Irons argues that federal theology's covenant of works is dependent upon the voluntarist nominalist concept or covenantal or congruous merit, where God voluntarily condescends and superimposes a covenant upon the created order in which he promises humanity a reward for their obedience that is less than God's strict standard of justice would require. This covenantal or congruous merit is considered to be *ex pacto* merit as opposed to merit according to God's strict standard of justice, also known as condign merit (Irons, 2000:262–263).

[9] Burger notes, "Some reformed theologians have problems with affirming a continuity between nominalist and reformed covenantal thinking. Nevertheless, the fact that the magisterial reformers oppose the pelagian tendencies of late medieval nominalism does not imply a discontinuation with a tradition of divine self-binding, thinking in terms of promise and covenant" (Burger, 2017f:5; cf. Woolsey, 2012:199). Horton does not see this continuity (Horton, 2007:60; Burger, 2017f:5).

[10] Voluntarism is a theory where the will takes precedence over the intellect. For instance, when God rewards something, he does not do so because of any inherent worth in the moral act, but because he freely chooses to do so (McGrath, 2011a:35).

[11] Huijgen writes, "The very invention of 'covenant' cannot be isolated from Swiss theologians' familiarity with the Swiss federation or *Eidgenossenschaft,* in which covenant or *Bund* was a central idea, and which provided a heuristic framework for God's covenant with humans" (Huijgen, 2017:1-2).

church. This relationship too was seen as a mutually binding covenant (Lillback, 2001:29–37; Burger, 2017f:5-6; Klempa, 1998:94–95; Woolsey, 2012:185–194).

Consequently, God's relationship with humanity was viewed as a contractual relationship that had to be secured with a covenant much as the contractual relationships in economic and political life were secured by covenants. Accordingly, when the Westminster Confession states that "[t]he distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant", this assertion needs to be seen against the background of this nominalist covenant theology and the voluntarist medieval societal and political structures, such that relationality was not considered to be natural but added by a voluntary act of God.

Thus, a second systemic problem with Horton's federal theology is its assertion that, because there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship between God and humanity, God's fundamental relationship with humanity needs to be secured with a covenant. This is problematic not only because the word *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship", but also because, as this study will show, covenants are redemptive instruments that secure and guarantee God's missional intent for humanity and creation, often during times of uncertainty, as will be further developed in the next chapter.[12]

### 1.3. The intratrinitarian covenant of redemption

Federal theology typically finds the unity of salvation in the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in which it "is arranged that humans will be saved, how they will be saved and who will be saved" (Huijgen, 2017:3). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit make an agreement to purchase the redemption and glory of sinners who have been elected to receive salvation and glory. In this agreement, the Son voluntarily agrees to become the representative head and guarantor of these elect sinners, taking upon himself the responsibility not only to meet their legal obligations but also to purchase their salvation with his death on a cross; the Father promises the Son that he will receive all that he needs for this comprehensive task; and the Holy Spirit voluntarily agrees to apply the purchased benefits of salvation to the elect so that they can inherit the eternal life the Son earned for them with his faithful obedience (Allen, 2010:40–41; Bavinck, 2006:III:212–215; Beach, 2002:101–142; Beeke and Jones, 2012:237–258; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:982; Berkhof, 1996:265–271; De Graaf, 2010:67, 74; Edwards and Smythe, 1880; Fesko, 2016a, 2016b; Frame, 2013:59–60; Grudem, 1994:518–519; Kamphuis, 1982:62–63; Kline, 2001:222, 235–236; 2006:145; Loonstra 1990:332–351; Hodge, 1952:358–362; Macleod, 2002:126–128; Muller, 2003:265–267; O'Donnell, 2011; Richard,

[12] See also section 1.4.3 of this chapter.

2020:43–62; Schilder, 1935:262–268; 1950:96–99; 1947:383–384, 397; Swain, 2016:107–125; Turretin, 1994:177–178; Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:200–208; VanDrunen and Clark, 167–196; Vanhoozer, 2010:258–259, 269; 2014b:77–80; 2014a:17–19; Vos, 1980:245–252; Witsius, 1990:60–107).[13] Horton also operates with a covenant of redemption (Horton, 2006a, 78–82, 87; 2007a:136–139; 2011a:303, 309, 446, 487, 510–511, 518, 587, 616, 727–718, 854).

I will now proceed first to investigate and then to evaluate the main exegetical support offered for the existence of the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[14]

### 1.3.1. The main exegetical support for the covenant of redemption

Exegetical support for this doctrine from the Old Testament is inferred mainly from the Psalms, which speak about God's covenantal relationship with the anointed king, and from the Prophets, which speak about God's covenantal relationship with the suffering Servant and the messianic Branch.

Yahweh's relationship with the anointed King in the Psalms involves not only God's historical covenantal relationship with Israel's anointed king, but also his covenantal relationship with Jesus Christ, the one David represents and foreshadows. Because Jesus Christ is the pre-existent Son of God, this covenantal relationship includes intratrinitarian activity before the creation of the world.

Thus, when Psalm 2:7 states, "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'", this not only refers to the historical covenantal relationship between David and Jesus Christ, but it also alludes to a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant between the Father and the Son (Fesko, 2016b:93–94; Kline, 2001:235–236).

When Psalm 40 states, "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in

[13] Fesko asserts that "the doctrine is not based upon one or two isolated texts but rather an entire web of texts spread across the canon of Scripture … creating a tapestry of the work of the trinity in the redemption of fallen humanity.… On exegetical grounds, not speculative, various theologians detected covenantal language in the various parts of Scripture that reported and revealed the intra-trinitarian deliberations regarding salvation" (Fesko, 2016a:81). Muller formulates this idea as follows, "[T]he notion of an eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son is established primarily by way of conclusions drawn from a collation of various texts that present the nature of the work of redemption" (Muller, 2007:19; cf. 22, 28; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:194). For references to Reformed scholastic resources on the covenant of redemption, see Heppe, 2007:376–378, 382–384. For locating the origin of the concept of the *pactum salutis*, see Muller, 2007. For the place of the doctrine of the *pactum salutus* in covenant theology, see Woo, 2018:14–23. For whether the *pactum salutis* involves not only the Father and the Son, but also the Spirit, see Allen, 2016:40; Williamson, 2018:3–5. For an overview of criticism of the theologoumenon of the covenant of redemption, see Loonstra, 1990:140–184; Woo, 2018:24–28, cf. 31–38, 85–89, 139–142, 187–190, 235–239. When the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace are collapsed into one covenant (Kersten, 1980:1–233), the result is a soteriological determinism that does not do justice "to what the Bible says about God's interaction in time with all those with whom he concludes the covenant of grace" (Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:207; Van Asselt, 2012:81–82).

[14] For these sections, I thankfully made use of Williamson, 2018; Woo, 2018.

the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart'", this not only refers historically to David and Christ, whom he represents and foreshadows, but it also alludes pretemporally to the Son's willingness to obey the Father's will for him for the sake of the salvation of the elect (Fesko, 2016b:14–15; Cocceius, 2016:87; Turretin, 1994:177–178; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:181–182, 192–194).

When Psalm 89:3–4[15] states, "You have said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations'", this not only refers to God's historical covenant with David and his historical new covenant with Christ, but it also alludes to the pre-temporal covenant between the Father and the Son "which these historical covenants 'disclose'" (Williamson, 2018:11; Fesko, 2016b:14). The same is true for Psalm 110:4 which states, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'" (Fesko, 2016b:104–106; Cocceius, 2016:87; Kline, 2001:226–227; Turretin, 1994:177; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:186–187, 192–194).[16]

God's covenantal relationship with the suffering Servant not only involves God's historical covenantal relationship with Christ, but also includes the pre-temporal intratrinitarian covenant relationship between the Father and the Son. Thus, when Isaiah 53:10 states, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand", this will of the Lord alludes to an intratrinitarian plan between the Father and the Son that the Son voluntarily accepted and that underlies his actions and accomplishments (Fesko, 2016b:269; Cocceius, 2016:86; Kline, 2001:226–227; Turretin, 1994:178; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:182–183, 192–194).

God's covenantal relationship with the messianic Branch also includes the pre-temporal intratrinitarian covenant relationship between the Father and the Son.[17] Thus, when Zechariah 6:13 states, "It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both", this "counsel of peace" is an allusion to the pre-temporal *pactum salutis* that undergirds the historical peace that the coming Messiah would bring (Fesko, 2016b:77; Cocceius, 2016:85–86; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:187–189, 192–194; Witsius, 1990:61 [II.2.7]; cf. 61–62 [II.2.8]).

[15] See also verses 28–29, 34–37, 49.
[16] Fesko believes that this text refers only to a pre-temporal oath made by the Father to the Son because the Old Testament does not mention this oath (Fesko, 2016:103). However, see Williamson, 2018:13.
[17] For an overview of the exegesis of Zechariah 6:13 with support for the *pactum salutis* from Jerome to modern exegesis, see Woo, 2018:62–76.

Exegetical support for the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption from the New Testament is inferred mainly from Luke 22:29; John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 24; Ephesians 1:3–14; 1 Timothy 1:9–10; and Hebrews 7:20–22.

Concerning Luke 22:29 ("and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom"), Williamson writes, "Theodore Beza (1519–1605) introduced Luke 22:29 into the discussion, when he rejected Jerome's translation of διατίθημι as 'appoint' (Latin: *dispono*) in favour of: 'I therefore *covenant* to you, just as my Father *covenanted* to me, a kingdom'" (Williamson, 2018:16). This covenantal appointment is considered to have occurred pre-temporally in the intratrinitarian *pactum salutis* (Fesko, 2016b:120; Cocceius, 2016:88; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:190, 192–194; Turretin, 1994:177; Witsius, 1990:60 [II.2.3]).

With regard to John 6:39, 10:29, 17:2, 6, 24, which speaks about those given by the Father to Jesus, Horton believes that a covenant of redemption is implied when "the Son is represented (particularly in the fourth Gospel) as having been given a people by the Father (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 4–10; Eph. 1:4–12; Heb.2:13; citing Isa. 8:18) who are called and kept by the Holy Spirit for the consummation of the new creation (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:11–13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:5)" (Horton, 2006a:79–80).

Ephesians 1:3–14, which states that the Father "chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world" and "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" is considered to be an allusion to a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption because it is located in the pretemporal realm and read through the lens of Psalm 2, 110, and Zechariah 6 (Fesko, 2016b:116–117; cf. 108–110).

A similar inference is drawn with regard to 1 Timothy 1:9–10. Because this text states that God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel", God's purpose and grace which God gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began is considered to be an allusion to the pre-temporal covenant of redemption (Fesko, 2016b:120).

Hebrews 7:20–22 states that, while "those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath", Jesus is "the guarantor of a better covenant" because of the oath God swore in Psalm 110:4. This ordination of Jesus as priest with a divine oath that makes him the guarantor of a better covenant is considered to have occurred in eternity (Fesko, 2016b:104; Cocceius, 2016:87–88; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:187, 193; Witsius, 1990:2.4–60).

#### 1.3.2. Evaluation of the main exegetical support for the covenant of redemption

Investigating the main exegetical support for the covenant of redemption drawn from the Old Testament, we saw that the Old Testament defence of this intratrinitarian covenant is based on a typological exegesis that not only points forward to the historical Christ but also points backward to him pretemporally.

However, it is generally agreed that typological exegesis ordinarily includes only analogical correspondences as pointing forward (Beale, 2012:14; Williamson, 2018:272). This does not mean that an Old Testament passage can never refer to God's eternal decisions if these decisions are not mentioned explicitly. For instance, when Old Testament says something about the relationship between God and someone prefiguring Christ, what is said there about Christ is true of the Father and the Son in their Trinitarian relations because God does not change. However, eternal decisions do not necessarily imply a covenant.

Second, not only is this bi-directional typological hermeneutic unusual, it is also completely unwarranted because the Old Testament texts that traditionally support the covenant of redemption do not point backward, but forward. "A key issue addressed by the Psalter", Williamson writes, "is the apparent failure of God's promises concerning the Davidic dynasty (cf. Ps. 89). But these two psalms (2 and 110), along with others (e.g., Pss 72;132) affirm that God's promises will not fail. Rather, such hopes would yet be realized—in a future, ideal Davidic ruler". He adds, "And the NT leaves us in no doubt as to when and in whom such fulfilment took place" (Williamson, 2018:23).

Thus, the Lord's decree in Psalm 2, the covenantal oath in Psalm 89, and the twin oracles in Psalm 110 allude only to God's promises made to David concerning his offspring, which were ultimately fulfilled in his greater Son. Likewise, Psalm 40:7–9 refers only to David's submissive attitude, which was perfectly fulfilled in the submissive attitude of his greater Son. Similarly, Isaiah 53 has in mind God's covenant with David and only how God's new covenant with Israel fulfills the realities foreshadowed in this chapter. In the same way, Zechariah 6 has in view God's covenant with David and only the future harmonious relationship between the messianic Branch and the Lord whose temple he will build and on whose throne he will rule for the sake of the peace of his people (Williamson, 2018:274–278).

As for the main exegetical support for the covenant of redemption drawn from the New Testament, when Luke 22:29 speaks about God conferring or covenanting the kingdom to the Son, this might simply refer to God's covenant promise to grant the kingdom to the offspring of Abraham and David or it could refer to God's pretemporal decree to do so.

When, for instance, John 6:39; 17:2, 6, 24 speak about the Father giving the elect to the Son, these passages are referring to the pretemporal plan of salvation and not a pretemporal covenant. When Ephesians 1:3–14 speaks about the pretemporal nature of our election in Christ and our predestination according to God's eternal plan, this alludes only to a pretemporal divine decree.[18] When 2 Timothy 1:9–

[18] When the New Testament speaks about "the Father sending the Son and/or the Son's voluntary obedience to the will of the Father" (John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23–24, 36–38; 6:29, 38–39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28–29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:18, 36; 11:42; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3–4, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21. Cf. Matt. 10:40; 15:24; Luke 4:43; 9:48; 10:16; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 1:4; 4:4; 1 John 4:9–10, 14), this obedience can easily be explained on the basis of the Son's filial responsiveness to the Father's will and not on the basis of a formal intratrinitarian

10 speaks about God's saving plan "before the ages began", this likewise refers only to a pretemporal decree. When Hebrews 7:20–22 speaks about Jesus being made a priest with an oath, this does not refer to an oath made in eternity, but in time after the giving of the Mosaic law, in all likelihood the one God swore to David and fulfilled in his greater Son (Heb. 7:28; cf. Ps. 110) (Williamson, 2018:30–33).[19]

In the light of our analysis and evaluation, I conclude that, although the alleged exegetical support for a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption does show something of a unified act of the Father and the Son, it is not strong enough to bear the freight of a *pactum salutis* between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in which federal theology finds the unity of salvation.[20] Moreover, the theological logic of the *pactum salutis* does not need to be framed in covenantal terms. The most that can be said is that Scripture speaks about God's eternal plan or decree for our salvation. However, "[t]his divine plan or decree must not necessarily be understood as covenantal, implying a more formalized agreement or contractual relationship between the persons of the Trinity" (Williamson, 2018:280; Lehrer, 2006:37; Letham, 2019:433–439; Murray, 1977:130–131; 1982:234–238).

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covenant (Lewis and Demarest, 1996:3:333; *contra* Köstenberger and Swain, 2008:169; Swain, 2016:119–120; VanDrunen and Clark, 2007:180, 193). Baugh asserts that in Galatians 3:19–20, "Paul moves briefly but most profoundly behind the historical development of the covenant of grace into the eternal realm". In verse 19, Paul reflects on the Son's pre-incarnate existence, while in verse 20 he reflects upon "the intratrinitarian life of God as the foundation of the covenant with Abraham," rooting the inheritance of God's promises in the *pactum salutis* (Baugh, 2004:69). However, verse 20 does not allude to an intratrinitarian covenant, but simply underscores Paul's argument that because it is not a human opinion but God's opinion that Gentile Christians become children of Abraham by receiving the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ and not through works of the law, this should not be tampered with just as you do not tamper with a human will or covenant. This is all the more the case because God's promise came unilaterally directly and orally from God and not through a mediator (Van Bruggen, 2004:110; cf. 105–110; *contra*: Clark, 2007:191; Woo, 2018:79–82). Vanhoozer (2014b:78) seems to suggest that the expression "eternal covenant" in Hebrews 13:20 refers to the eternal covenant of redemption. However, the expression "eternal covenant" is a reference to the lasting character of the new covenant (cf. Heb. 9:11–5; van Bruggen, 2010:316).

[19] To make Hebrews 7:28 fit with his pretemporal interpretation of the making of the oath, Fesko explains this verse as referring not to the making of the oath itself, but to the "word" or "revelation" of the oath which came after the giving of the law (Fesko, 2016b:104). Williamson, however, rightly observes, "But while it is true that the text does indeed refer to "the word of the oath" (ὁ λόγος δὲ τῆς ὁρκωμοσίας), there is nothing to demand a peculiar understanding of the Greek syntax here, that would make the 'revelation', rather than the 'oath' itself, the subject of the following clause. Surely it is the divine oath, rather than merely the revelation thereof, that 'appointed the Son'?" (Williamson, 2018:33).

[20] This conclusion is not a manifestation of falling into the pitfall of underinterpretation, as Swain suggests. On the contrary, those who advocate a *pactum salutis* fall into the pitfall of overinterpretation (*contra* Swain, 2016:118; cf. Williamson, 2018:34). Loonstra also asserts there is an absence of exegetical warrant for the *pactum salutis* (Loonstra, 1990:187–190). However, he stills argues for the use of the concept of the *pactum salutis* as an explanation of the voluntary humiliation and submission of the Son to the Father (Loonstra, 1990:341–351). Robertson argues that when God's decree is structured in covenantal terms, this has "a sense of artificiality" about it and "extend[s] the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety" (Robertson, 1980:54). While new covenant theology rejects the covenant of redemption (Vlach, 2007:205–206; Lehrer, 2006:37–38), progressive covenantalism does not (Gentry and Wellum, 2018:77–79).

Thus, a third systemic problem with Horton's federal theology is that it finds the unity of salvation in a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that does not have the strong biblical support that he alleges it has.

### 1.4. The covenant of works

In addition to operating with a covenant of redemption, federal theology also operates with a covenant of works (Allen, 2010:41–42; Bavinck, 2004:II:564–579; Beeke and Jones, 2012:217–236; Beale, 2011:42–43, 174, 917–918; Belcher, 2020a:63–78; 2020b:23–35; Berkhof, 1996:211–218; Bolt, 2006:171–189; Estelle, 2007:89–135; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:79–84, 211–258, 667–670; Grudem, 1994:516–518; Hodge, 1952:117–122; Kline, 2006:107–117; Letham, 2019:349–365; Macleod, 2002:121–122; Muller, 2003c:175–189; Packer, 1993:87; 2012:7; Schilder, 1932:193–195; 1935:246–252; 1950:90–92;[21] Schreiner, 2017:19–30; Turretin, 1992:569–589; Vos, 1980:237–245; 2012–2014:18, 32– 36, 40–46, 54, 107, 114, 120, 130–134, 137; Spykman, 1992:260–263; VanDrunen, 2014:40; cf. 39–94; Waters, 2020:79–97; Williams, 2005:70–75; Witsius, 1990:16–29 [I.2–4]).[22] This covenant is considered by some to be "the identifying feature of the federal theology" (Weir, 1990:22, 29; cf. Burger, 2017f:2). Horton also operates with a covenant of works (Horton, 2005a:93–119; 2006a:83–104; 2011a:138, 385, 415–418, 420, 437, 446, 487, 506, 506, 541, 575, 609).

First, I will outline the law-gospel distinction underlying the covenant of works. Second, I investigate the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of works. Third, I will evaluate this main biblical and theological support.

#### 1.4.1. The law-gospel distinction underlying the covenant of works[23]

It is also helpful to understand federal theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in general and the covenant of works in particular against the background of Luther's breakthrough concerning his understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Throughout the late Middle Ages, justification was understood as a cooperative effort between God and humanity. This is exemplified, for instance, in the sacrament of penance, which, after the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, was probably the most important sacrament in the life and

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[21] Fesko mistakenly claims that Schilder does not hold to a covenant of works (Fesko, 2016a:182–184; cf. de Jong, 2019:174). Schilder did, however, not consider the covenant of works to be a *quid pro quo* contract (Schilder, 1932:194).

[22] For references to Reformed scholastic resources on the covenant of works, see Heppe, 2007:281–300. This covenant is also called a covenant of nature, a covenant of creation, a covenant of innocence (Muller, 2003c:175). The Westminster Standards gave confessional status to the covenant of works but refer to the pre-fall arrangement as both a covenant of "works" and a covenant of "life" (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:924, 942, 968). On the origin of the covenant of works, see Muller, 2003c:175–189; Weir, 1990:1–36; Woolsey, 2012:80–158. On Irenaeus and Augustine on a pre-fall covenant, see Woolsey, 2012:164–166, 170–182; Lillback, 2001:38–45.

[23] Horton writes, "The architects of federal theology clearly recognized that their covenant of works-grace scheme arose from their prior commitment to the distinction between the law and the gospel" (Horton, 2006a:85).

discipline of the church (Pelikan, 1978:210). Penance was considered to be the paradigmatic way in which God and humanity interacted when it concerned God's justice and his grace. God was considered to be a righteous judge who demanded perfect obedience from humanity (Pelikan, 1975:330). At the final judgment, the books would be opened to see whether obedience outweighed disobedience. This doctrine of a righteous God demanding strict obedience was accentuated and reinforced by the Doom painting of the final judgment on the walls of medieval cathedrals, depicting Christ judging souls and sending them either to heaven or to hell (Burger, 2015:273).

The sacrament of penance enabled a person to make things right before the final judgment through confession of sin and making satisfaction in a manner that had been determined by the priest for the sins he had committed after his baptism (Pelikan, 1978:210). [24] But even though the satisfaction of Christ was decisive, had a person really ever contributed sufficiently to this satisfaction with his penance? Moreover, if ultimately it was the genuineness of his repentance that was decisive in this regard, how did one know whether his repentance was genuine enough? It is understandable that this cooperative effort between God and humanity with regard to God's justice and grace, on the one hand, and humanity's contribution to satisfying this justice and receiving this grace, exemplified so clearly in the sacrament of penance, on the other, would lead to massive uncertainty concerning one's salvation (Burger, 2015:273–274; 2017c:27, 34).

In the context of this medieval spirituality of cooperating with God for one's salvation illustrated so clearly in the sacrament of penance, Luther received his liberating breakthrough that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. However, this liberating breakthrough concerning justification by faith did lead him to make a sharp contrast between law and gospel. According to Luther, "[t]he Law is the hammer of death, the thunder of hell, and the lightning of God's wrath to bring down the proud and shameless hypocrites . . . [and] to tear to pieces that monster called self-righteousness" (Luther, 2018:91; cf. 88, 113). Consequently, "[t]he Law and the Gospel are contrary ideas . . . [and] have contrary functions and purposes. . . . [t]he Law has nothing to give. It demands, and its demands are impossible" (Luther, 2018:63). On the other hand, unlike the Law, "[t]he Gospel . . . brings on the gift of the Holy Ghost, because it is the nature of the Gospel to convey good gifts. . . [t]he Gospel brings donations. It pleads for open hands to take what is being offered" (Luther, 2018:63). What is offered is the righteousness of Christ (Luther, 2018:11, 53, 57–58, 104, 134). Accordingly, "the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same" (Luther,

[24] For the move from public to private penance and the influence of Irish missionaries in this regard, see U.S. Catholic Church, 1995:1447; Vorgrimler, 1992:208–209. However, Kate Dooley challenges the theory that private penance was an original institution of the Irish church (Dooley, 1982:390–411).

2005:125; cf. Kim, 2013:2). Consequently, the law tells us that we are sinners while the gospel tells us that we are pardoned and saved.

This distinction between law and gospel as two different ways of being saved typically underlies federal theology's distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, Whereas the way of salvation in the former covenant is by works and law, the way of salvation in the latter covenant is by faith and the gospel.[25] Consequently, the nature of our image of God begins with God being a God of law and justice and only then being a God of mercy and grace.

### 1.4.2. Biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of works

Whereas the covenant of redemption was a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant between the persons of the Trinity, the covenant of works was a temporal extratrinitarian covenant made between God and humanity.[26] The biblical and theological support offered for this covenant of works is argued in the following manner.

First, God superimposed the structure of a covenant of works upon created reality when he voluntarily condescended and commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[27] This implies that God created them as morally responsible human beings who could know and obey his law and who would know that disobedience to God's law and the covenant of works is sin that would make them guilty. This moral responsibility continues after the fall into sin. Establishing a covenant of works in this manner with Adam and Eve entails that this covenant of works is essentially a legal/ethical relationship with God. Moreover, because humanity remains morally responsible to God after the fall into sin, the covenant of works ensures the stability of God's law.

Second, when God superimposed a covenant of works upon created reality by commanding Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he promised them the reward of the eschatological inheritance of eternal life if they would personally obey his command in a *quid pro quo* manner (Gen. 2:16–17). The reward for this obedience is not a reward according to God's strict standard of justice, but an *ex pacto* reward, i.e., one that God freely accepts because of his

[25] This distinction between law and gospel, however, developed differently in Lutheran and Reformed theology. While both traditions worked with a law-gospel distinction, within the Lutheran tradition this distinction developed into a law-gospel hermeneutic where the law-gospel distinction is used "as a filter for all of sacred Scripture, arguing that all of Scripture is either Law or Gospel, and typically this amounts to identifying all conditional passages—i.e., biblical passages which contain obligations, or in which eternal life is conditional in some sense on the believer's obedience or perseverance—as 'law, not gospel'" Within the Reformed tradition, however, this distinction typically developed in a more redemptive-historical covenantal manner (Garcia, 2012:172; 171; McGraw, 2016:79–86). Horton, however, mistakenly believes that the Lutheran and Calvinistic understanding of the law-gospel distinction is essentially the same (Horton, 2011a:137; 1997:27–42). For more on this distinction, see Renihan, 2018:17–67; Burger, 2018a:2; McGowan, 2005:183–189; 2016:19–21, 69–70, 179–182; Sandlin, 2007:193–247.

[26] For this section, I thankfully made use of Burger, 2017f; 2018a; 2019; Irons, 2000.

[27] This is generally referred to as the probationary command.

covenantal promise. However, if Adam and Eve would be personally disobedient, they and their posterity would forfeit the reward of this eschatological inheritance and suffer the curse of the covenant of works, viz. death.[28] Thus the covenant of works determines not only the destiny of humanity, but also that humanity's foundational relationship with God and creation is characterized by earning God's blessings through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner. Moreover, it highlights that God is sovereign in this covenant of works and that humanity is dependent upon him. Furthermore, it implies that the nature of our image of God functionally begins with God being a God of law and justice and then being a God of mercy and grace.

Third, as the federal or covenantal head of the human race, Adam represented humanity in his obedience to this law principle of inheritance. When Adam failed in representing humanity and fulfilling the covenant of works by his disobedience, Christ as the head of the covenant of grace represented the elect and fulfilled the covenant of works by his obedience (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 44b-49). In this way, the concept of the federal headship of Christ in the new covenant is incorporated into the covenant of works so that humanity does not exist as unrelated individuals, but exists in solidarity as an organic or covenantal unity in Adam, its federal head. As such, all humanity is included in Adam's disobedience and the consequences of his disobedience.

Fourth, some proponents of a covenant of works also look to Hosea 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:20–21, 25–26 for support for this covenant. Others look to God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Israel and see these covenants "anchored in" and "fulfilling . . . God's creative purposes" (Bartholomew, 1995:28–30).

What distinguishes Horton's understanding of the covenant of works from mainstream federal theology are the following elements. First, on Horton's view, the covenant of works is not an additional structure superimposed upon created reality, but part of created reality itself because God constituted Adam and Eve as covenant beings by voluntarily creating them in his image with the commission to lead all of creation into the eschatological reward of God's Sabbath rest following "God's own pattern of creating and enthronement" (Horton, 2011a:386; 381, 384, 421, 425, 440–442, 688; 2006a:10, 83–84).

Second, as the image of God, Adam did not need any grace to be able to obey God and fulfill his covenant commission since he had been created with a transcendent ethical consciousness because the law of God was written on his heart. Since human beings are constituted as covenant beings with the ability to respond to God, the covenant of works is not an expression of God's voluntary condescension toward humanity after he had created them, but rather a revelation of his justice and goodness towards them in creating them.

[28] Thus, this merit is congruous *ex pacto* merit; see section 1.2.

Consequently, the reward for Adam and Eve's obedience is not earned as a result of God's free acceptance of their obedience because of his covenantal promise, but instead a reward that is earned because of his strict justice toward them by having constituted them as covenant beings created in his image. In this way, the legal and meritorious character of the covenant of creation is protected from a confusion or conflation of law and grace (Horton, 2011a:411, 424; 2005a:83–84, 94, 100; 2006a:54, 84, 89, 91–93, 100; 2006c:49; 2009b:316).

Third, Horton uses the law-gospel distinction dogmatically as a hermeneutical lens to interpret all biblical passages that contain obligations or in which eternal life is conditional in some sense on the believer's obedience or perseverance as law and not gospel (Horton, 2011a:137; 1997:27–42).

Fourth, Horton believes that incorporating the federal headship of Christ into the covenant of works is necessary to uphold the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience (Horton, 2006a:87, 89; 2011a:632).

Fifth, he considers the Mosaic covenant at Mount Sinai in some sense to be a republication of the covenant of creation/works God made with Adam in the Garden because the conditional language of this law-performance covenant is illustrated by the constant reminder that if Israel would do what God commanded, it would live, but if it failed to do this, it would die (Horton, 2002c:133; 2005a:120–121, 151, 159; 2005a: xii, 120, 151, 159; 2006a:32–33, 97; 2007a:13–15, 17, 97; 2011a:420, 541, 712, 77).[29]

Sixth, the covenant of works is still in effect today, and humanity can know the reality of this covenant because the law is written on their consciences (Horton, 2011a:138, 140–142, 387, 979; 2006a:92–93, 118, 191; 2007a:35, 88, 92, 2008a:125, 209; 2008b:261; 2009a:253; 2011c:237; 2016b:84–85, 90; 2018a:62, 295; 2018b:63, 75, 136–137).

### 1.4.3. Evaluation of the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of works

In evaluating the biblical-theological support of the covenant of works, I will address the following questions. First, did God make a covenant with Adam and Eve before the fall into sin? Second, did God promise Adam and Eve the reward of the inheritance of eternal life for their obedience? Third, did Adam and Eve's relationship with God need to be regulated by law? Fourth, was God's relationship with Adam and Eve a relationship that did not need God's grace? Fifth, does the concept of federal headship need to

[29] Because the majority of federal theologians considered the Mosaic covenant to be "simply an administration of the one covenant of grace while others viewed it as a distinct covenant" (Caughey, 2012:31; Jones, 2011:189–199), I am including Horton's understanding of the Mosaic covenant as in some sense a republication of the covenant of works in this evaluation of covenant theology in general. Because of "the legal and conditional character of the Mosaic covenant with its blessings of long life in the land of Canaan offered for obedience, and its curse of captivity and slavery threatened for disobedience", the Mosaic covenant was considered by the minority to be a republication in some sense of the covenant of works (Caughey, 2012:31; Letham, 2013:169; Venema, 2010:93–94). Jones refers to these two positions as the dichotomist and the trichotomist views (Jones, 2011:189–199; see also Reid, 2020:149–152). For a taxonomy of the various positions highlighting the difference nuances, see Ferry, 2009:76–105; Golding, 2004:164–173; Karlberg, 2000:17–57.

be incorporated into the covenant of works? Sixth, was the Mosaic covenant in some sense a republication of the covenant of works? Seventh, do Hosea 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:20–21, 25–26 exegetically support a pre-fall covenant? Eighth, are God's post-fall covenants anchored in God's pre-fall covenant and do they fulfill God's creational purpose of this pre-fall covenant?

First, did God make a covenant with Adam and Eve before the fall into sin? The answer to this question depends upon one's definition of the word "covenant". Because federal theology, including Horton's understanding of this theology, considers divine-human covenants to be synonymous with divine-human relationships, it considers God's relationship with Adam and Eve before they fell into sin to be a covenant. This also is true of Horton's understanding of Adam being created in covenant with God because he was created in the image of God. However, since this study does not consider divine-human covenants to be synonymous with divine-human relationships, but understands them to be redemptive instruments that secure and guarantee God's missional intent for humanity and creation, often during times of uncertainty, this study does not consider God's relationship with Adam and Eve before they fell into sin to be a covenant.[30]

Second, did God promise Adam and Eve the reward of the inheritance of eternal life for their obedience in a *quid pro quo* manner?[31] Genesis 2:17–18 does not promise the reward of the inheritance of eternal life for their obedience. It only warns that the sanction for disobedience would be death (Burger, 2019:277; Hoeksema, 1976:108; Williamson, 2007:54). Instead of this sanction implying a promise of earning one's eternal destiny through personal obedience in a *quid pro quo* manner, it "marked the path to the loss of the state Adam already enjoyed" (McComiskey, 1985:217). This state would include the privilege of living in God's loving presence close to the tree of life with their blessed potential to exercise their God-given responsibility of exercising fruitful stewardship over creation. Thus, "Genesis does not tell us of *earning life by obedience and good works*, but rather of *making good use of given possibilities and not losing them*" (Burger, 2019:278; 2018a:9).[32] This criticism also applies to Horton's understanding that the covenant of works is not a structure superimposed upon created reality, but part of created reality

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[30] The covenant of works serves theological interests and in that way has implications for this study (Burger, 2017f:8-14). This will be further developed in the next chapter. Some argue that the concept of covenant is present in Genesis 1 and 2 even though the word "covenant" does not occur. However, the strength of this argument is contingent upon *bĕrît* being synonymous with relationship. Moreover, the weakness of this argument is that it begins the interpretation of the Genesis 1 and 2 narrative with the concept of covenant derived from elsewhere in Scripture and then superimposes this understanding upon the narrative structure of the text. In this regard, Leder helpfully writes, "Biblical theological topics in GK [Genesis-Kings] emerge in terms of the narrative development of the theological problem, not as a conclusion from the examination and comparison of a variety of texts. Its theology of covenant does not begin with a summary of features typical of a covenant and drawn from any and all biblical texts without regard to the text's narrative shape" (Leder, 2014:694).

[31] For a brief discussion of the debate among seventeenth-century theologians about the nature of Adam's reward and whether it was the reward of heaven or continued life in the garden, see Jones, 2014.

[32] For the influence of the sacrament of penance on the connection between works and merit, see 1.4.1.

itself because God constituted Adam and Eve as covenant beings by voluntarily creating them in his image with the commission to lead all of creation into the eschatological reward of God's Sabbath rest following God's own pattern of creating and resting.[33]

Third, did Adam and Eve's relationship with God need to be regulated by law? We saw that federal theology assumes that since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity on account of their ontological distance, God voluntarily condescends and secures his relationship with them by way of a covenant of works. We also saw that federal theology can best be understood against the background of late medieval nominalist covenant theology that makes use of the distinction between *potentia absoluta* (i.e., what God can theoretically do because of his absolute power) and *potentia ordinata* (i.e., what God in actual fact does and will do because he has ordained it and has revealed that he will act in a certain manner). Accordingly, God's ordained and revealed will is not a manifestation of his justice and goodness, but simply a matter of his sovereign good pleasure. However, because God's sovereign good pleasure is also a manifestation of his justice and goodness, creation is by its very nature a manifestation of his goodness and justice.

Thus, it would appear that God's relationship with Adam and Eve before the fall did not need to be secured with a covenant of law or works, either as an additional structure superimposed upon created reality or as part of created reality itself, because God constituted Adam and Eve as covenant beings by voluntarily creating them in his image with his law written on their hearts as a manifestation of his justice. Instead, God's justice was manifested simply by the fact that their being created according to their kind had moral implications. In this light, according to Burger, "we can understand God's wrath and judgment over a sinful world in Romans 1 and 2 without any law or covenant. Law and covenant enlarge the problem of sin and God's wrath, as the Jewish people have experienced. But justice exists before the law or the covenant" (Burger, 2017f:25; see also van Bruggen, 2014c). This also implies that Horton's

[33] Regarding earning anything from God, Faber writes, "But the question must arise: Can man ever earn anything in relation to God? The Belgic Confession states in Article 24, speaking about man's sanctification and good works: Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?); nay, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He who *worketh in us both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.*" He then adds, "Would this confession be valid only for the life in the covenant of God's grace and not also for the covenant in the Paradise situation? The question 'For what can we merit?' is a strong and striking rhetorical statement concerning the basic structure of the relation between God and man, Creator and creature. Each and every breath was a gift of God of life, and the creation of man as the image of God was fruit of God's favour" (Faber, 1982:90–91). Even if Adam's obedience did not merit anything, that does not mean that Christ's obedience did not merit anything so that the gospel would be lost. Christ's obedience merited in the context of demerit or sin, while there was no demerit in the context of Adam's obedience that would enable him to merit. Moreover, Christ's obedience far excels Adams's obedience and is greatly disproportionate to it (McWilliams, 1991:120–121; cf. McGowan, 2016:77; Jones, 2015b; Williams, 2005b:72–75; *contra* VanDrunen, 2007:51).

dogmatic law-gospel distinction and his assertion that the covenant of works is still in effect today is not warranted by Scripture.[34]

Fourth, was God's relationship with Adam and Eve a relationship that did not need God's grace in order for them to be able to obey God and fulfill their covenant commission since they had been created with a transcendent ethical consciousness because the law of God was written on their hearts? The answer to this question depends on one's definition of the word "grace". Because in Horton's theology grace is given only to sinners, Adam and Eve did not need any grace, for this would undermine their state of integrity, according to Horton. Moreover, as the image of God, they did not need any supplemental grace to be able to obey God and fulfill his covenant commission since they had the law of God written on their hearts.

However, if "grace" is not restricted to forgiving grace, but also includes God's "condescending" grace and supplemental grace, as this is understood by much of federal theology (Strange, 2019:123), then Adam and Eve did receive grace in the garden for the fulfilment of their commission, just as the second Adam received grace for the fulfilment of his commission (Isa. 42:1; Lk. 2:40, 52). In this regard, Jones asserts, "Divine grace is a perfection of God's nature, and thus a characteristic of how he relates to finite creatures, even apart from sin. In the garden, the grace of God was upon Adam; in the 'wilderness,' the grace of God is upon his Son, the second Adam. God's graciousness may be summarized simply as what he is in and of himself" (Jones, 2015b; Kevan, 1964:112). Moreover, because "[t]he true human who bears God's image is inconceivable even for a moment without the [natural] indwelling of the Holy Spirit", it is incorrect to assert that as the image of God, Adam did not need any supplemental grace to be able to obey God and fulfill his covenant commission, simply because the law of God was written on his heart (Bavinck, 2006:III:292; cf. 2004:II:558–559; Jones, 2015b; Leithart, 2007:170–171, 187–191;

[34] Horton's dogmatic law-gospel distinction or law-gospel hermeneutic is not warranted by Scripture. It is not the case that "law" refers to all commands in Scripture while "gospel" refers to all promises of salvation by grace through faith (*contra* Horton, 2004:21; 2011a:665). Both law and gospel include promises and commands (McGraw, 2016:79–111). The Canons of Dordt, for instance, "highlights the imperative force of the gospel: 'And as it hath pleased God by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments' (5.14)" (Beeke and Jones, 2012:323; McGraw, 2016:83). Moreover, failing to see and adhere to this law-gospel hermeneutic is not a confusing of law and gospel (*contra* Horton, 2008a:107–119, 122, 124, 157, 247, 250; 2009a:35, 210; 2011a:439; 2011e:159, 214, 226, 260; 2011c:227; 2016b:129; 2016d:272, 285, 2018b:94, 97). Furthermore, failing to see and adhere to this law-gospel hermeneutic also does not confuse what God has done and what we do (*contra* Horton, 2016d:283; 2004:21). Consequently, speaking to others about living, doing, and being the gospel is also not a confusing of law and gospel (*contra* Horton, 2008a:18, 152, 240; cf. 124–148; 2016d:272; 2017a:35–38; 2011c:27; 2017c:27–32). When Horton asserts that the law alone tells us that we are sinners while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved (Keller, 2016:96), he forgets that the gospel also tells us we are sinners (1 Cor. 15:3). Moreover, when Horton asserts that the law is written on the hearts of every human being, he overlooks that Rom. 2:15 speaks about "the work of the law" written on their hearts. This will be elaborated on in the section that deals with Horton's two-kingdom theology.

McGowan, 2005:191–198). Furthermore, because there was special revelation before the fall, it is also incorrect to assert that Adam did not need any supplemental grace to be able to obey God and fulfill his covenant commission just because the law of God was written on his heart.[35]

Fifth, does the concept of federal headship need to be incorporated into the covenant of works? The answer to this question is twofold. First, if there is no covenant of works that Christ needed to fulfill with his obedience because man failed to fulfill the covenant of works with his disobedience, then the concept of federal headship *cannot* be incorporated into a covenant of works. Second, the federal headship of Christ does not *need* to be incorporated into a covenant because the parallel between the federal headship of Adam and Christ does not require it to be incorporated into a covenant structure (Leder, 2014:694; McGowan, 2005:178–199; 2016:111–203; Murray, 1977:II-47–59; *contra* Horton, 2006a:87, 89; 2011a:632; Bolt, 2006:181, 185; Schreiner, 2017:22).[36] This implies that incorporating the federal headship of Christ into the covenant of works is not necessary to uphold the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience.[37]

Sixth, was the Mosaic covenant in some sense a republication of the covenant of works? The answer to this question is twofold. First, if there is no covenant of works, there can be no republication of the covenant of works. Second, if Adam and Eve's relationship with God did not need to be regulated by law, then Scripture gives no warrant for the Mosaic covenant to be in some sense a republication of the

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[35] Karl Barth understands creation to be the external basis or context within which God enters into a covenant of grace with humanity. Thus, Barth's theology has no room for a pre-fall covenant of works that is distinct from a covenant of grace (Barth, 1958a:III/1:94–228; cf. 229–339). Barth's perspective has influenced others to criticize federal theology's twofold distinction between a meritorious covenant of works and a non-meritorious covenant of grace. For a criticism of Barth's covenant theology, see McGowan, 2016:22–40. For criticism of the Scottish theologians T.F. Torrance and J.B. Torrance who fundamentally shared Barth's perspective on federal theology, see McGowan, 2016:40–45. For Berkouwer's, De Graaf's, and Hoeksema's understanding of a pre-fall covenant that was not a covenant of works, see Berkouwer, 1971:206–209; De Graaf, 1977:37; 2010:23–24; Hoeksema, 2004:308–312. For a thorough summary of De Graaf's doctrine of the covenant that also documents how De Graaf went from understanding the pre-fall covenant as a covenant of works in which Adam had to obtain eternal life to understanding this covenant as a covenant of God's favour in which he would inherit eternal life, see Wendt, 2020:81–109; Dijkstra-Algra, 1982:11–12; For Frame's, Hoekema's, Murray's, and Williams's understanding of the pre-fall arrangement between God and humanity, see Frame, 2013:62–66; Hoekema, 1986:117–121; Murray, 1977:47–59; Williams:2005:46, 51, 62, 72–74. For a thorough summary of Murray's response to federal theology, see Jeon, 1999:103–190. For K. Schilder's emphasis on the unity of the covenant and his defence of the covenant with Adam in paradise see Strauss, 1986:66–98, 112, 201; 1995:23–24; Veldhuizen, 1995:104–105. For the legacy of covenant theology in the Reformed Churches Liberated, see Burger, 2021:109–126. For different ways of understanding grace regarding the covenant of works, see Ward, 2003:117–123.

[36] Burger rightly notes, "The idea of Adam's headship is crucial to understand the influence of sin. Nevertheless, the idea of headship is not sufficient to understand our participation in Christ. The mystical union with Christ implies a renewed indwelling in Christ and transcends the idea of headship" (Burger, 2017f:25).

[37] Regarding federal theology's use of the analogy of Adam and Christ in which Christ solves the problem Adam created, Leder writes, "Federal theology reads GK [Genesis-Kings] from the point of view of the Pauline Adam-Christ analogy. From the point of view of GK, however, Adam plays a minor role; Abraham is the character with and through whom God begins to solve the problem of exile from the Garden presence when divine instruction excises him from the scatteredness of Babel to direct him to 'the land,' the place where God would dwell in the midst of Abraham's descendants" (Leder, 2014:691).

covenant of works in which Israel's primary function was to reveal just how sinful humanity is. Moreover, Horton's restriction of the works principle to Israel's staying in the land as a nation and enjoying God's temporal blessings as typological of the eschatological Paradise of God and salvation in Christ has a serious problem. Letham exposes this problem as follows: "Let us suppose for a moment that this was so. If this argument is correct, the archetypal blessings of salvation in Christ would be received by grace through faith . . . but Israel would receive the typological blessings, such as Canaan, by meritorious law-keeping according to the works principle. These . . . are two alternative, antithetical ways of inheritance." He adds, "But a type corresponds to the antitype. If the one is a type of the other, we conclude either that the blessings of the covenant of grace are received by law-keeping on the part of the recipients—in which case there is no gospel—or the temporal blessings of the Mosaic covenant were to be received by grace, which undermines [Horton's] argument."[38] He concludes, "The only other possibilities are either that law and grace work together, in distinct ways, or that the typical relationship is untenable; in both cases the argument is undermined" (Letham, 2013:170–171; 2019:459).

Furthermore, Horton's distinguishing between Old Testament believers being individually justified by faith according to the Abrahamic covenant and remaining in the land corporately as a nation through works is also seriously problematic.[39] Letham writes, "[I]f the Mosaic covenant had been based on a works principle an unavoidably schizoid character would have dogged the rest of the OT—which aspect was Abrahamic and which Mosaic?" (Letham, 2013:148; Elam, Van Kooten, Bergquist, 2014:125–129, 142; Gaffin, 2009; Turretin, 1994:265; cf. Dennison, Sanborn, and Swinburnson, 2009:81).[40]

Seventh, do Hosea 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:20–21, 25–26 exegetically support a pre-fall covenant? The translation of Hosea 6:7 is strongly debated. Some translate *kᵉʾā·ḏām* in a personal sense ("like

[38] Letham is writing about Kline, but since Horton follows Kline in this distinction, what he writes also applies to Horton.

[39] Huijgen writes, "The dichotomy between collective and individual . . . is indicative of present day philosophy post-Enlightenment rather than characteristic for the times of the Bible" (Huijgen, 2017:11).

[40] Lev. 18:5 ("You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord") is often appealed to with the understanding that this text teaches a works-righteousness as a way to life (Estelle, 2009:109–146). However, instead of teaching a works righteousness as the way to life, this text teaches a faith-righteousness, i.e., the obedience of faith that leads to life (Letham, 2013:147; Shepherd, 2012:xx-xxii; van Bruggen, 2006:149–150; Williams, 2005:150–152). According to Davies, "[t]his is the constant and repeated dynamic of faith and obedience to which the O.T. bears witness (Deut. 5.33; 30.16; 32.46f.; Neh. 9.29; Ps. 119.93; Prov. 4.4, 22; 8.35; 19.16; 21.21; Ezek. 18.21; 20.11, 20.13, 20.21; Amos 5.14; cf. Luke 10:28)" (Davies, 1990:192; cf. 177–204). Because faith characterizes obedience in both the old and the new covenant, Gal. 4:21–31 also does not contrast works-righteousness and faith-righteousness as two opposing ways to life (McGowan, 2016:75–76). Moreover, in Galatians 4, Paul is not making a timeless, abstract comparison between the old and new covenant in general, but a contemporary, concrete comparison between the old covenant that has rejected the Christ (i.e., present Jerusalem, v. 25) and the new covenant that has acknowledged him as its redeemer in particular (van Bruggen, 2004:131–132). For the position of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on republication, see The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2016.

Adam"), while others translate *kᵉʾā·ḏām* in a geographical sense ("at Adam"; cf. Jos. 3:16).[41] Because of the difficulty of translation and therefore of interpretation, Hosea 6:7 does not provide conclusive exegetical support for a covenant of works (Dumbrell, 1984:45–46; McComiskey, 1985:214–216; Williamson, 2007:55–56; *contra* Allen, 2010:41; Bavinck, 2004:II:656; Curtis, 2009:170–209; Robertson, 1980:22–24; Williams 2005:47).

While Jeremiah 33:20–21, 25–26 refers to a covenant with creation, this is probably an allusion to God's covenant with Noah and creation (Williamson, 2007:66, 71, 74; *contra* Beale, 2011:43; Robertson, 1980:19–21; Schreiner, 2017:20–21). Moreover, there is no reference of a covenant with humanity.

Eighth, are God's post-fall covenants anchored in God's pre-fall covenant and do they then fulfill God's creational purpose of this pre-fall covenant? The answer to this question is threefold. First, if there is no covenant of works, post-fall covenants cannot be anchored in God's pre-fall covenant and cannot fulfill God's creational purpose of this pre-fall covenant. Second, that some post-fall covenants contain terminology that may allude to the pre-fall narrative does not mean that this pre-fall narrative needs to be understood in a covenantal way (*contra* Bartholomew, 1995:28–30). Third, while some make this claim because they understand *bĕrît* to be synonymous with "relationship", if the word *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship", then God's post-fall covenants cannot be anchored in God's pre-fall covenant as God's creational purpose of this pre-fall covenant (*contra* Bartholomew, 1995:28–30; cf. 13–14, 18, 21–29).[42]

Thus, a fourth systemic problem with Horton's federal theology is that it operates with a covenant of works that does not find a warrant in Scripture.

### 1.5. The covenant of grace

In addition to operating with a covenant of redemption and a covenant of works, federal theology also operates with a covenant of grace (Allen, 2010:42–43; Bavinck, 2006:III:193–232; Beeke and Jones, 2012:259–278; Belcher, 2020b:37–46; Berkhof, 1996:272–301; Cocceius, 2016:68–169; Currid, 2020:99–109; De Graaf, 2010:21–23, 34, 45, 53, 59, 64, 67, 72, 85, 111, 115, 121, 187, 189, 192, 196–197, 216–217, 228, 263, 282, 292; Frame, 2013:66–67; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:84–94, 666; Grudem, 1994:519–522; Hodge, 1952:354–377; Kamphuis, 1982:64–65; Kline, 2006:138–153; Muller, 2006:11–56; Letham, 2019:440–463; Macleod, 2002:128–131; Murray, 1988; Packer, 1993:87; 2012:7–8;

[41] The Septuagint translated *kᵉʾā·ḏām* as ὡς ἄνθρωπος "like mankind".
[42] When Genesis 6:18 and 9:9, 11, 17 speak about "establishing" a covenant (*hēqîm bĕrît*) instead of "cutting" a covenant (*kāraṯ bĕrît*), this does not necessarily mean that this refers to an already existing covenant because *hēqîm bĕrît* can also refer to initiating a covenant (Ezek. 16:60–62). The context of Gen. 6:18 makes this quite plausible (Burger, 2019:279–280; *contra* Gentry and Wellum, 2018:187–195, 213, 587, 667).

Robertson, 1980:93–300; Shepherd, 2000:11–63; Schilder, 1935:252–257; 1950:93–94; 1992;[43] Spykman, 1992:263–264; Stam, 61–64; cf. 65–118; Turretin, 1994:569–589; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:539–572; Vos, 1980:252–267; 2012–2014:76–84, 92–137; Waltke, 2012:76; Witsius, 1990:104–355). Horton's federal theology also operates with a covenant of grace (Horton, 2006a:104–107; 2011a:138, 152–153, 157, 196, 203–204, 250, 420, 446, 487, 575, 609, 612, 615–616, 644–645, 682, 716–717, 733, 772, 779, 781, 789, 791, 795, 797, 818, 851, 854, 866). In what follows, I will first investigate the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of grace. Second, I will evaluate this main biblical and theological support.[44]

### 1.5.1. The main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of grace[45]

When I dealt with the covenant of redemption, we saw that in this covenant the Son voluntarily agrees to become the representative head and guarantor of these elect sinners, taking upon himself the responsibility not only to meet their legal obligations but also to purchase their salvation with his death on a cross. We also saw that the Holy Spirit voluntarily agrees to apply the purchased benefits of salvation to the elect so that they can inherit the eternal life that the Son earned for them with his faithful obedience. This is what drives the economy of salvation in the covenant of grace, giving it stability and unity.

This view, moreover, leads to a Christocentric view of history where history is interpreted in the light of the covenant of redemption and where the gospel is communicated from this perspective. Thus, Bavinck asserts, "It is a false perception that God first made his covenant with Adam and Noah, with Abraham and Israel, and only finally with Christ; 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" (Bavinck, 2006:III:215; cf. 228; Burger, 2018a:6).

This overarching covenant of grace God is historically inaugurated and announced to Adam and Eve immediately after their fall into sin as the so-called *protoevangelion* or promise of redemption (Gen. 3:15) when God promises to make all things new through a human being who would deal with the problem of the devil by crushing his head. This promise is then formally ratified by God with Abraham, through whom God wants to bless all the nations of the earth by giving them faith to accept this promise of redemption and to have this redemption realized in their lives (Gen. 15; cf. 12:1–3).

Even though this covenant of grace is unilateral in origin, it is bilateral in its continuation or realization (Gen. 17; 22). Thus, to enjoy the realization of the promised blessings of the covenant of

[43] Schilder saw the covenant of grace and the covenant of works as two phases of one covenant (Schilder, 1935:254; cf. de Jong, 2019:174).
[44] For this section, I thankfully made use of Burger, 2017f; 2018a; 2019.
[45] I am aware that federal theology's understanding of the covenant of grace is not monolithic. What follows is the typical or mainstream understanding. For my use of the word "typical," see footnote 2.

grace, the recipients of the promises need to respond to these promises with faith and obedience. Because Abraham believed the promises of God, he is considered to be the father of believers (Rom. 4; Gal. 3).

The covenant with Abraham is then renewed with Israel as a nation to whom God gives the law as a guide to help them be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests and as a guardian to lead them to Christ for salvation (Ex. 19:5–6; 24; 32; Gal. 3:24). In this way, law and gospel become two administrations of the covenant of grace. In these two administrations of the covenant of grace, Israel has a typological function of "prefigure[ing] in an imperfect way what will be given perfectly in Christ" (Burger, 2018a:2). As a result, Israel essentially has a pedagogical function as a means to an end in the history of redemption, viz. preparing the church for the coming of Christ (Bavinck, 2003:I:376; cf. Burger, 2018a:4).

This covenant with Israel is then renewed with David to whom God promises an eternal kingship if his sons are faithful to him (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Ps. 89; 132; 1 Ki. 2:4). These promises made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Israel, and David are then fulfilled in a new covenant that God makes with all believers (Jer. 31–33; Ezek. 36–37).

Whereas the covenant of redemption drives the economy of salvation within the covenant of grace by its stability and unity, the covenant of works also informs it. As the head and mediator of the covenant of grace, Christ fulfills the conditions of the covenant of works for elect sinners with his active obedience by perfectly fulfilling the obedience of the law required in this covenant, while with his passive obedience Christ deals with the sanction of the covenant of works by bearing the curse of the law and satisfying God's justice for them (Gal. 3:10–14; Heb. 8; 10). In doing so, he purchased substantivized benefits of salvation for elect sinners, which the Holy Spirit applies to them in a particular order (*ordo salutis*) when they believe in Christ (Rom. 3:21–26; 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:30).[46] Moreover, when they believe in Christ, the active and passive obedience of Christ is imputed to them (Rom. 4; Gal. 3). With the inauguration of the new covenant, Israel's typological and pedagogical function comes to an end and God's dealings with Israel as a nation also comes to an end and can be missed.

The following elements distinguish Horton's understanding of the covenant of grace from mainstream federal theology. First, drawing on ancient Near Eastern parallels, he considers the covenant of grace to be an unconditional promissory land covenant made with Abraham, comparable to ancient Near Eastern royal grant or gift covenants where the vassals are the beneficiaries of an inheritance because of a victory of the suzerain (Horton 2011a.:537; 779). However, because the Mosaic covenant is in some sense a republication of the covenant of works, Israel has, on the one hand, the conditional

[46] Typically, the order of salvation is constructed as follows: election, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification/redemption (Burger, 2017c:244).

promise of corporately staying in the land as a nation and enjoying God's temporal blessings based on obedience to the covenant of works, while, on the other hand, it has the unconditional promise of individual salvation in Christ through faith alone.

Second, because the Mosaic covenant in some sense is a republication of the covenant of works, Israel's corporate history is an interlude or parenthesis in the history of redemption that primarily has a revelatory function, the function of revealing our human sinfulness (Horton, 2011a:440–443; cf. 152–153, 337, 384, 420, 448, 493, 528, 537, 539, 959, 986; 2006a:47, 69; 2016c:320; 2018b:81). However, because Israelite believers were individually justified by faith, Israel's history has a secondary pedagogical function of prefiguring salvation in Christ (Horton, 2006a:74; Burger, 2018a.:6).[47] After Israel has served this temporary typological and pedagogical function, God's dealing with Israel as a nation becomes unclear.[48]

Third, the new covenant is both unconditional and conditional. It is unconditional in its essence: members of the new covenant are freed from obeying the law for their justification. But it is conditional in its administration: obedience to the law is needed for final salvation, but is the fruit of having received a new heart (Horton, 2006a:182; cf. 173–194; 2011a:575–586, 615–619, 653–680; 2011e::150–154, 156–160; 2011c:152; cf. 150–153; 2007a:148–152, 263–266; 2009:330–336).

### 1.5.2. Evaluation of the main biblical and theological support offered for the covenant of grace

In evaluating the biblical-theological support of the covenant of grace, I will address the following questions. First, did God inaugurate and announce an overarching covenant of grace to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15? Second, did God ratify this overarching covenant of grace with Abraham and renew this overarching covenant with Israel, with David, and in the new covenant? Third, is Israel's function in the history of redemption simply typological and pedagogical so that God's history with Israel is an interlude or parenthesis in the history of redemption that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant? Fourth, did Christ fulfill the conditions of the covenant of works with his active obedience by perfectly fulfilling the law obedience required in this covenant by Adam, and did he with his passive obedience deal with the sanction of the covenant of works by bearing the punishment our sins deserved? Fifth, did Christ bear the curse of the law for elect sinners, and did he satisfy God's justice for them? Sixth, did Christ purchase the benefits of salvation with his death on the cross, and does the Holy Spirit apply these benefits to elect sinners when they appropriate them through faith in Christ? Seventh, is the active and passive obedience of Christ imputed to us when we believe in Christ? Eighth, is the twofold scheme of

[47] Here Horton's view overlaps with mainstream federal theology.

[48] On the one hand, the church does not replace Israel, but is the fulfilment of God's promise made to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed (Horton, 2011a:730). On the other hand, Israel has no distinct place in Horton's ecclesiology, even though he believes that Romans 11 seems to argue for an extensive ingrafting of Jews into the church (Horton, 2011a.:945–950; 2006a:132; cf. Burger, 2018a:5-6).

unconditional and conditional covenants warranted by Scripture? Ninth, is it wise to use extrabiblical material, such as Hittite international treaties, as a template to interpret biblical covenants?

First, did God announce an overarching covenant of grace to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15? Nowhere do we read in Genesis 3:15 that God announced an overarching covenant of grace to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin. What we do read is that God promised to make all things new through a human being who would deal with the problem of the devil by crushing his head. This study understands this to be God's commitment to the creational purpose of his mission for his glory by bringing creation and humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of his loving presence in Christ through the Spirit in his coming kingdom or the new heaven and new earth where he will be all in all.[49]

Second, did God ratify this overarching covenant of grace with Abraham and renew this overarching covenant with Israel, with David, and in the new covenant? Nowhere do we read in Scripture that God did so. What we do read is that God formally regulated his existing relationship with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai and on the Plains of Moab, and with David by way of individual covenants, and that he promised to formally regulate his relationship with Israel in a new covenant. Each of these covenants builds upon the former and strengthens it.

Third, is Israel's function in the history of redemption simply typological and pedagogical so that God's history with Israel is an interlude or parenthesis in the history of redemption that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant? While God's history with Israel does have a typological and pedagogical function, nowhere do we read that God's history with Israel is simply typological and pedagogical so that God's history with Israel is an interlude or parenthesis in the history of redemption that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant. On the contrary, God's new covenant is not a new covenant with the New Testament church as such, but his new covenant with Israel in its representative Messiah.[50]

Fourth, did Christ with his active obedience fulfill the conditions of the covenant of works for elect sinners by perfectly fulfilling the law obedience required in this covenant by Adam? Because there is no covenant of works, Christ could not fulfill the conditions of the covenant of works. Because this study understands Christ to be Israel's representative sent to fulfill Israel's role to be a blessing for the nations, it understands that with his obedience Christ was a blessing for the nations and thus the true

[49] This will be developed further in the next chapter.

[50] This study understands federal theology's emphasis on the unity of the covenant of grace with its canonical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation and with its reduction of Israel's function in the history of redemption to a typological and pedagogical role to have a supercessionist tendency that does not take seriously the dynamics of the history of redemption in which God enters into a plurality of covenants with Israel, Israel's king, and Israel's fathers (Burger, 2018a:4, 8-9, 18; 2019a:271; Soulen, 1996:12–17; Westerman, 2018:loc. 363, 506).

Israel in the way Israel was meant to be. As such, he was also the last Adam in whom we receive our new humanity. This obedience of Christ is the obedience of faith. [51]

Fifth, did Christ with his passive obedience bear the curse of the law for elect sinners and satisfy God's justice for them? The answer to this question has to do with whom Christ represented. While we do read in Scripture that Christ represented those who were elected from all eternity (Jn. 6:44; 17:2, 6, 9, 24; Rev. 7), we also read that Christ represented all humanity (Jn. 1:29; 3:16–17; 12:47; 1 Jn. 2.2; 4:14) as well as Israel in particular (Gal. 3:10–14; 4:4–5). Moreover, since the law was given to Israel, the curse of the law pertains not to humanity in general, but to Israel alone (Wright, 1993:137–156; 2013:526–527). Consequently, salvation from the curse of the law through the satisfaction of God's justice would therefore also pertain to Israel because it had failed to keep the law.

Because this study understands Christ to be Israel's representative sent to fulfill Israel's role to be a blessing to the nations, it understands that with his obedience[52] Christ rescued Israel from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them and, in doing so, he satisfied God's justice for them (Gal. 3:10–13). However, having rescued Israel from the curse of the law, as Israel's representative and Abraham's seed, he also fulfills Israel's calling to bring Abraham's blessing of being rescued from the curse of the law to the nations "before that curse could reach them" (van Bruggen, 2005:199–201; O'Donovan, 1994:123–130, 134, 141; Wright, C., 1992:22, 44, 62–63, 125–135, 153–174, 182; 2006:65–66, 325, 342–344; Wright, 2013:495–537; cf. Burger, 2017f:27; 2018a:15)[53]. This understanding prevents a narrowed, individualistic understanding of salvation that "leav[es] out the breadth of creation, neglecting the role of Israel, forgetting Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom of God, without any missionary drive" (Burger, 2014a:3).

Sixth, did Christ purchase substantivized benefits of salvation with his death on the cross, and does the Holy Spirit apply these benefits to elect sinners when they appropriate them through faith in Christ? Nowhere does the New Testament speak about Christ purchasing benefits of salvation for us. Instead, it speaks about Christ ransoming people (Mk. 10:45; Rev. 5:9; 14:4). Moreover, the twofold

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[51] This will be further developed in the next chapter.

[52] The distinction between Christ's active obedience and his passive obedience introduces a bifurcation into the obedience of Christ that Scripture considers being of one piece. Carson helpfully points this out when he writes, "A passage like the so-called Christ-hymn in Philippians 2 seems to depict Christ's obedience as all of a piece, including his willingness to become a human being and his progressive self-humiliation, climaxing in his obedience on the cross itself." And he adds, "By virtue of all of this obedience Christ was vindicated and his people are saved." (Carson, 2004:55).

[53] Burger helpfully writes, "The curse of the law has to be understood not as the problem of humanity, but of Israel solely. The law was given to Israel as Israel's prerogative and problem, as Paul makes clear in Galatians 3 and Romans 2–3. Having solved the problem of Israel, however, Jesus was able to fulfil Israel's role as well and to solve Adam's problem. As the seed, promised to Abraham, he bore the curse to bring Abraham's blessing to the nations" (Burger, 2017f:27). In this regard, van Bruggen writes, "If it can be said at all that the Gentiles also have been redeemed from the curse of the law, then it happened before that curse could reach them" (van Bruggen, 2005:199; Burger, 2018a:15).

soteriological structure where Christ purchases benefits of salvation and the Holy Spirit applies these benefits leads to an extrinsic appropriationist understanding of salvation where salvation "no longer is 'in Christ' but rather 'on the basis of what Christ has done'" (Evans, 2008:264; 2015b:24). This, in turn, can lead to a Christian discipleship that is "functionally Christless" or in which Christ is "not personally involved in [one's] obedience" (Macaskill, 2019:viii; cf. vii-xi; Burger, 2014a:3; see also Canlis, 2010:155–157). Furthermore, disconnecting the benefits of Christ from participating in the person of Christ can lead to the danger that Christians are thrown back on themselves wondering whether these benefits are for them or not (Burger, 2017c:25–26, 35; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:504).[54]

It is the understanding of this study that, instead of participating in the salvation Christ has purchased for us by the Holy Spirit applying the benefits of this work to us, we participate in Christ himself through our ontological union with him through faith. Consequently, our Christian identity is relocated and reconstituted by living ex-centrally in Christ so that it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20; Jn. 15:5; cf. MacCaskill, 2019:1–10; O'Donovan, 1994:22, 25, 76–97, 247–248; 2014:14, 40–41; Vanhoozer, 2006c:29). According to Burger, this can lead to the following reformulation of the order of salvation: "1. God's eternal love in Christ. 2. The gift of Christ for those who believe the good news of Christ. 3. The transformation of our lives through the effect of Christ in our lives. 4. The completion of this at his second coming, when we will be conformed to Christ" (Burger, 2017c:247).[55]

Seventh, are the active and passive obedience of Christ imputed to us when we believe in Christ? This question assumes that the benefits of salvation that Christ purchased with his active and passive obedience are disconnected from Christ and part of the order of salvation. Because we already saw that the New Testament nowhere speaks about Christ purchasing benefits of salvation, but rather about Christ ransoming people, his active and passive obedience cannot be imputed to us. Moreover, there is no need

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[54] Van der Kooi and van den Brink write, "The danger of overemphasizing the subject is that the reality of salvation becomes completely determined by our human appropriation. God's acts seem to become real and present only when, through the Spirit, the believer touches that reality and is enabled to appropriate it as his or her own. Or in theological language, the work of Christ is completely absorbed in the work of the Spirit". They add, "When the objective aspect . . . is absorbed by the subjective aspect . . . , the human subject begins to revolve around its own axis" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:504).

[55] All translations from Dutch to English are mine unless otherwise noted. Burger rightfully asserts that construction of the typical Reformed order of salvation that places images of salvation within a certain order as benefits of salvation in which believers share in a certain order "does not help to do justice to the use of these biblical images in the New Testament". Accordingly, he suggests, "It seems more fruitful to me to disconnect these biblical images from the moments in the order of salvation, and no longer use them as if they were dogmatic concepts that each represents a benefit of salvation as identified in the order of salvation." He adds, "It seems to make more sense to me, on the one hand, to allow these images to speak for themselves, as images that each have something to say about Jesus' significance for healing and restoration; and, on the other hand, to describe the moments in the order of salvation with words that are different from these biblical images." (Burger, 2017c:246–247). Earlier he wrote, "Instead, each image highlights different aspects of the entire process" (Burger, 2008:544; cf. 545; cf. Gaffin:1987:127, 130–131, 138; McGowan, 2006:160–163; Seifried, 2000:174).

to use the language of imputation[56], because when we clothe ourselves with Christ through faith, we participate in Christ's obedience, resurrection, and justification and are given him as our righteousness and new life (Bird, 2004:253–275; Burger, 2008:248–250; 2014a:7-9; Gaffin, 1987:122–124; Gundry, 2004:17–45; Han, 1995:231–239; Seifried, 2000:173–175).[57] Furthermore, we share in his identity as Son of God (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 4:25; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 2:10).[58]

Eighth, is the twofold scheme of unconditional and conditional covenants warranted by Scripture? No, it is not (Burger, 2019:299; Garcia, 2012:174; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:662–666, 693–694, Kwakkel, 2009:130; 2018). To assert that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional does not do justice to the fact that there are both conditional and unconditional aspects to this covenant. While God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 has a strong unconditional aspect that makes no explicit mention of his responsibilities, these responsibilities are assumed because otherwise God would not have made a second covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 after he and Sarah tried to realize the fulfilment of the covenant promise of a child on their terms and not God's (Pratt, 2008:8–9; Wright, 2006:2005–206). Moreover, this second covenant with Abraham has conditional aspects—walking before God and being blameless—which were to find concrete expression in the condition of circumcision.[59]

The same is true with the Davidic covenant. While God makes an unconditional dynastic promise to David 2 Samuel 7, this unconditional promise contains an implicit condition indicated by God's

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[56] Even though there is no need to use the language of imputation, this does not mean that it cannot be used. Canlis rightly observes that "[s]trictly speaking, 'imputation' involves the 'gifted' character of our righteousness, underscoring that it comes only from God and not from ourselves . . . [This imputation] can also occur through union with Christ" (Canlis, 2010:139–140).

[57] Instead of teaching that our union with Christ in his resurrection includes our justification, Horton interprets this text to mean that because with the resurrection of Christ the age to come has broken into this age, the future verdict of our justification has been brought forward into the present (Horton, 2018b:257, 275; 2007a:300; 2011a:709).

[58] When Rom. 4 and Gal. 3 use the language of imputation, this language is used in connection with the citation of Gen. 15:6 where the author of Genesis speaks about faith being imputed to Abraham as righteousness. There is no mention of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. When he does speak about the relationship between Christ and our justification, he no longer uses imputation language because it is no longer needed (Burger, 2008:247–248; 2014a:8). Moreover, Paul does not use the expression "righteousness of Christ".

[59] Because Horton considers the Abrahamic covenant to be unconditional, he is constrained to describe the obligation to circumcise not as a condition of the covenant, but a sign of this covenant comparable to the rainbow being a sign of God's covenant with Noah and creation (Horton, 2006a:33; 2007a:15). However, Horton fails to see that the condition of circumcision "served as a synecdoche for the covenantal requirement of a blameless life" (Pratt, 2008:8, 10). Moreover, when he considers the fulfilment of the stipulations of the Abrahamic covenant not to be necessary for Abraham to enjoy the salvific blessings of this covenant, but only as a means through which these blessings come to his heirs and typological of the obedience of Christ (Horton, 2006a:45), he is operating with a false dichotomy. About this false dichotomy, Kim writes, "If the stipulations only pertain to the *extension* of the Abrahamic covenant and the prefiguring of the Messiah's obedience how does this align with Paul's quotation of Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 in regards to Abraham's faith (both verses written in the context of *personal* salvation)?" He concludes, "It is more appropriate to maintain, based on the biblical evidence, that faith (which, if genuine, is expressed in obedience to God) is also the necessary means for an individual to enjoy the *salvific* blessings of the covenant (cf. James 2:22–23) (Kim, 2013:176). When Horton considers the new covenant to be unconditional in its essence but conditional in its administration (Horton, 2006a:182; cf. 173–194), he is imposing a distinction upon biblical covenants that is foreign to the nature of these biblical covenants.

statement that he will discipline David's son if he is disloyal (2 Sam. 7:14b). This implicit condition is made explicit in 1 Kings 2:4 where God's dynastic promise to David is conditional upon his sons' loyalty to God (cf. 1 Ki. 9:4–5). Based on a comparison with 1 Samuel 2:30, Kwakkel writes, "From this text onward readers of Samuel and Kings know that YHWH reserves the right to cancel a promise if the behavior of its recipients runs counter to his expectations. Apparently, he did not think it necessary to stipulate explicitly things that could be considered self-evident at all times" (Kwakkel, 2018:86). Elsewhere, he writes, "When God speaks, he always appeals to the listener, even when he makes an unconditional promise (as in Gen. 9:8–17 and 15:18–21). Precisely the unconditional aspect implies a strong call to a faithful trusting response" (Kwakkel, 2009:130).

Ninth, is it wise to use extrabiblical material, such as the Hittite international treaties, as a template to interpret biblical covenants as Horton does (Horton, 2006a:29; cf. 23–34; 2007a:13; 2011a:44, 151, 424, 782–283)?[60] No. For instance, since biblical covenants are neither conditional nor unconditional but instead have unconditional and conditional aspects, Horton's use of conditional suzerain-vassal law covenants, on the one hand, and unconditional promissory royal grant covenants, on the other, lacks Scriptural warrant.

Moreover, the understanding that promissory royal grant covenants were unconditional was based on early research which more recent research has called into question. Knoppers, for instance, has concluded that because land grants were always dependent on loyalty to the king even when this was not explicitly mentioned, these land grants were predominantly conditional (Knoppers, 1996:670–697). Thus, recent research undermines the results of earlier research. Furthermore, because the making of treaties or covenants in the ancient Near East was a diverse and complex matter, advocating a single covenant form is simplistic. It does not do justice to the complexity of the data (Weeks, 2004:6–10, 139, 163; Letham, 2019:460–461; van Bekkum, 2017; Burger, 2019:275–276).

Thus, a fifth systemic problem in Horton's federal theology is that it operates with an overarching covenant of grace that does not find a warrant in Scripture.

### 1.6. The essence-energy distinction

Horton's federal theology also operates with an essence-energies distinction. This distinction is "the necessary metaphysical underpinning of many ideas and doctrines" in Horton's federal theology

[60] While Horton makes the following concession, " . . . it is probably unwise to make the law covenant/promise-covenant too heavily dependent on formal similarities with ancient Near Eastern treaties. Regardless of parallels, only the exegesis of particular covenants in Scripture can determine its basis and terms" (Horton, 2006a:45), this concession sounds hollow in the light of Horton's actual use of these parallels. For instance, Hittite suzerainty law treaties form the structural template for interpreting biblical covenants in his introduction to covenant theology (2006a). After asserting that God adapted these treaties for his relationship with his people, he then deals with the Mosaic covenant before the Abrahamic covenant so that "he effectively sets up a system where law comes before grace" (McGowan, 2016:73; cf. 72–76).

(Bintsarovskyi, 2019:31; cf. Horton, 2011a:612). To evaluate Horton's understanding of the essence/energy distinction, I will first analyze his understanding of this distinction. Second, I will evaluate it.

### 1.6.1. Horton's understanding of the essence-energies distinction

Horton's understands the essence-energies distinction as follows. First, to maintain the Creator-creature distinction, he appropriates the Eastern Orthodox essence-energies distinction because he wants to acknowledge that communion with God is possible and real without any fusion of persons or essences (Horton, 2011a:602–605, 611, 691, 736–737, 818, 851, 910; 2007a:143–146, 268–269, 274–275, 281–283, 285, 302–307). Following the Eastern Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), he compares the essence of God to the sun and the energies of God to the rays of the sun (Horton, 2011a:130; cf. 52, 228, 237, 613, 690, 817; 2007a:212, 268, 270).

Second, although God's attributes are identical with his essence, they do not reveal this essence, but only his energies (Horton, 2011a:131, 228, 237, 255, 265, 267, 269, 332, 556, 603, 694, 698; 2007a:282). While God is immutable in his essence, there is real change in his activity or energies in the history of redemption (Horton, 2011a:235–242; 2011d:77–79; 2005a:46–48, 49; 1998a:31–34). Although God's essence is impassible and thus cannot feel, will, act, or be affected by creatures, the persons of the Trinity are passible and can be affected by creatures because they can feel, will, and act. While God does not communicate his essence to us when he speaks, he does communicate his energies when he creates, sustains, governs, redeems, and reveals himself through his speech (Horton, 2011a:130–131, 136, 154, 159, 164, 166, 181, 237, 331–334, 360, 574, 612, 751, 753; 2005a:69–70, 85; 2007a:302–303; 2008c:101, 137; 2017:54, 58, 64, 93, 120). Although we cannot be united to Christ's essence, we can be united to his energies. In this way, we participate in the fellowship of the Trinity and become partakers of the divine nature (Horton, 2007a:186, 285, 302; 2011a:603, 612–615, 690–691, 694, 698–700). While the Lord's Supper does not communicate the essence of Christ's life-giving flesh to us, it does communicate the energies of this life-giving flesh (Horton, 2007a:202–203, 285, 302; 2008c:137; 2011a:700, 816–818, 843; 2017b:272). Although we cannot partake of the divine essence and be deified, we can partake of the divine energies of God that emanate from his essence, but are distinguished from his essence as the rays of the sun are distinguished from the essence of the sun (Horton, 2011a:689–692, 694, 698–700; 2017b:285–286; cf. 2007a:267–307).

Third, Horton considers the essence-energies distinction comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about the incomprehensibility of God (2011a:49–53, 113, 129, 223, 263, 689, 698) and about our ability to know God not in his essence, but in his works (Horton, 2011a:130, 574, 690; 2007a:212, 231, 274–275), as well as to the Reformed epistemological distinction between archetypal and ectypal

theology and the contrast between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross (Horton, 2002c:7–9,184–191; 2005a:16–18; 2007a:272, 282; 2011a:54, 77–79, 128–129, 131, 210).

Fourth, because Reformed theology teaches that even in our glorified state we know God only in his works, Horton considers that there is overlap between the Western doctrine of glorification and the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* (Horton, 2011a:688, 689; cf. 688–710; 2011d:325–341; 2016c:390; 2017b:45, 284–288, 488–493; 2007a:267–307). Thus, Horton claims that Reformed theology, while not explicitly mentioning the essence-energies distinction, presupposes it.

Fifth, he believes that the essence-energies distinction safeguards the Creator-creature difference better than Western theology against pantheistic tendencies in Western mysticism (Horton, 2011a:52, 237, 615).

### 1.6.2. An evaluation of Horton's understanding of the essence-energies distinction

In evaluating Horton's understanding of the essence-energies distinction, I will address the following questions. First, is the essence-energies distinction comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about the incomprehensibility of God? Second, is the essence-energies distinction comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about our ability to know God in his works, but not in his essence? Third, is the essence-energies distinction comparable to the Reformed epistemological concept of analogical knowledge of God, the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology, and the contrast between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross? Fourth, is there is overlap between the Western doctrine of glorification and the Eastern doctrine of *theosis*? Fifth, does comparing the essence-energies distinction to the distinction between the sun and the rays of the sun prove what Horton attempts to prove?

First, is the essence-energies distinction regarding the unknowability of God's essence comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about the incomprehensibility of God? When Reformed theology speaks about the incomprehensibility of God, it means that the finite cannot contain the infinite. Our knowledge of God is never exhaustive knowledge but always partial and limited. Moreover, our knowledge of God is always cloaked in mystery (Bavinck, 2004:II-28, 40, 48; Beeke, 2019:69–70; Frame 2013:702–704; Letham, 2019:167–168; van den Brink and van der Kooi, 2012:218–219). Thus, the essence-energies distinction concerning the unknowability of the essence of God is not the same as what Reformed theology teaches about the incomprehensibility of God. In this regard, Bavinck rightly asserts, "God's incomprehensibility, so far from canceling out God's knowability, rather presupposes and affirms it (Bavinck, 2004:II:56).

Second, is the essence-energies distinction regarding the unknowability of God's essence and his knowability in his energies comparable to what Reformed theology teaches about our ability to know God in his works, but not in his essence? When Reformed theology teaches that we know God not in his essence, but his works, it does not mean that when God reveals himself in his works, he does not reveal

his essence, but that he reveals his essence through his works. Consequently, Bavinck writes, "The 'ontological' Trinity is mirrored in the 'economic' Trinity" (Bavinck, 2004:II:318). According to Reformed theology, there is a unity between God's being and his works (Torrance, 2016:87). Consequently, when God reveals himself, he reveals his essence or nature. This is especially the case when God reveals himself essentially in Jesus Christ (Huijgen, 2011:183–184; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:23). Thus, the essence-energies distinction regarding the unknowability of God's essence and his knowability in his energies is not the same as what Reformed theology teaches about knowing God not in his essence, but in his works. Moreover, it is a false dilemma. Bintsarovskyi rightly notes, "Horton's formulation presents a false dilemma. The issue is not whether we know God from his essence or his acts. The real issue is whether we know God's essence from his acts, or whether it remains shrouded despite God's revelatory activity" (Bintsarovskyi, 2019:283). Furthermore, this formulation "drive[s] a wedge between the inner Life of God and his saving activity in history or between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity" (Torrance, 2016:187; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:284–288; see also Zorgdrager, 2014:374, 380).

Third, is the essence-energies distinction comparable to the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology, the Reformed epistemological concept of analogical knowledge, and the distinction between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory? When Reformed theology uses the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology, the intention is to distinguish between God's self-knowledge and the knowledge that he gives of himself to creatures through revelation. It does not, however, imply that the ectypal revelatory knowledge is not in any way a revelation of God's archetypal knowledge. Instead, it implies that our knowledge of God is not separated from God's own self-knowledge and is always partial and limited, as we saw when we dealt with God's incomprehensibility (Bavinck, 2003:I:214).

When Reformed theology speaks of analogical knowledge of God, it means that our knowledge of God is "shaped by analogy to what can be discerned of God in his creatures, having as its object not God himself in his knowable essence, but God in his revelation, his relation to us, in the things that pertain to his nature, in his habitual disposition to his creatures. Accordingly, this knowledge is only a finite image, a faint likeness and creaturely impression of the perfect knowledge that God has of himself". Thus, analogical knowledge of God means that because there is similarity and dissimilarity between us and God, we can receive imperfect, but true knowledge of God's essence (Bavinck, 2004:II:33, 99, 110, 128, 136–137, 342; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:125–127)[61].

[61] However, Bavinck does not always consistently maintain that we can have imperfect, but true knowledge of God's essence. Occasionally, he writes that we cannot know God in his essence (e.g., Bavinck, 2004:II:36). However, when he does so, he means that God "cannot be known perfectly, that is, in his essence" (Bavinck, 2004:II:190; cf. 36). Moreover, when Bavinck asserts that God cannot be known in his essence, he is combating

Horton, however, instead of using the Reformed concept of analogy in a positive manner like this, uses it in a negative sense. Analogical knowledge of God for him means that we can never have any knowledge of God's essence.[62] According to Horton, a theology of the cross is a "[p]hrase used by Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) to emphasize that human knowledge and experience must be based on the foolishness of the cross, not human abilities or human ascent to God (theology of glory)". A theology of glory is a "[p]hrase used by Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) to criticize medieval theologians who sought direct access to God without the need of mediation" (Horton, 2011a:1001–1002). "At the heart of all theologies of glory," Horton asserts, "Luther warned, is the desire to ascend to God and strip off his self-chosen masks so that we are no longer restricted to his back but can behold his inner essence—the blinding glory of his face" (Horton, 2011a:250). However, because we have seen that God always gives some knowledge of his being when he reveals himself, the essence-energies distinction is not comparable to the distinction between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory. Thus, Reformed theology, while not explicitly mentioning the essence-energies distinction, does not presuppose this distinction.

Fourth, is there is overlap between the Western doctrine of glorification and the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* or participating in the divine nature? The answer to this question is a yes and a no. There is no overlap between the Western doctrine of glorification and the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* if this doctrine is taken to mean that participating in the divine nature entails a participation in the energies of God and not the essence or being of God. As we have seen, the distinction is incompatible with Reformed theology. However, there is overlap between the Western doctrine of glorification and the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* when participation in the divine nature is understood as a real participation in God in which our humanity reaches its destiny by being completely transformed into the image of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Yet, this real participation in God is not a participation only in the energies of God, but a participation in the being of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Billings, 2005; 2007:51–61, 96, 190,

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speculative knowledge of God apart from God's revelation of himself in Christ (Bavinck, 2003:I:110–111; cf. Bintsarovskyi, 2019:75).

[62] This becomes very clear when Horton speaks about God's essential attributes (Horton, 2011a:255, 267, 286, 288, 290, 303, 336) that are identical with his essence or existence (Horton, 2011a:245, 265). He writes, "However, according to the analogical account, *all* the passages that disclose God's being and character are accommodated to our capacity rather than predicates that obtain univocally between God and creatures" (Horton, 2011a:257). Consequently, Bintsarovskyi concludes "Horton seems to believe that the essence is not simply a set of attributes, but a sort of interior substantiality that requires strictly univocal predication in order to be known" (Bintsarovskyi, 2019:33). Frame writes something similar, "There is a certain picture of God lurking behind Horton's expressions. In this picture, God has a periphery and a dark center. The periphery contains his goodness, omnipotence, wisdom, the things revealed to us, in his word. We can know this periphery by God's revelation. But the center is entirely unknown to us. It is like a black hole, from which no light escapes" (Frame, 2011:214).

193, 196; Canlis, 2004; 2010:188–191, 236–238; Fairbairn, 2007; 2009:6–12, 33–35; Finlan, 2006; 2007; Habets, 2006; 2009a; 2009b; Letham, 2019:769–788; 2011:91–102, 123–128; Mosser, 2002).[63]

Fifth, does comparing the essence-energies distinction to the distinction between the sun and the rays of the sun prove what Horton attempts to prove? No, it does not because the rays of the sun always manifest something about the essence of the sun. Thus, the metaphor actually proves what Horton denies. Bintsarovskyi aptly formulates this in this manner. "While it is true, of course, that we do not know the sun directly, it is equally true that the rays communicate some knowledge of the sun rather than leaving us totally ignorant about it." He adds, "The metaphor of the sun and its rays fits well in analogical reasoning … because the properties of heat and light communicated by the rays presuppose that the sun itself possesses these properties, albeit in a different measure—with greater temperature and luminosity. Thus, the metaphor illustrates that while we do not know God's essence directly, we do know it in some measure based on its 'operations'" (Bintsarovskyi, 2019:286).

Thus, a sixth systemic problem with Horton's federal theology is that it operates with an essence-energies distinction that misunderstands Reformed theology and finds no warrant in Scripture.

### 1.7. Justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis*

To evaluate Horton's understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo saluti*s with a view to giving direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice, I will first analyze his understanding of this concept. Second, I will evaluate it.

#### 1.7.1. Horton's understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis*

Horton understands justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis* as follows. First, when Protestant soteriology distinguishes regeneration from effectual calling through the Word, it uses a forensic ontology in answering the problem of our guilt and a participatory ontology (e.g., infused habits) in answering the problem of our corruption so that these two events are like two trains running on parallel tracks (Horton, 2007a:301–302; cf. 216, 236). Moreover, if intrinsic transformative change through the infusion of habits occurs before justification, this will obscure the *extra nos* basis of our justification (Horton, 2007a:176, 261). To get these two trains running on the same track and secure the *extra nos* basis of our justification, Horton makes God's judicial verdict of justification, announced through the effectual call, the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis* or order of salvation so that justification is "the engine that pulls adoption, new birth, sanctification, and glorification in tow" (Horton, 2011a:708; cf. 588, 597, 610–612, 677, 706, 710, 708; 2007a:129, 138–139, 143, 147–148, 198, 201, 203, 216–217, 247, 264, 292–293; 2012:91, 93; 2013a:184; 2018a:209, 219, 273; 2018b:361, 470–471, 493).

[63] This will be further developed in the next two chapters.

Second, while union with Christ is the matrix or proper habitat of the *ordo salutis,* justification is the forensic basis of this union (Horton, 2007a:129, 143, 174; 2011a:620; 2012:91; 2018b:285, 470).

Third, drawing on the work of Kevin Vanhoozer and speech act theory, Horton asserts that this judicial verdict of justification, announced in the effectual call, occurs when the Father speaks in the Son through the Spirit or God's illocutionary act of justification is combined with the perluctionary work of the Holy Spirit issuing forth into repentance and faith. In other words, God's declaration creates the reality it declares and is constitutive of what it declares (Horton, 2007a:135, 138, 166, 198, 201–203, 218, 220–230, 240; 2011a:567, 610–611, 645, 649, 892; 2018b:361).

Fourth, although God's declaration of righteousness is a judicial verdict that generates transformative change, the transformative change is not part of God's declaration of righteousness (Horton, 2007a:139, 203, 250). To illustrate the difference between primary and secondary causality, Horton compares God's effectual calling to be a speech act analogous both to the initiating act of creation *ex nihilo* when God said "Let there be [righteousness]!" and the Spirit's action within creation bringing about the transformative effect of this declarative speech act when God said, "Let the earth bring forth!" (Horton, 2012:91; cf. 2007a:203; 2011a:159, 326, 575, 611, 621, 645, 662–663, 753; 2014c:127–149).

Fifth, because God's judicial verdict of justification, announced in the effectual call, is the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis,* Horton makes a distinction between what he considers the "gospel" and the "effects" of the gospel, typically using the word "gospel" to refer to our justification through faith and the "effects" of the gospel to refer to the transformative effects of our justification through faith.

Sixth, in asserting that God's declaration creates the reality it declares and is constitutive of what it declares, the concept of the infusion of habits is no longer necessary because Horton has made regeneration and effectual calling synonymous (Horton, 2007a:197; cf. 195–204; 240–242; cf. 232–239; 2011a:610; cf. 608–612, 669–670; 573; cf. 572–575).[64] Moreover, the charge of legal fiction no longer applies because God's declaration of righteousness is a judicial verdict that generates transformative change.

Seventh, Horton considers his covenant ontology, with justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis* at the core of this ontology, to be a rival paradigm to a participatory ontology because it deals better with the charge that the doctrine of justification by faith is a legal fiction (Horton, 2007a:201).

### 1.7.2. Evaluation of Horton's understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis*

In evaluating Horton's understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis* I will address the following questions. First, is justification the forensic basis of union with Christ? Second, if

[64] Because the terminology of infused habits opens the door for a non-forensic source of justification that obscures the *extra nos* basis of justification, Horton believes the terminology of infused habits should be abandoned.

God's judicial verdict of justification is the forensic basis of our union with Christ, what is the forensic basis for God's judicial verdict of justification? Third, is God's declaration of righteousness a judicial verdict that creates what it declares or generates transformative change? Fourth, do infused habits involve the infusion of a divine substance leading to the fusion of the divine and the creature? Fifth, should the terminology of infused habits be abandoned because it opens the door for a non-forensic source of justification that obscures the *extra nos* basis of justification?

First, is justification the forensic basis of union with Christ?[65] No, it is not. When I dealt with the question of whether the active and passive obedience of Christ is imputed to us when we believe in Christ, I noted that there is no need to use the language of imputation in its forensic sense because when we clothe ourselves with Christ through faith, we participate in Christ's resurrection and justification and are given him as our righteousness and new life. This implies that justification is not the basis of our union with Christ, but rather is included in this union. This is what we read in the New Testament. Because the historical resurrection of Christ includes his justification (Rom. 1:3–4; 4:23–25; 1 Tim. 3:16) and we participate in the redemptive life history of Christ (Rom. 6:1–11; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 3:1–4), we are justified through our union with him (Rom. 4:25; cf. Bird, 2011:149–151; Burger, 2008:186, 193, 248, 250–251; 2014a; Evans, 2008:264–265; Gaffin, 1987:122–124; Miller, 2013:55–62; Seifrid, 2000:47, 174–175; Tipton, 2007:23–38; Vos, 1994:149–153).[66] Thus, not the doctrine of justification, but the doctrine of union with Christ keeps the Reformed soteriological train from running on parallel tracks. This implies that the word "gospel" includes both what Christ has done for us as well as what he does in us.

Second, if God's judicial verdict of justification is the forensic basis of our union with Christ, what is the forensic basis for God's judicial verdict of justification? We just saw that the historical resurrection of Christ is the legal basis of our justification because we participate in the redemptive life history of Christ through our union with him. In other words, the redemptive-historical justification of Christ is the forensic basis for God's judicial verdict of justification or his justifying speech act. However, because Horton makes God's justifying speech-act to be the forensic basis of our union with Christ, he essentially has no forensic basis for God's justifying speech-act. Michelson suggests this when he writes, "Yet on what basis are sinners declared to be 'in the right'? If the justifying declaration is prior to the single covenantal and ontological relation of the believer with Christ, then the declaration of justification

[65] While this is Horton's default position, he sometimes makes union with Christ precede justification (Horton, 2011a:587, 622; 2018b:470–471). This leads to a lack of conceptual clarity as well as confusion (McGraw, 2013:255–256; Michelson, 2018:399–400).

[66] For references to the debate between members of Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) and Westminster Seminary California (Escondido), see Miller, 2013.

is baseless. This is worse than a legal fiction, for we have no relation to Christ whatsoever by which we are considered to be in solidarity with him" (Michelson, 2018:400; see also Hoglund, 2016:72).[67]

Third, is God's declaration of righteousness a judicial verdict that creates what it declares or generates transformative change?[68] No, it is not. The transformative change occurs because what Christ has done *for* us as we participated in his death and resurrection, he does *in* us as the Holy Spirit joins us to him by having us put him on through faith so that it is no longer we who live, but he who lives in us (Gal. 2:20).[69] Because God's declaration of righteousness is included in his justification of Christ through our union with him, it essentially "affirms an already existing reality". Thus, instead of God's judgment generating transformative change, it is "just a stamp that officially creates the new status" (Burger, 2014a:11).[70] Consequently, God's judicial verdict of justification, announced through the effectual call, cannot be the engine or the generative source of the whole *ordo salutis*. If it was, it would be "an overinflation of the doctrine of justification" (Michelson, 2018:393).[71]

Fourth, do infused habits involve the infusion of a divine substance leading to the fusion of the divine and the creature? No, they do not. When Christ does in us what he has done for us, this does not result in the infusion of a divine substance that fuses us with the divine. Rather, it involves Christ infusing his inherent righteousness in us as he lives his life in us through the Holy Spirit. Lindbeck aptly captures this when he writes, "Inherent righteousness is simply the effect in human beings of incorporation into Christ and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is not a quasi-independent external product of God's efficient causality.… Insistence on infused created grace becomes a way of saying that union with Christ is genuinely transformative of the human person." He concludes, "Thus it can be argued that when

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[67] Thus, instead of defusing the legal fiction charge, Horton increases the vulnerability to this charge (Michaelson, 2018:394). Hoglund asks the following suggestive question about Horton's assertion that the judicial verdict of justification, announced in the effectual call, creates the reality it declares: "I submit that Horton has identified one of God's crucial speech acts, but that this is God's decision or election, rather than the outworking of this election in effectual calling. Is it not conceivable on Horton's terms that the Father announced to the Son, 'Let there be justification,' in a pretemporal covenant for redemption?" (Hoglund, 2016:72).

[68] When Horton asserts that Paul compares God's justifying speech act to his *ex nihilo* fiat in creation in Rom. 4:17 (Horton, 2011a:611, 645, 753; 2018b:300, 361), he fails to see that this text refers to God creating descendants of Abraham through his effectual call (Hoglund, 2016:72–73).

[69] This is how the legal fiction charge is properly defused so that it no longer applies (Michelson, 2018:401–408). This is also why, when we include what Christ does *in* us to the content of the gospel, we are not confusing the fruit or effects of the Gospel with the gospel itself (Horton, 2014b; 2016d:76–79). Thus, there is no reason to consider a covenant ontology to be superior to a participatory ontology because it deals better with the charge that the doctrine of justification by faith is a legal fiction.

[70] This was only an option, not a settled opinion for Burger in 2014. Later, however, writing about God's declaration of justification generating transformative change, he writes, "Justification language in the New Testament, however, does not go that far. You are still too close to the Augustinian idea of justification, which understood justification as the 'engine' of the entire Christian life" (Burger, 2017c:257)

[71] Michelson writes, "A 'covenantal ontology' represents an overinflation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as justification is extracted from its setting within the economy of redemption and given a task—i.e., funding an all-encompassing ontology—which is not native to its constrained, yet crucial role in a more balanced *ordo salutis*" (Michelson, 2018:393).

Aristotelian categories are given a participationist interpretation, they can no longer be as easily misused (Lindbeck, 1985:238; Michelson, 2018:404–405).[72]

Fifth, should the terminology of infused habits be abandoned because it opens the door for a non-forensic source of justification that obscures the *extra nos* basis of justification? No. Any infused habits prior to our justification cannot obscure the *extra nos* basis of justification because they never meet the standard of perfection that is needed for justification (Michelson, 2018:406–407). What does obscure the *extra nos* basis of justification, however, is Horton's assertion that God's declaration of justification does what it says because it generates transformative change and thus rebuts the legal fiction charge, while not making a *firm* distinction between the declaration of justification and the transformative change that this declaration generates because the transformative change is the effect of a *single* speech act announced in the effectual call.[73] Consequently, because the forensic is the ontological, God's single justifying speech act is implicitly transformative, obscuring the *extra nos* basis of justification (Michelson, 2018:399–400).

Thus, a seventh systemic problem in Horton's federal theology is that it operates with an understanding of the relationship between justification and the *ordo salutis* that misunderstands how Scripture speaks about this relationship and thus finds no warrant in Scripture.

### 1.8. Two-kingdom theology

To evaluate Horton's understanding of the two kingdoms in relation to clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice, I will first analyze his understanding of this concept. Second, I will evaluate it.

#### 1.8.1. Horton's understanding of the two kingdoms

Horton's two-kingdom theology can be characterized as follows. First, while he understands the expression "the kingdom of God" to refer to the eschatological kingdom, he understands the use of this expression in Scripture to refer primarily to the kingship or rule of God in the Garden of Eden, in Israel,

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[72] A few times Horton contrasts the infusion of supernatural habits with the role of the Holy Spirit, suggesting that the latter can take over the function performed by the former (Horton, 2007a:146, 185). However, Michelson, with a nod to Lindbeck, rightly observes, "Yet as Lindbeck suggests, the notion of infused habits interpreted along participatory lines provides the metaphysical density to describe the Spirit's work in the redeemed individual in conforming them to Christ. The Spirit's continuing agency in bringing about this act of intrinsic participation in Christ is indispensable, but the remaining question is whether an account which dispenses with habitual grace altogether can adequately denote the intrinsic change enacted by the Spirit's ongoing work in the believer?" (Michelson, 2018:405).

[73] When Horton attempts to avoid the legal fiction charge by comparing God's effectual calling to be a speech act analogous both to the initiating act of creation *ex nihilo* when God said "Let there be [righteousness]!" and the Spirit's action within creation bringing about the transformative effect of this declarative speech act when God said, "Let the earth bring forth!", he fails to see that he is no longer speaking about the transformative effects of a single speech act, but has introduced a second speech act into this comparison. Hoglund hints at this when he asserts that Horton's reference to God's justifying verdict as being both a "forensic verdict" as well as a "summons" are in fact "two different speech acts" (Hoglund, 2016:72).

and in the church (Horton, 2011a:539; cf. 537–547, 720, 754; 2016c:363–374, 381–391). He distinguishes this rule from the way God rules in the world.

He bases this distinction on the difference between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission, as well as on his dogmatic understanding of law and gospel. The cultural mandate was given to all humanity in the covenant of creation and is enabled by God's general revelation or natural law through his common grace. The Great Commission or cultic mandate was given in the covenant of grace to the church and is enabled through special grace (Horton, 2006a:111–126; 2011a:712–715, 719, 728; 2009a:161–165; 2011c:62–64).

Second, God unconditionally promises to uphold creation with his common grace in his covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures. However, this is not a redemptive covenant, but a covenant of law that enables believers and unbelievers to fulfil the cultural mandate and engage in cultural activity (Horton, 2006a:115–128; 2011a:364–368, 712–715, 925–927; 2008d:45–65; 2009a:245–266; 2011c:210–246, 282).

Third, since the fall into sin, this cultural activity belongs to the common or secular realm and pertains to the temporal, not the eternal, while the cultic mandate belongs to the sacred realm and pertains to the eternal. These two realms or kingdoms exist independently, parallel to or alongside each other (Horton, 2006a:114–115; 2008b:252–266; 1995:*passim*). As a result, Christians are dual citizens, fulfilling their cultural vocation in the common kingdom in a common way, like unbelievers, with the natural law as their source of revelation, and fulfilling their cultic vocation in the sacred kingdom in a special way, with Scripture as their source of revelation.[74]

Fourth, because our vocations outside the church have bearing only on the temporal, they are considered "creation" work, i.e., non-redemptive, and not "kingdom" work, i.e., redemptive (Horton, 2010b). Consequently, the church should not try to apply the gospel to social issues. This is all the more the case because "Christianity is not a culture [but] a system of truth claims" (Horton, 2008e:26).[75] To apply the gospel to social issues would not only lead to a confusion of kingdoms, Christ and culture, general and special revelation, and law and gospel; it would also trivialize the gospel (Horton,1995:90–

[74] In 2006, Horton wrote, "There is no difference between Christians and non-Christians with respect to their vocations … If Christians as well as non-Christians participate in the common curse and common grace of this age in secular affairs, then there is no 'Christian politics' or 'Christian art' or 'Christian literature,' any more than there is 'Christian plumbing'" (Horton, 2006b.; Keller, 2016:212). Yet, in 2011, Horton writes that his two-kingdom view does not entail that Christians do not do their work in a distinctively Christian way (Horton, 2011g). However, in 2014, he writes again, "There is no such thing as Christian farming, holy medicine, kingdom art, even though believers engaged in these callings alongside unbelievers are holy citizens of his kingdom. The service that a janitor, homemaker, doctor, or business person provides is part of God's providential care of his creatures. It requires no further justification" (Horton, 2014a:228).

[75] For Horton's critique of the idea of Christendom, see Horton, 1994:83–106.

91; 1994:35, 83; 2006a:17, 121–128; 2008a:114, 124, 157, 206; 2009a:253–254, 263; cf. 245–266; 2011c:84, 86, 100, 118, 212, 226–228, 238, 2458, 271, 286).

Fifth, since the marks of the church are the mission of the church such that the church fulfils its mission in the world by opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven through the keys of the kingdom and by the faithful execution of the marks of the church, the church should also not try to make disciples by being a people who are active in the world by embodying the gospel, as this so easily distracts from the church as a place where Christ is the active party, forgiving and renewing sinners (Horton, 2011c:266–290; 2008a:*passim*; 2009a:*passim*; 2011c:*passim*).

### 1.8.2. Evaluation of Horton's understanding of the two kingdoms

In evaluating Horton's understanding of the two kingdoms, I will address the following questions First, what is the relationship between "the rule of the king" and "the realm of the king" when Jesus uses the expression "the kingdom of God"? Second, does the cultural mandate belong to the covenant of works and the Great Commission belong to the covenant of grace? Third, is the separation of two sources of revelation, enlightened by common grace and enlightened by special grace, warranted by Scripture? Fourth, is general revelation sufficient to fund a parallel ethic in the common kingdom alongside an ethic in the sacred kingdom? Fifth, is God's covenant with Noah a common grace non-redemptive law covenant? Sixth, is Christianity not a culture, but a system of truth claims?

First, what is the relationship between "the rule of the king" and "the realm of the king" when Jesus uses the expression "the kingdom of God"? While the word βασιλεία refers to both the reign of the king as well as the realm of the king, when Jesus uses the expression "kingdom of God", he is not referring to the reality of Christ's reign of grace here and now in which Christ applies the benefits of his redemptive work to believers through the Spirit to create a new covenant community or church, but rather to the reality of the realm of the Sabbath rest of the fullness of God's loving presence in Christ through the Spirit in the coming kingdom of God or the new heaven and new earth where God will be all in all.[76] Van Bruggen articulates this as follows: "The Greek word *basileia*, like the Hebrew word *malkut*, means both kingly *rule* and kingly *territory*. These meanings reflect different aspects of the word but are not mutually exclusive. The word *basileia* is not an abstract term for king*ship*, (which exists apart from the recognition of such a status); it is rather a concrete reference to "kingly *dominion*", (the acknowledged and exercised royal power in a particular territory)" (van Bruggen, 1999:76; cf. 73–82; 2014a; 2014b).[77]

[76] The reality of this dominion acknowledged and exercised in a particular territory was promised in the so-called *protoevangelion* or promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15, promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:3), prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 2:44 and 7:11–14), and proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. This will be developed further in the next chapter.

[77] God intended this reality to be prefigured in his relationship with Israel and the land in the Old Testament, see de Bruijne, 2011b:371; cf. 370-376.

This *basileia* is a realm which we will inherit (1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) and into which we must enter (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; Jn. 3:5) "in which everything is subject to him [i.e., God]" (van Bruggen, 1999:76). Accordingly, Jesus can say that his kingdom is not of *this* world (Jn. 18:36). Thus when Horton uses the nomenclature of "two kingdoms" to refer to the two different ways in which Christ rules the world and the church, he is using the word "kingdom" in a different way from Jesus when he referred to the kingdom of God.[78]

Second, does the cultural mandate belong to the covenant of works and the Great Commission belong to the covenant of grace? Since I have established that there is no covenant of works and no overarching covenant of grace, this cannot be the case. Since I have also established that faith characterizes obedience in both the Old and New Testament, the cultural mandate and the Great Commission are both to be carried out through the obedience of faith.

Third, is the dichotomizing of two sources of revelation, the enlightening by common grace and the enlightening by special grace, warranted by Scripture? Earlier, I wrote that when Horton asserts that the law is written on the hearts of every human being, he overlooks the fact that Rom. 2:15 speaks about "the work of the law" written on their hearts. Because the law Paul is referring to is the Mosaic law, he means that when Gentiles by nature or spontaneously do what the law requires, they do so because somehow the influence of the written law of God makes itself felt in their lives. Stob expresses this well when he writes, "Paul is here declaring that in the consciousness of the unregenerate an effect of the law's 'operation' is registered" (Stob, 1985:63; Kloosterman, 2007). This implies that God's general revelation through conscience is intrinsically tied to his special revelation in Scripture and thus not an independent

[78] I am aware that the nomenclature "two kingdoms" has found its way into theological discourse via Augustine's use of the concept of the two cities and Luther and Calvin's use of the concept of the two kingdoms. However, the only two kingdoms Scripture speaks about are the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (Scheuers, 2012:275). When Horton asserts that Augustine taught the two-kingdoms approach when he wrote about the two cities—the city of God and the city of man—(Horton, 1994:88–92; 2006a:120–122; 2009a:250; 2011a:924), he spatializes Augustine's city of man into a common realm or earthly domain. However, for Augustine "the earthly city is a systemic—and disordered—configuration of creaturely life" that manifests itself in a love for self and a lust for power *within* human society (Smith, 2017:46; Crouse, 2017:276; Bourke, 1974:200–202). When Horton implies that his two- kingdom approach is comparable to Luther's (Horton, 1994:93–94; 2006a:120; 2011a:924; 2011c:245), he overlooks the fact that Luther's two kingdoms refers primarily to "two realms within human existence corresponding to humanity's two natures," with the invisible spiritual realm referring to "the human person before God alone (*coram Deo*)" where God governs invisibly directly through his Word and the visible and the visible physical or earthly realm referring the human person in the eyes of men and the world (*coram homnibus* or *corum mundo*) where God governs visibly through external means (Crouse, 2017:5–6; cf. 1–34; Littlejohn, 2017:12–29). When Horton implies that his two-kingdom approach is comparable to Calvin's (Horton, 1994:94–98; 2006a:120, 126; 2011a:924; 2011c:245), he fails to understand that for Calvin the two kingdoms "does not so much refer to two separate realms or worlds as to a twofold government of God over the conduct of believers who are being renewed after his image and are subject to his rule" (Venema, 2012b:14; cf. 3–32; Calvin, 1960:III:847–849). When Horton criticizes Augustine, Luther, and Calvin for not being consistent with their two-kingdom theology (Horton, 2006a:120, 2011a:924), what Crouse writes about VanDrunen also applies to Horton: "Not once does VanDrunen allow that what he calls 'inconsistencies' may actually be practices consistent with a theory that he has misinterpreted" (Crouse, 2017:100).

source of revelation alongside Scripture. Kloosterman aptly captures this intrinsic relationship when he writes, "From Paul's argument, however, it seems clear that, for him, 'nature' is not the source of any moral norms, of which then the law was supposedly the objectification. Rather, precisely the reverse was the case: this doing 'by nature' . . . what the law requires indeed demonstrates the power of the [written] law" (Kloosterman, 2007; Bavinck, 2003:I:87; Scheuers, 2012:135; Waddington, 2012:).[79] Moreover, Gen. 1:28 and 2:16–17 show that before the fall into sin, God kept general and special revelation together (Frame, 2011:325–326; Vos, 1948:27–40; Waddington, 2012:192–193; 2014:191–192; see also Poythress, 2016:193–196, 205). This will also be the case in the eschatological kingdom. This implies that when Horton asserts that God rules the world through common grace and the church through special grace, he operates with an artificial duality that simply does not exist.[80]

Fourth, is general revelation sufficient to fund a parallel ethic in the common kingdom alongside an ethic in the sacred kingdom? No, it is not. In chapter two, I noted that humanity is no longer open and receptive to living in the presence of God and each other because, when they fell into sin, they closed themselves to living in the loving presence of God and each other and became turned in on themselves and self-enclosed. This being turned in on ourselves and self-enclosed has consequences for our inner orientation or mindset. Our understanding became futile and darkened (Rom. 1:21, 28). Moreover, our will suppresses the truth that God reveals in his general revelation (Rom. 1:18–20). Thus, both epistemologically as well as ethically, general revelation is insufficient to fund a parallel ethic in the common kingdom alongside an ethic in the sacred kingdom (Frame, 2011:325–332; Keller, 2012:2010; Kloosterman, 2007; O'Donovan, 1994, 81–82; Poythress, 2016:193–194, 207; Stob, 1985:62; Strange, 2011:250–252; Venema, 2012b:21–23).

Fifth, is God's covenant with Noah a common grace non-redemptive law covenant? This is not the case because the distinction between redemptive and non-redemptive covenant is based on Horton's

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[79] This is the opposite of what Horton asserts: "It is a fact that the law of God which we call the [written] moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved on the minds of men." (Horton, 2009a:253). When Horton separates general and special revelation into two parallel realms, he forgets that "moral consensus between Christians and non-Christians does not originate in general revelation, as is often assumed, but rather originates in a mixture of general and special revelation. What is often taken as evidence of general revelation, natural law, and common grace in our Western culture may actually be rather the historical influence of special revelation, biblical law, and the gospel" (Strange, 2011:253; Keller, 2016:211). Leithart calls this mixture "middle grace" (Leithart, 1995:4–5). Furthermore, the separation of two sources of revelation, enlightenment by common grace and enlightenment by special grace, implies that a secular state can be religiously neutral. However, this is "a 'myth', a confused, compromised, and unstable state of affairs, and a fruit of the Enlightenment rather than the Reformation" (Strange, 2011:248; Keller, 2012:211).

[80] In this regard. Frame rightfully writes, "But Scripture never suggests that pagan governments are not responsible to God's special revelation. Indeed, Israelite prophets brought God's special revelation to bear against Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Cush, Egypt, Tyre, and Sidon, as well as Israel (as Isa. 13–23) and against Rome (the Book of Revelation)" (Frame, 2011:322). Ouweneel roots two-kingdom dichotomizing in the scholastic nature-grace dualism (Ouweneel, 2017:9, 34–35, 185, 228, 233, 235, 261, 287, 289, 297–298).

dogmatic law-gospel distinction or law-gospel hermeneutic which is not warranted by Scripture. Moreover, I indicated that this study considers divine-human covenants to be redemptive instruments that secure and guarantee God's missional intent for humanity and creation, often during times of uncertainty. Consequently, there is no such thing as a non-redemptive covenant: all God's covenants are redemptive. Moreover, asserting that God's covenant with Noah is a non-redemptive covenant dichotomizes God's work in creation and redemption that Scripture integrates (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:20) (Venema, 2012a:117–118; cf. 114–120; 2014:13–19; *contra* Van Pelt, 2020:111–132).

Sixth, is Christianity not a culture, but a system of truth claims? This is a false dilemma that further dichotomizes creation and redemption and compartmentalizes the Christian life. Christianity is both a system of truth claims and a culture. The truth claims give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture. Moreover, since the Spirit uses the gospel to create the culture of the new creation of Christ's resurrection life, to which the members of the church bear witness as they perform what is in Christ by putting on Christ and clothing themselves with him so that they act out the perfection of God's eternal life and do heaven on earth, applying the gospel to social issues does not trivialize the gospel nor does it prohibit using the adjective "Christian" for our vocations since our vocations outside the church are functionally secular because they only have bearing on the temporal.[81] This also entails that being a missional church that makes disciples by being a people who are active in the world through embodying the gospel does not easily distract from the church as a place where Christ is the active party, forgiving and renewing sinners. Rather, this activity in the world should attract people to this place—the church—because that is the place where Christians are directed to be the interactive theatre of the gospel that bears witness to the reality of God in this world and embody the Christian hope for the world.

Thus, an eighth systemic problem in Horton's federal theology is that it operates with an understanding of two kingdoms that finds no warrant in Scripture.

### 1.9. Conclusion

[81] For an essay on the Christian witness as redeemed culture, see McIhenny, 2012:251–274. McIhenny, with a nod to Wolters, rightfully observes that when two-kingdom advocates resist using the adjective "Christian" for the vocations of Christians and institutions because these things are functionally secular, they ignore the useful distinction between the structure and direction of creation (McIlhenny, 2012:68–69, 265–270; see also Wolters, 1985:49–52, 72–95). For a balanced view of the relationship between the church and culture that does not dichotomize Christ's redemptive and creational rule, see Carson, 2008; Keller, 2012; Leithart, 2019; O'Donovan, 1999; Schilder, 2016; Smith, 2017; Venema, 2014. When Horton asserts that the idea of Christendom is a Christian capitulation to a worldly status quo, he forgets that "the core idea of Christendom is . . . intimately bound up with the church's mission . . . not as a *project* of the church's mission, . . . [but as a] *response* to mission, and as such a sign that God has blessed it. It is constituted not by the church's seizing alien power, but by alien power's becoming attentive to the church" (O'Donovan, 1999:195; Leithart, 2003:135–157).

To determine to what extent the consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice are the result of systemic problems in his federal theology, I investigated and evaluated his federal theology.

First, we saw that a problem in his federal theology is that the word *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship," as his theology presupposes.

Second, we saw that a problem with his federal theology is that it asserts that, because there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship between God and humanity, God's fundamental relationship with humanity needs to be secured with a covenant. This is problematic not only because the word *bĕrît* is not synonymous with "relationship", but because covenants in the Bible are redemptive instruments that secure and guarantee God's missional intent for humanity and creation, often during times of uncertainty.

Third, we saw that a problem with his federal theology is that it finds the unity of salvation in a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, which does not have the strong biblical support that Horton alleges it has.

Fourth, we saw that a problem with his federal theology is that it operates with a covenant of works that does not find a warrant in Scripture.

Fifth, we saw that a problem in his federal theology is that it operates with an overarching covenant of grace that does not find a warrant in Scripture.

Sixth, we saw that his federal theology operates with an essence-energies distinction that misunderstands Reformed theology and finds no warrant in Scripture.

Seventh, we saw that a problem in his federal theology is that it operates with an understanding of the relationship between justification and the *ordo salutis* that misunderstands how Scripture speaks about this relationship and thus finds no warrant in Scripture.

Eighth, we saw that a problem in his federal theology is that it operates with an understanding of two kingdoms that finds no warrant in Scripture.

### 2. Implications of the systemic problems in Horton's federal theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice[82]

Having identified the systemic problems in Horton's federal theology, I will now draw out the implications these systemic problems can have for his communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice.

[82] While this section focuses primarily on possible negative consequences of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity, there are positive consequences as well. For instance, together with mainstream federal theology, his theology communicates a gospel that embraces the five *solas* of the Reformation. However, the fact that these fives *solas* are also embraced by those who do not hold to federal theology means that they not intrinsic to federal theology.

First, asserting that humanity needs to be created in a covenant relationship since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of the distinction between the Creator and the creature and the metaphysical distance between them does not allow Horton to consider the possibility that there can be a "natural" communion between God and humanity that maintains the distinction between the Creator and the creature and their metaphysical distance, such as an ontology of love in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This view, in turn, appears to drive his strident opposition to any form of a "natural" participation in the life of God and his embrace of a rival covenant ontology of only a legal/ethical union with God, as I concluded as a possible consequence in chapter three (4.1.1).

Second, finding the unity of salvation in a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit apparently leads Horton to understand the covenant of grace as being governed by God's decretal election. This, in turn, seems to lead to a communication of a gospel in which he considers the new covenant to be unconditional in its essence but conditional in its administration and may be the reason why he considers those who have not yet been united to Christ through faith to be only externally related to the covenant, as I concluded as a possible consequence in chapter three (4.1.10). However, because Horton does not collapse the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace into one covenant, his federal theology does not lead to a soteriological determinism that does not do justice "to what the Bible says about God's interaction in time with all those with whom he concludes the covenant of grace" (Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:207; Van Asselt, 2012:81–82).

Third, asserting that to demonstrate God's holiness and justice and to protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification there needs to be a sharp distinction between law and gospel does not allow Horton to consider that God's foundational relationship with humanity could be a relationship that is first determined by love and then by law. This view, in turn, determines why he considers Adam's relationship with God and creation to be fundamentally a relationship entailing earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner. Moreover, this also determines why he considers God's covenant with Israel in some sense to be a republication of the covenant of works. Further, this determines why he considers the covenant of works to be still in effect today for all those who do not believe in Christ.

As a result, all of this seems to lead to a communication of a gospel in which the nature of our image of God begins with God being a God of law and justice and then being a God of mercy and grace. This also appears to lead to a communication of the gospel in which we always first need to be confronted with the law and then the gospel, because the law alone tells us that we are sinners while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved. Moreover, this apparently leads to the shaping of the nature of

our self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image, as I concluded as a consequences in chapter three (4.1.2, 4.1.5, and 4.2.1.1).

Fourth, asserting that God works out his plan of salvation in one overarching covenant of grace with a canonical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation does not allow Horton to take seriously the dynamics of the history of redemption in which God enters into a plurality of covenants with Israel, Israel's king, and Israel's fathers. This view, in turn, appears to lead him to consider the nation of Israel as an interlude or parenthesis that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant because its purpose in the history of redemption is simply typological and pedagogical.

The fact that Horton considers the Mosaic covenant to be, in some sense, a republication of the covenant of works in which Israel primarily functions to reveal our human sinfulness seems to confirm this understanding of the implications of his view. However, this approach can lead to a communication of a gospel in which God's concrete dealing with Israel as a nation can easily be missed, as I concluded as a consequence in chapter three (4.1.9).

When Horton makes the doctrine of justification, which deals with the problem of our guilt, the heart of the economy of redemption and considers God's justification of sinners through faith to essentially be the gospel, this apparently leads him to communicate a gospel that has an individualizing impact, which narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins and shapes the nature of our self-image primarily as a legal and ethical self-image, as I concluded as consequences in chapter three (4.1.6. and 4.2.2.1).

When Horton claims that Christ, as the head and mediator of the covenant of grace, fulfills the conditions of the covenant of works for elect sinners by perfectly carrying out the obedience of the law required in the covenant of works (active obedience), while he deals with the sanction of the covenant of works by bearing the curse of the law and satisfying God's justice for them (passive obedience) and that Christ purchased benefits of salvation for elect sinners which the Holy Spirit applies to them in a particular order when they believe in Christ, this view does not allow him to have a single, participatory soteriological structure found in union with Christ. In turn, this view appears to lead to a communication of the gospel with a twofold soteriological structure and an extrinsic appropriationist understanding of salvation where Christ is not personally involved in one's obedience of faith. Moreover, Christians risk being thrown back on themselves, wondering whether the benefits of salvation are for them or not, as I concluded as a possible consequence in chapter three (4.1.7).

Fifth, having asserted that humanity needs to be created in a covenant relationship since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of the distinction between the Creator and the creature and their metaphysical distance, Horton reinforces this assertion by metaphysically undergirding his federal theology with the distinction between the essence

and energies of God and the claim that we can never know God in his essence, but only in his works. However, this assertion appears to lead to a communication of the gospel in which we can never have any knowledge of God's being, but only of his energies manifested in his works. Moreover, it appears to shape our Christian identity in connection with our union with Christ in such a way that we seem to only have an outward or extrinsic union with Christ, as I concluded as consequences in chapter three (4.1.2 and 4.2.1.2).

Sixth, asserting that God's declaration of justification is the forensic basis of our union with Christ seems to lead to a communication of the gospel that has no forensic basis for God's declaration of justification, as I concluded as a consequence in chapter three (4.2.1.3). Moreover, asserting that God's declaration of justification is the generative source of the transformative aspects of our union with Christ appears to lead to an approach to shaping our Christian identity and practice that requires us to constantly look to our justification as the source of our transformation instead of looking to our union with Christ as the source, as I concluded as a consequence in chapter 3 (4.2.1.3). Furthermore, this view of justification apparently is the reason why Horton restricts the proper use of the word "gospel" to what Christ has done *for* us and does not include in the use of this word what Christ does *in* us. This, in turn, appears to influence Horton's discouragement of the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality as a means of cultivating our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama drama of redemption, as I concluded as consequences in chapter three (4.1.6, and 4.2.2.1).

Seventh, asserting that the cultural mandate was given to all humanity and is enabled by God's general revelation or natural law through his common grace while the Great Commission or cultic mandate was given to the church and is enabled through special grace, so that Christ rules in the world through general revelation and in the church through special revelation, leads Horton to separate what Scripture holds together. This, in turn, can affect the shaping of our Christian practice in that it appears to compartmentalize the Christian life through artificially dichotomizing activities in the common and the sacred realm, as I concluded as a consequence in chapter three (4.2.2.2).

The combination of these possible implications of the systemic problems of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice require us to reframe our understanding of divine-human covenants and incorporate it into an ontology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre.

## 3. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking to what extent the consequences of the design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice is the result of systemic problems in his federal theology. The overall answer to this question is that these consequences appear to be the result of systemic problems in his federal theology.

First, communicating a gospel with a covenant ontology of only a legal/ethical union with God apparently can be linked to the fact that his federal theology does not allow for a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Second, communicating a gospel that distinguishes between conditional and unconditional covenants, makes the new covenant unconditional in its essence but conditional in its administration, and considers those who have not yet been united to Christ through faith to be only externally related to the covenant apparently can be linked to his understanding of the covenant of grace being governed by the outworking of God's decretal election in the *pactum salutis*.

Third, communicating a gospel that considers Adam's relationship with God and creation to fundamentally be a relationship of earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner, considers God's covenant with Israel in some sense to be a republication of the covenant of works, considers the covenant of works to still be in effect today for all those who do not believe in Christ, asserts that we always first need to be confronted with the law and then the gospel because the law alone tells us that we are sinners while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved, suggests that our image of God begins with God as a God of law and justice and only then as a God of mercy and grace, and implies that the nature of our self-image is first and foremost legal and ethical can all apparently be linked to his understanding of the covenant of works and the dogmatic distinction between law and gospel he insists upon because he wants to uphold the God's holiness and justice and protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification.

Fourth, communicating a gospel that considers the nation of Israel as an interlude or parenthesis that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant because its purpose in the history of redemption is simply typological and pedagogical, considers the Mosaic covenant in some sense to be a republication of the covenant of works in in which Israel primarily functions to reveal our human sinfulness, considers God's justification of sinners through faith to essentially be the gospel so that it appears to have an individualizing impact that narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins and shapes the nature of our self-image primarily as legal and ethical, has a twofold soteriological structure where Christ first purchases benefits of salvation and then the Holy Spirit applies these benefits, and an extrinsic appropriationistic understanding of salvation where Christ is not personally involved in one's obedience of faith apparently can all be linked to his view that there is an overarching covenant of grace that has God's declaration of justification as the heart of the economy of redemption.

Fifth, communicating a gospel in which we seemingly can never have any knowledge of God's being but only of his energies manifested in his works and that shapes our Christian identity in connection with our union with Christ in such a way that we seem to only have an outward or extrinsic union with

Christ apparently can be linked to Horton's understanding of the essence/energies distinction that metaphysically undergirds his federal theology.

Sixth, communicating a gospel in which God's declaration of justification appears to have no forensic basis, seems to shape our Christian identity and practice by having us to constantly look to our justification as the source of our transformation, restricts the proper use of the word "gospel" to what Christ has done *for* us and does not include in the use of this word what Christ does *in* us, and seems to discourage the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality as a means of cultivating our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama drama of redemption apparently can be linked to his understanding of justification as the engine that drives the *ordo salutis.*

Seventh, communicating a gospel that shapes our Christian practice by appearing to compartmentalize the Christian life through artificially dichotomizing activities in the common and the sacred realm apparently can be linked to his understanding of the two kingdoms.

Because of these negative consequences the design of Horton's federal theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice appear to be the result of systemic problems in his federal theology, I will outline the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice. In the next chapter, I will begin to do this by sketching the contours of a theodramatic biblical theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. To that I now turn.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF GOD AND DIVINE-HUMAN COVENANTS: THE DRAMA OF GOD'S MISSION FOR HIS GLORY

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture?

The fourth question that arises from our overarching question is: What is the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and participation in the life of God for a theodramatic model of communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity?

To answer this question, I will sketch the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre[83] and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in five acts.[84] The unifying theme of this theodramatic biblical narrative is the drama[85] of God's mission for his glory. First, I will clarify the unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory, explain some of the terminology used in this plot, and outline the eschatological orientation of the plot. Second, I will sketch the unfolding of the plot of this drama in five acts.[86] This theodramatic biblical narrative will serve as an illustration of the theodramatic imagination at work, enabling us to see the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in this drama as a unified drama through our union with Christ through faith.

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[83] The next chapter will deal with how the contours of this theodramatic biblical narrative give rise to the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology.

[84] Vanhoozer writes, "Correctly identifying the number of acts in the theodrama . . . helps us better to understand the unity and diversity of Scripture (i.e., one play with many acts); second, it helps disciples to understand better where they are in the story." He adds, "The most important thing is to do justice to the story line of Scripture. To omit something essential to the story is to risk compromising the logic of the gospel. We can call this first criterion 'canonical comprehensiveness'." On the other hand, "for the sake of explanatory power, it is important to focus on essential developments only. The goal here is to find the simplest yet also most powerful outline, the story line that can account for the integrity of the whole plot in the least amount of moves. We can call this second criterion 'theodramatic loveliness,' lovely because it provides the most understanding in the briefest compass" (Vanhoozer, 2014b:96). For an overview of the various proposals that have been offered, see Vanhoozer, 2014b:95–98).

[85] In chapter two, we noted that Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines drama as "[Late Latin *dramat-, drama,* from Greek, deed, drama, from *dran* to do, act]" (Merriam-Webster, 1996). Accordingly, Vanhoozer writes, "A drama is a *doing* (from *drao* = "I do")" (Vanhoozer, 2010:195).

[86] Regarding what constitutes an act, Vanhoozer writes, "In the context of theater, an act is a major division of a play that signals a change of time and/or place and is susceptible of being further divided into various scenes. In the context of theology, however, it is better to think of each act as a vital ingredient in the historical outworking (i.e., economy) of the divine decree. As such, each act is 'according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2:23). What we need is a way of marking the historical progression of a single unified action'" (Vanhoozer, 2010:97).

## 1. Before the curtain rises

Before the curtain rises, I will first clarify the unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory. Second, I will explain terminology used in connection with this plot. Third, I will outline the eschatological orientation of the plot.[87]

### 1.1. The unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory

If we want to understand the unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory, we need to remind ourselves, as I stated in chapter 2, that God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity bears witness[88] to his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity. This implies that when Jesus glorifies or makes known the glory of the Father, and the Father and the Spirit glorify or make known the glory of the Son (Jn. 8:54; 12:28; 14:13; 16:14; 17:1, 5), this activity bears witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity. Moreover, when Jesus glorifies the Father through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith (Jn. 5:30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:26; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8), this bears witness to the fact that the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity includes the Son's communicative activity of a listening and thankful spirit of openness and responsiveness in the immanent Trinity (Jn. 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). It is this communicative activity of mutual glorification, i.e., making the glory of each other known, through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that is the heart of the drama that God enacts in his mission for his glory when he creates the world and humanity and has them participate in and bear witness to the glory of his perfect life on earth as in heaven in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2010:241–294; 2014b:73–77, 80–82; 2014a;14–17; 2016a:50–53; Webster, 2006:143–152). On earth as in heaven! The persons of the Trinity freely determined the plot of this drama of God's mission for his glory (Jn. 6:39; 17:4, 6, 24; Eph. 1:3–14).[89]

### 1.2. Terminology used in the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory

If we want to understand the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory, we also need to understand terminology used in the description of this plot. When this study speaks about the drama of God's mission for *his glory*, it understands "God's glory" to refer to the splendour of his perfect life.[90] Bavinck, for

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[87] This study has a synchronic, not a diachronic approach to reading Scripture. About these two approaches, Williamson writes, "A diachronic approach looks at how the shape of the text may have developed through time, whereas a synchronic analysis looks at the shape of the text at a single point in time: namely, the final or canonical form of the text" (Williamson, 2007:85).

[88] In chapter two, we noted that this means that "the economic Trinity corresponds to but does not exhaust or encompass the reality of the immanent Trinity" (Vanhoozer, 2010:203).

[89] Paul refers to this as "a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:10). *Contra* Vanhoozer and Edwards who see this free self-determination as the covenant of redemption or the *pactum salutis* (Vanhoozer, 2010:258–259; 2014b:77–80; 2014a:17–19; Edwards and Smythe, 1880).

[90] "Splendour" is an attempt to translate the idea of "weight" or "heaviness" associated with the Hebrew word *kabod. Kabod* is translated with *doxa* in the Septuagint (LXX). Kittel writes, "The LXX word receives its distinctive

instance, has written, "The 'glory of the Lord' is the splendor and brilliance that is inseparably associated with all of God's attributes and his self-revelation in nature and grace, the glorious form in which he everywhere appears to his creatures" (Bavinck, 2004:II:252; VanDrunen, 2015:32; see also Ashford and Bartholomew, 2020:113).

This splendour of God's perfect life is like "a many-faceted gem, which reflects and refracts light in ever-new, ever-unexpected ways as it is admired" (Hamilton, 2010:59). Moreover, it is closely associated or interchangeable with God's presence and God's name**.** The former is the visible and active manifestation or presentation of God's glory (Ex. 16:7; Ex. 33:12–22; Lev. 9:23–24; Dt. 5:24; 1 Sam. 4:21–22; Ps. 19:1; Isa. 6:3; Gaffin, 2000:508; Fairbairn, 2009:17–19; Vriezen, 1970:207–209); the latter describes God's glory (Ex. 33:18–19;[91] 34:6–7; Hamilton, 2010:56–59; van der Woude,1997:1363). Furthermore, this splendour is associated with God's light as the visible manifestation of God's presence (Isa.58:8; 60:1–3; Dodd, 1953:206; Vanhoozer, 2010:250).[92]

Since love is the bond of perfection (Col.3:14; cf. Mt. 22:37–40; Rom. 13:8, 10), God's love binds the splendour of his perfect life together in perfect unity. Performing and bearing witness to the glory of God's perfect life in Christ through the Holy Spirit on earth as in heaven involves acting out and making God's glory known so that God is known for who he is in the splendour of his perfect life (Vanhoozer, 2010:249; 2014b:*passim*; 2014a:16, 20).[93] This, in turn, will evoke praise for God from others (von Rad, 1964:238; Kilner, 2015:63; Longman, 2010:78).

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force from the fact that it is used for כָּבוֹד. We find in it the meanings of כָּבוֹד, and we do not find in the LXX term the meanings of the Greek δόξα. It has become identical with כָּבוֹד" (Kittel, 1964:242).

[91] When Moses asks to see God's glory, God says that he will make all his goodness pass before him and proclaim his name to Moses. This implies that as the name of the LORD is a description of God's glory, so it is also a description of his goodness. Thus, God's glory and God's goodness appear to be used synonymously.

[92] Rose compares listening to texts to listening to music. Accordingly, he hears the melody of God's glory not only in the word *kabod* or one of its synonyms, but also in the melody of superlatives, such as, "The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!" (Ps. 113:4; cf. Ps. 96:3–4; 72:19; 145:11–12; Ex. 18:11; Dt. 10:17), the melody of being incomparable, such as, "Who is like the Lord our God" (Ps. 113:5; cf. Jer. 10:6; Isa. 45:14; Ps. 88:8; 89:7–9; Dt. 6:4), and the melody of simultaneously being above and below, such as, "Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? (Ps. 113:5–6; 36:6–7; Isa. 44:6, 8) (Rose, 2020:285–293).

[93] For the connection between God's mission for his glory and God wanting to be known for who he is, see Wright, 2006.

When this study speaks about *participating* in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, it understands this as partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4)[94] by living in God's loving presence and sharing in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit.[95]

Since the Son glorifies the Father by being open and responsive to him through listening to and thankfully doing his will, participating in the Son's communion of love with the Father involves sharing in his listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness (Canlis, 2010:3–5, 43–44, 47–51; Fairbairn, 2009:13–37; Torrance, 1992:73–98). Because faith joins us to Christ so that our subject is objectively relocated in the risen and ascended Christ and it is no longer we who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in us (Gal. 2:20), this participation in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit is considered to be an ontological participation in the life of God (Billings, 2005; 2007:61–65; Evans, 2015:27–30; Fairbairn, 2007; 2009:6–12, 33–35; Letham, 2011:85–128; 2019:768–788).[96]

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[94] About being a partaker of the divine nature according to 2 Pet. 1:4, Starr writes, "The consensus view that 2 Peter writes solely of the future, of an eschatological entry into a state of divine incorruption, fails to take seriously the juxtaposition of the divine attribute of virtue mentioned in 1:3 and the exhortation for the readers to enter into virtue *now* (1:5–7). The readers have already now been given everything that is necessary for piety and therefore are no longer subject to the tyranny of passionate desire." He concludes, "The interpretation that 2 Peter envisions something belonging solely to the future cannot be supported from the immediate context and suggests mistakenly that a departure from the physical world is requisite for participation in the divine nature" (Starr, 2007:83; *contra* Bauckham, 1983:181–182; Kelly,1969:301–303; van Houwelingen, 1993:33–34)). Letham correctly notes that our partaking of the divine nature occurs through our union with the person of Christ. He writes, "This [partaking of the divine nature] goes beyond communion. It entails union. It is more than participation in the communicable attributes of God. It is not to be restricted to union with righteousness, goodness, holiness, or truth, neither is it union with the benefits of Christ, as if it were union with the doctrine of sanctification. It is union with *Christ*" (Letham, 2019:788; 2011:127; *contra* Frame, 2011:1011–1012). Whether we should call our participation in the divine nature "glorification" or "*theosis*" or "deification" is essentially "just a matter of words" (Burger, 2008:543). Macaskill cautions against using the word "*theosis*" because is both "under-determined" and "over-determined". It is "under-determined" because "the terminology of *theosis* can be applied to a broad range of theological accounts that vary in significant ways". It is "over-determined" because "the modern doctrine, with all its varieties, has come to operate within a certain conceptual framework that may not be directly mapped onto that of the New Testament writers" (Macaskill, 2013:75).

[95] Burger is hesitant in speaking about participating in God because we do not directly participate in the unique relationship of the Father and the Son. As a result, he prefers to restrict the use of the word "participation" to participation in Christ (Burger, 2012:344–348; 2008:325, 350, 352–354; 2017c:164). While I understand that we do not want to suggest that participating in the life of God entails becoming part of the Trinity, I fail to see how the nomenclature "participating in the life of God" suggests this when it is clear that this participation in or dwelling in the life of God is the result of our indirect, mediated participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:21; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:15, 16; 5:20). Following Canlis in analyzing Calvin, I understand this as a Christological participation in God or communion (*koinonia*) with God (278; cf. 14–17, 53–88; 138, 142, 145). Evans refers to this as "pneumatological-incarnational realism" (Evans, 2015:27–30).

[96] Drawing on Calvin, Billings refers to this as a "substantial" participation because through faith we participate in the substance of Christ (Billings, 2007:53–65). While Canlis finds that the term "substantial" can hinder more than it can help and thus prefers to speak about a "pneumatological" or "non-substantial" participation, she believes that she and Billings are essentially saying the same thing because they both ground their doctrine of participation in the Spirit (Canlis, 2010:14; Billings, 2007:62–63). Letham writes, "Strictly speaking, we are united to [Christ's] humanity, but his humanity is inseparable from his deity, due to the hypostatic union. Thus, union with his humanity is union with his person. Moreover, since the person of Christ is that of the eternal Son, we are united to God". He adds, "This does not mean any blurring of the Creator-creature distinction, any more than the assumption of

When this study speaks about a divine-human *covenant*, it understands the function of a divine-human covenant to be God's commitment to secure and guarantee his creational purpose[97] in the drama of his mission for his glory by bringing creation and humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of his loving presence in Christ, through the Spirit, in his coming kingdom or the new heaven and new earth where he will be all in all.

Because sin and unbelief often threaten the fulfillment of this creational goal and thus lead to uncertainty in God's relationship with his people, God regulates this existing relationship in order to deal with this problem of uncertainty and rescues the drama of his mission for his glory by making covenants with his people to secure and guarantee the fulfillment of his purpose for creation.[98] As such, covenants are manifestations of God's faithfulness to his creational purpose.

In understanding a divine-human covenant to be God's commitment to secure and guarantee his creational purpose of the drama of his mission for his glory, this study considers divine-human covenants to be "redemptive instruments" with missional intent.[99] Leder sums up this redemptive function of covenants in the following manner: "Theologically, covenants are redemptive instruments by which God manages human life in exile from his presence until that problem is solved (Rev. 21:3–4)". He adds, "Until then, God's priestly people are bound to God (Ex. 19–24; Gen. 17), within the framework of a divine commitment to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15; cf. Gal. 3), which in itself is a particular outworking of his divine commitment to creatures in his presence" (Leder, 2014:695–696).

Wright sums up the missional intent of God's covenants as follows, speaking here of Israel: "As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God." He adds, "The Abrahamic task of being a means of blessing to the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations. Just as it was the role of the priests to bless the Israelites, so it would be the role of Israel as a whole ultimately to be a blessing to the nations" (Wright, 2006:331; cf. Bauckham, 2004:1–54; Booth, 2015:location 322–4493; Burger, 2019:298; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:653, 654–55; 2015:245–46; Goheen, 2011:23–48; 2014:40–48; 2016; Goheen and Mullins, 2019:13–30; Wielenga, 1997:190– 224).

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humanity by the Son in the incarnation does. His humanity remains his humanity (without confusion, without mixture). So, we remain creatures" (Letham, 2004:468).

[97] For the relationship between God's creational purpose and his covenants with creation and humanity, see Williamson, 2007:44–58.

[98] For regulating an existing relationship in order to deal with a problem of uncertainty by making covenant with is people to secure and guarantee the fulfillment of God's purposes, see Burger, 2019:274–275, 283; 2021c:124; Goldingay, 2003:181; 2006:182–184; Leder, 2012:180, 182; 2013:208, 2011–218; 2014:286, 694–696; Noort, 1989:7–32; Stek, 1994:25, 37–41; *contra* Bartholomew, 1995:23–26. For understanding the reason for making covenants as a rescue operation, see Burger, 2018a:14; Wright, 2013:504.

[99] For Horton's understanding of divine-human covenants, see chapter 3, section 2.2. and chapter 4, sections 1.1.-1.5.

### 1.3. The eschatological orientation of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory

The plot of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness that he enacts in the drama of his mission for his glory is a plot that is oriented toward the future. We see this eschatological orientation primarily in the following five features.

First, the end of the narrative plot, as depicted in Rev. 21–22, shows us the ultimate fulfillment of the plot of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness by depicting a new creation where heaven and earth are united, which, together with God's people, participate in the glory of God's perfect life. This fulfillment of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory is depicted in the imagery of a new creation as a new Jerusalem, a new temple, and a new Paradise that echo the imagery of Gen. 1 and 2. Consequently, this eschatological depiction of the telos of the narrative plot functions as a template or lens through which to read the whole narrative plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory (Alexander, 2008:13–73, 131–132; 2018:18–28; 2020:12; Beale, 2004a:191–209; 2004b:66–80, 365–373; 2011:15–24; 2016:3–14; Beale and Kim, 2014:15–16; Dumbrell, 1985:1–78, 165–196; Lister, 2015:63–69, 79–81).[100]

Second, the end of the narrative plot shows us Christ being glorified with the glory he had with the Father before all time and forever (Jn. 17:5; Jude 25). The glorified Christ is the image of God for whom humanity was created (Col. 1:15–16; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; Heb. 1:3). As the image of God, Christ is also the last (*eschatos*) Adam whose eschatological image redeemed humanity will one day bear (1 Cor. 15:45). This eschatological Adam is the Son of God into whose image redeemed humanity is predestined to be conformed (Rom. 8:29). This eschatological depiction of redeemed humanity in the glorified image of Christ serves as a lens to interpret humanity being created in the image of God in Genesis 1 (Behr, 2013:27; Boer, 1990:160; Fairbairn, 2009:59–64; Grenz, 2004a:626; Holmes, 2005:319; Hughes, 1985:20; Kline, 1977:261, 266; 2006:92–93; Letham, 2011f:13–14; Ridderbos, 1975:73; Tanner, 2010:12–14; Vorster, 2011:4, 16; cf. Kilner, 2015:60–69, 79–82).[101]

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[100] Horton rightfully states that "eschatology should be a lens and not merely a locus" (Horton, 2002c:5).

[101] Grenz writes, "When the nature of the human person is assumed to emerge solely from creation—i.e., apart from Christ—and when Christ is cast as, above all, the divine antidote to human sin, not only is anthropology cut loose from any Christological grounding, but Christology is also made dependent on anthropology. We might say that the first Adam thereby becomes the measuring rod for the Second". He adds, "Furthermore, the linear approach [i.e., Christology being reduced to merely the third topic of systematic theology] endangers the cosmic dimension of Christology. It suggests that Christ's connection to the wider creation story is mediated through the story of the fall of humankind rather than arising directly out of Jesus' vocation in the divine program". He concludes, "The result is an anthropocentric, rather than a theocentric, doctrine of creation. Creation becomes the background or stage for the drama of the fall and subsequent restoration of humankind, rather than an area in which Christ is Lord and as Lord completes the human vocation to be the *imago Dei"* (Grenz, 2004a:626). Vorster writes, "The Genesis version of the *imago Dei* offers a broad framework to understand the nature of humankind's relationship with God, but at the

Third, Hebrews 4:9 tells us that "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God". Because this rest is the Sabbath rest of a new creation where heaven and earth are united, which, together with God's people, participates in the glory of God's perfect life, it is the eschatological goal of God's work of creation. This eschatological goal serves as a lens to interpret why God, after six days of creation, rested from his work of creating on the seventh day and why he instituted the Sabbath as a sign of the Mosaic covenant (Dumbrell, 1984:34–36; 1994:22–23; Kline, 2006:33–38; Horton, 2005a:79–80; 2006a:106; 2011a:386, 403–404, 419–420, 441, 906; 2011d:122–123, 138, 145–146, 446, 452–458; Vos, 1948:140–141; Westermann, 1974:65)[102]

Fourth, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ launched the penultimate fulfillment of God's creational purpose as an already, but not yet, fulfillment that is available to those who put on Jesus Christ through faith. This means that with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the future of the glory of God's eschatological new creation breaks forth into the present (Beale, 2004b:25; 2011:15–16, 19; Beale and Kim 2014:17–28, 135–140; cf. Alexander, 2008; 2018; Horton, 2002c:116).[103]

Fifth, within this penultimate fulfillment of God's creational purpose, Christ's outpouring of the Holy Spirit plays a central role, as was predicted with the promise of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26–27). This is the same Spirit through whom Christ was conceived and who enabled him to live in a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness to his Father as he faithfully fulfilled his ministry on earth. The climax of this ministry takes place when he pours out this same Spirit upon his

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same time gives the concept an open meaning which makes further theological reflection possible. A theological anthropology should therefore not be limited to a protological understanding of the *imago Dei*. The Christological foundation that the New Testament ascribes to the concept is of crucial importance for the further understanding of the concept, specifically with regard to the destination of the human" (Vorster, 2011:16). Writing in a general sense about implicit notions in Genesis being made explicit elsewhere in Scripture, van Bekkum articulates a similar view when he asserts, "From a broader biblical perspective, the beginning of Genesis shows important, deeper layers of meaning. . . . These broader and deeper meanings do not replace the first, more literal meaning, but include them" (van Bekkum, 2020:21).

[102] Vos writes, "The Sabbath is an expression of the eschatological principle on which the life of humanity has been constructed. There is to be to the world-process a finale, as there was an overture, and these two belong inseparably together" (Vos, 1948:140). Westermann writes, "What is peculiar to the holy day in the course of every day happenings is that it points to the goal of the creature which God has created in his image. The work which has been laid on man is not his goal. His goal is the eternal rest which has been suggested by the rest of the seventh day (Westermann, 1974:65; Dumbrell, 1984:35). Because God's goal is the eternal Sabbath rest, Moltmann refers to the Sabbath as that "which completes and crowns creation" (Moltmann, 1985:6; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:231).

[103] Beale writes, "The NT transformation of the storyline of the OT that I propose is this: *Jesus' life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfilment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new-creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God's glory*" (Beale, 2011:16). Writing about the possibility of Israel continuing to be able to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations during this already and not yet character ushered in by Jesus' resurrection, Jenson writes, "By Jesus' Resurrection occurring "first," a sort of *hole* opens *in* the event of the End, a space for something like what used to be history, for the church and its mission" (Jenson, 1997:85; Burger, 2008:526).

church as the downpayment (*arrabon*) of the incorruptible and immortal life of the Sabbath rest of the fullness of God's loving presence in Christ in the eschatological new creation. This means that with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the future of the glorified or transfigured[104] eschatological new creation is also breaking forth into the present (Billings, 2005; 2007:51–61, 96, 190, 193, 196; Canlis, 2004; 2010:188–191, 236–238; Fairbairn, 2007; 2009:6–12, 33–35; Habets, 2006; 2009a; Horton, 2007a:267–269, 272, 284, 302, 306, 308; 2011a:386; 2017b:285–286; 2018a:49, 52, 208, 250, 364; 2018b:488–493; Letham, 2019:769–788; 2011:91–102, 123–128; Macchia, 2018:*passim*; Mosser, 2002).[105] [106]

## 2. Participation in the life of God and divine-human covenants: the drama of God's mission for his glory

Having clarified the unifying theme of the plot of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts in the drama of his mission for his glory, explained terminology used in this plot, and outlined the eschatological orientation of the plot, I will now sketch[107] the unfolding of the plot of this theodrama in five acts.[108] The first act is creation: the stage of the theodrama. The second act is the election of Israel:

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[104] "Glorified" or "transfigured" can be synonymous with created life undergoing *theosis* or deification. The New Testament links "glory" and "image" (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 4:4, 6; 2 Cor 3:18; Heb. 2:5–10). Mathews writes, "Peter likewise speaks of Christ as the valued Son who received 'honor and glory from God the Father' (2 Pet 1:17) at the mount of transfiguration, where the disciples witnessed the 'glory' of the kingdom to come (Matt 17:1–8). It is this 'glory' for which redeemed humanity in Christ is destined who himself is the 'glory' of God (John 1:14, 18; 17:4)" (Mathews, 1996:171).

[105] Macchia writes, "As the consequence of Christ's Spirit conception and Spirit filling, his resurrection is an overflow of the Spirit that is poured out beyond Christ at Pentecost. . . . Christ was always meant to overflow so that he could *take others into union* with himself. . . . His entire journey, from his incarnation to his crucifixion and resurrection, creates the means by which he incorporates all flesh into his life in the Spirit, his life with the Father." He concludes, "Mediating a river of the Spirit for others on behalf of the Father reveals Christ's identity and mission" (Macchia, 2018:27).

[106] This eschatological orientation of the plot of the drama of God's mission for his glory implies an eschatological ontology in which "God is the eternal God [who] [c]oming from the eschaton, . . . is already present from the beginning" (Burger, 2020c:10). For a helpful analysis and comparison of an eschatological ontology that "takes the dynamics of the history of salvation with its tensions, disappointments, hopes, surprises and all its unexpected newness" seriously with a version of a Christian-Platonist participatory ontology that ignores these dynamics because "reality is perceived as a cyclic movement from eternal unity to temporal plurality and back to eternal unity" or an "'ecstatic and self-gathering movement of being'" (Boersma, 2020c:10), see the whole essay (see also Huijgen, 2019a:82–84).

[107] In sketching the unfolding of the plot of God's mission for his glory, I will read the narrative of Scripture backwards and forwards, allowing the Old Testament to shed light on the New Testament and the New Testament to shed light on the Old Testament (cf. Hays, 1989:26–33; 2003:216–238; see also chapter 2, section 1.1). While the final resolution of the plot is known from the beginning, this does not mean that this method of reconstructing the plot does not respect the dramatic unfolding of the plot with its tensions and questions.

[108] Just as any good drama has various acts, so also the theodrama of Scripture has various acts. Well known is the suggestion that N.T. Wright (1991b:7–32; 1992:140–143) has put forward about dividing the theodrama of Scripture into five acts: (1) Creation, (2) Fall, (3) Israel, (4) Jesus, and (5) Church. The church is familiar with the first four acts of the drama as well as the beginning of the fifth act but needs to faithfully and creatively bring the fifth act to completion by immersing itself in the first four acts and the beginning of the fifth. Sam Wells (2004:52–57) agrees that this model has tremendous potential, but disagrees with Wright's version of the drama. Since the drama begins and ends with God, it should not end with the church, but with the eschaton or the end of the drama. Moreover, since

the theatre of the theodrama (1). The third act is the sending of God's Son: the theatre of the theodrama (2). The fourth act is the pouring of the Holy Spirit on the church: the theatre of the theodrama (3). The fifth act is the return of Christ: the theatre of the theodrama (4).

### 2.1. Act one: the drama of creation as the stage of the theodrama[109]

The first act of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts in the drama of his mission for his glory is the creation of the stage of the theodrama. This act will be sketched in five scenes. Scene one portrays the creation of the visible stage of the theodrama, viz. the world as a holy temple. Scene two depicts the creation of humanity in the image of God, participating in his life through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. Scene three presents the antagonist introducing sin and death on the stage of the theodrama. Scene four portrays God's prediction that humanity will solve the problem humanity created. Scene five shows us God securing and guaranteeing his commitment to the drama of his mission for his glory with his covenants with Noah and creation.

#### 2.1.1. Scene one: the creation of the world as a holy temple

The persons of the Trinity make their intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification present in time by creating a world as a holy temple in which they act out and bear witness to the life of heaven on earth, making the world a place where heaven and earth meet.[110] On earth as in heaven! That the world is a cosmic holy temple is implied by the fact that the end of the narrative plot as depicted in Rev. 21–22 portrays God's new creation as a temple (Rev. 21:16; cf. 21:10–27).[111] Moreover, Scripture describes creation with temple imagery (Ps. 78:69; 104:1–2; Isa. 66:1). Furthermore, there are parallels between features of the Garden of Eden and those of the Tabernacle and Temple (Alexander, 2008:37–42; Beale, 2004a:191–209; 2004b:31–38, 66–76; 2011:617–648; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:246–253; Gladd, 2019:6–7; Hamilton, 2010:73–74; Horton, 2011a:401; Kline, 1980:20–26; 1999:35–42; 2006:47–49;

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Jesus is the goal to which creation pointed forward and the eschaton points back to, he ought to be in the middle of the drama. Furthermore, making the fall the beginning of a new act implies that the fall is an act of God and not the result of humanity's misuse of the freedom God created them with. Thus, the fall should be part of Act One, dealing with creation. Wells then amends Wright's five-act play as follows: (1) Creation, (2) Israel, (3) Jesus, (4) Church, (5) Eschaton. This study follows Wells' suggestion.

[109] The stage is heaven and earth (Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:173–188). While creation can be called the stage of the theodrama, this does not exclude that it also participates in the theodrama (e.g., Ps. 19, 98, 148; Rom. 8:22–25; Rev 5:13; cf. Vander Lugt, 2016:189–191).

[110] For the expression "heaven and earth meeting", see Wright, 2016:76, 340; see also Vanhoozer, 2014a:75.

[111] On the one hand, John writes that there will be no temple on the new earth (Rev. 21:22); on the other hand, he describes the New Jerusalem with temple imagery. Thus, he appears to assimilate the temple and the city implying that "God's presence does not dwell in one place like the temple of old, but fills the whole of the new creation" (Lister, 2015:74).

Middleton, 2005:81–88; Smith, 2010:14–17, 27–32, 36–37; van Bekkum, 2020:27–28; Walton, 2009:78–86; Wenham, 1994:399–404).[112]

As the author of the theodrama, the Father speaks the creation of the world into existence through Christ[113] as the eternal Word, who is life itself, in[114] whom and for whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Jn. 1:3–5; 5:26; Col. 1:16–17).[115] Moreover, he forms and fills his formless and empty creation into "a hospitable home for the plant world, animal kingdom, and, as the crown of creation, the human race" through the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:297).[116] This hospitable home is beautiful and corresponds to God's intentions for it (Gen. 1:31; Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:300–301).[117] Because the Father is present in this hospitable home in Christ (Heb. 1:3) and through the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:30), acting out and bearing witness to their

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[112] For ancient Near Eastern parallels, see Beale, 2004a:195–197; 2004b:50–60, 76–80; Walton, 2009:78–92. Because of these parallel, it has been suggested that, while the world is a cosmic temple, Eden could be compared to the holy of holies in the temple (Beale, 2004b:74; 2011:620). Block has challenged the view that Eden is a cosmic temple. He has a fundamental hermeneutical difficulty with reading Gen. 1–3 as "temple-building texts". He articulates his difficulty as follows: "The question is, should we read Gen 1–3 in the light of the later texts, or should we read later texts in the light of these?. . . . The fact that Israel's sanctuaries were Edenic does not make Eden into a sacred shrine. At best this is a nonreciprocating equation" (Block, 2013:21). However, about this nonreciprocating relationship, Garvey writes, ". . . it is utterly plausible that Moses was simultaneously made aware both of a cosmic pattern of creation, and of an architectural plan that was to imitate it in the form of the tabernacle. Or else it is possible that later, his inspired reflection on the divinely appointed structure of the tabernacle led him to the understanding of the cosmos that inspired Genesis 1. . . . So whichever insight came first, it is likely to be the same prophetic mind that gave us both the pattern of the tabernacle, and the temple imagery of the creation narrative". He adds, "Each therefore informs the other, making it foolish to ask if the tabernacle is a representation of the cosmos, or that the description of the cosmos is derived from the tabernacle. As described in the *Torah*, they are both simply macrocosmic and microcosmic representations of God's relationship to the world" (Garvey, 2020:loc. 5105–5117; see also Braun, 2020:186–187).

[113] Referring to the eternal Word as Christ before he was Christ, has scriptural warrant (Phil. 2:5–6). Sanders writes, "Paul may be using the kind of shorthand we use when we say, 'The sixteenth president of the United States was born in this cabin'" (Sanders, 2017:91).

[114] Because Paul uses both *en* and *dia* in Col. 1:16, it is better to translate *en* as "in" and not "through". Otherwise, there is no difference (van Eck, 2007:83). Thus, van Eck writes, "Not only are believers, therefore, in Christ . .. .all of creation is 'in Him'" (van Eck, 2007:83). About the world being created in Christ, Macleod writes, "Creation is Christ-shaped. The space-time curve is Christ-shaped" (Macleod, 2002:93).

[115] Letham writes, "Creation was made *in Christ*. In turn, the cosmos has a purpose. It is held together by the Son. He sustains it at every moment and directs it toward the end he intends it for. That end is himself. All things were created and are sustained *for Christ*. The reason the universe exists is for the glory of Christ, the Son of God. The goal toward which it heading is conformity to him" (Letham, 2011:13).

[116] For a comparison of the Genesis account of creation with other accounts, see Beale, 2006:289–290; Hamilton, 2010:70–72. Contrasting these accounts, Hamilton writes, "Contrasting what Genesis says with other accounts of the origin of all things will help us see more clearly how Genesis 1 and 2 proclaim the glory of God" (Hamilton, 2010:70).

[117] Regarding the beauty of creation, Brueggemann writes, "In Gen 1:31, at the conclusion of the sixth day of creation, Yahweh exclaimed, 'It was very good.' Most probably this is an aesthetic judgment and response to a brilliant act of creation. The sense of beauty, or loveliness evokes on Yahweh's part a doxological response to the created order, a sense of satisfaction on the part of the artist, a glad acknowledgment of success. Here and in some other places a glad affirmation of creation is moved more by awe and delight than by ethical insistence or command. Thus Prov 8:30–31, in speaking of creation, culminates in a statement of 'delight' and 'rejoicing'" (Brueggemann, 1997:339; Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:300).

trinitarian life of mutual glorification, creation has a "natural"[118] (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship with God by living in his loving presence and participating in his life by living and moving and having its being in God (Ac. 17:28). Participating in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit makes the world a place for communion in the life of God (Canlis, 2010:53–61, 70–74). As such, created reality is able to participate in God's trinitarian act of mutual glorification.

After six days of creation, God rested from his work of creating on the seventh day because he had reached the goal for which he had created, viz. the Sabbath rest (Dumbrell, 1984:34–36; 1994:22–23; Letham, 2011:10; Westermann, 1974:64–65).[119] This Sabbath rest was meant to last forever because the narrator does not mention the evening and morning of this day as he had done with the other six days (Dumbrell, 1984:22; Letham, 2011:10). However, while meant to last forever, the glory of this Sabbath rest at creation would be elevated in the life of the new creation, for in this new creation there will be no sun, moon, or stars because it will bask directly in the light of the glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).[120] In this regard, Horton rightfully writes, "Creation was the stage—the 'beautiful theater'—for God's drama, not an end in itself. Life in the garden was not intended to simply go on in perpetuity but was merely the point of departure for the great march of creation behind God's vice-regent into the everlasting life of God's own Sabbath-rest" (Horton, 2011a:386).[121]

### 2.1.2. Scene two: the creation of humanity in the image of God

Having made their intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification present in time by creating a world as a holy temple in which they act out and bear witness to the life of heaven on earth, making the world both a place where heaven and earth meet and a place for communion in the life of God, the persons of the Trinity create humanity in their image and after their likeness (Gen. 1:26). Since the glorified Christ is the image of God for whom humanity was created (Col. 1:15–16; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; Heb. 1:3) and the heart of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity is the Son's communicative activity of a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness in the immanent Trinity

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[118] While distinct from God, creation is inherently compatible with God. About this compatibility, Letham writes, "This compatibility is demonstrably at the heart of God's intentions for his creation *and for man himself*" (Letham, 2011:16). Elsewhere, he writes, "Since the Son found it possible to live as man, we must conclude that God made humanity in such a manner as to be capable of union with him in Christ" (Letham, 2019:475).

[119] For ancient Near-Eastern parallels to divine rest after creating a temple, see Beale, 2004b:60–66; Walton, 2009:72–77.

[120] While the glory of the Sabbath rest of creation will be transfigured and elevated in the eternal Sabbath rest, this does not mean that the precise nature of this transfigured and elevated Sabbath rest was *determined* by the beginning. Thus, God's love gives more than we could ever predict.

[121] Letham writes, "At the end comes the unfinished seventh day, when God enters his rest, which he made to share with man, his partner, whom he made in his own image. There is an implicit invitation for us to follow" (Letham, 2011:10). Van Bekkum suggests that one of the ways we can do this is that, when we rest from our weekly work, we should focus our attention on God's creation and celebrate it with him as he did when he rested from his work (van Bekkum, 2020:22–23, 59).

that God enacts and bears witness to in the drama of his mission for his glory when he creates the world and humanity, creating humanity in his image and after his likeness[122] would entail creating them to be partakers of the divine nature by participating in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit.[123] This is confirmed by the fact that "in" (*be*) and "according to" (*ke*) refer to a model in which humanity is created. Accordingly, being created in God's image entails being created "according to" the model of God's image (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 1973:90; Koehler and Baumgartner, 2001:104; Kilner, 2015:90).[124] Since, as the image of the Father, Christ represented the Father and bore witness to his glorious presence on earth so that he became visible on earth because he was a person where heaven and earth met (Jn. 14:9–10; 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:1, 4), participating in the Son's status and communion of love with the Father through the Spirit, humanity is designed to represent God and to bear witness to his glorious presence so that he becomes visible on earth because humanity is the place where heaven and earth meet.[125] As such, humanity is designed to become a participant in the drama of God's mission for his glory.

God energizes humanity to be able to do this by breathing into Adam the breath of life so that he becomes a living being (Gen. 2:7; cf. Job 33:4).[126] The Spirit who energizes him is the same Spirit who

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[122] Not only are the terms "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demuth*) a form of Hebrew parallelism (Smail, 2005:25); the terms are also more or less synonymous and interchangeable (Berkhof, 1996:203; Fairbairn, 2009:60; Horton, 2011a:391; Kilner, 2015:124–133).

[123] Kilner rightly observes, "We cannot interpret Old Testament texts as if the authors had the New Testament ideas in view. However, we can interpret them with the expectation that they do not contradict what the New Testament reveals were God's purposes from 'before the beginning'" (Kilner, 2015:53). Smail similarly observes, ". . . we can say that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has both a protological and an eschatological dimension. It describes the basic constitution, and indeed the ontology of our humanity, as well as its ultimate destiny. If Adam is made in the image of God, so also is Christ, the *eschatos Adam*, the ultimate human being, who is the possibility, the actuality and the promise of a human life that images the life of God" (Smail, 2003:22–23).

[124] Regarding being created in the image of God entailing being created according to the image of God as a model or standard, Kilner writes, "This meaning is confirmed by the corresponding use of *kata* (normally 'according to') in the New Testament. In fact, the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, most often uses *kata* to translate both *be* and *ke*; the Latin Vulgate always uses *ad* (toward) for both" (Kilner, 2015:91). Letham writes, "The text of Genesis states that the man and his wife were created *in* the image of God. The image of God itself is identified for us in the NT. Paul points out that it is Christ who *is* the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). . . . Christ as the second Adam *is* the image of God. Adam was created *in* Christ" (Letham, 2011:14). This runs parallel to the world being created *in* Christ. If the world being created in Christ implies that the world is Christ-shaped, then Adam and Eve being created in the image of Christ implies that they are created as Christ-shaped.

[125] For ancient Near Eastern background of kings embodying the presence of a god, see Beale, 2011:31; Middleton, 2005:121. When Genesis 1 considers humanity as such to be created in the image of God to represent him by embodying his presence, this would "constitute a genuine democratization of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology" (Middleton, 2005:121). For ancient Near East background of images representing rulers who were physically absent and establishing their presence and rule, see Beale, 2011:31; Clines, 1968:87–88; Kilner, 2015:55–58; Middleton, 2005:104–108.

[126] Allison and Köstenberger write, "What is not being said is that the infusion of the breath of life into Adam is an impartation of the Holy Spirit". They add, "Though the two are distinct, they are not unconnected, in that the Holy Spirit, as 'the Lord and Giver of life,' gives the spark of life to the previously formed 'dust of the ground,' and Adam become a living creature" (Allision and Köstenberger, 2020:334–335). Macchia writes, "Adam and Eve were

enables him to have a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship because it is through this Spirit that he lives together with Christ in the Father. Thus, being created to share in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and being designed to represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth so that God becomes visible on earth because it is the place where heaven and earth meet is the ontological reality of humanity having been created in the image of God.[127]

Because humanity is designed to represent its ontological status of having been created in the image of God, this status issues forth in an active mission in which humanity acts out or performs its ontological identity. Again, as Christ was the model according to whose image humanity was created, so Christ is the model according to whom this status and communion issues forth in an active mission in which he acts out or performs his ontological identity (Heb. 2:9). As the image of the Father, Christ's mission involves "carrying out the Father's will throughout creation and [the] sustaining of the universe (see Jn 1:1–5; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–3)" (Fairbairn, 2009:61). What this looks like we see when the Son of God becomes incarnate.[128] As the incarnate Son of God, we see that Christ loves creation (Jn. 3:16), has compassion on it (Mt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 6:34), and restores and heals it. Moreover, as the mediator of creation, he cares for the sparrows (Mt. 10:29), feeds the birds of the air (Mt. 12:24), and clothes the flowers of the field and the grass of the field (Mt. 6:28–30). Furthermore, after having fed the five thousand, he commands the leftovers to be gathered up so that nothing would be wasted (Jn. 6:12; cf. Moo and Moo, 2018:120–122). In carrying out his mission, Christ participated in the drama of God's mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith so that the splendour of God's perfect life became visible on earth as it is in heaven because he was the person where heaven and earth met. On earth as in heaven!

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created to be the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (implicitly) in the image of the Word by which all things were created (Gen. 2:7)" (Macchia, 2018:189).

[127] For being created in the image of God as an ontological status and destiny, see Kilner, 2015:*passim*. For having been created in the image of God as an ontological reality, see Strachan, 2019:29–31. Regarding the connection between image of God and sonship, Mathews writes, "Genesis 5:1–3 clearly echoes 1:26–28 and demonstrates that the 'likeness' (*dĕmût*) of God that stamped Adam was perpetuated by his offspring. Adam fathered a 'son' in his own 'likeness' and 'image' (5:3), which showed that the Adamic family continued the *imago Dei* and also the divine blessing first received by Adam (5:3–31)" (Matthews, 1996:169). Matthews adds, "The motif of sonship is also taken up in Luke's Gospel, where he appeals to Genesis 5 in reciting Jesus' genealogy and rightly infers that Adam is 'the son of God'" (3:38) (Matthews, 1996:169; see also: Crouch, 2010:1–15; Dempster, 2003:58; Kline, 2006:45–46; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:321–323). For an overview and refutation of understanding the image of God as the attributes of reason, righteousness, or relationality, and the function of rulership, as well as how these attributes and function flow from being created in the image of God, see Kilner, 2015:177–230. For examples of importing theological and cultural ideas into one's interpretation of being created into the image of God, see Kilner, 2015:43–51.

[128] As we stated earlier, God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity mirrors and reveals his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity.

When God creates humanity in the image of Christ, he intends them to participate in this drama of his mission for his glory that bears witness to Christ's listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness. The narrator of Genesis describes this mission when he writes, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, *so that* they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Gen. 1:26 NIV; italics added).[129] He adds, "God blessed[130] them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1:28). In the next chapter, the narrator further describes this mission by writing, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15).[131] Since "ruling" (*radah*) has royal overtones and "to work" (*abad*) and "take care" (*shamar*) have priestly overtones,[132] God intends humanity to participate in the drama of his mission for his glory by acting out or performing its ontological identity as kings and priests participating in and performing and bearing witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation "through fill[ing] up the earth, tak[ing] possession of it, and tak[ing] control of it" (Barr, 1968:22; Kilner, 2015:208–209).[133] As kings, this would involve "the work of forming culture or developing civilization" as good stewards of creation (Middleton, 2005:89). As a priest, he would be one who "takes the world in his hands to refer [i.e., consecrate] it to God and who, in return, brings God's blessing to what he refers [i.e., consecrates] to God. Through this act, creation is brought into communion with God himself" (Zizioulas, n.d.:4; Burger, 2020b:20–21). In doing so, humanity is "to extend the geographical boundaries

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[129] Kilner writes, "Some translations use 'and' to render the conjunction between the statements about image and rule. But this Hebrew conjunction (*we*), connecting a cohortative verb like 'let us make' with a jussive verb, typically expresses a more purposeful 'so that'—here, 'so that they may rule'" (Kilner, 2015:207; see also Middleton, 2005:53). Interestingly, the Dutch *Nieuwe Vertaling* also translates with "so that" (*opdat*) (Middleton, 2005:53).

[130] About this blessing, van Bekkum writes, "Here again the powerful activity of God's speaking comes first: God blesses and in the uttering of that blessing he effects their being fruitful and becoming numerous" (van Bekkum, 2020:22).

[131] Beale writes, "Adam's commission to 'cultivate' (with connotations of 'serving') and 'guard' in Gen. 2:15 . . . is probably part of the commission given in 1:26–28" (Beale, 2011:32).

[132] Wenham writes, "Here is added that man's job in the garden is 'to till it and guard it.' עבד 'to serve, till' is a very common verb and is often used of cultivating the soil (2:5; 3:23; 4:2, 12, etc.). The word is commonly used in a religious sense of serving God (e.g., Deut 4:19), and in priestly texts, especially of the tabernacle duties of the Levites (Num 3:7–8; 4:23–24, 26, etc.)." He adds, "Similarly, שמר 'to guard, to keep' has the simple profane sense of 'guard' (4:9; 30:31), but it is even more commonly used in legal texts of observing religious commands and duties (17:9; Lev 18:5) and particularly of the Levitical responsibility for guarding the tabernacle from intruders" (Num 1:53; 3:7–8) (Wenham, 1987:67; cf. Alexander, 2018:22–23, 26; Beale, 2004b:66–70; 2011:32–33; Leder, 2013:210–211).

[133] "Subdue" *(kabash*) also has priestly overtones (Smith, 2010:101–102). About "subdue" (*kabash*), Barr writes, "I doubt whether more is intended here than the basic needs of settlement and agriculture . . . Basically what is intended is tilling; it corresponds with the 'working' or 'tilling' of the ground in the J story, Genesis ii.5, 15" (Barr, 1974:22).

of the garden till Eden covers the whole earth" (Beale, 2004b:81–82; Burger, 2020b:21; Hamilton, 2010:73; Kline, 2006:68–70; Moo and Moo, 77).

If Adam and Eve would participate in this drama in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, they would not only participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory that Christ is performing and bearing witness to, they would also enter into the fullness of God's eternal Sabbath rest and live forever, as the tree of life in the centre of the Garden of Eden symbolized (Gen. 2:9). Because Adam is the representative head of humanity (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45–49), so would his posterity.

However, if they would not participate in this drama in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, they would not only fail to participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory that Christ is performing and bearing witness to, but also lose what they already enjoyed, as the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil indicates (Gen. 2:16–17; McComiskey, 1985:217; Burger, 2019:278; 2018a:9). Because Adam is the representative head of humanity, so would their posterity.[134]

Whereas living in communion with God and participating in his life in a lush and abundant Garden was meant to draw Adam and Eve into an ever-deeper communion with God through a posture of thankfulness to God, the prohibition to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was meant to draw them into this ever-deeper communion through a posture of trustfully listening to God (Gerrish, 1981:218; Canlis, 2010:84).[135]

#### 2.1.3. Scene three: the antagonist introduces sin and death into the drama

When God has created Adam and Eve in their image and after their likeness and has given them the mission to act out and perform their ontological identity of having been created in the image of God, Satan (Rev. 12:9), the antagonist, introduces sin and death on the stage of God's drama of his mission for his glory through the use of a serpent. Using this serpent, Satan attacks Adam and Eve's thankful and trustful listening posture with the suggestion that God has withheld something from them and that what God has said to them can not be trusted (Gen. 3:1–5).[136] Instead of participating in God's drama for his glory by living in communion with him and participating in his life in a listening and thankful filial spirit

[134] In chapter four, I wrote, " . . . the federal headship of Christ does not *need* to be incorporated into a covenant [of works] because the parallel between the federal headship of Adam and Christ does not require it to be incorporated into a covenant structure (Leder, 2014:694; McGowan, 2005:178–199; 2016:111–203; Murray, 1977:II-47–59; *contra* Horton, 2006a:87, 89; 2011a:632; Bolt, 2006:181, 185; Schreiner, 2017:22)

[135] Van Bekkum indicates something similar when he writes, "By forbidding humanity to eat from this tree, God does not so much put a brake on the development of knowledge and skill, but prioritizes trust in Him" (van Bekkum, 2020:27).

[136] Van Bekkum writes, "The cosmic battle between good and evil is first and foremost a battle for humanity and its devotion to God" (van Bekkum, 2020:33–34).

of the openness and responsiveness of faith, they believe the antagonist by unthankfully allowing themselves to be driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God and unreceptive to his voice.[137] In doing so, they became self-enclosed or curved in on themselves.

However, instead of this curved-in way of living enhancing their lives it diminishes their lives because they no longer live in communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit and perform and bear witness to the intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith as they have been designed to do.[138] Rather, they perform and bear witness to just how estranged and destabilized their self-enclosed and curved-in lives have become as a result of not participating in the life of God as they had been created to do.

They are ashamed of themselves and of being in each other's presence (Gen. 3:7). They are ashamed to be in God's presence (Gen. 3:8). They are afraid to tell the whole truth when God questions them (Gen. 3:10, 12). Instead of lovingly and uninhibitedly living for the other, i.e., God, each other, and creation, they selfishly and fearfully live for themselves (Burger, 2020b:23).

When God comes with his judgment upon their fall into sin, their self-enclosed, destabilized existence becomes even more weakened.[139] They no longer are allowed to live in God's presence in the Garden of Eden but are condemned to live outside of this garden (Gen. 3:23–24). Moreover, God pronounces a curse on their relationship with creation (Gen. 3:17–19; Burger, 2020b:15, 23–24; Moo and Moo, 103). Childbearing will become hard work and painful for women (Gen. 3:16a). Wives will desire to control and dominate their husbands. However, rather than being controlled and dominated, husbands will resist this desire by ruling over their wives (Gen. 3:16b).[140] Whereas childbearing will become hard work and painful for women, working the land will become hard work and painful for men (Gen. 3:17–19; Mathews, 1996:249). Furthermore, they are no longer allowed to eat from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22). Whereas before their fall into sin, death was a possibility (Burger, 2020b:23; van Bekkum, 2020:30), now

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[137] For the interpretation of "you will be like God knowing good and evil" as wisdom apart from God or moral autonomy, see Dumbrell, 1994:27; Kidner, 1967:63; Mathews, 1996:206; Sailhamer, 1992:104; van Bekkum, 2020:31; Waltke, 2007:258; Wenham, 1987:63–64; Williamson, 2007:50). Beale writes, "Adam did not guard the Garden but allowed entrance to a foul snake that brought sin, chaos and disorder into the sanctuary and into Adam and Eve's lives. He allowed the Serpent to 'rule over' him rather than 'ruling over' it and casting it out of the Garden" (Beale, 2004b:87; cf. Hamilton, 2010:75; Horton, 2011a:410; Waltke, 2007:259).)

[138] For understanding sin as being curved in on oneself or *homo incurvatus in se*, see Luther, 1972:245, 291, 313, 345–346, 513; Burger, 2017e:38; O'Donovan, 2014:14–23; Balthasar, 1994:TDIV:165; cf. 137–201; see also Jenson, 2006.

[139] God's glory or the splendour of his perfection entail all of his attributes, including his justice.

[140] Regarding "desire" and "rule", Mathews writes, " . . . better is the explanation suggested by Gen 4:7b, where 'desire' and 'rule' [*māšal*] are found again in tandem: 'It desires to have you, but you must master [*māšal*] it.' In chap. 4 'sin' is like an animal that when stirred up will assault Cain; it 'desires' to overcome Cain, but the challenge God puts to Cain is to exercise 'rule' or 'mastery' over that unruly desire." He concludes, "If we are to take the lexical and structural similarities as intentional, we must read the verses in concert. This recommends that 3:16b also describes a struggle for mastery between the sexes" (Mathews, 1996:251).

it is inevitable because of God's judgment (Gen. 3:19). As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, God subjects creation to futility so that it does not function as it was designed to function because of its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:20–21; Dunn, 1998:470; van Bruggen, 2006:122).[141] Consequently, creation mourns (e.g., Hos. 4:3; Jer. 4:28; 12:4, 11; Isa. 24:4; Moo and Moo, 2018:103–107) and groans (Rom. 8:22–23; Moo and Moo, 2018:107–110; see also Burger, 2020b:*passim*).

Because Christ is the model according to whose image humanity is created, with their fall into sin Adam and Eve did not lose their status of being in the image of God nor was the model of this image damaged. Rather, as we saw with Adam and Eve, it is their humanity, which became curved-in on itself, that is damaged because of the fall into sin.[142] Because Adam is the representative head of the human race, this has consequences for his posterity.[143] Due to Adam's fall into sin, every human being is conceived and born in sin. Thus, every human being by nature is self-enclosed and curved in on itself with a natural tendency to unthankfulness and an unresponsive listening posture to God. This, in turn, will have harmful consequences for humanity's mission of performing and bearing witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation.[144]

#### 2.1.4. Scene four: God predicts that humanity will deal with the problem it created

When God manifested or performed his glory in his judgment on Adam and Eve because of their fall into sin, he also performed his glory in his judgment on the serpent and Satan (Rev. 12:9). First, God curses the serpent that Satan used to introduce sin and death on the stage of the drama of God's mission for his glory. While all animals would experience the curse of humanity's fall into sin, the serpent would experience this curse the most because God cursed it "above all livestock and all animals" (Gen. 3:14). Because "eating the dust" symbolizes "total defeat" (Isa. 25:12 65:25; Mic. 7:17) as well as "humiliation" (Ps. 44:25; 72:9), its crawling on its belly and eating dust will be a perpetual reminder of its humiliation and ultimate defeat as well as of Satan's humiliation and defeat (Sailhamer, 1992:106–107; Waltke, 2001:93).[145]

This ultimate defeat is further spelled out when God declares, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise

[141] Dunn writes, "God subjected all things to Adam, and that included subjecting creation to fallen Adam, to share in his fallenness" (Dunn, 1998:471).
[142] For an overview and refutation of those who assert that the image of God is completely lost, virtually lost, partly lost, or appears to be lost, see Kilner, 2015:159–176.
[143] For why the federal headship of Christ does not need to be incorporated into a covenant of works, see note 52.
[144] Burger writes, "Where our task as human beings was to govern, sanctify and bless the rest of creation in the name of God, people and the rest of creation are now a mutual threat to each other" (Burger, 2020b:24).
[145] Sailhamer writes, "This curse does not necessarily suggest that the snake had previously walked with feet and legs as the other land animals" (Sailhamer, 1992:106).

his heel" (Gen. 3:15). With this declaration, God rescues[146] the drama of his mission for his glory by "break[ing] up the unholy alliance between Satan and the woman. Instead of Satan and humanity being pitted against God, God says he will draw the battle lines differently" (Greidanus, 2007:83–84).

Moreover, with this declaration and redrawing of the battle lines, God predicts that humanity will deal with the problem humanity created.[147] In doing so, God gives humanity "literally a seed of hope" (Dempster, 2003:68).[148] However, this drama will entail a lifelong conflict or warfare between Satan and his seed, i.e., those who bear witness to him and his way (Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn 3:8, 12), and the woman and her seed, i.e., those who bear witness to Christ and his ways (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; cf. Rom. 4:13, 16–18; Gal. 3:8). Thus, there will be a lifelong struggle between good and evil (Ross, 1998:145). Yet, the promise in this lifelong conflict is that through it, God's drama will become a redemptive drama of his mission for his glory in which he redeems creation and humanity from Satan, as the god of this world (Mt. 4:8, 9; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1 Jn. 5:19), and restores them into his loving presence again (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21–22).[149] This redemption and restoration will be accomplished by humanity crushing Satan's head with his heel, thus damaging his own heel in the process. However, the question is: will humanity succeed in crushing Satan's head?[150]

### 2.1.5. Scene five: God promises to preserve humanity and creation

God declared that the drama of his mission for his glory would entail a lifelong conflict or warfare between Satan and his seed and the woman and her seed or a lifelong struggle between good and evil, and we see this lifelong conflict and struggle coming to a head in the days of Noah. In Noah's days, we read that "[t]he LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time". As a result, "[t]he LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled". Consequently,

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[146] Even though there is a crisis and God comes to the rescue of the drama of his mission for his glory, Gen. 3:15 does not entail the making of a covenant. See the previous chapter.

[147] This implies that God is committing himself to his creational purpose.

[148] This has rightly been called the *protoevangelion,* i.e., the first mention of the Father's good news of salvation. For an inner-biblical interpretation of Gen. 3:15, see Hamilton, 2020:3–340. For an exploration of the connection between Gen. 3:15 and Johannine theology, see Köstenberger, 2020:264–284. For serpents and dragons being symbols of spiritual opposition and supernatural forces, see Williamson, 2020:332–352.

[149] Leder writes, "The entire biblical narrative, then, develops the problem of humanity's refusal of divine instruction and exile from the presence of God and emplots a sequence of events, complications, and conflicts that bring about life in God's presence again" (Leder, 2010:25).

[150] I am aware that crushing Satan's head will ultimately be accomplished with the seed of the woman, i.e., Christ striking a mortal blow to Satan's head. Moreover, this victory will be attained at the cost of his own life, for Satan will strike a mortal blow to Christ's heel. Thus, this redemption and restoration will be accomplished with Christ's death on the cross (Jn. 19:30; Mt. 27:51; Greidanus, 2007:84) and his return in glory (Heb. 2:14; Rom. 16:20; Williamson, 2007:51). However, because all that we know at this time is that humanity will crush Satan's head with his heel and damaging its own heel in the process, I ask: Will humanity succeed in crushing Satan's head? This has the benefit of keeping the dramatic tension in the narrative.

he decided that he would manifest his glory by coming in wrath[151] with his judgment and "wipe from the face of the earth the human race [he had] created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 6:5–7).[152]

Because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:5–8), God communicates his decision to destroy all of life on the earth to him. At the same time, he tells him that he is going to establish his covenant with him (Gen. 6:18).[153] I already noted that this study understands the function of a divine-human covenant to be a rescue operation in which God bears witness to or performs[154] his faithfulness to his creational purpose and his love for creation and humanity by committing to secure and guarantee this creational purpose of the drama of his mission for his glory by bringing creation and humanity into the Sabbath rest of the fullness of his loving presence in Christ, through the Spirit, in his coming kingdom or the new heaven and new earth where he will be all in all. At the same time, I noted that because sin and unbelief often threatened the fulfillment of this creational goal and thus lead to uncertainty with regard to God's relationship with his people, God regulates this existing relationship in order to deal with this problem of uncertainty by making covenants with his people to secure and guarantee the fulfillment of his creational purpose.

We see this in God's covenant with Noah. God's decision to destroy all of life on the earth except for Noah and his family because of sin and unbelief leads to the uncertainty about his prediction made in Genesis 3:15 that humanity would solve the problem it created. To secure and guarantee this prediction, God rescues the drama of his mission for his glory by making his covenant with Noah.[155] In other words, Noah can fully place his trust in God because God will make sure that his prediction will be fulfilled.[156] At the same time, God's covenant with Noah secures and guarantees God's promise that Noah and his

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[151] The reality of God's wrath in judgment has been described as his offended holy love (Vriezen, 1970; 306; Peels, 2007:110).

[152] Leder writes, "Adam and Eve's descendants now relate to God as defiled and defiling priests on the earthly plane of the heaven-and-earth-sanctuary. . . . Humanity's continuing and increasing defilement of God's presence is the narrative occasion for the flood. . . . " (Leder, 2013:211).

[153] There is no need to understand this covenant as a confirmation of a covenant God supposedly made at creation because "establish" (*heqim*) not only refers to the confirmation of a covenant (Lev. 26:9; Dt. 8:18), but also to the initiation of a covenant (Ex. 6:4; Kwakkel, 2009:120–121; *contra* Dumbrell, 1984:24, 25–26, 43; Bartholomew and Goheen, 2004:51; van Pelt, 2020:119–120; Waltke, 2001:136). It is difficult to see how this covenant can refer to the covenant God made with Noah and creation after the flood because God decided never to destroy all of life on the earth with the waters of a flood *after* he smelled the pleasing aroma of Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:20–22; Kwakkel, 2019:175). Thus, the covenant with Noah in Gen. 6:18 is a different covenant from the one in Gen. 9:8–17 (Kwakkel, 2009:120–122; Burger, 2019:281–282; see also van Pelt, 2020:117–119; *contra* Dumbrell, 1984:25–26, 39; 1994:30–32; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:187–195; 2015:59–61; Hahn, 2009:95–97; Leder, 2013:210; Macaskill, 2013; Williamson, 2007:59).

[154] Because God's attributes are attributes of his being in communicative activity or divine doing, this study speaks about God performing his attributes. This will be further developed in the next chapter.

[155] With the expression "my covenant" (Gen. 6:18), God highlights "the absolute character of God's assignment and promise (Kwakkel, 2009:121; 2019:176).

[156] This implies that God is committing himself to his creational purpose.

family will survive the waters of the flood if Noah builds an ark for himself, his family, and the animals God commanded him to put in the ark. Noah can also firmly place his trust in this promise (Kwakkel, 2009:120–121; 2019:176; see also Burger, 2019:280–281).[157]

After the waters of the flood subside, Noah offers a sacrifice to God (Gen. 8:20). When God smells the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice, God determines never to destroy all of life on the earth with the waters of a flood, even though humanity's sinful nature has not changed (Gen. 8:21). Then God updates his covenant with Noah with another covenant (Gen. 9:8–17; Burger, 2019:282),[158] this time with Noah and all of creation. As God's first covenant with Noah was necessary because sin and unbelief threatened the fulfillment of God's prediction that humanity would solve the problem it created, leading to uncertainty between God and his people, so also this second covenant with Noah, this time including creation, is necessary because humanity's sinful nature has not changed after the flood (Leder, 2013:211; Williamson, 2007:61).[159] And so, God once again secures and guarantees his commitment to his prediction that humanity would solve the problem it created.[160] And he seals this commitment with the sign of the rainbow.[161] Every time the rainbow appears in the clouds, God will remember his commitment never to destroy all of life on the earth with the waters of a flood.[162]

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[157] While God's promise to Noah is unconditional, his covenant with Noah is not unconditional because, as I wrote in the previous chapter, "When God speaks, he always appeals to the listener, even when he makes an unconditional promise . . . Precisely the unconditional aspect implies a strong call to a faithful trusting response" (Kwakkel, 2009:130).

[158] God's covenants with his people are not independent and unrelated to each other but are "interrelated and mutually dependent" (Gentry and Wellum, 2018:656; 2015:252). Thus, "the same relationship can be regulated by different successive *bĕrît*s" (Burger, 2019:274).

[159] Whereas in Gen. 6:5, humanity's depravity is the ground for God's judgment, in Gen. 8:21, it is grounds for God's mercy. Wenham aptly writes, "were it not for the changed logic of God, in that he now cites man's depravity as a ground for his mercy rather than for his judgment, the descendants of Noah would be heading for extinction in another deluge" (Wenham, 1987:206; Williamson, 2007:61).

[160] This implies that God is committing himself to his creational purpose.

[161] For God's covenant with Noah and creation guaranteeing his commitment to creation, see Burger, 2019:282; Dumbrell, 1984:43; 1994:31; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:2004–2008; Kwakkel, 2009:121–123; Williamson, 2007:68; Wright, 2006:326–327; see also Belcher, 2020b:51–55. Kwakkel writes, "It is customary to speak of God's covenant with Noah or the Noahic covenant. Usually this means not only the promise of Genesis 9:8–17 but also the obligations described in 9:1–7. In other words, it is a covenant of mutual obligations and to that extent also a relationship. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as one distinguishes this nomenclature from the meaning of the Hebrew word *bĕrît* in 9:8–17. That *bĕrît* has the character of an unconditional commitment" (Kwakkel, 2009:123).

[162] Turner writes, "The majority of exegetes understand the bow (*qeset*) in the clouds to maintain its military connotations and thus to represent, in one way or another, God's war bow". He says, "I suggest that a plausible explanation for the use of the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, in this context, can be found not in the suggestions outlined above [the war bow thesis], but in the Genesis cosmology itself, set out in some detail in ch. 1. Gen. i 6–8 recounts God's creation of the "firmament" (*raqiah*), to act as a barrier between the 'waters above' and the 'waters below'" (Turner, 1993:120). Thus, Turner sees the rainbow as symbolizing a domelike barrier that holds back the waters above the dome (Williamson, 2007:64).

### 2.2. Act two: the drama of the election of Israel as the theatre of the theodrama (1)[163]

The second act of the drama of God's mission for his glory—or his communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts on the stage of this world—is the drama of the election of Israel as the theatre of the theodrama.

This act will be sketched in five scenes. Scene one depicts God continuing the drama of his mission for his glory by electing Abraham (and Israel)[164] to be the theatre of his communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and to bear witness to the splendour of his perfect life by doing heaven on earth and to spread the blessing of this life throughout the world.[165] Scene two portrays God committing himself to use Abraham and Israel to spread the blessing of living in his loving presence and participating in his life in Christ through the Spirit throughout the world by making covenants with Abraham. Scene three shows God committing himself to use Israel to spread that blessing throughout the world by making covenants with Israel. Scene four depicts God committing himself to use Israel to spread that blessing throughout the world by making a covenant with David. Scene five portrays God committing himself to use Israel to spread that blessing throughout the world by promising to make a new covenant with Israel.

#### 2.2.1. Scene one: the election of Abraham (and Israel)

Just as humanity before the flood failed to participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, so humanity after the flood failed to participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory in this manner as well. Just as God manifested his glory in the wrath of his judgment on humanity and all of life with the waters of the flood because humanity unthankfully allowed itself to be driven by its own agenda and standards, independent of God and unreceptive to his voice because of its self-enclosed or curved-in existence, so God manifested his glory in the wrath of his judgment on humanity after the flood because it unthankfully allowed itself to be driven by its own agenda and standards because of its self-enclosed or curved-in

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[163] "Theatre" reconceptualizes the biblical notion of "holy temple". For Calvin on creation being a theatre, see, e.g., (Calvin, 1960:I:51–58, 60–61, 71–72, 179–180: II:340–342; III:713–714). For his use of "theatre" for the church, see, e.g. (Calvin, 1960:III:881). While Act one also includes a theatre of God's drama, viz. humanity and creation, Act two focuses intentionally on the election of a specific people to be the theatre of God's drama. Because Jesus, the church, and the new heaven and the new earth are also the theatre of God's drama, I placed a number behind this act and each of the following acts in the drama of God's mission for his glory.

[164] Since Abraham is the father of Israel, Israel is elected in Abraham's election.

[165] God's election of Abraham and Israel for the sake of the world implies that the world is the audience of the theodrama. This continues to be the case when Gentiles become believing participants in the theodrama (Vander Lugt, 2016:163). However, since the drama of God's mission for his glory is an interactive drama of redemption, this mission takes place not only before the audience but also among the audience to incorporate them as believing participants into God's drama of redemption (Vander Lugt, 2016:126, 137, 161–178; Vanhoozer, 2005:414–417).

existence. And so, when they decided to make a name for themselves by building a city with a tower reaching to the heavens and to remain together instead of spreading out over the earth, God confused humanity's language and dispersed it over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:1–9).

However, instead of giving up on the drama of his mission for his glory to make all things new in a world where his people and his world would once again dwell in his loving presence and be people and places where heaven and earth meet, God rescues his drama and makes a new beginning.[166] He calls Abram and Sarai to be a blessing for the world and to be the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

In doing so, God wants to use them as a new Adam and Eve and thus deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin (Gen. 3:15; Bartholomew and Goheen, 2004:55; Burger, 2019:283; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:260–264; 2015:94–97; Leder, 2010:27, 79; 2013:212; Wright, 2006:194–195; Wright, N., 1992:216, 262). As such, he wants to use them to subdue the chaos and disorder caused by sin and invite humanity and creation into his Sabbath rest by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit.[167] On earth as in heaven! However, will Abram and Sarai succeed in dealing with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and, in doing so, crush Satan's head?[168]

To have Abram and Sarai deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin, God calls Abram to make a complete break with his past and leave behind everything dear to him, his country, his distant relatives, his immediate family and go to the land that God would show him (Gen. 12:1).[169] To encourage Abram, God promises that he would bless him and make his name great by making a great nation of him (Gen. 12:2).[170] Moreover, he promises him that he will not only be "the recipient of [national] blessing",

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[166] Even though there is a crisis and a rescue operation here, Gen. 12:1–3 do not contain a covenant (*contra* Dumbrell, 1984:55–72; cf. Bartholomew, 1995:23; Stek, 1994:28; cf. Burger, 2019:284).

[167] Williamson describes the significance of Gen. 12:1–3 as follows, "[Gen. 12:1–3] has been well described as the Bible's Magna Carta. Here we find a synopsis of the divine agenda in which God's rescue plan for humanity is revealed. . . . It has been hinted at in the previous chapters but here is disclosed most fully. As the apostle Paul puts it [Gal. 3:8], here God announced the gospel in advance to Abraham" (Williamson, 2007:77).

[168] I am aware that ultimately Abraham's great Son will deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and crush Satan's head, but at this point in the narrative, we do not know this. Thus, to keep the dramatic tension in the narrative, I ask: will Abram and Sarai succeed in dealing with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and, in doing so, crush Satan's head?

[169] Waltke writes, "The past perfect tense [i.e., "had said", e.g., NIV and NKJV] is used because God calls Abraham in Ur before his father dies, not in Haran (see 12:28, 31; 15:7; Acts 7:4)". He adds, "Or does God call Abraham a second time as he does with Jeremiah (1:4–19; 15:19–21)?" (Waltke, 2001:204).

[170] Williamson understands the threefold promise of verse 2 to center on the promise of nationhood. He writes, "The 'great nation' and the 'great name' appear to define more precisely the nature of the anticipated 'blessing'". He adds, "The prospect of a 'great name' likewise relates to the overarching promise of nationhood". He sees this suggested "by the implicit contrast with the failed aspirations of the tower-builders of Babel (cf. Gen. 11:4), whose attempts at civil organization (nationhood) had been thwarted by divine judgment" (Williamson, 2007:82–83).

he would also be "the mediator of [international] blessing" for "in [him] all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; Williamson, 2007:82).[171]

The latter promise would not be fulfilled automatically. Rather, it would depend on the nations' attitude to Abram. Those who would be on good terms with him and identify with him and his God, God would bless. However, those who would be hostile to him and treat him lightly, God would curse (Williamson, 2007:83–84). But God's overriding concern was that in Abram all the families of the earth would be blessed. God blessed Abram to be a blessing by living for the other through willing the good of the other, viz. the nations (Gen. 12:3; Williamson, 2007:83–84).

### 2.2.2. Scene two: God's covenants with Abraham

When God made his covenant with Noah and his subsequent covenant with him and creation, I noted that because sin and unbelief often threaten the fulfillment of the creational goal of the drama of God's mission for his glory and thus lead to uncertainty in God's relationship with his people, God regulates this existing relationship in order to deal with this problem of uncertainty and to manifest his faithfulness to his creational purpose and his love for creation and humanity by making covenants with them to secure and guarantee the fulfillment of this creational purpose. This is why God made these two covenants. We seem the same with the two covenants God makes with Abram/Abraham.

Even though God had promised Abram that he would bless him and make his name great by making a great nation of him, he doubted this promise because God had not given him any offspring (Gen. 15:2–3). God tells him not to be afraid and reiterates his promise to make him into a great nation (Gen. 15:4–5). Abram trusts God's promise and God accepts this listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith to his promise as an act of righteousness, i.e., "a response that now fits with what he expects from him" (Gen. 15:6; Kwakkel, 1996:48).

When God rewards this posture of faith with a repeated promise of the gift of the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:7; cf. 12:7; 13:14–17),[172] Abram asks God how he will know that he will possess the land (Gen. 15:8). To secure and guarantee the fulfillment of these two promises, which both pertain to the fulfillment of God's creational purpose of the drama of his mission for his glory, God makes a covenant with Abram according to the custom of those days where covenant partners cut animals in half and then walk between these animals, thereby guaranteeing their commitment to the covenant they just made or cut.[173] But in this

[171] The niphal form of *brk* can have either a passive sense ("in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed"), a reflexive sense ("by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves"), or a middle sense ("all the families of the earth will find blessing in you"). While the passive sense is the most natural in the context (Mathews, 1996:117), the reflexive and middle senses each have a passive implication (Wright, 2006:217).
[172] Kwakkel writes, "The new element in 15:18–21 is the broader description of the land and the way in which God records his promise, namely in the form of a *bĕrît*" (Kwakkel, 2009:123). Moreover, if Abram is going to become a great nation, this nation will need to possess land.
[173] For making of this covenant in order to deal with Abram's uncertainties, see Burger, 2019:284: Leder, 2013:213.

covenant, only God unconditionally walks between the bloody carcasses of the animals in the signs of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. In doing so, he is swearing an oath: "May I be cut in half if I do not fulfill my promise of giving you and your descendants the land of Canaan" (Gen. 15:9–12–21; cf. Jer. 34:18–20; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:287, 292; 2015:110–111; Kwakkel, 2009:124; Robertson, 1980 131–137; Ross, 1988:212; Waltke, 2001:244–245; Williamson, 2007:86).[174]

After having made a covenant with Abram in Genesis 15, God makes a new covenant with him in Genesis 17 (cf. Num. 25:12; Burger, 2019:285–286; Kwakkel, 2009:124–127; Williamson, 2007:84–91).[175] As God updated his first covenant with Noah with a second one in order to deal with uncertainty in a new situation, so God updates his first covenant with Abram with a second one in order to deal with uncertainty in his new situation.

Abram and Sarai tried to realize the fulfillment of God's promise of becoming a great nation by being curved in on themselves instead of through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith in God's promise. As a result, Abram fathers a son through Sarai's maidservant Hagar (Gen. 16). However, this leads to the uncertainty of whether God can still use Abram and Sarai in the drama of his mission for his glory.[176]

To deal with the problem of this uncertainty, God offers to make a covenant with Abram, if he walks before him and is blameless.[177] This would entail that, while God's promises in his first covenant with Abram were unconditional, his promises in this second covenant would be conditional (cf. Gen. 17:9).[178] In other words, if God is going to be able to use Abram and Sarai in the drama of his mission for his glory to represent him and to bear witness to his glorious presence so that he becomes visible on earth because they are people where heaven and earth meet, they will have to faithfully and wholeheartedly live in his loving presence through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and not allow themselves to be driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God and

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[174] Because God unconditionally guarantees the fulfillment of his promises in this covenant, it is usually compared with ancient Near Eastern royal grant or gift covenants (Burger, 2019:284; Stek, 1994:29; Williamson, 2007:86). However, in the previous chapter, I observed that these land grants were predominantly conditional (Knoppers, 1996:670–697).

[175] *Contra* Belcher, 2020b:66–69; Gentry and Welllum, 2018:299–305, 312–318; 2015:117–119; Redd, 2020:141–143.

[176] Leder writes, "Sarah's attempt to overcome her barrenness (= death) forms the narrative occasion for God's securing the promise by means of another covenant" (Leder, 2013:214; 2014:695; Burger, 2019:285).

[177] Leder writes, "The cohortative after the two imperatives expresses intended result" (Leder, 2013:214). Consequently, Williamson suggests the following translation, "Walk before me and be blameless *so that* I may establish my covenant with both you and your descendants" (Williamson, 2007:87). All italics are in the original unless otherwise noted.

[178] Burger writes, "God remarkably and consistently refers in this chapter to his covenant with Abraham as 'my covenant.' On the one hand, such references emphasize the decisive role of God in this covenant, which is a relief to Abram given his own clumsy efforts to help God realize his promise. On the other hand, by means of such references God indicates subtly that he is God, which itself creates obligations on Abraham" (Burger, 2019:285).

unreceptive to his voice.[179] This faithful and wholehearted living in God's presence would include the faithful practice of the rite of circumcision as a sign of God's covenant, which was meant to visibly remind them of their status and obligations of belonging to God's covenant community (Gen. 17:9–14).[180]

While God's first covenant with Abraham focused only on the national blessing of nationhood, this second covenant focuses on both national and international blessing, with the emphasis being on Abraham's international significance (Williamson, 2007:87–88). This can be seen in the fact that Abraham would become "the father of a multitude of nations", a promise God enshrined in the changing of his name from Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:4–5). His being the father of a multitude of nations would include him being the spiritual father of many nations, i.e., "the spiritual benefactor" "mediating divine blessing to them" (cf. Gen. 45:8; Williamson, 2007:89, 88; see also Rom. 4:16–17 and Dumbrell, 1984:73).[181] This will occur through God giving Abraham the land and his descendants, including kings, becoming a great nation. God's covenant with Abraham would be an everlasting covenant. The heart of this everlasting covenant is that God would be God to them (Gen. 17:6–8). In other words, there will always be descendants of Abraham who would live in God's loving presence and be a blessing for the world by participating in the drama of his mission for his glory through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Sometime after God fulfilled his promise of providing Abraham with the birth of Isaac, God tests Abraham's faith by commanding him to take the son for whose birth he had waited for 25 years and sacrifice him as a burnt offering much as Canaanites sacrificed their children as an offering (Gen. 22:1). Because Abraham does indeed wholeheartedly live in his loving presence through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and was ready to sacrifice Isaac, he passes God's test (cf. Heb. 11:17–19). Because he did, God intervenes and calls the sacrifice of Isaac off. Since God has providentially led a ram to where Abraham was and its horns are caught in a thicket, Abraham sacrifices the ram instead of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). God rewards this posture of faith by promising him under oath that he will surely bless him by making him into a great nation through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 22:15–18).[182] God will indeed use Abraham and his descendants as the theatre

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[179] Leder writes, "The covenant offer makes clear that, by binding himself to God as a vassal to a suzerain, Abraham and his descendants are committed by self-maledictory oath to God's way and time of fulfilling the promise of an heir" (Leder, 2013:214). God's continual use of the expression "my covenant" (verses 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14) illustrates the same point (Burger, 2019:285).

[180] In the previous chapter, I wrote that the condition of circumcision "served as a synecdoche for the covenantal requirement of a blameless life" (Pratt, 2008:8, 10).

[181] Williamson writes, "Moreover, in every other place where the precise grammatical construction found here is employed (i.e., the inseparable preposition *le* [to/for] joined to the noun *ab* [father] in a 'resultative sense'), a non-physical concept of fatherhood is undeniably in view" (Williamson, 2007:88).

[182] Burger rightly notes, "The word *berit* is not used in Genesis 22, but the divine oath again gives an unconditional character to the promises attached to the covenants of Genesis 15 and 17. As such, we find here the climax of the story of God's covenant with Abraham" (Burger, 2019:287). According to Hahn, "oaths always contain both a

of the drama of his mission for his glory to represent him and to bear witness to his glorious presence by being people and places where heaven and earth meet. On earth as in heaven!

### 2.2.3. Scene three: God's covenants with Israel

When God made his first covenant with Abraham, he had said, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13–14). After the 400 years, God remembered his covenant with Abraham and revealed his name to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Accordingly, he led his people or son Israel (Ex. 4:22–23; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Rom. 9:4) out of Egypt to himself at Mount Sinai where he made his first covenant with them (Ex. 19–24). Whereas God demonstrated his faithfulness to his creational purpose and his love creation and humanity by coming to the rescue of this creational purpose with his two covenants with Noah and his two covenants with Abraham because of a crisis that caused uncertainty about the fulfillment of this creational purpose, no crisis causes uncertainty when he makes his first covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Burger, 2019:298).[183] However, because God's covenants with his people are not independent and unrelated to each other, but update previous covenants to new situations, God's first covenant with Israel updates his two covenants with Abraham for the new situation of Abraham's descendants having become a nation (Ex. 24:8; Burger, 2019:288).[184]

Before God makes his covenant with his son[185] Israel as a nation, he explains what kind of a nation Israel will be if they keep his covenant through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith (Ex. 19:5–6). They will have the status of being his "treasured possession [*sĕgullâ*][186] among all people", i.e., they will be a people with whom he has a valued and special

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blessing and a curse element . . . [the] self-curse may be expressed in either the verbal declaration or the ritual enactment. . . . Since there is no curse element in [God's] verbal declaration, it is proper to suppose that it is symbolically contained in the ritual enactment. Since the only ritual act is Abraham's sacrificial 'offering' of Isaac, it emerges as *the* sign of [God's] self-malediction". He then concludes, "The net effect of God's self-maledictory oath, then, is that God has now assumed sole and complete responsibility to bless the nations through Abraham's seed, even if that means bearing the curse in order to remove whatever might impede its fulfillment" (Hahn, 2009:127; Burger, 2019:287).

[183] Leder considers God's covenant with Israel to be a "response to the threat of the nations to annihilate the promised seed" (Leder, 2013:216). However, God had dealt with this threat by delivering Israel out of Egypt.

[184] Accordingly, Anderson writes, "In the final form of the Pentateuch (Torah), the Mosaic covenant is subordinate to the Abrahamic. In this canonical context the Abrahamic covenant, which guarantees the promise of land and posterity, is the overarching theme within which the Mosaic covenant of law is embraced" (Anderson, 1999:137; Williamson, 2007:96).

[185] For Israel being God's son, see Ex. 4:22–23; Hos. 11:1. As Adam had the status of God's son, so Israel has the status of God's son. As Adam was given the mission to represent this status by making it visible on earth, so Israel is given the mission to represent their status by making it visible on earth.

[186] Durham writes, "The image presented is that of the unique and exclusive possession, and that image is expanded by what appears to be an addition ('for to me belongs the whole earth') to suggest the 'crown jewel' of a large collection, the masterwork, the one-of-a-kind piece" (Durham, 1987:262).

relationship for the sake of the other people in the world (Williamson, 2007:96–97; Wright, 2006:255–256). As a treasured possession, they will function as "a kingdom of priests", i.e., they will mediate the presence of God to the nations by performing and bearing witness to the splendour of his perfect life through participating in his life and living in his loving presence.[187] As a treasured possession, they will also function as "a holy nation", i.e., a nation that is set apart from the other nations and consecrated to God as the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory.[188] In being God's treasured possession by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, Israel is to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations (Gen. 12:3). In doing so, God wants to use them to deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and crush Satan's head. Will Israel succeed in dealing with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and, in doing so, crush Satan's head?

Israel agrees to keep God's covenant with them (Ex. 19:8).[189] However, this will involve keeping God's commandments and statutes (Ex. 20–23).[190] To impress upon the people his holiness and the required holiness of living in his presence, God presents himself to them in a powerful display of his majesty and holiness (Ex. 19:16–25). When Israel keeps God's covenant in this way, it will not only increasingly learn what participating in the drama of God's mission for his glory entails, it will also concretely bear witness to the surrounding nations what participating in the drama of God's mission for his glory involves.[191] Essentially, it involves a life of love (*agape*), i.e., living for the other and willing the good of the other, as God lives for the other and wills the good of the other (Mt. 22:37–40).

The covenant agreed to (Ex. 19:8) is then formally ratified (Ex. 24:1–8). After Moses tells the people all of God's commandments and statutes, the people once again agree to keep these commandments and statutes (Ex. 24:3–4, 7). Having offered sacrifices to God (Ex. 24:5), Moses throws

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[187] Wright writes, "As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The Abrahamic task of being a means of blessing to the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations. Just as it was the role of the priests to bless the Israelites, so it would be the role of Israel as a whole ultimately to be a blessing to the nations (Wright, 2006:331). While Kwakkel does not consider Wright's interpretation to be the primary interpretation of Israel being a kingdom of priests, he does allow for it as a secondary interpretation (Kwakkel, 2014:29–31). Commenting on Israel being God's treasured possession "for [*ki*] all the earth is mine", Dumbrell writes, "Israel is called because the whole world ('earth') is the object of Yahweh's care" (Dumbrell, 1994:45; see also Williamson, 2007:97; *contra* Kwakkel, 2014:29).

[188] Durham writes, "Israel as a 'holy people' then represents a third dimension of what it means to be committed in faith to Yahweh: they are to be a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people" (Durham, 1987:263).

[189] In addition to functioning as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, Israel would also function as the servant of the LORD who would be a light to the nations by bringing his justice to them (Isa. 42:1, 6; 49:6).

[190] For the difference between God's commands (Ex. 20) and his statutes (Ex. 21–21), see Williamson, 2007:98.

[191] About the revelatory function of God's commandments and statutes, Williamson writes, "Just as Yahweh had made himself known to Pharaoh (cf. Exod. 5:2) and the Egyptians (as well as the surrounding nations) through the deliverance of the exodus, so he would further make himself known to Israel and the nations through the covenant relationship established at Sinai" (Williamson, 2007:98–99).

some of the blood of the sacrifices on the altar, which symbolizes God's presence, and some on the people, symbolizing their consecration to God. The people again repeat their commitment to be God's treasured possession by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through keeping God's covenant (Ex. 24:6–8; Dumbrell, 1984:98; Durham, 1987:343; Kwakkel, 2014:33; Nicholson, 1986:172–174; Williamson, 2007:100).[192]

However, a few days later, God's son Israel violates the second commandment by having Aaron build a golden calf and worshipping this golden calf (Ex. 32:1–6). Consequently, God no longer considers Israel as his people (Ex. 32:7). Moreover, he wants to destroy them and make a great nation out of Moses (Ex. 32:10).[193] When Moses intercedes for the people, invoking God's unconditional promise of making Abraham into a great nation, God decides not to destroy Israel (Ex. 32:14). When God decides to send an angel with Israel instead of going himself (Ex. 32:34; 33:2), Moses intercedes again (Ex. 33:12–16) and God has compassion on his people and forgives them (34:6–7; cf. 33:19; 34:9). Moreover, he commits to personally accompany his people with his presence (Ex. 33:17). Because of the crisis and uncertainty Israel's violation of God's covenant with them has caused, God acts in faithfulness and rescues the drama of his mission for his glory by formalizing this commitment to his creational purpose and to having Israel be the theatre of this drama of his mission for his glory by making another covenant that updates his first covenant with Israel for the new situation in which Israel has broken this covenant (Ex. 34:10; Burger, 2019:289, 292; Dumbrell, 1984:105–107; Kwakkel, 2014:34–38; Williamson, 2007:106–108; *contra* Gentry and Wellum, 2018:435–437; 2015:179–180).[194] However, this second covenant is different from

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[192] Nicholson writes, "Thus, what is set out in a programmatic manner in Exodus 19:3b–8 is finally completed in 24:3–8 where Israel gives its pledge of obedience to the words of the covenant and is then, as the author of Exodus 19:3b–8 took it, constituted as Yahweh's 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation'" (Nicholson, 1986:173). About some of the blood being thrown on the altar, Kwakkel writes, "As for the sprinkling of the blood of the animals on the altar, this blood represented the life of the animal (see Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11, 14). When the blood was sprinkled on the altar, the life of the animal was given to God. This shows once more that Moses' offerings were a symbolic expression of the people's willingness to dedicate their lives to God." He adds, "Viewed from this perspective, the ritual act of sprinkling the other half of the blood on the people is very meaningful. The fact that Israel's involvement in the covenant was confirmed by this blood showed that the covenant was forever bound up with their willingness to dedicate their lives to God" (Kwakkel, 2014:33).

[193] Williamson writes, "Clearly, Israel's special status as the people of God is called into question: Yahweh describes them to Moses as 'Your people whom you brought up' and 'this people' (Exod. 32:7, 9)" (Williamson, 2007:106).

[194] It is noteworthy that the violation of the second commandment with the making and worship of the golden calf is immediately preceded and followed by the Sabbath command. Enns writes, "The framing of the rebellion narrative by the Sabbath law indicates that although God's plan has almost been destroyed, it is now proceeding undiminished. God will be with his people, no matter what happens" (Enns, 2000:149; Williamson, 2007:108). The fact that the Sabbath functioned as a weekly reminder of God entering his rest after six days of creation and the people's calling to increasingly enter into this Sabbath rest by being God's holy people (Ex. 31:13, 16–17), emphasizes this same point (cf. Williamson, 2007:102–103). The same can be said about the instructions for construction of the tabernacle and the construction of the tabernacle that bracketed Israel's violation of the second commandment. About the covenantal significance of the tabernacle, Williamson writes, ". . . the tabernacle (signifying Yahweh's kingly presence in the midst of his people . . .) vouchsafed Israel's enjoyment of 'rest' in the

God's first covenant with Israel because it is first a covenant with Moses and, in Moses, a covenant with Israel (Ex. 34:27; Burger, 2019:289).[195] This second covenant is a mediated covenant (Dumbrell, 1984:110).[196] Because Moses has found favour in the sight of God (Ex. 33:12–13, 16–17; 34:9), God has compassion on his people and forgives them. This "special position of Moses distinguishes the covenant of Exodus 34 from the covenant in Exodus 24". As such, Israel's participation in or performance of God's drama of his mission for his glory can only be based on "the wonders to which [God's] name testifies; that is, his undeserved mercy, compassion, grace, love, faithfulness, and willingness to forgive (Exod 33:19; 34:6–7)" (Kwakkel, 2014:38).[197]

After forty years in the desert, a new generation of the people of Israel is standing on the threshold of the land of the Promised Land. However, this new generation is no better than the previous generation (Ezek. 20:18–26; Nu. 25:1–13; Burger, 2019:290–291). Both generations have rebelled against the Holy Spirit (Ps. 106:33), grieved the Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10; cf. 11–14), and resisted the Holy Spirit (Ac. 7:51). This leads to the uncertainty of whether God can still use this new generation in the drama of his mission for his glory. Moreover, in addition to having Joshua lead them instead of Moses, the situation of the new generation in the Promised Land will be different from their situation in the desert.

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Promised Land—itself a foretaste of the ultimate restoration of God's creation intention for humankind" (Williamson, 2007:103).

[195] That this second covenant is made with Moses and in him with Israel can also be seen in the use of the singular pronoun "you" in Ex. 34:10–28. Kwakkel writes, "However, in Exod 34:10 the second person singular refers only to Moses, since he is distinguished from the other Israelites, who are denoted as 'your people' and 'the people you live among.' If, then, in the next verse God continues to use the second person singular by saying, 'Obey what I command you today,' the most logical interpretation is that he is addressing Moses in this and the following verses". He adds, "All the Israelites had to obey [cf. v. 13], but the second person singular pronoun in this chapter shows that Moses bore primary responsibility for their obedience" (Kwakkel, 2014:37).

[196] Commenting on Moses meeting face to face with God in the Tent of Meeting and wearing a veil when he speaks with the people, Dumbrell writes, "The conjecture is that as a result of the national apostasy of Exod. 32, an apostasy of the kind which continued to trouble Israel right to the end of its history, the full significance of the Sinai covenant is now veiled in her experience". He adds, "This situation would continue for Israel until the veil would be removed in Christ and through the Spirit Israel would be placed in the Mosaic position (and indeed in the Exod. 19 position. Never again in the Old Testament does Israel return to its original Sinai position or realise its Sinai potential" (Dumbrell, 1984:110).

[197] Burger writes, "The sons of Aaron take over the priestly role of the people as a whole, and the Levites will serve in the tabernacle. . . . Israel is no longer a kingdom of *priests*" (Burger, 2019:289–290). However, when God gave Israel the status of being his treasured possession that was meant to function as a kingdom of priests, Israel already had special priests (Ex. 19:22, 24). Moreover, before God made his second covenant with Israel, he had already given instruction for the special priesthood (Ex. 28–29; 30:30). Thus, I fail to see how "[t]he sons of Aaron take over the priestly role of the people as a whole . . . [and] Israel is no longer a kingdom of *priests*". The claim that Israel must no longer be a kingdom of priests because, when Israel is on the Plains of Moab, God continues to call them "his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6) and "a people holy to the LORD", but not "a kingdom of priests," is a conclusion drawn from an argument from silence, which is generally considered to be weak or even fallacious (Deut. 26:19; Burger, 2019:290; Duncan, 2012:83). What can be said is that "the priests facilitated the maintenance of the divine-human relationship between Yahweh and Abraham's descendants" (Williamson, 2007:105; see also Burger, 2019:289). Moreover, Burger rightly notes, "The covenant with Levi serves as a reinforcing supplement to the covenant with Israel (Num. 3:11–31; 8:16–19)" (Burger, 2019:289). God's covenant with Phinehas (Nu. 25:12-13) needs to be seen within this context.

Thus, God once again performs his faithfulness to the drama of his mission for his glory and his love for creation and humanity by coming to the rescue of his creational purpose and making a third covenant with his son Israel (Deut. 29:1; cf. 8:5; 14:1).[198] However, because this new generation is no better than the previous generation with its uncircumcised hearts (Dt. 10:12–22) and because the commandments God gave them to keep could not give them life (Ezek. 20:25), this new generation will not be able to keep this new covenant which promised them a blessed life in the Promised Land if they kept it[199] and a cursed life if they failed to keep it, the ultimate curse being the curse of exile from the Promised Land (Dt. 28; 31:16, 20). Thus, exile from the Promised Land will be inevitable (Dt. 28:36, 54–68; 30:1).[200] Yet, precisely because God is faithful to the drama of his mission for his glory, he offers his people hope by promising to come to the rescue of his creational purpose and one day bring his people Israel to repentance by circumcising their hearts and restoring them to the Promised Land (Dt. 30:1–10; Burger, 2019:291; Williamson, 2007:112–113). On earth as in heaven!

### 2.2.4. Scene four: God's covenant with David

The failure to keep his covenant that God had predicted on the Plains of Moab soon became a reality in the Promised Land. Not only did Israel fail to drive out all the Canaanites (Jos. 13:13; 16:10; 17:11–13; 15:63; Judg. 1:21, 27–36; 2:1–5), life soon also resembled the life of the Canaanites (Judg. 2:11–13, 19–20; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1, 25; 8:33; 10:6; Ps. 78:56–64; 106:34–39). By the end of the book of Judges, Israel has become like the nations and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Judg. 19–21; de Jong, 2002:88).

We continue to see the same failure to keep God's covenant when Israel wants a king like all the nations (2 Sam. 8:5, 20). Although when God had made his second covenant with Abraham, he had promised that kings would come forth from his descendants (Gen 17:6, 16), when Israel demands a king, they rejected God as their king (1 Sam. 8:7). When God grants Israel Saul as its first king, Saul also rejects God as his king (1 Sam. 10:19; 15:23, 26). Because he rejects God as king, God rejects him as king (1 Sam. 15:23, 26; 16:1, 7).

Israel's second king, however, is a man after God's own heart[201] who is willing to live in a listening and thankful spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith (1 Sam. 13:14; Ac. 13:22). After David has been anointed as king of all Israel (2 Sam. 5:1–12), has brought rest to Israel by defeating

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[198] For uncertainty in God's relationship with his people and the need to update the relationship to a new situation, see Burger, 2019:290; 2021:124.
[199] For a depiction of the Promised Land as a recapture of Eden, see Dumbrell, 1984:119–123, 126.
[200] Burger writes, "The external character of the law means it is not enough to solve the problems of humanity, and not even enough to secure a good life in the Promised Land. Covenantal nomism is only an intermediate solution (cf. Gal. 3)" (Burger, 2019:291).
[201] Wright writes, "The phrase does not mean (as it may sound in English) a special favorite of God. Rather since the heart is the seat of the will and intentions in Hebrew, the phrase simply means that David will be the one who will carry out the purposes of God" (Wright, 2006:344).

Israel's enemies, and has brought the ark of God up to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6; Ps. 132:5, 8), he wants to build a house for the ark (2 Sam. 7:1–2). However, instead of having David build him a house, God will build a house for David by establishing his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16).

While the narrator in 2 Samuel 7 does not refer to this promise of a Davidic dynasty as a covenant, Scripture does elsewhere (Ps. 89:3–4, 28, 34, 39; 132:11–12). When we consider that Israel's continued apostasy led to the uncertainty whether God could continue to use Israel in the drama of his mission for his glory and that God's covenant with David is a covenant within God's three covenants with Israel, then we see that with his covenant with David God once again acts in faithfulness to the drama of his mission for his glory and his love for creation and humanity by coming to the rescue of the creational purpose of this drama (2 Sam. 7:24; 1 Chron. 17:22). This covenant with David is meant to give stability to his three covenants with Israel because Israel was meant to be his treasured possession that was to function as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for the sake of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations (Ps. 89:19–20;[202] Jer. 30:21–22; Ezek. 34:23–24; Lk. 1:68–75; Isa. 55:3b-4[203]; de Jong, 2002:87–89, 92–97; Burger, 2019:293). However, will God's covenant with the house of David bring this stability? Will it enable Israel to deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and crush Satan's head?

In the previous chapter, I noted that God's covenant with David has both unconditional and conditional aspects (2 Sam. 7:14b; 1 Ki. 2:4; 9:4–5; Ps. 132:11–12; cf. 1 Sam. 2:30; Kwakkel, 2018:86; 2009:130). This mixture of unconditional and conditional aspects has to do with the connection between God's covenant with David and his choice of Zion/Jerusalem as the place for his dwelling (Ps. 132:13, 17–18). As God's covenant with David is meant to give stability to his covenants with Israel, so his choice of Zion/Jerusalem as the place of his dwelling is meant to give stability to his covenant with David. If David and his sons participate in God's drama for his glory by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth so that God becomes visible on earth because Israel is a place where heaven and earth meet, they will need to find their source of strength in God's dwelling in Zion/Jerusalem.[204] However, even if they fail to do so and

[202] Most Hebrew manuscripts speak of "godly ones", not "godly one". Tate writes, "A number of Heb. mss have the singular, 'your loyal-one,' probably with Nathan and 2 Sam 7 in mind. LXX has 'your sons' (τοῖς υἱος σου = בְּנֶיךָ) (Tate, 1998:410). See also de Jong, 2002:96–97.

[203] De Jong interprets the parallel position of "with you an everlasting covenant" and "my steadfast, sure love for David" as follows: "But I think it's better to stick to the reality of both of them [i.e., both covenants] and imagine that the covenant with the people gets the usual Davidic upgrading. God remains faithful to his covenant with his people, but the manifestation of that faithfulness is shown by what the Lord God does in and to the house of David" (de Jong, 2002:97).

[204] About finding their source of strength in Zion/Jerusalem, see de Jong, 2002:37. Commenting on the unconditional form of promise that one of his sons would always be on his throne de Jong also writes, "What should not escape us is that this promise was made to David in connection with the building of the temple" (de Jong, 2002:29; Robertson, 1980:232–233). Commenting on the connection between God's promise to David and his

consequently fail in keeping the conditional form of God's covenant, God will still keep the unconditional form of his promise because of his choice of Zion/Jerusalem (Ps. 132:12–13; Isa. 14:32).[205] Moreover, out of Zion/Jerusalem, God will make "a horn sprout for David" and "a lamp for [his] anointed" (Ps. 132:17; Ps. 89:24; Lk. 1:69), who one day will perform and bear witness to God's glorious presence on earth through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations because he is a place and a person where heaven and earth meet.[206] On earth as in heaven!

### 2.2.5. Scene five: The new covenant

When God made his third covenant with Israel on the Plains of Moab, he predicted that, because of their constitutional incorrigibility, they would fail to keep his covenant and be sent into exile (Dt. 28:36, 54–68; 30:1; Williamson, 2007:112). What God had predicted also happened (Jer. 11:10; Ezek. 16:59; 2 Ki. 17:7–23; 24:10–25:11). Yet, God also offered his people hope by promising to one day bring his people Israel to repentance by circumcising their hearts and restore them to the Promised Land (Dt. 30:1–10).

Because divine-human covenants are manifestations of God's faithfulness to his creational purpose of the drama of his mission for his glory that rescue this drama in a time of crisis or uncertainty, God encourages his people in exile with the promise of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–28; Isa. 54:1–10).[207] With this new covenant, God will achieve his ideal: a theatre of his theodrama made up of actors who bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith so that God becomes visible on earth because they are a people where heaven and earth meet.

God will achieve this purpose by circumcising his people's hearts (Dt. 30:6). He will give them a new heart and a new spirit, i.e., he will make them into new creations by changing their being curved in on themselves and being self-enclosed, driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God

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choice of Zion in Ps, 132, de Jong points to the significance of the preposition "for" (*ki*) connecting verses 11–12 and verses 13–18. Accordingly, he writes, "If we want to take the word 'because' with which this sentence begins seriously, we have to explain this verse in such a way that the choice of Zion is placed under the promise to David as its solid ground" (de Jong, 2002:31).

[205] De Jong writes, "Thus, the election of Zion reinforces the unconditional promise in order to protect it from damage inherent in its conditional form" (de Jong, 2002:32; see also Williamson, 2007:138–139).

[206] Cf. de Jong, 2002:32; Burger, 2019:293.

[207] About the newness of the new covenant, Dumbrell writes, "In short, the 'new' will be its irrefragability. It will not be new because of new conditions which Yahweh will attach to it, nor because it is the product of a new historical epoch, nor because it will contain different promises, for indeed those attached to the Sinai covenant could hardly have been more comprehensive, but what will make it new is that in the new age *both* partners will keep it" (Dumbrell, 1984:178).

and unreceptive to his voice and give them a listening and thankful filial of the openness and responsiveness of faith (Ezek. 36:26–27; Thomas, 1993:238). Consequently, they will not live in the flesh, but in the Spirit of the Father and the Son with the law written on their hearts, performing and bearing witness to the life of heaven on earth (Ezek. 36:27, 33; Jer. 31:33; cf. Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Jl. 2:28–29; Ezek. 37:14; Zech. 12:10). As such, they will be born of God and live in God (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; cf. 1 Jn 4:15, 16). This Spirit will not depart from them (Isa. 59:21). Moreover, God will cleanse them of their sins, i.e., he will forgive them their sins and spiritually cleanse them from sin's effects (Ezek. 26:25; Jer. 31:34; Allen, 1990:179; Thomas, 1993:237–238).

Furthermore, God will achieve his purpose of having a theatre of his theodrama made up of actors who make him visible on earth by having his people return to the Promised Land where they will live under a Davidic king as one people, with he being their God and they being his people (Ezek. 34:23; 36:28; 28:25; 37:15–28; 39:28; Jer. 30:22, 24; 31:33; 32:38; 50:4), the temple restored (Ezek. 40–48), the nations incorporated into this covenant, as promised to Abraham (Ezek. 36:36; 37:28; Jer. 33:9; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 55:3–5; 56:4–8; 66:18–24), and the land/creation enjoying an abundant fruitfulness comparable to the Garden of Eden (Ezek. 36:34–35; Isa. 51:3). This will be nothing less than a resurrection from the dead and a new creation (Ezek. 37:1–14; 36:33–38). God will do this for the sake of his name (Ezek. 36:20–23).[208] Because this covenant is eternal (Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 37:26; Isa. 55:3; 61:8), it is also God's last covenant with Israel that will achieve what God always wanted with the drama of his mission for his glory: on earth as in heaven.[209] Thus, "while the restoration of the Jews in the Promised Land marked the beginning of the fulfillment of the new covenant promises, this was merely the beginning. The best was yet to come when the 'rest' foreshadowed in Joshua would find its ultimate consummation in the new heavens and the new earth" (Williamson, 2007:180; Robertson, 1980:299–300).[210]

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[208] Wright rightfully observes that God wants to be known and worshiped for who he is: the creator, the ruler, the judge, and the savior of the world (Wright, 2006:71–188).

[209] Robertson writes, "Because it [i.e., the new covenant] shall bring to full fruition that which God intends in redemption, it never shall be superseded by a subsequent covenant". He adds, "God's previous covenants may be regarded as 'everlasting' only insofar as they find their realization in the new covenant" (Robertson, 1980:277–278).

[210] Regarding continuity between the old and new covenant, see Burger, 2018a:14-18; 2019:295–296, 298; Dumbrell, 1984:177–178; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:547–562, 705–712; 2015:229–236; Robertson, 1980:280–300; Waltke, 2012:91–92; Williamson, 2007:180. When Gentry and Wellum assert that the old covenant was made up of believers and unbelievers while the new covenant is made up of only believers (Gentry and Wellum, 2018:555–556, 707–708; 2015:233–234), they forget that "the reality of the new covenant partly has a hidden and contested character, and is open to further eschatological realization in the future. This aspect is important when discussing the partly hidden character of Christ's reign, the restoration of Israel, the (im)perfection of the church, and the (im)perfection of Christian holiness". Moreover, they forget that "the church is a mixed community because not all church members are regenerate or remain faithful until the end, and the process of the writing of the law on the heart is unfinished, and the consequences and effects of sin are still felt notwithstanding the promise of complete forgiveness" (Burger, 2019:296).

### 2.3. Act three: the drama of the sending of God's Son as the theatre of the theodrama (2)

The third act of the drama of God's mission for his glory—or his communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts on the stage of this world—is the drama of the sending of his Son as Israel's substitute and representative to be the theatre of the theodrama.

This act will be sketched in six scenes. Scene one depicts the incarnation of the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Scene two portrays the baptism of the Son of God with water and the Spirit. Scene three shows the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit. Scene four depicts the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit. Scene five portrays the Son of God arising from the dead through the Holy Spirit and being vindicated as the Son of God through the Holy Spirit. Scene six shows us the Son of God ascending into heaven through the Holy Spirit and becoming the head and mediator of the new covenant and lord of the universe.

#### 2.3.1. Scene one: the incarnation of the Son of God through the Spirit

God began to fulfill the promises of the new covenant by having his son Israel return to the Promised Land. However, because by and large he did not circumcise their hearts; the generation that returned was no better than the generation that had been sent into exile (e.g., Isa. 56:9–12; 57:1–13; 58:1–14; 59:1–13). Because they too resisted the Holy Spirit (Ac. 7:51), they were not the theatre of his theodrama made up of actors who bore witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and who represented this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith so that God became visible on earth because they were a people where heaven and earth meet. So, God maintains his faithfulness to the creational purpose of the drama of his mission for his glory and his loving promise of a new covenant—the covenant in which he would make Israel into a new creation by circumcising their hearts and filling them with the Holy Spirit who would make them receptive to his voice, writing the law upon their hearts so that they would listen to and do his will and bear witness to the life of heaven on earth—by sending his own Son in our flesh as Israel's substitute and representative to be this theatre of his theodrama.

To make Israel into a new creation by circumcising their hearts and filling them with the Holy Spirit, the Son needed to be conceived and born through the Holy Spirit. For even though the Son possesses the Spirit as the eternal Son of the Father, for him to fill or baptize Israel with the Spirit he also needed to possess the Holy Spirit as a human being, because it is as the holy, incarnate Son of God that he would baptize Israel (Ac. 2:33).

Accordingly, the Son of God took on the flesh of an Israelite through the Holy Spirit as announced by an angel to Joseph and Mary (Mt. 1:18, 20; Lk. 1:35) so that, as the holy, incarnate Son of God, he could baptize or fill with the Holy Spirit (Macchia, 2018:3, 37, 158–166, 185; Torrance, 1996:31).[211]At the same time, when Jesus took on our flesh through the Holy Spirit, he identified with us and united himself with our human nature forever (Phil. 2:6–7). As such, "[w]e can become one with him because he first became one with us" (Letham, 2011:21).

### 2.3.2. Scene two: the Son of God baptized with water and the Spirit

Having been conceived and born by the Spirit, Jesus grows and becomes strong in the Spirit (Lk. 2:40, 42; cf. 1:80) as he spends time in the Scriptures (Lk. 2:46–47, 49) and in prayer (Mt 26:36, 39, 42, 44; Mk 1:35. 6:46. Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; Jn 11:41, 42; 17; Heb. 5:7). Moreover, having been conceived and born by the Spirit, Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan.

As God's son (Ex. 4:22–23; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Rom. 9:4), Israel would have been God's treasured possession among the nations, chosen to mediate the presence of God to the nations by being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory, if they had kept God's covenant by performing and bearing witness to God's perfect life on earth as in heaven through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. Because Israel failed, John calls Israel to repent and be baptized with a baptism of repentance "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Lk. 1:17) or else face the fire of God's coming judgment (Mt. 3:2–3, 7–12). Christ, however, identifies with Israel and is baptized just like Israel to fulfill all righteousness even though he as the true Israel does not need a baptism of repentance (Mt. 3:13–17). In submitting to baptism, as God's beloved Son, he publicly and officially becomes Israel's substitute and representative, "so that Israel can be freed from the curse of the law and . . . can finally fulfill its role: remove the curse of sin so that God's blessing can reach the nations (cf. Galatians 3:6–14)" (Burger, 2017c:101–102; 2020a:167).

Having identified with Israel as their substitute and representative when he was baptized by John in the Jordan, Jesus is also baptized or anointed with the Spirit when he rises from the water of his baptism. Whereas being anointed with oil in the Old Testament symbolized being publicly consecrated for being a prophet, priest, or king (Ex. 30:30; Nu. 3:3; 1 Sam. 10:1; 15:17; 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4; 1 Ki. 1:39; 19:16) and being empowered for these tasks by the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13; Zech. 4:1–6), Jesus is publicly consecrated and empowered for his task as Israel's prophet (Dt. 18:15, 17–19; Jn. 7:16; 8:28; 12:49–50; 14:24; Ac. 3:22–23), priest (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 4:14–16; 5:1–10; 7:11–28; 9:11–14; 10:8–12, 19–

[211] Macchia writes, "He is conceived by the Spirit to be the Spirit baptizer, to bear flesh that will incorporate in itself all flesh. The incorporation of all peoples into himself as his own body by the Spirit has its embryo in the Son's uniting himself by the Spirit to flesh at the virginal conception". Moreover, "The mediation of the Spirit at the incarnation is sanctifying, for Jesus is conceived as the holy Son of God (Luke 1:35)" (Macchia, 2018:163).

22; 1 Tim. 2:5), and king (Ps. 110:1–2; Mt. 22:42; Lk. 1:31–33; Rev. 1:5; 19:16) directly by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16). Accordingly, Jesus will fulfill his mission in the power of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 61:1–2; Lk. 4:18).

However, Jesus is not only baptized with the Holy Spirit to be empowered for his mission as Israel's true prophet, priest, and king. He is also baptized with the Holy Spirit because he will baptize Israel with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost since he permanently possessed the Spirit "without measure", i.e., fully (Jn. 3:34; 1:33; 7:38–39; 20:22; Ac. 1:5; 2:17, 33; 10:44–47; Col. 1:19; Macchia, 2018:184–185; Burger, 2017c:221). When he performs this baptism, God's ideal will begin to be fulfilled: a theatre of his theodrama made up of actors who bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and who represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth through filial openness and responsiveness by trustfully listening to and doing his will so that God becomes visible on earth because they are a people where heaven and earth meet. Thus, Jesus' baptism with the Spirit at the Jordan meaningfully ties together his conception by the Holy Spirit and his baptizing with the Holy Spirit as the climax of his ministry and the fulfillment of Israel's hope of the promise of the new covenant (Macchia, 2018:242).[212]

**2.2.2. Scene three: the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Spirit**

Having identified with Israel when he was baptized by John in the Jordan and having been anointed or baptized with the Spirit when he rose from the water of his baptism, Jesus continues to identify with Israel by offering the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative to deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil. This begins with his being led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days where he is tempted by the devil concerning his relationship with himself, the world, and God (van Bruggen, 1993:116; Lk. 4:1–13). However, where Adam and Eve and Israel failed, Jesus, as the faithful Adam and true Israel, passes the devil's temptations in the power of the Spirit.

Having passed the devil's temptations in the power of the Spirit, as a prophet, like John the Baptist before him, Christ calls Israel to faith and repentance in the power of the Spirit and summons

[212] Macchia writes, "Though impressive patristic evidence can be mustered from the fourth and fifth centuries granting the reception of the Spirit at the Jordan a significant role to play, the classic creeds of the church (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition) do not mention it, nor Christ's bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost, for that matter". He adds, "The creeds focus theologically on the eternal Son's taking on flesh at the incarnation in order to die and rise again. While this confession is orthodox as far as it goes (cf. Heb. 2:14), it does not go far enough" (Macchia, 2018:190). Wright comes to the same conclusion in what he calls "The Missing Middle" (Wright, 2016:3–24).

Israel to believe the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand/come near[213] in order "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Lk. 1:17) or else face the fire of God's coming judgment (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14–15; cf. Lk. 4:18; Isa. 61:1–2; Mt. 7:13–27; 11:24–30; 18:23–35; 20:1–16; 21:18–27, 33–44; 22:1–14; 24:1–51; 25:1–46; Lk. 13:1–8, 22–30; Lk. 16:1–31; 18:1–8). This kingdom had been prophesied by Daniel, who said that a day would come when God would destroy the kingdoms of this world and set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; 7:11–14; cf. Rev. 11:15). It had been proclaimed by John the Baptist as well, when he called people to repent and be baptized with a baptism of repentance (Mt. 3:1–12; Mk. 1:3–8; Lk. 3:2–27). Because this kingdom of heaven is a realm which one will inherit (1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) and into which one must enter (Mt. 5:20; 7:13–14; 18:3; Jn. 3:5), Israel needs to repent and believe the Father's good news of this coming kingdom by being born again and believing in Jesus Christ as their substitute and representative (Mt. 5:3, 20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:24; 25:34; Mk. 9:47; Jn. 3:3, 5; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5; Jas. 2:5). When they do, he forgives them their sins so that they can enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 9:2, 6; Lk. 7:47–48, 50; cf. Mic. 7:18–19). Moreover, they will be able to call God their Father because they participate in Jesus' status and communion of love with the Father (Mt 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 8, 9, 14, 26, 32; 7:11; 18:14; Lk 11:13; cf. Ro 8:14–17; 2 Co 6:18; 1 Jn. 3:1).

Christ not only proclaimed the Father's good news of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven in the power of the Spirit, but he also demonstrated the good news of the nearness of the kingdom by healing the sick in the power of the Spirit (Lk. 4:14; 5:17). His preaching of the good news of the coming kingdom of heaven "went hand in hand with his 'healing every disease and sickness among the people' (Matt. 4:23–24; 9:35; Mark 1:39" (van Bruggen, 1999:83). In the coming kingdom of heaven, we will be

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[213] With regard to the kingdom of heaven being near, van Bruggen writes, "The proximity [of the kingdom] does not primarily refer to time ('it's almost there'), but to spatial proximity ('it's close by'). . . . John knew that the Messiah would come directly after him: He was already born and was near (as near as the distance from Nazareth to the Jordan River)! When the Lord Jesus begins to preach, He is near Israel. . . . And now the kingdom of heaven is as close to the people as the King walking in their streets." He adds, "Today that Savior is in heaven, but that is not far away. Heaven (invisible to us) is as close as the palace adjacent to the forecourt. In faith we see Him there at Father's right hand. . . . With Jesus' coming, the kingdom of heaven has come near. That is not the same as 'having come'". He concludes, "Precisely the preaching of the nearness [of the kingdom] makes clear that it is not a question of 'is it here or not?' The real question is: 'Are *we* ready to believe in that kingdom of Jesus and to expect it?'. Good news: the kingdom is already near. Now the question: Where are you staying?" (van Bruggen, 2014b), *contra* those who understand the kingdom primarily as the expansion of God's rule in Christ and thus being already here (e.g. Allison, 2012:183–187; Bartholomew and Goheen, 2004:129–135; Beale, 2011:428–437; Duvall and Hays, 2019:172–173; Gentry and Wellum, 215:243–252; 2018:648–654; Goldsworthy, 2004:615–620; Ladd, 1974; Perrin, 2019:23–98, 152–168; Ridderbos, 1962; Schreiner, 2008:41–79; Vos, 1948:372–386; Waltke, 2012:49–71; Wright, 1996:172, 191–196; Yarbrough, 2012:95–123). About this expansion of the rule of God in Christ, van Bruggen writes, "So when the gospel of the kingdom of God resounds from John the Baptist, it is not about *expanding* the power of God on earth: He is and always has been the Almighty on earth and always will be! That is reality, not nearness" (van Bruggen, 2014a). While the proximity of the kingdom does not refer primarily to time, it does also refer to time when we consider that Scripture uses the same word (*eggizo*) for the kingdom being near and the end being near (Lk. 21:31; Rom. 13:12; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7).

immortal and incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:49–50). Accordingly, there will be no death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4). To demonstrate the nearness of the coming kingdom, Jesus heals the sick who are brought to him and who place their faith in him.[214] He even raises the dead in the power of the Spirit! (Mk. 5:35–42; Lk. 7:11–17; Jn. 11:37–44; Mt. 27:51–53).[215] What is more, he also casts out demons in the power of the Spirit to demonstrate that the kingdom of heaven, where Satan will have been crushed, has come near (Mt. 4:24; 8:16–17; 10:1; Lk. 6:18).[216]

In passing the devil's temptations in the power of the Spirit, proclaiming the Father's good news of the coming kingdom of heaven in the power of the Spirit, and demonstrating the good news of the coming kingdom of heaven by healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead in the power of the Spirit, as a priest Jesus was surrendering his life to his Father and thankfully offering him the sacrifice of his life through the power of the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative.[217] He continued to do this by perfectly keeping the law of love because Israel failed to keep this law of love (Mt. 3:15; 5:17; Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 4:4–5; Phil. 2:8; 3:9; Rom. 5:19). What he preached about the lifestyle that leads to the coming kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5–7), he also practiced himself, even when people disappointed him, opposed him, wanted to kill him, and betrayed him (Burger, 2017c:100–101; 2020a:160–161). He was poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and pure in heart. He never had any unrighteous

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[214] Van Bruggen writes, "Jesus demands *faith* when he heals. People must have faith in him if they are to be healed. When that faith is absent, he cannot do signs and wonders (as in Nazareth, Mark 6:5–6), not because his power is inadequate, but because the gifts of heaven are sent only through him, and only to believers" (van Bruggen, 1999:84).

[215] Van Bruggen writes, "These healings are part of a program of *preaching* and must not be isolated from it. The miracles *show* that the kingdom of heaven is really around the corner. Its blessings are already being felt!" (van Bruggen, 1999:83).

[216] Concerning Mt. 12:28 where Jesus says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you", van Bruggen writes, "Every time he drives out evil spirits by the power of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of heaven has come to earth and touches people (Matt. 12:28). These exorcisms are like invading troops landing in hostile territory" (van Bruggen, 1999:86). Elsewhere he writes, "It is not Jesus' intention to make a statement about whether God's kingdom has already been fully established, or is in the process of advancing. The expression *ephthasen eph' humas* means that God's kingdom has now 'come to you' or 'reached you'." He adds, "The discussion, however, is not about how exactly that kingdom will become reality, but about whether one is currently dealing with phenomena of *God's* kingdom or *Satan's* kingdom. Jesus states that the reality of the casting out of these demons is a presentation of *God's* kingdom and of the arrival of this new messianic reign in Israel. This verse does not deal with the further course of events concerning the establishment of that kingdom" (van Bruggen, 1990:227–228). Thus, he writes, "In Matthew 12:28 (compare Luke 11:20), we read that *in the person of Jesus* the kingdom of God is presented to his contemporaries. It reaches them through Jesus. Those who do not want to seek it through him will fail to find it" (van Bruggen, 1999:81). This is also van Bruggen's interpretation of Lk. 17:21 where Jesus says, "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." He writes, "The presentation of the kingdom is so humble and modest that mocking Pharisees can ask just *when* it is coming—failing to notice that it is already in their midst (Luke 17:21)" (van Bruggen, 1993:320–321).

[217] Torrance writes, "Jesus comes to be the priest of creation to do for us, men and women, what we failed to do, to offer to the Father the worship and the praise we failed to offer, to glorify God by a life of perfect love and obedience, to be the one true servant of the Lord" (Torrance, 1996:14).

anger or impurity in his heart. He never retaliated or was anxious. He loved his enemies, praying for them and even laying down his life for them (Lk. 23:34; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 Pet. 2:23–22).

**2.3.4. Scene four: the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Spirit**

Earlier we saw that when God gave Adam and Eve the mission to fill the earth and to subdue it, he gave them the mission to spread the life of the Garden of Eden out over the whole earth and, in doing, to participate in the drama of his mission for his glory. However, because they failed to carry out this mission through the spirit of filial openness and responsiveness to God, they spread over the whole earth a life of sin and death, with the devil being the god of this world. When God called Abram and Sarai to participate in the drama of his mission for his glory, he wanted to use them as a new Adam and Eve to deal with the problem caused by their sin and be a blessing for the nations by inviting them and creation into his Sabbath rest by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. When God made his first covenant with Israel at Sinai, he wanted to use them in the same way. If they would keep his covenant, they would be his treasured possession that would function as a kingdom of priests, mediating the presence of God to the nations by performing and bearing witness to the splendour of his perfect life through participating in his life and living in his loving presence. Moreover, they would function as a holy nation, set apart from the other nations and consecrated to God as the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory. Furthermore, they would function as God's servant, being a light to the nations by bringing God's justice to them. However, because Israel, even under the leadership of the house of David, failed to function as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and God's servant, they not only failed to deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin and to be a blessing for the nations by inviting them and creation into his Sabbath rest by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit; they also called the curse of the law down upon themselves, the ultimate curse being the condemnation of death (Dt. 27:26; Jer. 11:3; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 3:10).

God comes to the rescue of the drama of his mission for his glory and maintains his faithfulness to his promise of a new covenant and his love for creation and humanity by continuing to have Christ identify with Israel. Having identified with them in the sacrifice of his life as their substitute and representative, he also identifies with them with the sacrifice of his death. His death reveals "what happens when God approaches the world with his salvation" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:478).

Jesus is not only opposed and ridiculed; he also needs to be eliminated (Lk. 20:9–18). In the process of being eliminated, Jesus becomes the victim of horrible injustice as he, though innocent, is condemned to death as a blasphemer and crucified as a political threat. Thus, "[a]t its core, the suffering of Jesus is the result of the violence, honesty, cowardice, and treason of the people towards him. . . . People got rid of Jesus because he was in their way" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:479). Yet,

God uses this terrible injustice done to Jesus by using his suffering and death to deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil and bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations (Ac 2:23).[218]

Accordingly, knowing why he had taken on human flesh as the eternal Son of God, Jesus predicts his death (and resurrection) several times before it takes place (Mt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19; Mk. 8:31; 10:33; Lk. 9:22, 44; 18:32–33). On one of the occasions, he indicates that he must suffer and die (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; 9:31; Lk. 9:22). This ultimately referred to the fact that he had come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Burger, 2017c:100).

Because Jesus knew he had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, "he signed his own death sentence by entering Jerusalem on a donkey" as Israel's king "and bringing the temple service to a halt" (Burger, 2017c:101; Mt. 21:1–17; Mk. 11:1–11, 15–18; Lk. 19:29–40, 45–46; Jn. 12:12–19). Shortly thereafter he celebrates the Passover with his disciples and gives the elements of bread and wine a new interpretation, interpreting the bread as his body and the wine as his blood of the new covenant, clearly alluding to the blood of the old covenant (Lk. 22:19–20; Ex. 24:8; Mt. 26:26–28; Mk. 14:22–24). Moreover, he asserts that he will not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drinks it new in the kingdom of his Father (Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25). In interpreting the elements of bread and wine in this manner, Jesus is interpreting his imminent death as the means that will bring about a new exodus that will deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil once and for all (cf. Burger, 2017c:101; Wright, 2002:155–156).

After fighting an intense spiritual battle about doing the will of his heavenly Father and drinking the cup of his wrath (Mt. 26:36–46; Mk. 14:32–42; Lk. 22:40–46), Jesus is betrayed and arrested (Mt. 26:47–56; Mk. 14:43–50; Lk. 22:47–53). After he is led before the Sanhedrin who condemned him to death as a blasphemer (Mt. 26:57–68; Mk. 14:53–65; Jn. 18:12–13, 19–24), he is led before Pilate, the governor, who condemned him to death by crucifixion for claiming to be a king (Mt. 27:11–26; Mk. 15:2–15; Lk. 23:2–3, 18–25). In being condemned to death, though innocent, Jesus not only continued to identify with Israel; he also identified with victims of injustice (Burger, 2017c:86, 90–91, 227–228).

#### 2.3.5. Scene five: the Son of God vindicated as the Son of God through the Spirit

Earlier we saw that God promised that a son of Adam and Eve would deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil caused by their sin (Gen. 3:15). We also saw that a son of Abraham would deal with the problem caused by their sin and invite humanity and creation into his Sabbath rest by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Gen. 12:3). We further saw that a son of David would rule Israel as his treasured possession that would truly mediate the presence of God to the nations by performing and bearing witness to the splendour of his perfect life through participating in his life and living in his loving

[218] I am aware that the distinction between the sacrifice of Jesus' life and the sacrifice of his death is not an absolute distinction since the sacrifice of his death is, strictly speaking, still part of the sacrifice of his life. However, I am using this distinction primarily as a *theological* distinction.

presence because it was set apart from the other nations and consecrated to God as the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory (Ex. 19:5, 6; 2 Sam. 7:12–16). Moreover, we saw that when God promised to make a new covenant with Israel, this covenant was compared to the resurrection of the dead and a new creation (Ezek. 37:1–14; 36:33–38). Accordingly, many Jews believed in a bodily resurrection from the dead when God would intervene in history and set things right with the renewal of creation, the destruction of Israel's enemies, and the restoration of Israel as the true people of God (Wright, N., 1992:321–332; 1996:126–127, 255–256; 2008b:46–47; Burger, 2017c:53–54).

When the Holy Spirit raises Jesus from the dead, God begins to do this. Jesus had not only predicted his death; he had also announced he would rise from the dead (Mt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19; Mk. 8:31; 10:33–34; Lk. 9:22; 18:32–33). In doing so, he linked his resurrection to his death. When he does rise from the dead, he rises with a glorified resurrection body as the first fruits of God's new creation as a fulfillment of the promise of a new covenant (Jn. 11:25–26; Ac. 2:24; Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:20–23; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5, 18; cf. Ezek. 37:1–14; 36:33–38).

### 2.3.6. Scene six: the Son of God ascends into heaven through the Spirit

Even though many Jews believed in a bodily resurrection from the dead when God would intervene in history and set things right with the renewal of creation, the destruction of Israel's enemies, and the restoration of Israel as the true people of God, they did not believe that the Messiah would have to die to achieve that goal (Lk. 24:1–49; Jn. 20:24–29). Accordingly, even though Jesus had announced his resurrection from the dead, none of Jesus' followers initially believed he had arisen (Mt. 28:1–10; Jn. 20:11–18; cf. Mt. 16:22; Lk. 9:45; 18:34). Moreover, even though Jesus appeared to some of his followers after his resurrection from the dead (Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:13–30, 34, 36–49, 50–53; Jn. 20:16, 19–29; 21:1–14; Ac. 1:1–11; 1 Cor. 15:5–7), no one had been present when Jesus arose from the dead, giving the resurrection "the character of a miraculous mystery . . . the beginning of something new that still remains unknown to us . . . the beginning of a new creation, in which death is conquered and sin defeated. What that really means for us at this time is still unimaginable" (Burger, 2017c:78; cf. 77–79; cf. Lk. 24:31, 36; Jn. 20:19; Rom. 8:17–25; 1 Cor. 15:35–44; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Forty days after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus ascends into heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit where he inherits the glory of God as he is glorified with the glory that he had in his Father's presence, the glory that he had with him before the world existed (Lk. 24:50–53; Ac. 1:9–11; Jn. 17:5, 24; Burger, 2008:532).[219] The disciples who are present at his ascension only see him ascending; they do not see him entering heaven because "a cloud took him out of their sight" (Ac. 1:9).

[219] The ascension through the power of the Holy Spirit can seen also in 1 Pet. 3:18–19, 22. Having been made alive through the Spirit, Christ also ascended into heaven through the same Spirit. The very fact of his ascension was a proclamation to the spirits in prison of his victory over his adversaries (van Houwelingen, 1991:130–138; see also

Consequently, the two angels who were also present need to tell them that Jesus had ascended into heaven (Ac. 1:11). While a cloud reveals God's glory or his presence (Ex. 40:34–38; 1 Ki. 8:10; Lk. 9:34–35; Lk. 21:27), it also conceals his glorious presence (Ex. 40:35; 1 Ki. 8:11–12). Thus, as the resurrection has a hidden character, so also the ascension has a hidden character because it conceals Christ's glorious presence since he is now hidden in the glory of God (Col. 3:3; cf. Burger, 2017c:79; Kamphuis, 2015:9–11).[220]

Moreover, those who have been made alive together with Christ through faith participate in Christ being hidden in the glory of the Father. Their life is hidden with Christ in God because they are seated with him in the heavenly places (Col. 3:3; Eph. 2:5–6). Accordingly, also their life has a hidden and mysterious character like Christ's life (Burger, 2017c:79–80; Kamphuis, 2015:16–17).

Having triumphantly ascended into heaven, Christ is rewarded for his obedience by being given "the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow," in fulfillment of Ps. 110 (Phil. 2:9–10; Mk. 12:35–37; Burger, 2017c:80). From heaven, Christ continues to participate in the drama of his Father's mission for his glory through filial openness and responsiveness so that "that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10).

### 2.4. Act four: the drama of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church: the theatre of the theodrama (3)

The fourth act of the drama of God's mission for his glory or his communicative activity of mutual glorification through filial openness and responsiveness that he enacts on the stage of this world is the drama of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church so that church can be the theatre of the drama of God mission for his glory. Because the new covenant is made with Israel in Christ, its representative, the church on which the Holy Spirit is poured out is the reconstitution and expansion of Israel as the New Testament church (cf. Burger, 2019:294–295, 298; Wright, 2013:774–1042).

This act will be sketched in two scenes. Scene one depicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church. Scene two portrays the church performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ.

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Kistemaker, 1987:141, 150). Allison and Köstenberger argue that Jesus' ascension into heaven through the Spirit is an implication of his descent into Mary's womb through the Holy Spirit. They write, "God the Father sends God the Son on his earthly mission which begins with the Holy Spirit effecting the incarnation and ends with the Spirit's effecting the ascension. . . . As the Holy Spirit works the descent of the Son into the earthly womb of the virgin Mary, so the Spirit works the ascent of the Son to the heavenly throne room. From heaven to earth and back again: the work of the Holy Spirit" (Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:360–361).

[220] The fact that Jesus' ascension conceals his glory has implications for understanding the so-called states of Christ, i.e., his humiliation and his exaltation. Instead of understanding these states as a rigid, historical progression, they also need to be understood in a dialectical manner. Thus, Horton correctly writes, "So, we see not simply a progression from the state of humiliation to that of exaltation, or from prophet to priest and finally king, but a dialectic of cross and glory" (Horton, 2005a:258; Kamphuis, 2015:11). Kamphuis adds, "Humiliation continues in his exaltation. For he is hidden. He can still be misunderstood and mocked. Even his sufferings are filled up in the suffering of his own" (Kamphuis, 2015:11).

### 2.4.1. Scene one: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church

Having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and anointed or baptized with the Holy Spirit at the Jordan, having offered the Father the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death through the Spirit, having been vindicated by the Spirit, and having ascended into heaven through the Spirit to be exalted at the right hand of his Father, Jesus received from his Father the promise of the new covenant Spirit and poured this Spirit out on the church on the day of Pentecost as the climax of Israel's history and the history of his life (Ac. 2:33).[221]

When the day of Pentecost arrives,[222] a group of about 120 people, including the disciples, are all in one place (Ac. 2:1). Suddenly, they are baptized with the Holy Spirit (Ac. 2:2). As a result, they all begin to proclaim the mighty works of God in different languages as the Spirit enables them (Ac. 2:4–11), symbolizing the incorporation of the nations into Israel.[223]

Participating in the drama of God's mission for his glory by participating in Christ's prophetic ministry from heaven, Peter, in response to the people's confusion (Ac. 2:13), explains that what is happening is the fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh.[224] Continuing to participate in Christ's prophetic ministry from heaven, Peter then goes on to preach the history of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension to encourage his audience to call upon the name of the Lord (Ac. 2:22–36).

When many in the audience ask what they should do because the Spirit has convicted them of sin (cf. Jn. 16:8, 9), Peter calls them to repentance. Moreover, he calls them to be baptized in the name of Jesus, symbolizing their dying with Christ to their old life and their rising with Christ to a new life (Rom. 6:3–11; Col. 2:11–12). When they do, they will receive forgiveness of their sins. Moreover, they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of God's promise in the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Isa.

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[221] *Contra* Burger who refers to the resurrection as the climax of Israel's history and the history of Jesus' life (Burger, 2017c:58, 72, 77; see also Wright, who falls short of seeing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the climax of Israel's history and the history of Jesus' life, Wright, 2012:*passim*; 2016:205, 208, 312, 357).

[222] The day of Pentecost had agricultural associations because it celebrated the beginning of the grain harvest. Accordingly, it was also called the Feast of Weeks that celebrated the first fruits of the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:22; Lev. 23:15–17; Nu. 28:26; Stott, 1990:612–62: Wright, 2008a:21). Pentecost also had historical associations because it celebrated the giving of the law at Mount Sinai which was considered to have occurred fifty days after the exodus from Egypt (Stott, 1990:62; Wright, 2008a:21). These two associations could symbolize the gift of the Spirit as the first-fruits (Rom. 8:23) of God's eschatological future (Rom. 8:23; Van Eck, 2003:55) and the Spirit writing the law on the hearts of members of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Stott, 1990:62) so that Israel would be able to fulfill its mission of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations (cf. Wright, 2008a:21).

[223] Stott writes that the speaking of other languages symbolizes the universality of the church (Stott, 1990:63). Moreover, the curse of the tower of Babel is reversed.

[224] For the expression "last days" or similar ones, see also 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; Ju. 18; 1 Jn. 2:18. These expressions do not refer to the future, but to the time in which people lived, viz. the time between Jesus' ascension and his return (van Eck. 2003:65). The expression "all flesh" applies, in the first place, to the 120 people gathered together in the house. As such, these 120 represent all Israel (van Eck, 2003:65–66; cf. 47). The Spirit being poured out on all Israel is an initial fulfillment of Nu. 13:29 (van Eck, 2003:66).

32:15; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Jl. 2:28–29). Furthermore, this promise of receiving the Spirit will also be fulfilled for "all those all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself", i.e., those Jews living in the dispersion further away from Jerusalem and the nations among whom they live (Ac. 2:39; Gal. 3:14; van Eck, 2003:79–80). In this way, God will fulfill his promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

#### 2.4.2. Scene two: the church performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ

Earlier we saw that because Christ surrendered his life to his Father and offered him the sacrifice of his life through the power of the Holy Spirit, not only as Israel's substitute but also as its representative, Israel participated in the story of the sacrifice of his life to his Father and was sanctified in him. We also saw that in dying a death on the cross, Christ made atonement for Israel's sin through expiating or removing it from God's sight and propitiating or stilling his wrath so that, in him, Israel is reconciled to God and freed from the curse of the law and the power of the devil. Furthermore, we saw that because Jesus rose from the dead as Israel's representative, Israel participated in his resurrection from the dead and was justified in him and has its new life in him. What is in Christ, Israel's representative, can be summed up as the resurrection life of God's new creation (Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5; O'Donovan, 1994:*passim*).

However, if God would achieve his ideal—having Israel be the theatre of his theodrama, made up of actors who perform and bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and who represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth through filial openness and responsiveness by trustfully listening to and doing his will so that God becomes visible on earth because they are a people where heaven and earth meet—he would have to do more than have Christ do things *for* Israel. He would also need to have Christ do things *in* the hearts of the people of his new covenant community through the Holy Spirit.[225]

Christ would have to circumcise or regenerate their hearts and make them into new creations by changing their being curved in on themselves and being self-enclosed, driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God and unreceptive to his voice. He would have to give them a spirit of filial openness and responsiveness to trustfully listen to and do his will by filling or baptizing them with the

[225] While this study does not operate with a twofold soteriological structure where Christ purchases benefits of salvation and the Holy Spirit applies these benefits, the point that Calvin makes about this structure can be applied to our distinction between what Christ has done *for* us and what he also needs to do *in* us through his Spirit. Calvin says that "we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us" (Calvin, 1960:III:537).

Holy Spirit and increasingly incorporating them into his communion of love with the Father and making them one with him, so that they can bear witness to what is in Christ through the Holy Spirit by putting on Christ through faith and clothing themselves with him so that they receive the mind of Christ (Jn. 1:12–13; 3:4–5; 4:13–14; 6:35, 53–58; 7:37–39; 8:31–32; 10:3, 27; 14:19, 21; 15:4–5, 7–8, 10–12, 16; 17:11, 20–23, 26; 20:21; Rom. 8:9–10; 12:5; 13:14; 15:3, 5; 1 Cor. 3:11, 16; 6:17, 19; 10:16; 11:1; 12:27; Gal. 3:1–5, 27; 4:6; Eph, 1:22–23; 2:21–22; 4:10, 13; 5:2; Col. 1:18; 2:9–10, 19; 3:12; 1 Pet. 1:23; 2:21; 4:1; 1 Jn. 2:6; 4:15–16; 5:20; cf.1 Cor. 2:16).[226]

Being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation through the Holy Spirit is an incarnational life because it manifests our being joined to the glorified human Christ in heaven through the bond of the Holy Spirit as members of his body (Rom. 12:4–5; Eph. 1:23; 4:12; 5:23, 30; 1 Cor. 12:12, 14–20, 27).[227] This incarnational life involves being the anointed presence of Jesus on earth where we look at those in need with the compassionate eyes of Jesus (Lk. 7:13), listen to those in need with the merciful ears of Jesus (Mt. 9:27–31), speak into the lives of the lost with the prophetic mouth of Jesus (Mt. 9:35–38), give to the hungry with the loving hands of Jesus (Mt. 14:13–21), and go to those in need with the ministering feet of Jesus (Ac. 10:38).

Being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory that performs and bears witness through the Holy Spirit to the resurrection life of God's new creation is a cruciform life because it manifests our having died and been buried together with Christ (Rom. 6:3–11; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:11–13). This cruciform life is a life of daily putting off our old self in Adam (Eph. 4:22, 24; Col. 3:9). This involves denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus (Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27; Gal. 2:20; 1 Jn. 3:16).[228] In losing our lives in this manner and following Jesus, we will paradoxically find it in his death and resurrection (Mt. 10:39; 16:25; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24; 17:33; Jn.

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[226] Most of these Scripture references come from Burger's illuminating chapter on images for union with Christ (Burger, 2017c:140–194). In a summary statement about our union with Christ through faith and the Spirit, he writes, "When we come to faith, we discover: we are in Christ and he is in us. Union with Christ is given through faith in Christ. Those who do not believe can read about this union, but do not know this union from personal experience." He adds, "Nevertheless, union with Christ remains a deep mystery for those who believe. Nowhere does the Bible give a description of that union or of the creation of that union. Many images are used to indicate that union and to clarify it, as we have seen: the true bread that we eat, the good shepherd and his sheep, the vine and the branches, clothing we put on, a body, a body with a head, a marriage, a building or a temple with Christ as its cornerstone or as a foundation." He concludes, "All these images show something, but at the same time it appears that these images cannot simply determine conceptually what the place of Christ himself is. If—as Christians believe—there is union with Christ, then it is a divine reality. And wherever we encounter a divine reality, we discover something bigger than we can comprehend, but therefore all the more real" (Burger, 2017c:183–184).

[227] Thus, this incarnational life is a participatory life through union with Christ. I am aware that the incarnation as such is a one-time event and as such unrepeatable (see Billings, 2011:123–165).

[228] About denying ourselves and taking up our cross, van Bruggen writes, "How complete our self-denial needs to be can be seen in the other expression Jesus uses for it: taking up his cross. The cross is a Roman means of execution. Whoever takes up the cross, is going to die" (van Bruggen, 1988:190).

12:25–26; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; 4:6–8; Rev. 2:10–11; 7:14–17; 12:11). Putting off our old self in Adam also involves no longer being a slave to sin (Rom. 6:2, 7, 11, 15–23; 8:12–13; 12:17, 19, 21; 13:13–14; Gal. 5:19–21, 24; Eph. 2:3; 4:25–31; 5:3–7, 11–12, 18; Col 2:20; 3:5–9; 1 Cor. 6:9–10, 12–19; 2 Cor. 12:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:3–6; 5:22; 1 Tim. 5:22; Ti. 2:12; 3:3; Jas. 3:14–16; 4:1 Pet. 2:11, 24; 1 Pet. 4:1–4; 1 Jn. 3:4, 8–9). Putting off the old self in Adam further involves leading a counter-cultural life (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:26–28; 3:19; 4:19, 13; 5:9–11; 7:28, 31, 33–34; 11:32; 2 Cor. 7:10; Gal. 4:3, 9; 6:14; Eph. 2:2; Phil. 2:15; Col. 2:8, 20; 2 Tim. 4:9; Ti. 2:12; Jas. 1:27; 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; 2:20; 1 Jn. 2:15–17; 3:2, 13; 4:4–6; 5:4–5, 19).[229] Leading a cruciform life of daily putting off our old self in Adam by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus as those who are no longer slaves to sin and live a counter-cultural life will involve spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:3–5; Rom. 8:37; Eph. 6:10–20; 2 Thess. 3:3; Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8–9; Rev. 12:13–17) and a participation in the sufferings and death of Christ (Mt. 5:11; 10:22, 25; 24:9; Jn. 15:18–25; Ac. 5:41; Rom. 8:17–23; 2 Cor. 1:5; 2:16; 4:9–12, 16–18; 5:14–17; 12:9–10; Gal. 2:19–20; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:14).[230] Moreover, through these sufferings, the crucified Christ is increasingly formed in us (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; cf. 2:20). However, these sufferings "are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).[231]

Being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation through the Holy Spirit is an *anastiform* or resurrectional[232] life because it manifests our having arisen together with Christ. This resurrectional life is a life of daily putting on our new self in Christ (Eph. 4:22, 24; Col. 3:9). This involves having Christ form himself in us as he lives the resurrection life of God's new creation in and through us (Jn. 6:57; 15:1–17; Gal. 2:20;

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[229] About this cruciform counter-cultural life, Burger writes, "Pentecost gives perseverance and hope to live a cruciform life: to be present at the place of the cross and to share in Christ's suffering: where I am confronted with my own sin, with brokenness and pain, with the social and ecological injustice in the world, with persecution and temptation, with the experience of being forsaken by God. Expectantly, we may look forward to the Spirit of God's love, who, through our efforts, overcomes evil through his goodness" (Burger, 2021b).

[230] About "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions," van Eck, pointing his readers to Ac. 4:24 and Rev. 6::11, writes, "The thought behind this is that Christ only bore part of the suffering that one has to endure for his name in this world. The remainder is for his followers. Paul sees the imprisonment he is now undergoing for the cause of Christ and his congregation as part of this suffering that is still lacking" (van Eck, 2007:121). About the word "suffering", Burger writes, "The word that is used for 'suffering' in the Greek, however, is never used in connection with the dying of Christ for our sins. It about suffering that belongs to the end time, all kinds of trouble or oppression, but not to deal with the problem of our sin. In other words, it's not about participating in Christ's suffering and death for our sin" (Burger, 2017c:208).

[231] About "the sufferings of this present time", van Bruggen writes, "The 'sufferings of this present time' are not limited to persecution. It is all suffering related to the time in which we live. This time is characterized by the reign of Sin resulting in death (5:12–21)". He adds, "The sufferings of this present time include the degeneration of society as outlined in 1:24–32. This suffering is thus closely related to the reality of people who experience the reality of Sin (5:12). Precisely Christians, like Lot in Sodom, will suffer injustice and sin in this world. In this injustice and sin, Christ's kingship is not acknowledged. Those who are of Christ suffer this with him in this time" (van Bruggen, 2006:121; see also Burger, 2017c:206, 224).

[232] For the term and concept of "resurrectional", see Gorman, 2019:53–76.

4:19; 5:22–23; Eph. 1:19–20; 2:5, 10; 3:16–17; Phil. 1:21; 2:13; 4:13; Col. 2:6–7, 10). This resurrection life of God's new creation is a manifestation of the wholeness of the different facets of a life of love for God and one's neighbour (Mt. 5–7; Rom.12–14, 16–18, 22; 8:1–11; 9:11–21; 13:1–10, 14; 14:1–23; 15:1–7; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:1–20; 7:1–40; 8:1–13; 9:4–6, 12, 15, 18; 10:23–33; 11:1–34; 13:1–13; 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 1:5–11; 6:14–18; 8:1–14; 9:6–15; Gal. 6:1–10; Eph. 4:25, 28–29, 32; 5:1, 15–33; 6:1–20; Phil. 1:9–11, 27; 2:1–5, 14–18; 3:17; 4:1–9; Col. 3:10–25; 4:1–6; 1 Thess. 4:9–12; 5:12–18; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:5, 13–15; 1 Tim. 5:1–25; 6:1–2, 11–21; 2 Tim. 1:3–14; 2:1–26; 4:1–5; Ti. 2:1–15; 3:1–11; Philem. 1:17–18; Heb. 4:1–11; 10:22–25; 12:1–17; 13:1–19; Jas. 1–5; 1 Pet. 1:13–25; 2:13–25; 3:1–7; 4:7–11; 1 Jn. 4:12, 15–16; Rev. 2–3). Leading a cruciform and resurrectional life will involve spiritual warfare and a participating in the sufferings of Christ (Mt. 5:10–12; 10:18–22; 2 Tim. 2:3, 9; Heb. 10:32; Jas. 5:10, 13; 1 Pet. 2:19–20; 3:14, 17; 4:13–16). However, as with the sufferings that accompany leading a cruciform life, so also the sufferings that accompany living a resurrectional life "fill[…] up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" and "are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Col. 1:24; Rom. 8:18).

Being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation through the Holy Spirit is an ascensional life because it manifests our having been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 1:20; 2:7; Col. 1:13).[233] This ascensional life of daily putting on our ascensional self and performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ involves our participating in the drama of Christ as priest, "the mediator of worship",[234] glorifying the Father in heavenly worship when we come to worship together on earth (Heb. 2:12; 8:2; 12:22–24). On earth as in heaven! As such, the drama of our worship on earth is "the echo" of the drama of worship taking place in heaven (Torrance, 1996:14). This also involves a participation in the drama of his prayers in heaven (Lk. 22:31–32; Jn. 17:9–21; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:13–16; 6:20; 7:25–28; 8:1–6; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1–2; cf. Rom. 8:26–27). The drama of these prayers includes not only the prayers for ourselves but also our prayers for the world (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:1–4; Burger, 2017c:232; 2008:535–538). Of foremost importance is the petition for the gift and the filling of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13; Jn. 3:34; 4:10; 7:37–39; 14:16–17; Ac. 4:31; 8:15; Eph. 3:14–19; 5:18; Burger, 2020d:233) so that we can participate in the drama

[233] About "transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son", van Bruggen writes, "When Paul says that 'God has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves' (Col. 1:13), he does not mean that this kingdom is the Christian community. Rather, he is speaking about the indissoluble tie that already exists with the kingdom of heaven. Thus, he also says concerning people who are still living on the earth: 'God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6)'" (van Bruggen, 1999:82).
[234] The term "mediator of worship" is from Torrance (Torrance, 1996:43–67).

of Christ as priest by offering God the priestly sacrifice of our lives (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Burger, 2020d:232).[235]

Putting on our ascensional self and performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ also involves participating in the drama of Christ's prophetic ministry of preaching the Father's good news of the coming kingdom and calling people to repentance in order "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Lk. 1:17) or otherwise face the fire of God's coming judgment (Mt. 3:9–10; 11:20–24; Lk. 12:47–48; Rom. 2:4–5, 9; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 7:9–10; Heb. 12:24–25; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 2:5, 21–22; 3:3, 19).

Moreover, it involves participating in the drama of Christ's kingly ministry of forgiving people their sins and exercising church discipline (Mt. 16:19; 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5), administering the sacraments (Mt. 26:26–29; 28:18–19; 1 Cor. 11:17–31), and participating in the gifts of the Spirit Christ gives from heaven as the ascended king (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 7:7; 12:1–31; 14:1–40; Eph. 4:9–16; 1 Pet. 4:10–11; Burger, 2017c:230–231).[236]

Being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation through the Holy Spirit as a cruciform, resurrectional, and ascensional life is the only fitting response to God's mercy in the life of God's new covenant community and is meant to arouse ethnic Jews who do not believe in Christ to jealousy (Rom. 11:17–24, 30–32; 12:1–2). The more non-Christian ethnic Jews are able to see how the Christian church presents its life to God as an innovative and creative sacrifice by thankfully participating in the drama of God's mission for his glory, the more the Holy Spirit can use this sacrifice to arouse them to jealousy and graft them back into reconstituted Israel through faith in the Jesus Christ (de Bruijne, 2001:141–145).

Because the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the first fruits or the down payment of the resurrection life of God's new creation (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14), our participation in or performance of the drama of God's mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation through our incarnational, cruciform, resurrectional, and ascensional life is incomplete (Burger, 2017c:203, 206–207, 210, 212, 216–217, 231, 234–235).[237]

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[235] About our response of faith, Torrance rightly writes, "Our response in faith and obedience is a response to the response already made for us by Christ to the Father's holy love, a response we are summoned to make in union with Christ" (Torrance, 1996:53–54). In the same vein, Burger writes, "Whoever puts on Christ can participate in good practices that are, as it were, prepared beforehand: we are, says Paul, 'created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Ephesians 2:10)" (Burger, 2017c:170).

[236] In 1 Cor. 13:8–10, Paul writes, "As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away". Since this "perfect" refers to the eschaton when we will no longer see in a mirror dimly, but face to face, it is exegetically untenable to consider the so-called special gifts of the Spirit to have ceased after the time of the apostolic church (de Bruijne, 2006; Fee, 1987:645–646)

[237] About the incompleteness of our participation in Christ, Burger writes, "At the same time you can see the incompleteness in the use of the expression 'in Christ'. On the one hand, this expression reminds us that Christ is

Accordingly, we are still eagerly awaiting the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23–25). This brings us to the last act of God's drama of his mission for his glory.

### 2.5. Act five: the drama of the return of Christ and the theatre of the theodrama (4)

The fifth act of the drama of God's mission for his glory—or his communicative activity of mutual glorification through filial openness and responsiveness that he enacts on the stage of this world is the drama of the return of Christ so that world and the people of this world—will be the theatre of God's glory in a way he always wanted, where the persons of the Trinity make their intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification present in time in a new creation where they, humanity, and creation act out and bear witness to the life of heaven on earth, making the world a place where heaven and earth meet.

This act will be sketched in two scenes. Scene one depicts the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead. Scene two portrays the ushering in of a new heaven and new earth, a new holy temple, where creation and humanity live in God's loving presence, participating in his life, and reflect his glory by doing heaven on earth for all eternity.

#### 2.5.1. Scene one: the return of Christ as judge

In Act 3, Scene two (2.3.2), I noted that John the Baptist called Israel to repent and be baptized with a baptism of repentance or else face the fire of God's coming judgment. John had also said that the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16), i.e., the fire of God's judgment (van Bruggen, 1999:232–233). Consequently, in Act 3, Scene 3 (2.3.3), I noted that as a prophet Christ also called Israel to faith and repentance in the power of the Spirit and to believe the good news that the kingdom of heaven had come near or else face the fire of God's coming judgment. Accordingly, Jesus frequently compares God's coming judgment to fire (Mt. 5:22; 7:19; 13:40, 42. 50; 18:8–9; 25:41; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:49; Jn. 15:6; van Bruggen, 1999:233).[238]

Because only the Father knows when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, will return (Mk. 13:32), Jesus and the apostles after him urge the people to wait and be watchful in order to be prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 24:42, 44; 25:10, 13; Mk. 13:35–37; Lk. 12:40; 1 Thess. 5:6; Jas. 5:9; 2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 19:7, 22:14). Even though only the Father knows the moment of the Lord's Jesus Christ' return, his return will be preceded by the birth pangs of God's new creation (Mt. 24:1–31;

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our substitute: representative and inclusive. We can be in him". He adds, "On the other hand, this expression is necessary when we still participate incompletely in Christ. It has only happened to the substitute; there is still something to be done to us—'in Christ' always calls attention to this incompleteness. The tension between what has already happened and what has not yet happened—but will happen—is part of the expression 'in Christ'" (Burger 2017c:216–217)

[238] About this fire, van Bruggen writes, "Already in the Old Testament, fire is a symbol of God's purifying and cleansing activity. This fire is not an uncontrollable, irrational natural disaster in which a great deal of value is lost, but a carefully planned trash incineration project to purify and preserve the environment of God's world" (van Bruggen, 1999:233).

Mk. 13:3–27; Lk. 17:5–28; Rom. 8:22) so that "[t]he community of Christ is living during the last days under a constellation that tells them that 'it is near, right at the door'" (Mark 13:29; van Bruggen, 1999:235). This constellation also includes the appearance of many antichrists, incited by the spirit of antichrist, the devil, who oppose and deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:18, 22–23; 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7; cf. Jn. 8:12–20, 25–30, 44–47, 54–58; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Jn. 5:18; van Bruggen, 2016:95–109) and an increase in lawlessness, during which time many will fall away from the faith (Mt. 24:12; Lk. 17:26–30; 21:24–27; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; 2 Tim. 3:1–4; 2 Pet. 2:5–10; Ju. 7).[239] The constellation also includes precursors of God's final judgment (1 Cor. 11:22; Heb. 12:5–11; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 3:19; 6:1–8; 8:6–12; 9:1–21; 16:1–16).[240]

When the Father's time allotted for this lawlessness is full, the Lord Jesus Christ will suddenly and unexpectedly appear on the clouds of heaven, the graves will give up their dead, those who died in Christ and the living in Christ who are instantaneously transfigured will meet him in the air, and the final judgment will take place (Mt. 24:27, 29–30; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 19:11–21; van Bruggen, 2016:111–127).[241] And the Lord Jesus Christ will be publicly vindicated and acknowledged as Lord to the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:10–11).

On the day of judgment, God will manifest his glory by showing no partiality. Whether you belonged to Israel or not will make no difference (Rom. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:17). When God opens the books, he will judge everyone by what they have done (Mt. 12:36–37; 16:27; Rom. 2:6–11, 12–16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12–13; 22:12). For some, this judgment will be more tolerable than others (Lk. 10:12, 14; 12:47–48). Those who did not participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith will be condemned to hell (Mt. 5:29–30; 10:28; 13:42, 50; 18:9; 25:46; Mk. 9:43; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:4; Ju.

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[239] About "the man of lawlessness", van Bruggen writes, "It is not very plausible that we should think of this 'man of lawlessness' as a human person. It is a summarizing characterization, a personification like we can also speak of 'the modern man'. There will come a time when the God-fearing man will be repressed by the godless man" (van Bruggen, 2016:114). Because 2 Thessalonians 2 speaks about lawlessness and 1 and 2nd John speak about denial that Jesus is the Christ, the antichrists and the man of lawlessness are not the same However, they are related because they both are incited by Satan (van Bruggen, 2016:114–115). Rev. 13 depicts this relationship between the man of lawlessness and the antichrists as the relation between the beast rising from the sea and the beast rising from the earth (van Bruggen, 2016:116).

[240] Because God's judgment is meant to remove the curse of sin from this world, his fatherly discipline is also a form of God's judgment. Burger writes, "God can punish us from a pedagogical point of view to train and encourage us to purge our lives of evil. Thus, punishment and judgment can have a positive effect: not condemning and negative, but educational and encouraging" (Burger, 2017c:261).

[241] About the word "appearance" (*parousia*), van Bruggen writes, "The word for his appearance (*parousia*) actually means 'presence'. It stands in contrast to 'absence' (cf. Phil. 2:12). To be present somewhere, people often have to travel and arrive somewhere. This does not play a role in the appearance of the Lord of Lords. There is no distance to be bridged. With Him it is as if a curtain is pulled back and we suddenly see His presence when He appears on the clouds" (van Bruggen, 2016:128). This corresponds to what this study has asserted about the spatial nearness of the kingdom of heaven (see also Phil. 4:5).

7; Rev. 21:8).[242] Those who did participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith will be acquitted and vindicated and "inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34; 13:43; 19:29; 20:23; Lk. 12:32; 22:29; Jn. 3:16; 14:2–3; Rom. 8:1, 17; 1 Cor. 2:9; Eph. 1:11; Col. 3:24; 2 Tim. 2:12; Ti. 3:7; Heb. 11:16; 12:28; Jas. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:4–5; 2 Pet. 1:11).[243] Moreover, because they put on Christ, bore witness to what is in him, and are heirs together with him, they will be rewarded for their good works by participating in his reward (Mt. 25:21; Lk. 14:14; 22:29–30; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:14; 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 3:21; 11:18; 21:7; see also Burger, 2017c:261–262).

On this day of judgment, God will continue to manifest his glory by crushing Satan under his feet and throwing him into the lake of fire and sulphur (Rom. 16:20: Rev. 20:10). Moreover, he will also throw death and the grave in this same lake of fire and sulphur (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14; 21:4). In doing so, God fulfills the first part of his promise of rescuing the drama of his mission for his glory by removing sin, death, and the devil from this world (Gen. 3:15).

### 2.5.2. The new heaven and the new earth

To fulfill the second part of his promise of rescuing the drama of his mission for his glory by making all things new, God ushers in a new stage for the drama of his mission for his glory or his communicative

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[242] About those who have never heard of Christ, van Bruggen writes, "It is difficult for human beings to make definitive statements about God's dealings with those who have never heard of Christ. What was true in the circle of the disciples is even more true now. There the question was asked, 'Lord, what about him?' (John 21:212). Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return what is that to you? You must follow me' (John 21:22)" (van Bruggen, 1999:235). However, Paul does write, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:14–16). In the previous chapter, we saw that because the law Paul is referring to is the Mosaic law, he means that when Gentiles by nature or spontaneously do what the law requires, they do so because somehow the influence of the written law of God makes itself felt in their lives. Moreover, Paul also writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18–20). Thus, every human being has an innate sense of God referred to by Calvin as the *sensus divinitatis* or *semen religionis*. Calvin writes, "And they who in other aspects of life seem least to differ from brutes still continue to retain some seed of religion" (Calvin, 1960:I:44). Heppe writes, "The most essential content of natural religion is given by Riissen thus (I,7): '(1) that God is, (2) and that he must be worshipped, (3) that we must live good lives, (4) that the soul is immortal, (5) that a reward is due to virtue, punishment to wickedness" (Heppe, 2007:1–2). Regarding this sense of punishment, see Rom. 1:32). Because of the noetic effects of sin, the *sensus divinitatis* does not work properly in every human being (Plantinga, 2000:213–216).

[243] This acquittal and vindication were already received in faith when they were justified through faith. This acquittal and vindication of our life as a totality does not preclude that parts of our life will be condemned, exposed, and purified by fire (1 Cor. 3:10–15; 4:5). Thus, Burger writes, "Knowing that you are freed from condemnation and that you will escape God's wrath (Romans 5:9) does not rule out that the filter of God's corrective judgment can painfully affect your life" (Burger, 2017c:260).

activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness, viz. a new heaven and new earth, a new holy temple, where creation and humanity live in the sabbath rest of his loving presence, participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit and reflecting the glory of this life by witnessing to what is in Christ, viz. the resurrection life of his new creation (Rev. 21–22).

Before God ushers in this new stage for the drama of his mission for his glory, he first dismantles the old stage with a cosmic fire that destroys the old heavens with the sun, moon, and stars and the earth with all its unrighteous works (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).[244] Once the old stage of God's mission for his glory is completely dismantled, God ushers in a new stage, a new heaven and earth, according to his promise, where righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:13). Thus, the continuity between the old stage of the drama and the new stage lies in God's faithfulness to the drama of his mission for his glory to make all things new (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:3–5; see also van Houwelingen, 1993:93, 96).

On this new stage, we receive our inheritance together with Christ as we live in the sabbath rest of God's loving presence and reflect the glory of his presence by witnessing to what is in Christ, viz. the resurrection life of his new creation. All things will have been summed up in Christ, God will be all in all, and redeemed humanity will completely participate in the divine nature. This includes fully participating in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit (Jn. 14:23; 17:21–24). This also includes being glorified or transfigured into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13; Eph. 4:13; Mt. 13:43; Rom. 8:29–30; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4, 17; Col. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:1, 10; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Jn 3:2). This involves having incorruptible and immortal spiritual bodies, i.e., bodies completely indwelt and controlled by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 15:26, 42–44, 50, 53–54; Lk. 20:36; Rom. 8:21; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Pet. 1:4; Rev. 20:14; 21:4; 22:3).[245] This further

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[244] *Contra* Wolters who rejects "a cosmic annihilation, a complete destruction or abolition of the created order" (Wolters, 1987:408). Wolters writes, "Against this we shall argue that the author of 2 Peter . . . pictures the day of judgement as a smelting process from which the world will emerge purified" (Wolters, 1987:408). *Contra* Wolters, van Houwelingen writes, "In this way, however, justice is not done to the words 'pass away', 'burned up', 'loosed' and 'dissolved'. The terms Peter uses are so strong that the concept of purging is insufficient" (van Houwelingen, 1993:91). Concerning the text critical issue of εὑρίσκω ("be exposed" or "be found") or κατακαίω ("be burned up") in verse 10, he opts for κατακαίω because he considers this to be the more difficult reading. He writes, "Because of the enormous consequences for today's world, substantially the reading *κατακaesetai* is undoubtedly the most difficult!" (van Houwelingen, 1993:94; *contra* Wolters, 1987:410).

[245] About the spiritual body, Gaffin writes, "The somatic aspect of resurrection, even more than what has already been experienced, will disclose the full dimension of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer" (Gaffin, 1987:68). Kistemaker writes in a similar vein, "The resurrected body will be completely filled with the Spirit of glory" (Kistemaker, 1993:573). Macchia prefers to refer to the spiritual body as a "Spirit body" in which our mortal existence has been "'swallowed up' (or baptized) into immortal life (2 Cor. 5:4)" (Macchia, 2018:188). Later, he writes, "A translation better than *spiritual* here might be 'pneumatic'—or even 'Spiritful'—*body*" (Macchia, 2018:296).

involves the termination of marriage life so that humanity will be completely oriented towards God and one another like the angels (Mt. 22:30).[246]

The drama of God's mission for his glory, which began with the creation of the world and humanity, will then continue for all eternity as humanity bears witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in the Son's communicative activity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness in the immanent Trinity as they participate in his kingly rule and priestly care for creation. On earth as in heaven!

### 2.6. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking what the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and participation in the life of God for a theodramatic model of communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity is. I answered this question by sketching the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. The unifying theme of this theodramatic biblical narrative is the drama of God's mission for his glory or the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness and responsiveness. Having clarified the unifying theme of the plot of the drama, explained some of the terminology used in the plot, and outlined the eschatological orientation of the plot, I sketched the unfolding of the plot of the drama in five acts.

The first act of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts in the drama of his mission for his glory is the creation of the stage of the theodrama. This act was sketched in five scenes. Scene one portrayed the creation of the visible stage of the theodrama, viz. the world as a holy temple. Scene two depicted the creation of humanity in the image of God, participating in his life through filial openness and responsiveness. Scene three presented the antagonist introducing sin and death on the stage of the theodrama. Scene four portrayed God's commitment to the drama of his mission for his glory. Scene five showed God securing and guaranteeing his commitment to the drama of his mission for his glory with his covenants with Noah and creation.

The second act of the drama of God's mission for his glory that he enacts on the stage of this world is the election of Israel as the theatre of the theodrama. This act was sketched in five scenes. Scene

[246] About the end of marriage life and becoming like the angels, van Bruggen writes, "Jesus does not say that one *cannot* marry anymore. He also does not say anything about the possibilities of angels. The situation of the heavenly angels (the fallen angels are left out of the picture) is such that they praise God and are focused on His service. The male/female orientation is transcended and sublimated to a complete orientation towards God, which does not exclude one's fellow man, but does end the special marriage relationship with one specific person" (van Bruggen, 1988:269).

one depicted God continuing the drama of his mission for his glory by electing Abraham (and Israel) to be the theatre of his communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and to bear witness to the splendour of his perfect life by doing heaven on earth and spreading the blessing of this life throughout the world. Scene two portrayed God committing himself to use Abraham and Israel to spread the blessing of living in his loving presence and participating in his life in Christ through the Spirit throughout the world by making covenants with Abraham. Scene three showed God committing himself to use Israel for this purpose by making covenants with Israel. Scene four depicted God strengthening his commitment to use Israel for this purpose by making a covenant with David. Scene five portrayed God committing himself to use Israel to spread the blessing of living in his loving presence and participating in his life in Christ through the Spirit throughout the world by promising to make a new covenant with Israel.

The third act of the drama of God's mission for his glory that he enacts on the stage of this world is the sending of his Son as Israel's substitute and representative to be the theatre of the theodrama. This was sketched in six scenes. Scene one depicted the incarnation of the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Scene two portrayed the baptism of the Son of God with water and the Spirit. Scene three showed the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit. Scene four depicted the Son of God offering the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit. Scene five portrayed the Son of God arising from the dead through the Holy Spirit and being vindicated as the Son of God through the Holy Spirit. Scene six showed the Son of God ascending into heaven through the Holy Spirit and becoming the head and mediator of the new covenant and lord of the universe.

The fourth act of the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts on the stage of this world is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church so that church can be the theatre of the drama of God's mission for his glory. This act was sketched in two scenes. Scene one depicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church. Scene two portrayed the church performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ.

The fifth act of the drama of God's mission for his glory that he enacts on the stage of this world is the drama of the return of Christ. This act was sketched in two scenes. Scene one depicted the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead. Scene two portrayed the ushering in of a new heaven and new earth, a new holy temple, where creation and humanity lives in God's loving presence, participating in his life, and reflecting his glory by doing heaven on earth for all eternity.

We have now arrived at the next question of this study: what are the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly

communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture? The answer to this question will be given in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE CONTOURS OF A THEODRAMATIC SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture?

The fifth question that arises from our overarching question is: What are the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture?

To answer this, I will sketch the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. First, I will recap the nature of doctrine and structure. Second, I will sketch the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants.[1]

### 1. Before the curtain rises[2]

Before the curtain rises, we need to remind ourselves of what I wrote in chapter two about the nature of doctrine and the nature of structure. When I designed a theodramatic model for systematic theology in chapter two, I argued that there are at least five reasons for comparing doctrine to drama. First, Scripture is dramatic both in its form and its content. Second, both doctrine and God's relationship with humanity are essentially dialogical. Third, doctrine as drama appeals to the imagination.[3] Fourth, comparing

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[1] In the next chapter, I will outline how the contours of this theodramatic systematic theology can give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

[2] This section recaps two design features of a theodramatic model of systematic theology outlined in chapter two. That chapter, which also included reflection on the nature of Scripture and hermeneutics, dealt with themes normally dealt with in the prolegomena of a systematic theology. For topics that are dealt with in the prolegomena of systematic theologies, see Barth,1975:I/1:3–44; Bavinck, 2003:I:25–621; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:25–173; Frame, 2013:3–117; Grenz, 2000:1–28; Horton, 2011a:35–219; Jones, 2002:1–148; Letham, 2019:66–96; Spykman, 1992:3–136; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:1–74; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:1–19.

[3] In chapter two, citing Vanhoozer on theodramatic imagination, I wrote, "While imagination, as such, is 'the power of forming mental images of what is not really present' theodramatic imagination 'is the ability to form mental images of what is *really* present . . . even though it cannot be perceived empirically with the senses' (Vanhoozer, 2005:416). It is 'the power of synoptic vision: the ability to synthesize heterogeneous elements into a unified whole. . . . [It] is the ability to discover connections' (Vanhoozer, 2005:416, 281; 2016b:23–27, 133, 165, 177, 232; 2019:56, 108)

doctrine to drama is a constant reminder that the Christian life is filled with tension and urgency. Fifth, comparing doctrine to drama bridges the gap between theory and practice by reminding us that reading and interpreting Scripture redemptive-historically includes not only the text of Scripture, but also the reader of Scripture, for it shows how he figures in the story and is related to Christ in the history of redemption.

I also argued that doctrine reconceptualizes the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits," through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. As such, doctrine functions as the grammar[4] of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative. Moreover, a theodramatic systematic theology is the result of reflection upon the theodramatic nature of Scripture that appeals to our theodramatic imagination to creatively improvise and perform the theodramatic transcript of Scripture in new situations. Furthermore, doctrine is meant to give direction to our theodramatic imagination and action so that we participate in the theodrama of Scripture in a way that fits with the whole theodrama of redemption communicated to us in the script, transcript, and prescript of the theodrama and fittingly extend the meaning of the canonical text in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. Thus, doctrine as grammar and doctrine as direction for our theodramatic imagination and action make ontological truth claims about reality.

Moreover, I argued that the structure of a theodramatic systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form that is given to our communication of the gospel and to the shaping of our Christian identity and practice so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture.[5] As such, a theodramatic systematic theology should be designed in such a way that it trains us more in wisdom and life with God than in abstract truth.

### 2. The contours of a theodramatic systematic theology

Having reminded ourselves of the nature of doctrine and the nature of structure, I will now sketch the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. First, I will outline participation in the life of God and the drama of God. Second, I will sketch participation in the life of God

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[4] As the grammar of the church's practice and performance of the biblical narrative, doctrine attempts to make clear "*how Christian discourses have sense-making and life-shaping power for their users*" (Jones, 2002:9).

[5] In the previous chapter, regarding the intentional pedagogical form of systematic theology, I cited Burger as follows: "Themes are selected, these themes are put together in a certain order, relations are made between these themes. . . . This is what we always do when we explain the gospel to someone else . . . in a way that communicates the message effectively". He adds, "We do the same in education, but also in systematic theology . . . putting theological themes together in a certain structured way. . . . We always have a certain point of view from which we select and order theological themes, choosing words and images that fit our purposes. This is done in response to certain questions, which are being asked in our context" (Burger, 2015:269).

and the drama of creation. Third, I will outline participation in the life of God and the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants. Fourth, I will sketch participation in the life of God and the drama of Christ. Fifth, I will outline participation in the life of God and the drama of the Holy Spirit. Sixth, I will sketch the participation in the life of God and the drama of the return of Christ.

### 2.1. Participation in the life of God and the drama[6] of God as Trinity

To outline participation in or dwelling in the life of God and the drama of God, I will first sketch the drama of God as Trinity.[7] Second, I will outline the drama of God as God.

#### 2.1.1. The drama of God as Trinity

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates[8] the doctrine of the Trinity.[9] Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of God as Trinity in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, within the immanent or internal life of God, there are eternal relationships or processions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[10]

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[6] In chapter two, we noted that Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines drama as "[Late Latin *dramat-, drama,* from Greek, deed, drama, from *dran* to do, act]" (Merriam-Webster, 1996). Accordingly, Vanhoozer writes, "A drama is a *doing* (from *drao* = "I do")" (Vanhoozer, 2010:195). Because the substance of a theodramatic theology is dramatic, I have made the form of this theology dramatic.

[7] Kasper rightly refers to the doctrine of the Trinity as "grammar and summation of the entire Christian mystery of salvation". As such, theological reflection on the doctrine of God should begin with reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity (Kasper, 311; cf. 310–314; Lash, 1986:183, 188, 192, 193, 194; Burger, 2012:341–342). Van der Kooi and van den Brink refer to the Trinity as "the Gateway to the Doctrine of God" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:76). Thus, beginning the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology fits with the conviction that structure of a theodramatic systematic theology is the intentional pedagogical form that is given to our communication of the gospel and shaping our Christian identity and practice. Others who begin their doctrine of God with the doctrine of the Trinity include Barth (1975:I/1:293–489), Calvin (1960:I:13:120–159), Grenz (2000:53–76), Jones (2002:I-149–232), Kärkkäinen (2014:II-250–282), Letham (2019:66–154), Pannenberg (1991:259–336), and van Genderen and Velema (2008:143–164).

[8] Horton writes, "[D]octrine grows out of the biblical *drama*. . . the drama yields specific *doctrine*. . . doctrines are rooted in the drama. . . ." (Horton, 2016b). Vanhoozer writes that doctrine can be considered "the conceptual elaboration of *divine action*". As such, it is "a by-product of God's prior communicative action "(Vanhoozer, 2010:272, cf. 274). Thus, the biblical drama is foundational for doctrine.

[9] For a cartography of the renaissance of trinitarian theology, see Grenz, 2004; Kärkkäinen, 2007:67–380. Kasper rightly writes, " . . . if we follow the order of knowledge, we must begin with the missions as they occur in the history of salvation and with the revelation of these in words, and then come to know the eternal processions via the missions as their ground and presupposition" (Kasper, 2012:277; Vanhoozer, 2010:148). For further scriptural warrant for understanding God as Trinity, see Barth, 1975:I/1:384–489; Bavinck, 2004:II:261–264, 269–279; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:876–880; Berkhof, 1996:85–86; Calvin, 1960:I:140–145; Frame, 2013:433–443; Grenz, 2000:53–56; Horton, 2011a:273–278; Kärkkäinen, 2007:3–15; Letham, 2019:66–96; Macleod, 2002:49–59; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:81–86; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:143–146; see also Huijgen, 2017:17–30; Swain, 2020:25–51. For a defense that the oneness of God in Deut. 6:4 refers to qualitative uniqueness and not quantitative oneness as well as Paul's rephrasing of it in 1 Cor. 8:6, see Huijgen and Versluis, 2018:2013–225. For the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, see Beeke and Smalley, 2019:902–928; Berkhof, 1996:82–83; Grenz, 2000:56–64; Horton, 2011a:278–306; Kärkkäinen, 2007:19–64; Letham, 2019:97–125; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:90–104. For von Balthasar in the Trinity, see Balthasar, 1993:TDIII:505–535.

[10] The immanent or internal life of God is also referred to as the immanent, ontological or essential Trinity (Sanders, 2017:95).

Second, these eternal relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit include relationships of origin.[11] The Father eternally generates or begets the Son in the spiration of the Holy Spirit. The Son is eternally generated or begotten by the Father in the spiration of the Spirit.[12] Moreover, the Spirit simultaneously proceeds from the Father and the Son (Habets, 2010:223–227).[13] These eternal relations of origin that subsist within the one being of God are what is meant by the "persons" of the Trinity. Accordingly, "[i]t is not as though the relations *exist between* the three persons . . . rather the persons *are* the relations" (Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:255–256; See also Vanhoozer, 2010:146–147).[14]

Third, the eternal relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit include not only generative relations, but also communicative[15] relations. Since God speaks or communicates light to creation and humanity in Christ through the Spirit, the Father, Son, and Spirit speak or communicate light to each other in Christ through the Spirit (Jn. 1:4, 9; 1 Jn. 1:5). Since God shares life with creation and humanity in Christ through the Spirit, the Father, Son, and Spirit share life in Christ through the Spirit (Jn. 5:26; 6:63; 14:6; Ac. 3:15). Since Christ was always open and responsive to the Father by trustfully listening to and doing his will through the Spirit in time, he is always open and responsive to the Father by trustfully listening to and doing his will through the Spirit eternity (Jn. 5:19).[16] Since the Father, Son, and Spirit act together in

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[11] Pannenberg correctly writes, "The Father does not merely beget the Son. He also hands over his kingdom to him and receives it back from him. The Son is not merely begotten of the Father. He is also obedient to him. . . . The Spirit is not just breathed. He also fills the Son. . . . The persons cannot be identical simply with any one relation. Each is a catalyst of many relations" (Pannenberg, 1991:I-320; Vanhoozer, 2010:148).

[12] This is commonly referred to as *spirituque.*

[13] This is commonly referred to as the *filioque*. Commenting on the *filioque*, van der Kooi and van den Brink write, "The word *filioque* was never intended to say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son as from two different sources (such a 'double procession' would undermine the unity of God). Rather, it intended to convey the idea that the Spirit proceeded in a flowing movement from the Father and the Son, as from one source" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:103).

[14] This is not to say that the divine persons are "nothing but relations", but that "their distinct personal *identities* are relational" (Vanhoozer, 2010:144).

[15] In chapter two, I wrote that Vanhoozer gives the following definition of communication: "To communicate (Lat. *communicare*) is to 'share' or 'make common'". Moreover, it "carries connotations of 'communion' and 'communicant'" (Vanhoozer, 2010:206, 212). The fact that God communicates or makes common implies the drama of revelation. For the drama of God's revelation in Scripture, see chapter 2. Because the drama of revelation is implied, it will not be further developed in this chapter. However, the drama of revelation in Scripture will be further developed in the drama of the Holy Spirit. For systematic theological overviews of the drama of revelation, see Balthasar, 1982:GLI:429–683; Barth, 1975:I/1:45–489; 1956a:I/2:1-504; Bavinck, 2003:I:281–494; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:177–480; Berkhof, 1996:34–39; Calvin, 1960:I:35–96; Frame, 2013:519–693; Grenz, 2000:133–139; Horton, 2011a:113–185; Jones, 2002:57–109; Kärkkäinen, 2014:7–178; Letham, 2019:52–65; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:157–199; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:20–116. In chapter two, I concluded that because in our communication of the gospel we are creatures limited by time, history, body, and finitude, the design of a theodramatic model for communicating the gospel needs to highlight that our understanding will always be a subjective and limited interpretation of reality. Van der Kooi and van den Brink come to the same conclusion regarding revelation when they assert that, because revelation is always mediated indirectly through our earthly sensory perception, it will never give us a God's eye view but will always be a partial knowledge that is multi-interpretable (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:167–171).

[16] In chapter two, I wrote, "The eternal, filial responsiveness of the Son to the Father implies an eternal, hypostatic subordination, but not a substantial subordination (Boyer, 2009:271). Eternal, hypostatic subordination does not lead

the economy of creation and redemption with each person fulfilling his task in his specific manner, the Father, Son, and Spirit act together in the immanent Trinity.[17] This is all the more the case since they live in each other (Jn. 14:10; 17:21).[18] Since the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father and the Son and the Spirit glorify each other in time, they glorify each other in eternity (Jn. 17:5, 24). Thus, the economic Trinity reveals or communicates the immanent Trinity.[19] Fourth, the generative and communicative acts of Father, Son, and Spirit in time that reveal the generative and communicative activity of the Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity and imply that God's being is not static, but is a being in generative and communicative activity.[20] Because the Father initiates divine acts, he is the author or playwright of the

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to the Son having a different will than the Father because the Father and the Son (and Spirit) possess a common or shared will which they each hold properly or distinctively as Father and Son (and Spirit) internal to the indivisible fullness of their being (Swain and Allen, 2013:122–123, 126–131; Allen, 2013:83–89; Boyer, 2009:264–267; Muller, 2003:324–332; Vanhoozer, 2014a:19)".

[17] Augustine formulated this concept as follows: "God's works *ad extra* are indivisible, though the order and distinction of the persons is preserved" (Bavinck, 2006:III:318). He adds, "The Father works *of* himself *through* the Son *in* the Spirit. Scripture marks these distinctions very clearly in the so-called "differentiating prepositions" ἐκ (out of), δια (through), and ἐν (in) (1 Cor. 8:6; John 1:3, 14)" (Bavinck, 2006:III:319). Burger correctly notes, "However, this choice does not do justice to the fact that the New Testament shows a greater diversity in the use of prepositions. God acts through (*dia*) but also in (*en*) Christ. When we participate in Christ the Bible speaks of with (*sun*) Him. God acts in (*en*) but also through (*hupo* or *dia*) the Spirit". He suggests, "In order not to hinder one's reading of the Bible, I would rather not give three prepositions precedence over others, but look for the specific nature of the work of the three persons". Drawing on Basil, one of the Cappadocian fathers, he suggests that this can be done by speaking about the Father initiating an act, the Son effecting the act, and the Spirit perfecting the act (Burger, 2012:337). Concerning the interior works, van der Kooi and van den Brink write, "Only the interior works (*ad intra*), which are between the person of the Trinity, are divided. Only in this realm is it true that what the Father does differs from what the Son does; and the same is true for the relationship of the Spirit to the other two (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:97).

[18]This is often referred to as *perichoresis* (Clark and Johnson, 2015:64–67). For a critique of taking the concept of *perichoresi*s to imply that God is a sort of ontotheological, open, social society who has an ontological, perichoretic, dependent relationship with the world, see Vanhoozer, 2010:81–177. For a redefinition of social trinitarianism that takes into account justified objections, see van den Brink, 2014:431–50; see also Horrell, 2007:44–79. For a defense of a social aspect to the doctrine of the Trinity drawing on the Gospel of John, see Burger, 2012:345–348. For a sustained critique of any form of social trinitarianism, see Dolezal, 2017. For an argument that perichoresis has nothing to do with dancing, see Perkins, 2020.

[19] In chapter two, we noted that this means that "the economic Trinity corresponds to but does not exhaust or encompass the reality of the immanent Trinity" (Vanhoozer, 2010:203). See also Gunton, 2002a:76–93; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:87–89. The thesis that the economic Trinity reveals or communicates the immanent Trinity is a helpful improvement to Rahner's thesis: "*The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity*" (Rahner, 1997:22). This became known as "Rahner's rule". Gunton's version of Rahner's rule is: "God is what he does and he does what he is" (Gunton, 2002a:76). For the background and origin of Rahner's rule, see Sanders, 2005:47–82.

[20] In discussing modes of divine activity, Dalferth considers activity to be a universal property that is actualized in particular acts or events (Dalferth, 2006:145–147; cf. Vanhoozer, 2010:219). Drawing on Aquinas (God's being is an active presence) and Barth (God's being is his act), Vanhoozer proposes a post-Barthian Thomism of the drama of God as "being-in-communicative-act" (Vanhoozer, 2010:222). By post-Barthian he means that his proposal "include[es] other instances of divine speaking and acting alongside the Incarnation" (Vanhoozer, 2010:207). Regarding the difference between Aquinas and Barth, Vanhoozer writes, "The key differences are two: (1) Aquinas employs a single conceptual scheme, that of Aristotle, while Barth is more eclectic; (2) Aquinas asks what God the creator must be given the existence of creation while Barth asks what God must be given the history of Jesus Christ"

theodrama.[21] As such, "his will, plan, and purpose for the theodrama precede its actualization on the world stage" (Vander Lugt, 2014:65).[22] Because the Son effects divine acts, he is the protagonist in the theodrama. As such, he "mak[es] his embodied entrance onto the world stage in order to play the most important role and bring the theodrama to its climax." Accordingly, "every person and event in the theodrama either sets the stage for his performance or results from the role he plays" (Vander Lugt, 2014:71). Because the Holy Spirit perfects divine acts, he is the producer and director of the theodrama. As such, "the Spirit *produce[s]* the theodrama of God the playwright *through* Jesus the protagonist and other players to the world audience *in terms of the theodrama*". Accordingly, he can be called the "improvisation of God" (Vander Lugt, 2014:80).[23]

### 2.1.2. The drama of God as God

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of God as God. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of God as God in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, there is a connection between God's communicative acts and his communicative or performative[24] attributes or properties. When God performs the splendour of his perfect life as the God who communicatively acts in a compassionate, gracious, faithful, loving

(Vanhoozer, 2010:221). For a helpful introduction of Edwards' understanding of God as a communicative being, see Schweitzer, 2012. For the communicative nature of God within the Trinity, see Schweitzer, 2012:11–30.

[21] For this theodramatic triad, see also Vanhoozer, 2005:102, 106–107, 117, 177, 189, 193, 243–244, 249, 272, 448; Balthasar, 1988:TDI:268–305. Vanhoozer outlines the involvement of the Trinity in the theodrama as follows: "The Father is the playwright and producer of the action; the Son is the climax and summation of the action, The Spirit, as the one who unites us to Christ, is the dresser who clothes us with Christ's righteousness, the prompter who helps us remember our biblical lines, and the prop master who gives gifts (accessories) to each church member, equipping us to play our parts" (Vanhoozer, 2005:448).

[22] Vander Lugt adds, "Human participants have a genuine role to play in the theodrama, but God still maintains his sovereignty" (Vander Lugt, 2014:65). Because the Father, Son, and Spirit always work together since they are in one another, the Father also acts in the theodrama he authors.

[23] He adds, "While responsible for the entire production of the theodrama, the Spirit is also intimately involved in directing the theodrama, prompting the actors, equipping them with gifts, and empowering their performance". He thus concludes, "Consequently, it may be best to identify the Spirit as the producer-director, with the freedom of using these titles interchangeably and in a complementary fashion" (Vander Lugt, 2014:80). About the Spirit's role in the theodrama, von Balthasar writes, "The Father entrusts his play to him to be translated into real life . . . ; the Son entrusts himself to the Spirit's guidance, and, above all, the Church must entrust herself to him if her mission to proclaim the word, administer the sacraments and shepherd souls is to succeed" (Balthasar, 1993:TDIII:534; Vander Lugt, 2014:80). Because Scripture depicts God's being in generative and communicative theodramatic activity, Vanhoozer writes, "Scripture depicts the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit as a 'perfect drama': a doing than which nothing greater can be conceived; a ceaseless activity of communication that yields consummate communion" (Vanhoozer, 2010:243; 2016:52).

[24] Because God's attributes are attributes of his being in communicative activity or divine doing, Vanhoozer suggests that we could speak of them as "theatricals" (Vanhoozer, 2010:277; 2014b:39). Speaking of God's performative attributes tries to capture the notion of theatrical.

manner, then this implies that God is these performative attributes.[25] The same is true when he justly punishes the guilty; he is a communicatively holy and just God.

Second, because love binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:14; cf. Mt. 22:37–40; Rom. 13:8, 10), love also binds the splendour of all of God's communicative attributes together in perfect performative harmony. Accordingly, the most fundamental thing that can be said about God is that he is love (*agape*), i.e., he lives for the other and desires communion with the other (1 Jn. 4:8, 16; cf. Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 15:9, 13; 17:23–24, 26; Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; Gunton, 2002b:186–187).[26]

Third, when God comes with the wrath of his holy judgment, this holy justice is not an independent attribute separate from and alongside his love, but a manifestation of his offended love and thus intrinsically connected to it (Vriezen, 1970; 306; Peels, 2007:110; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:143–144).[27]

Fourth, as God's love and his holiness and justice should not be placed side by side because they are intrinsically connected in the drama of God as God, so God's immanence and transcendence should not be placed side by side either because they are also intrinsically connected in the drama of God as God.

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[25] Consequently, van der Kooi and van den Brink speak appreciatively about Krötke's suggestion to refer to God's attributes as "God's transparencies" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:149). Together with Krötke they believe all God's properties or transparencies are connected to God's glory (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:149, 153). Moreover, they add, "The attributes that God has form his being; in that sense God 'is' his attributes. Each of them offers a certain perspective on what God is in the essence of his being" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:153). Furthermore, they relate this to the simplicity of God. Rejecting the scholastic definition of the simplicity of God entailing that he is not composed of parts because this definition is based on the Greek philosophical "premise that anything composite must be defective and imperfect", they choose the definition that God is a unity or "of one piece" and thus completely trustworthy (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:151). This entails that that "his properties cannot be played off against each other and that he is utterly serious about his merciful turning toward us" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:146). Van der Kooi and van den Brink have the same difficulty with the Greek philosophical baggage put into God's impassibility. Instead of this meaning that God is unable to suffer and thus is invulnerable, they understand it to mean that "God is not derailed by evil and misery" because he is "in charge of history and in that sense stands above it. He does not become one of its many victims" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:152). In speaking about God, we must remember that we speak analogically about God, i.e., taking God as the prime referent, there is a partial commonality between God and humanity. The touchstone for this analogy is God's revelation in Scripture. Thus, it is an analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) before it is an analogy of creation (*analogia entis*) (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:135–140; see also Spencer, 2015).

[26] About God being described as love, Gunton writes, "To say that God is love means, first, that God is constituted, made up without reminder, of as personal structure of giving and receiving. Internally, God is a fellowship of *persons* whose orientation is entirely to the other". He adds, "The second is that the orientation of this God, his inner drive, we might say, is not to remain content with his eternal ordering as eternal love, but to move outwards to create a world which he loves and wishes to bring into relation with himself" (Gunton, 2002b:186–187). Commenting on 1 Jn, 4:8, 16, van der Kooi and van den Brink write, "Ultimately, this is the most fundamental statement that can be made about God" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:128). However, they nuance this statement by asserting that God's other attributes should not be subsumed under his love because "[a]ll God's properties are equally essential" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:150).

[27] Since there is no wrath within the immanent Trinity, the wrath of God is not an essential attribute of God (Ferguson, 2017:454). As God's offended love, however, it is a manifestation of God's essential attribute of love. Lane sums up this idea as follows, "Wrath is not an attribute of God in the way that his love or holiness is. His wrath is his response to something outside of himself" (Lane, 2001:146).

Because God is immanently present and involved in the life of Israel as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our knowledge of the drama of God as God takes its starting point in his immanently turning toward Israel. Thus, our knowledge of God "is embedded in the relationship that God has initiated with us". Accordingly, we cannot know God in a detached, objectified way, but only as a participant, i.e., in a relational manner (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:115).[28] However, because God is also transcendently present and involved in the life of Israel, his transcendence qualifies the manner he is immanently present and involved (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:141–144).[29]

### 2.2. Participation in the life of God and the drama of creation

To outline participation in or dwelling in the life of God and the drama of creation, I will first present the drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama. Second, I will sketch the drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama. Third, I will outline the drama of providence. Fourth, I will sketch the drama of the creation of humanity. Fifth, I will outline the drama of the fall into sin.

#### 2.2.1. The drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, because the Father, as the author of the theodrama, initiates divine acts, the Son, as the protagonist in the theodrama, effects divine acts, and the Holy Spirit, as the producer and director of the theodrama, perfects divine acts, the Father voluntarily[30] creates the heavenly stage of their theodrama

[28] Calvin sums up this idea as follows, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern" (Calvin, 1960:I:81; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:114–116).

[29] Because the distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes can lead to unfruitful discussions as to whether God can communicate an attribute or the fact that the so-called incommunicable attribute of immortality is communicated to angels, van der Kooi and van den Brink prefer to speak of "the attributes of divine transcendence and the attributes pertaining to God's condescension, or turning towards us" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:140). For how beginning with and placing a one-sided emphasis on the transcendent attributes of God can lead to an imbalanced view of God, see van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:133–135, 142. For systematic theological overviews of the attributes of God, see Barth, 1957:II/1:322–685; Bavinck, 2004:II:95–255; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:518–875; Frame, 2011:231–420; Grenz, 2000:88–97; Horton, 2011a:223–272; Jones, 2002:215–232; Kärkkäinen, 2014:283–309; Letham, 2019:155–181; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:113–156; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:132–143, 164–192; see also Gunton, 2002a; Holmes, 2007:54–71.

[30] Since God exists in himself, he did not need to create and thus intentionally chose to create as an act of his love (Jones, 2002:244–246; Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:207–210) because he wanted created reality to participate in their trinitarian relationship of love and bring it into the eschatological Sabbath rest of the fullness of their loving presence.

in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:16; cf. Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30) to live in their loving presence and participate in their intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification.[31]

Second, they create angels who live in their loving presence and participate in their intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through continuous heavenly worship (Job 38:7; Isa. 6; Ps. 103:20; 148:2; Rev. 5:11; Bavinck, 2004:II:464) and participation in the history of redemption (e.g., Gen. 3:24; 18; 19; 28:12; 32:1; 2 Ki. 6:15–17; 19:35; Dan. 10:13, 20; Gal. 3:19; Bavinck, 2004:II:463).[32] In participating in the history of redemption they serve as supporting actors who give interpretive clues by communicating God's intention through "announc[ing] what God is doing, will do, or may do" (Vanhoozer, 2010:229; cf. Heb. 1:14). As such, they serve as "travel guides" who accompany us on our journey to the kingdom of heaven (van Houwelingen, 2021). This makes heaven a place for communion in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit where God's will is done in a listening and thankful spirit of openness and responsiveness (Ps. 103:21; Mt. 6:10).

Third, because living in the Spirit entails being involved in spiritual warfare with the powers of darkness and because Jesus' return will be preceded by the appearance of many antichrists who oppose Jesus and deny that Jesus is the Christ, incited by the spirit of antichrist, the devil—the same devil who used a serpent to introduce sin and death on the stage of the drama of God's mission for his glory—a fall into sin must have occurred on the heavenly stage of God's drama of mutual glorification so that his will is no longer done in a spirit of openness and responsiveness. This fall appears to have been led by one angel known as the devil and Satan.[33]

Fourth, as "the father of lies" in whom "there is no truth" (Jn. 8:44), Satan intentionally corrupts the communicative agency God had created him with and becomes the chief antagonist in God's drama as he subverts and opposes the playwright's theodramatic intention by manipulating humanity not to participate in God's mission for his glory through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.[34]

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[31] This heavenly stage can be compared to "a multi-dimensional space that surrounds and permeates our earthly reality from all sides" (van Houwelingen, 2021:19).

[32] This twofold angelic ministry can be referred to as a liturgical and diaconal service (van Houwelingen, 2021:11)

[33] About this fall, Frame writes, "Scripture does not narrate the fall of Satan and his angels, but Isaiah 14:3–21 and Ezekiel 28:2–19 deal with the defeat of the kings of Babylon and Tyre, respectively, using imagery suggesting analogies with the fall of Satan" (Frame, 2013:775). About this fall, Bavinck writes, "All the power of sin on earth is connected with a kingdom of darkness in the world of spirits. There, too, a fall has occurred". He adds, "And Jude (v. 6) speaks of 'the angels that did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling,' that is, of angels who did not hold onto their principle, origin, or even rule, and left the dwelling place assigned to them. Clearly implied here is that many angels were not content with the state in which God had placed them. Pride took possession of them to make them strive for another and higher position" (Bavinck, 2006:III:35–36).

[34] About lying, Vanhoozer writes, "A lie is a misbegotten communicative act whose birth in words (what one claims as true) contradicts what one conceives (what one knows as false) and consequently misleads the one who hears it" (Vanhoozer, 2010:343). He adds, "One should no more dismiss Satan's pathological communicative agency, however, than ignore evil. For though it lacks positive being, nevertheless it is (paradoxically) there. For Satan's

Fifth, because the Father is the author of his theodrama, he has authorial determination over Satan. This does not mean, however, that Satan does not determine his own self-enclosed and unresponsive response to the divine author's dialogical interaction with him. Because God created Satan as a communicative, dialogical being, he incorporated a relative freedom in his playwright's design for Satan to freely determine his response to God (Vanhoozer, 2010:334–337).

Sixth, because angels participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory and Satan and his fallen angels are antagonists in this drama, the drama of God's mission for his glory is porous to action that is initiated on the heavenly stage of the theodrama. Consequently, God's drama is an enchanted drama that is suffused with the supernatural. Moreover, this supernatural suffusion is part of the interpretative framework of the drama.[35]

### 2.2.2. The drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, because the Father initiates divine acts, the Son effects divine acts, and the Holy Spirit perfects divine acts, the Father voluntarily creates[36] or authors the earthly stage of their theodrama in Christ, the protagonist of the drama, through the Holy Spirit, the producer and director of the drama (Col. 1:16; cf. Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6; 104:30).[37]

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power is precisely the power of non-being and nothingness, the power of delusion, the means by which Satan works his diabolical version of dialogical consummation. The darkness, death, and hatred in the world are the spawn of Satanic delusion (Rom. 1:28–32)" (Vanhoozer, 2010:343–344). Because "God is the ultimate person who, as the Giver of life, makes us into persons, into responsive and responding beings", van der Kooi and van den Brink write, "The figure of Satan falls far short of this concept of personhood. The devil stands for disintegration, estrangement, emptiness, and curse, and he is therefore the opposite of God as a person. The devil is in the service of *depersonalization*. . . . The devil is 'unperson' or 'antiperson'" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:333–334). For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama, see Balthasar, 1993:TDIII:465–501; Barth, 1960b:III/3:402–558; Bavinck, 2004:II:443–472; 2006:35–36; Berkhof, 1996:141–149; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:1109–1157; Calvin, 1960:I:162–179; Frame, 2013:771–780; Grenz, 2000:213–242; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:332–335; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:276–280.

[35] For more on porosity and enchantment, see Taylor, 2007:25–43; 2014:287–292.

[36] While *creatio ex nihilo* is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, it is implied. See Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:212–213; see also Gunton, 2002b:17; van Bekkum, 2020:19. For an overview of the historical development of *creatio ex nihilo*, see Gunton, 1998:65–96. Because God voluntarily creates, his act of creation can be considered an act of grace. Vanhoozer says that "grace is the gift of God's beneficent presence and activity—that is the communication of God's own light, life, and love to those who have neither the right to them nor a claim on God. . . . Grace is the economic Trinity, the means by which God extends himself toward others, first in creation and later in redemption. Put simply, grace is the Triune God—God sharing his Fatherly love for creation in the Son through the Spirit" (Vanhoozer, 2016a:53).

[37] While God's drama of his mission for his glory takes place on the planet earth, the earthly stage of his theodrama includes the whole universe (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 24; 90; 104; 148; Job 38–41; Isa. 40–44).

Second, because the Father authors or speaks the creation of the world into existence in Christ as the eternal Word (Ps. 33:6; 148:5; Isa. 48:13; Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), Christ is the ontological mediator of creation.[38]

Third, because the Father is ontologically present in his creation in Christ (Heb. 1:3) and through the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:30), creation has a "natural"[39] (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship with God, entailing living in his loving presence and participating in his life through living and moving and having its being in God (Ac. 17:28).[40] As such, because creation is the dwelling place of God in Christ through the Spirit, the ontological structure of creation is porous to God and good and bad angels. Accordingly, it is enchanted.[41] Consequently, created reality is able to ontologically participate in God's trinitarian act of mutual glorification and be a theatre of God's glory (Ps. 8; 19:1–6; 29; 65:9–13; 69:34; 96:11–12; 104; 148:1–4; Isa. 44:23; 49:13; 55:12).[42]

[38] Calvin defines Christ as ontological mediator of creation as follows, "In what pertains to the matter at hand we must first see what the word mediator means. Certainly, the eternal λόγος was already mediator from the beginning, before Adam's fall and the alienation and separation of the human race from God. In this sense, unless we are mistaken, he is also called by Paul the first-born of all creatures; and when John says that life was in him, he indicates the mode of communication from which otherwise hidden source, the grace of God flowed to men". He adds, "It is the proper function of the mediator to unite us to God" (Tylenda, 1973b:147, 148; See also Tylenda, 1973a; Canlis, 2010:53–88; Edmonson, 2004:14–39; Cumin, 96–125). About the world being created *in* Christ Macleod writes, "Creation is Christ-shaped. The space-time curve is Christ-shaped" (Macleod, 2002:93).

[39] In the previous chapter, I wrote, "While distinct from God, creation is inherently compatible with God."

[40] Cosmologically participating in Christ is not the same as redemptively participating in Christ. For this distinction, see Vanhoozer, 2010:156, 281.

[41] Because creation is the sacred dwelling place of God in Christ through the Spirit, it can also be considered to be ontologically sacramental, i.e., it mediates or communicates the presence or glory of God. As such, creation is an icon or a window through which we perceive God (Letham, 2019:282–283). There is no need to understand a sacramental ontology in a Platonic sense where Christ as the mediator of creation is identified with the Platonic forms or ideas (*contra* Boersma, 2009; 2011; cf. Billings, 2018:86–93; Burger, 2020c; Huijgen, 2019b:82–84; Provan, 2017:416–423).

[42] Thus, in chapter two, creation is not only the stage of the theodrama, but also participates in this drama. For Calvin on creation being a theatre, see, e.g., Calvin, 1960:I:51–58, 60–61, 71–72, 179–180; II:340–342; III:713–714). About how Christians should deal with evolution, see van Bruggen, 2015:4–7. Van Bruggen argues that there is an invisible aspect to created reality, and therefore we should remember that scientific conclusions are tentative because they are based on incomplete information and limited to natural causes. However, as such, they may be useful as computational models. For instance, "The computational models that are released on strata may be useful for exploratory drilling, without thereby requiring that the mathematical models of processes lasting millions of years be deemed also historically accurate". And, "A theory of evolution may be a useful model for organizing everything we observe in the world of fossils and animals, but it does not have to be at the same time a statement of historical nature" (van Bruggen, 2015:7; see also van Bekkum and Kwakkel, 2010:333–334). McGrath writes that because of the limits of science and human rationality, we should not "force reality into a Procrustean mould predetermined by the limits of our reason" (McGrath, 2019:202).

Fourth, because God reached the goal toward which he had created on the seventh day,[43] the eschatological goal of creation is the eternal Sabbath rest where creation will rest of the fullness of God's loving presence in Christ through the Spirit and God will be all in all.[44]

### 2.2.3. The drama of providence

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of providence.[45] Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of providence in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, the drama of providence communicates that after having created, God continues to be involved with creation by providing for it.

Second, the drama of providence is a trinitarian,[46] communicative,[47] gracious[48] activity with the Father initiating divine acts, the Son effecting divine acts, and the Holy Spirit perfecting divine acts.

Third, as we have said before, the Father having authorial determination over Satan does not mean that Satan does not determine his response to the divine author's dialogical interaction with him.

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[43] When Kline undergirds his framework hypothesis by asserting that "the divine author has employed the imagery of an ordinary week to provide a figurative chronological framework for the account of his creative acts" (Kline, 1958:156), this statement does not do justice to the fact that Ex. 20:11 and Ex. 31:17 seem to indicate that "the Israelite week is derived from God's creation week and not the other way around" (van Bekkum and Kwakkel, 2010:329).

[44] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama, see Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:173–188; Barth, 1958a:III/1:1–414; Bavinck, 2004:II:406–439, 473–506; Berkhof, 1996:126–140, 150–164; Calvin, 1960:I:159–169; Frame, 2013:184–206; Grenz, 2000:98–112; Jones, 2002:233–259; Kärkkäinen, 2015:9–163; Letham, 2019:271–291; Macleod, 2002:81–93; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:200–233; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:246–276.

[45] God's providence entails conservation (*conservatio* or *preservatio*), concurrence (*concursus* or *cooperatio*), and governance (*gubernatio*) (Frame, 2013:172–182; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:239–244). Barth refers to concursus as "divine accompanying" (Barth, 1960b:III/3:67–102). Regarding concurrence, because we live and move and have our being in God (Ac. 17:28), God participates in what we do (Phil. 2:12–13). This includes that "1. God equips people to act and gives them space to act independently and effectively. 2. People are and remain absolutely dependent on God's all-encompassing and decisive action" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:242). Concerning *concursus* and the responsibility for sin, "God is minimally present in human sin only in the sense that he creates the conditions that enable us to sin. God wanted people who would be able to sin, but did not want the sin itself" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:242–243).

[46] Vanhoozer writes, "Divine providence is less a matter of God's 'strong hand' than of the Father's *two* hands (i.e.,Son and Spirit)—in a word, triune authorship" (Vanhoozer, 2010:367). Lord's Day 9 of the Heidelberg Catechism captures this well when it begins its answer to the question, "What do you believe when you say, 'I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth'?" with: "That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ the Son" (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:876). What Lord's Day 10 confesses about the providence of God needs to be seen within this context (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:238–239; see also Vanhoozer, 2010:369–370).

[47] Because the Father exercises his authorial providence through his two hands—Son/Word and Spirit—the drama of his providence is best understood in personal communicative terms rather than in impersonal causal terms (Vanhoozer, 2010:370).

[48] The drama of providence involves God's special grace to the church as well as his common grace to those outside his church. Common grace includes the restraint of sin, God's wrath, God's gift of temporal blessings, enabling unregenerate people to do good, know the truth, and experience some blessings of the Holy Spirit (Frame, 2013:246–248; see also Horton, 2011a:364–368).

When the divine author created Satan as a communicative, dialogical being, he incorporated a relative freedom in his playwright's design for him to freely determine his response. So also the Father having providential determination over humanity does not mean that humanity does not determine their response to the divine author's dialogical interaction with them. As with Satan, so with people: When the divine author created them as a communicative, dialogical beings, he incorporated a relative freedom in his playwright's design for then to freely determine their response (Vanhoozer, 2010:334–337; see also Kwakkel, 1990:72, 78–79).

Fourth, because the drama of God's providence is not self-evident, it needs to be embraced within "the framework of faith" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:237).[49]

Fifth, as with the drama of the Trinity and creation, the drama of providence implies that creation is ontologically permeated with the presence of God and thus is enchanted with the presence of God.

### 2.2.4. The drama of the creation of humanity

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the creation of humanity. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the creation of humanity in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, because the Father initiates divine acts, the Son effects divine acts, and the Holy Spirit perfects divine acts, the Father voluntarily creates or authors humanity in Christ, the protagonist of the theodrama, through the Holy Spirit, the producer and director of the theodrama, in their image and likeness as communicative agents who are able to bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith and who will one day share in the eschatological destiny of Christ.[50]

Second, humanity can bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith because human beings are created as an anthropological duality[51] with a soul and a body that functions as a psychosomatic unity (Mt. 10:28; 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:8). This soul is a porous, spiritual, ontological reality distinct from the physical body. This reality is essentially a receptive and affective reality that functions like a sounding board through which we experience the resonances or vibrations of ourselves and others,

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[49] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of providence, see Barth, 1960b:III/3:3–270; Bavinck, 2004:II:591–619; Berkhof, 1996:165–178; Calvin, 1960:I:197–237; Frame, 2013:141–183; Grenz, 2000:112–123; Jones, 2002:259–292; Kärkkäinen, 2015:164–193; Letham, 2019:292–311; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:233–244; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:283–313.

[50] Humanity is created as male and female (Gen. 1:27). About the significance of having been created as sexual beings, see Grenz, 2001:269–303; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:280–287. For a defense of Adam and Eve being the first biological parents of the whole human race, see Beeke and Smalley, 2020:143–178; Frame, 803–806; Grenz, 2000:146–148; Macleod, 2002:92–92; *contra* Kärkkäinen, 2015:245–268; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:302; van den Brink, 2020:165–180.

[51] Duality is not the same as dualism. The latter thinks of the distinction hierarchically.

such as God, other human beings, and the world in which we live. Our souls respond rationally, affectively, and volitionally to the resonances they receive (Huijgen, 2019b:130–137).[52] As a receiving and responding spiritual reality, the soul can be equated with our subjectivity or personhood (cf., Oldhoff, 2020; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:267–274; Waaijman, 2002:435–446).

Third, because the Father is ontologically present in his creation in Christ (Heb. 1:3) and through the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:30), humanity has a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship with God entailing living in his loving presence and participating in his life through living and moving and having their being in God (Ac. 17:28).[53] Accordingly, the ontological structure of humanity is porous to God and to good and bad angels.

Fourth, because creating humanity in the image of Father, Son, and Spirit and after their likeness refers to creating them according to the model or standard of Christ, i.e., as sons of God who participate in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit,[54] humanity's calling to represent this status and communion by performing their ontological identity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith as kings and priests who participate in and bear witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation does not constitute their being created in the image and likeness of God, but flows forth from it (Kilner, 2015:94–105, 199–210; *contra* Beale, 2004b:83; 2011:30–33; Horton, 2005a:105; 2011a:397–400).[55] Accordingly, because the model of Christ cannot be lost or damaged, the image of God cannot be lost or damaged.[56] However, it can fail to function and thus damage humanity and creation.[57]

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[52] About the soul being essentially a receptive reality, Huijgen writes, "Knowledge starts with experience and is a form of perception. . . . Reason receives . . . before it starts producing, and that receptivity precedes conscious, reasoning thought". He adds, "In this context, it is striking that the German word reason (*Vernunft*) involves perceiving (*vernehmen*)" (Huijgen, 2019:132). About the soul being essentially an affective reality, Huijgen writes, "Affective, because experience (rather than thought) is primary" (Huijgen, 2019:133).

[53] What I wrote about Christ being the ontological mediator of creation also applies to humanity. Thus, Canlis, drawing on Calvin, writes, "Even in the Garden of Eden, Adam received life not from God *simpliciter*, but from Christ. 'He was the mid-point [*medium*] between God and creatures, so that the life which was otherwise hidden in God would flow from him'" (Canlis, 2010:59).

[54] As we noted earlier, cosmologically participating in Christ is not the same as redemptively participating in Christ.

[55] Just as humanity's royal rule and priestly care flow from their having been created in the image of God, so also human attributes that resemble God's attributes flow from their having been created in the image of God (Kilner, 2015:104, 189–199, 227–230). The same can be said about humanity having relational capacity (Kilner, 2015:210–227; *contra* Jones, 2002:322–336; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:264–266; see also Horton, 2011a:387–393).

[56] For an overview and refutation of those who assert that the image of God is completely lost, virtually lost, partly lost, or appears to be lost, see Kilner, 2015:159–176.

[57] When Paul speaks about having "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24), he is not referring to the image being renewed, but humanity being renewed according to the image. Kilner writes, "Although the passage in Colossians indicates that the person is changing, and that the unchanging standard according to which the person is changing is the 'image of its creator,' many mistakenly read the passage to be saying that the image itself is changing" (Kilner, 2015:192).

Fifth, because Adam's obedience or disobedience has consequences not only for Adam and Eve but also for their posterity, he is a public person who is the natural representative head of humanity (McGowan, 2005:189–198; 2016:126–128).

Sixth, because God created Adam and Eve as communicative, dialogical beings (Gen. 1:28; 2:16–17), he incorporated a relative freedom into his playwright's design for humanity to freely determine their response to him (Vanhoozer, 2010:334–337).[58] This relative freedom to determine their response entails that their actions have moral implications (Gen. 2:16–17). This, in turn, is a manifestation of God's justice (Burger, 2017f:25; van Bruggen, 2014c).[59]

### 2.2.5. The drama of the fall into sin

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the fall into sin. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the fall into sin in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, since the antagonist introduced sin on the stage of God's drama of his mission for his glory after humanity has been created in the image of God, sin "does not belong to the ontological structure of our humanness" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:301).

Second, even though the playwright creates the conditions that enable Satan to subvert and oppose the playwright's theodramatic intention by manipulating humanity to turn away from God and to not participate in God's mission for his glory through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, humanity freely determined their response by allowing themselves to be driven by their own agenda instead of God's.[60] Thus, humanly speaking, humanity is responsible for bringing sin onto the earthly stage of the theodrama.

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[58] Vanhoozer asserts, "The Author's and hero's activities ultimately exist on different levels. The Author is not, therefore, the hero's antagonist. On the contrary, the hero is concerned with the 'effort to exist' and the 'desire to be' on the horizontal plane of earthly existence, the very thing the Author enables". He adds, "My capacity for self-determination therefore has its ground not in my own (monological) existence but rather in the potentially infinite dialogue with the Author God who alone calls me into being and who consummates my life and gives it meaning. It is in response to the dialogical situations that comprise my life, especially my dialogical relation to God, that I exercise the freedom to realize my own voice-idea" (Vanhoozer, 2010:336). About the nature of the will, van Raalte writes, "Our wills, by definition, make free choices, or they are not wills" (van Raalte, 2018:559). Van der Kooi and van den Brink write something similar when they assert that our freedom of choice belongs to "our anthropological structure" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:277). Philosophically, this freedom of choice is referred to as compatibilism because is compatible with our desires and compatible with determinism (Frame, 2013:824–825).

[59] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the creation of humanity, see Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:335–429; 1991b:31–211; Barth, 1960a:III/2:1–523; Bavinck, 2004:II:509–588; Beeke and Smalley, 2020:II:125–321; Berkhof, 1996:179–218; Calvin, 1960:I:183–196; Frame, 2013:783–844; Grenz, 2000:125–132, 139–180; Horton, 2011a:373–407; Jones, 2002:293–343; Kärkkäinen, 2014:233–386, 426–468; Letham, 2019:315–365; Macleod, 2002:107–117; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:247–292; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:314–384.

[60] Regarding how evil, sin, and suffering can be harmonized with God's goodness and justice, "we *can* and *may* say that God, in choosing this creation with its possibilities and limitations, has chosen a reality that is vulnerable. . . . This quality allows us to say that suffering (including suffering that is not inflicted upon us by other people) does

Third, since God wants humanity to participate in the intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification in Christ through the Holy Spirit in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, the essence of sin is to rebelliously and unthankfully turn away from God and refuse to participate in the drama of his mission for his glory in Christ by distrustfully and unthankfully rejecting his divine instruction and to become autonomously self-enclosed and unresponsive to the playwright's dialogical interaction.[61] In doing so, humanity lives in the flesh and not in the Spirit (Rom. 8:5–9). As a result, they lost the glory they once possessed and fall short of the glory that was promised them (Rom. 3:23; Dunn, 1988:168).[62] This, in turn, has an impact on all of creation (Rom. 8:18–25).

Fourth, because Adam was the natural representative head of humanity (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22), all of humanity participated in his distrustful rebellion and the consequences of his rebellion (Moo, 2018:344–356; Murray, 1959:180–186; McGowan, 2016:119–121).[63] As a result, every human is conceived and born in sin, i.e., every human being by nature is self-enclosed and curved in on itself with a natural tendency to unthankfully be estranged from God and driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God and unreceptive to his voice.[64] Moreover, every human being is subject to death.[65]

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not happen outside the will of God. But we *absolutely may not* say that God actually wants evil, let alone sin" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:330–331).

[61] Calvin considers unfaithfulness to be the essence of sin (Calvin, 1960:I:244–246). Gerrish, however, writes, "But it is crucial to note that, for him [Calvin], the essence of infidelity is *not listening to God*" (Gerrish, 1881:218; Canlis, 2010:84). For an overview of how pride, concupiscence, sloth, and falsehood flow forth from unbelief or unfaithfulness, see Jones, 2002:356–361. For understanding sin as being curved in on oneself or *homo incurvatus in se*, see Luther, 1972:245, 291, 313, 345–346, 513; Burger, 2017e:38; O'Donovan, 2014:14–23; Balthasar, 1994:TDIV:165; cf. 137–201; see also Jenson, 2006.

[62] Since scientific conclusions are tentative because they are based on incomplete information and limited to natural causes, I see no need to recontextualize the fall into sin along evolutionary biological lines as van der Kooi and van den Brink do, even though they want to maintain a historical fall into sin by the first "true" human beings (Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:302; van den Brink, 2020:187–195; also *contra* Kärkkäinen, 2014:400–404).

[63] Because of the parallel between verse 12 and verses 15–19, Murray writes, "We must conclude that the 'all sinned' of verse 12 and the one trespass of the one man of verses 15–19 must refer to the same fact or event, that the one fact can be expressed in terms of both singularity and plurality, as the sin of one and the sin of all." He adds, "And the only solution is that there must be some kind of solidarity existing between the 'one' and 'the all' with the result that the sin of the one may at the same time and with equal relevance be regarded as the sin of all" (Murray, 1968:186). Moo comes to a similar conclusion when he writes, "The point is .. . that the sin here attributed to the 'all' is to be understood, in the light of vv. 12a-c and 15–19, as a sin that in some manner is identical to the sin committed by Adam. Paul can therefore say both 'all die because all sin' and 'all die because Adam sinned' with no hint of conflict because the sin of Adam *is* the sin of all" (Moo, 2018:353; see also van Genderen and Velema, 2008:408–410).

[64] Scriptural support for being conceived and born with a sinful nature can be adduced from, e.g., 1 Ki. 8:46; Ps. 130:3; Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; Jn. 3:3–5; see van Genderen and Velema, 2008:407.

[65] Being conceived and born with a sinful nature and being subject to death because humanity participated in Adam's sin is referred to as original sin. For a confessional description of original sin, see article 15 of the Belgic Confession (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:860). Because article 15 states that original sin "is enough to condemn the human race", it implies that original sin includes original guilt (see also Calvin, 1960:II:250–252; Canons of Dort, II-III:2 and 3; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:409–410). However, original guilt can also simply be the result of participation in the sinful act of the natural representative head (Rom. 5:18–19; Eph. 2:3; cf. McGowan, 2016:126–128). Johnson uses the "Christological realism" of the nature of our singular, realistic union with Christ with the dual implications of legal and transformative effects to shed light on our singular, realistic union

Fifth, when God predicts that humanity will deal with the problem it created through a lifelong conflict with Satan and his followers, through which he will redeem creation and humanity from Satan and restores them into his loving presence again, he is maintaining his faithfulness to his creational purpose and his love for creation and humanity. The human being who strikes a mortal blow to Satan's head at the cost of his own life is the protagonist of the theodrama through whom the playwright effects all his divine acts.[66]

### 2.3. Participation in the life of God and the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, because God chose Israel to deal with the problem caused by Adam and Eve's sin by bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations by bearing witness to what is in Christ, Israel's function in the drama of God's mission for his glory is not simply typological and pedagogical, but essential for the salvation of the world. Because God wanted to use Israel to bear witness to what is in Christ, as Israel's substitute and representative, Christ is also Adam's substitute and representative who bears the world's existence in their place and on their behalf, enabling them to participate in his history and destination (cf. Burger, 2017c:84–85).

Second, because God's new covenant is a covenant with Israel in its representative Messiah, God's covenant with Israel is not an interlude or parenthesis in God's drama that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant, but Israel continues to have an abiding place in God's drama (Rom. 11:28). Thus, instead of Israel being replaced with the new covenant, it is reconstituted in Christ. However, whereas Israel was to be a blessing to the Gentiles, now the Gentile Christian church is called to be a blessing for ethnic Jews by arousing them to jealousy so that they can be regrafted into reconstituted Israel (Rom. 11:11–24).

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with Adam. Accordingly, he writes, "If we take this understanding of the implications of being in Christ and apply it to the implications of being in Adam, we derive the following assertion: by virtue of our singular, realistic union with Adam, we experience both the guilt and condemnation of his primal trespass, as well as the corrupt condition into which he fell. Guilt and pollution are distinguishable but inseparable dilemmas that issue forth from our union with Adam" (Johnson, 2013;75–76; cf. 69–77; see also Ashford and Bartholomew, 2020:233–245). For original sin implying total depravity, see Frame, 2013:860–863. About the transmission of original sin, Bavinck writes, "How original sin is propagated remains somewhat mysterious. It is not something physical—transmitted by propagation—but a moral quality of the person who lacks the communion with God that one should and does possess by virtue of one's original nature" (Bavinck, 2006:III:364).

[66] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the fall into sin, see Barth, 1956b:IV/1:395–572; 1958b:IV/2:423–564; 1961a:IV/3a:368–478; Bavinck, 2006:III:23–190; Beeke and Smalley, 2020:325–496; Berkhof, 1996:219–261; Calvin, 1960:II:241–340; Frame, 2013:845–873; Grenz, 2000:181–212; Horton, 2011a:408–443; Jones, 2002:343–364; Kärkkäinen, 2014:387–425; Letham, 2019:366–401; Macleod, 2002:107–117; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:293–337; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:385–436.

Third, because God chose Israel to be the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, the drama of election begins with God's election of Israel.[67] What God enacts in the drama of the election of Israel in history is the outworking of his plan of salvation in Christ from eternity (Eph. 1:11).[68]

Fourth, while God's election of Israel is the performance of his unconditional love (Dt. 7:6–8; 9:4–6), it is conditional upon Israel's obedience of faith (Ex. 19:5–6; cf. 2 Pet. 2:10–11).[69]

Fifth, because God makes covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David mostly to deal with problems of uncertainty regarding the fulfillment of his creational purpose, covenants are redemptive

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[67] About two kinds of election, see de Jong, 2002:165–349; Calvin, 1960:III:926–932; see also Barach, 2004:149–156). God's special election unto eternal salvation will be dealt with in the drama of the Holy Spirit. Within his election of Israel, we also see God electing the older to serve the younger (Rom. 9:11–12; cf. vv. 7–8 re: Isaac and Ishmael). Van Bruggen writes, "Later, what is written in these verses have repeatedly been thought to refer to *eternal* election. However, the primary concern here is the designation of a place in time and the acceptance of that designation or calling. There is a place for Ishmael, but not the first place in God's history. The same is true for Esau: there is a place for him, but subservient to his younger brother. In both cases, God's direction and speaking is decisive" (van Bruggen, 2006:138). We see something similar with the dynamics of God's dealing with Pharaoh and Israel when God wanted Pharaoh, as the superior, to step aside and serve Israel, as the inferior. However, he did not want to do this (Rom. 9:17–18). Van Bruggen writes, "Pharaoh could have immediately stepped aside for Moses and God. That's what God wanted. Nothing else. Then Pharaoh would have saved Egypt, because the superior (Pharaoh and his people) had served the inferior (the slave people) at God's direction". He adds, "However, when Pharaoh resisted God's command, he and all his subjects burned themselves on the fire of God's mercy upon whom he wills (in this case: Israel). Thus, Pharaoh was awakened [or "raised up'] to demonstrate God's power. Either through cooperation or helpless resistance" (van Bruggen, 2006:140). Because of his resistance, Pharaoh evoked God's wrath and prepared himself (cf. middle voice) for destruction (Rom. 9:22). Van Bruggen writes, "There is an expression in 9:22 that seems to indicate that with the vessels of wrath, God never wanted anything but their destruction ('prepared for destruction'). . . . If Paul wants us to think of being predestined for destruction, however, there is no longer room for 'wrath'. Why should a vessel made to be thrown away be able to evoke wrath? However, the Greek word order makes it clear that 'wrath' *precedes* the preparation for destruction because of their unwillingness and hardening" (van Bruggen, 2006:143). This is also why God hated Esau/Edom (Rom. 9:13; Mal. 1:3). Van Bruggen writes, "Because Edom resisted that choice [the older will serve the younger] and continually was an enemy of Israel, Edom has become the object of God's hatred. God has an abiding wrath against this area of wickedness (Ml. 1:4)" (van Bruggen, 2006:138). What Paul writes about vessels of wrath preparing themselves for destruction because of their unbelief, parallels what he wrote in Rom. 1:18–32 and 2:1–13 (van Bruggen, 2006:143). Thus, there is no eternal hatred or wrath in God (Douma, 2017:326–333).

[68] In Romans 9–11, Paul describes this reconstitution as a cutting of hardened Jews off Israel, the olive tree, and a grafting in of Christian Gentiles into Israel (Rom. 11:17–24). Whether Paul, in Romans 11:25–26a indicates that the elect Jews will be grafted in (e.g., Bavinck, 2008:IV:668–672; Hendriksen, 1981:381; Hoekema, 1994:139–147) or is speaking of a large conversion of the Jewish people (e.g., Bruce, 1987:209; Cranfield, 1985:282; Dunn, 1988:681; Greijdanus, 1933:515–516; Murray, 1965–II:98; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:356; van Houwelingen, 2011:305–313; Venema, 2011:35–40; Vos, 1994:89) is difficult to determine. Because both lines of thought are present in the context of verses 25–26a and have a bearing on its interpretation, Van Bruggen speaks about "an exegetical stalemate" (van Bruggen, 2006:172). Because the word "Israel" in Romans 9–11 always refers to ethnic Jews, it is highly unlikely that "all Israel" refers to the church, the Israel of God, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles (*contra* Calvin, 1989:437; Barth, 1968:416; Wright, N., 1991a:249–250; 2004:61–62; 2013:1244–1252).

[69] For an overview of discussions and developments within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) regarding the relationship between covenant and election, see de Boer, 2007:107–136; see also de Jong, 2002:165–171.

instruments with missional intent through which God rescues the drama of his mission for his glory and moves this drama forward to its eschatological fulfillment (Leder, 2014:695–696; Wright, 2006:331). [70]

### 2.4. Participation in the life of God and the drama of Christ

To outline participation in or dwelling in the life of God and the drama of Christ, I will first outline the drama of the person of Christ. Second, I will sketch the drama of the work of Christ.[71]

#### 2.4.1. The drama of the person of Christ

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the person of Christ. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the person of Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, the Son of God, who is sent by the Father, takes on humanity's frail human flesh, and represents the Father on earth, bearing witness to his glorious presence, is the second person of the Trinity who eternally and perichoretically subsists in the generative and communicative being of God with his personal identity, communicatively effecting divine acts in time as the protagonist of God's drama of his mission for his glory (Mt. 1:23).

Second, when Christ takes on human flesh, he unites our human nature to his divine person so that he has both a divine and a human nature.[72] In having a human nature, Christ laid the indispensable foundation for our redemption, since our redemption takes place in him because he needs to obediently participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith as a human being. Moreover, because Israel and humanity called the wrath of God's judgment down upon themselves because of their intentional disobedience, a human being needs to still this wrath and bear this judgment.[73] Furthermore, because Israel and humanity need to rise

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[70] For a systematic theological overview of the drama of Israel and covenant, see Berkhof, 1979:221–265; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:338–380.

[71] "Christology and soteriology are two-in-one; person and work, Christology and soteriology, cannot be separated. In what Jesus does we detect who he is, and who he is becomes clear from the course of his life and his exaltation by God . . . [Thus, the sequence of dealing with the person of Christ before the work of Christ] is arbitrary and might just as easily have been reversed" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:385; see also Jones, 2002:366).

[72] On the different understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* or communication of attributes between the Lutheran and the Reformed, see Davidson, 2020:454–555. About Christ's divinity not being restricted by his humanity, but also being outside (*ex*) of it, see Davidson, 2020:461–463.

[73] When speaking about the redemption Christ achieves, we need to remember that we have redemption in spite of and because of Christ. We have redemption "in spite of" Christ because his death is the result of his being violently eliminated as a blasphemer and a political threat. Accordingly, "[at] its core the suffering of Jesus is the result of the violence, dishonesty, cowardice, and treason of the people toward him. . . . People got rid of Jesus because he got in their way. We cannot dress up this rejection in nice soteriological terms, for it manifests no saving or redeeming aspects" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:479). We have redemption "because of" Christ because, as the sovereign Lord of history, God uses this terrible injustice done to Jesus by using his suffering and death to deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil and bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations (Ac 2:23). Thus, "God absorbs the acts of people in his own acts" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:480).

from the dead as a glorified new creation transfigured by the Holy Spirit, a human being needs to rise from the dead as a glorified new creation transfigured by the Holy Spirit.

Third, in being conceived and born by the Holy Spirit and uniting himself to our flesh, Christ is the promised son of Adam and Eve, the human being who would deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil caused by their sin, the promised son of Abraham who would invite humanity and creation into God's Sabbath rest by participating in his life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the promised son of David who would rule Israel as God's treasured possession that would truly mediate the presence of God to the nations by performing and bearing witness to the splendour of his perfect life. In short, he is the promised Messiah and the authentic human being.

Fourth, as the promised Messiah and the authentic human being, Christ is Israel's substitute and representative, [74] who bears their existence in their place and on their behalf, enabling them to participate in his history and destination. Furthermore, because God wanted to use Israel to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations, as Israel's substitute and representative, Christ is also Adam's substitute and representative who bears the world's existence in their place and on their behalf, enabling them to participate in his history and destination (cf. Burger, 2017c:84–85).

Fifth, in taking on our weak and frail human flesh and uniting himself to our human nature, Christ enabled the love the Father has for him in eternity to enter into time so that our humanity can participate in this eternal Father-Son love by becoming children of God who are joined to the Son by being born of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith through the Spirit of God (cf. Clark and Johnson, 2015:58; Fairbairn, 2009:131–139).

Sixth, because Christ is the image of the Father who represented the Father and bore witness to his glorious presence on earth, "God's identity is definitively and irreversibly defined by Jesus" (Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:383; see also Clark and Johnson, 2015:79–82).[75]

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[74] Substitution is the exclusive element of our relationship with Christ. Burger writes, "Jesus Christ takes our place and remains permanently exclusive in this: *exclusive*, in the sense of unique and irreplaceable. With this moment, it is about him taking our place and taking over our role. . . . What he is, we are not. What he experiences, we do not need to experience. What he does, we cannot do" (Burger, 2017c:93–94). Representation is the inclusive element in our relationship with Christ. Burger writes, "Jesus Christ is our representative in whom we are represented. Thus, he is called the 'last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45). Unlike substitution (taking our place), representation is inclusive and thus open in the direction of . . . participation. . . . We can participate in his story to a certain extent and experience what he experienced. As he is, we may become. What he experienced, we can also experience. What he does, we can do. Representation and participation, therefore, belong together" (Burger, 2017c:94).

[75] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the person of Christ, see Balthasar, 1993:TDIII:149–282; 2004:TLII::13–361; 2005:TLIII:17–60; Barth, 1956a:I/2:1–221; Bavinck, 2006:III:233–319; Beeke and Smalley, 2020:721–865; Berkhof, 1996:303–330; Calvin, 1960:II:464–493; Frame, 2013:877–898; Grenz, 2000:243–339; Horton, 2011a:446–482; Jones, 2002:365–426; Kärkkäinen, 2013:35–290; Letham, 2019:471–544; Macleod, 2002:133–144; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:381–431; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:437–462.

### 2.4.2. The drama of the work of Christ

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the work of Christ. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the work of Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, by offering the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative,[76] Christ was the theatre of God's mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity through being open and responsive to Father by trustfully listening to and doing his will with the loving intent to redeem Israel and creation from the powers of evil: sin, death, and the devil.[77] Consequently, he called Israel to repent and believe the good news of the coming kingdom of heaven.

Second, when Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative, Israel participated in this sacrifice and was sanctified in him (Jn. 17:19; 1 Cor. 1:30).[78] Because God wanted to use Israel to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations by bearing witness to what is in Christ, the world also participated in the history of Israel's representative and has its sanctification in Christ (cf. Burger, 2008:546). [79] Accordingly, Christ is not only the true Israel but also

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[76] In chapter four, I wrote, that while we do read in Scripture that Christ represented those who were elected from all eternity (Jn. 6:44; 17:2, 6, 9, 24; Rev. 7), we also read that Christ represented all humanity (Jn. 1:29; 3:16–17; 12:47; 1 Jn. 2.2; 4:14) as well as Israel in particular (Gal. 3:10–14; 4:4–5). Instead of pressing these different perspectives into a theological system, Burger suggests that we formulate rules to help us understand the rhetorical intent or grammar of the speech acts in Scripture in the various situations in which these speech acts occur so that we can give a pastoral answer when one wonders who Christ represented. If one wonders whether he has been represented by Christ, then it is fitting to give the inviting answer that Christ represented all humanity. If one thinks that simply belonging to humanity is sufficient to be represented by Christ, then it is fitting to give the descriptive answer that Christ represented his church, i.e., believers and their children. If one does not want to believe because he trusts in his capacities, then it is fitting to give the confronting answer that Christ represented only those whom the Father draws to himself, i.e., the decretal elect. This last answer can also be considered a doxological answer that gives praise to God (cf. Burger, 2008:545–546; 2017c:290–291). Thus, this study agrees with the confessional formulation of the doctrine of limited atonement found in the Canons of Dort II.8: "it was God's will that Christ . . . should effectively redeem . . . only those who were chosen from eternity for salvation and given to him by the Father" (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:904). The pastoral context of this answer is the Remonstrants' assertion that Christ only made salvation possible for humanity and that it is up to humanity to make this a reality in their lives. However, it considers this to be only one perspective on the death of Christ that should be given as a confrontational and doxological answer. It could also be given as an eschatic-descriptive answer that is given in the life hereafter (Burger, 2008:456). That this confessional formulation of the Canons of Dort is only one possible confession formulation can be seen in the fact that the Belgic Confession in article 34 gives the descriptive answer, i.e., Christ represented the church, i.e., believers and their children when it writes, "And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults" (Strange and Vander Meulen, 2018:868). The pastoral context of this answer is the Anabaptists who asserted that children were not members of the covenant and therefore not in Christ. This same descriptive answer to the question of who Christ represented is found in the Forms for the Baptism of Infants (United Reformed Churches in North America:9–15).

[77] The word "redemption" "points to a broad spectrum of total deliverance (atonement, inner healing, sanctification, glorification) in Christ and emphasizes the unity of these aspects" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:444).

[78] Because Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his life through the Holy Spirit as *Israel's* substitute and representative, there is no need to formulate the sacrifice of Christ's life as a fulfillment of the covenant of works.

[79] For being sanctified by the Spirit, see the drama of the Holy Spirit.

the last Adam in whom humanity receives its new humanity (Eph. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).

Third, when Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative, he continued to be the theatre of God's mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity through being open and responsive to Father by trustfully listening to and doing his will with the loving intent to redeem Israel and creation from the powers of evil.[80]

Fourth, when Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative, Israel participated in this sacrifice and was redeemed in him (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Ti. 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18–19; Rev. 5:9; 14:4).

Fifth, when Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit as Israel's substitute and representative, as king, he defeated the powers of evil: sin, death, and the devil (Lk 10:18; Jn. 12:31; 1 Cor. 15:55; Col 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 1:18; 21:4). He defeated sin by making atonement for sin as priest by ransoming Israel from the evil of sin, [81] through expiating or removing it from God's sight and propitiating or stilling his wrath (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).[82] In doing so, as priest he reconciles Israel to God (Rom. 3:24–26; Col. 2:14), and as king frees them from the curse of the law and the power of the devil (Isa. 53:5–6; Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45;[83] Rom. 5:15–19; Gal. 3:13; Hebr. 2:14–15; Jn. 16:11; Col. 1:13; 2:15), so that Israel can bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations by bearing witness to what is in Christ (Gal. 3:14; Burger, 2020a:167; Macchia,

[80] Because Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit as *Israel's* substitute and representative, there is no need to formulate the sacrifice of Christ's death as a fulfillment of the covenant of works.
[81] In chapter four, I wrote, "Nowhere does the New Testament speak about Christ purchasing benefits of salvation for us. Instead, it speaks about Christ ransoming people (Mk. 10:45; Rev. 5:9; 14:4)". Thus, the work of Christ does not have a twofold soteriological structure where Christ purchased substantivized benefits of salvation which the Holy Spirit applies to those who believe so that salvation is no longer in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). For an overview of the historical background of how this twofold soteriological structure developed, see Burger, 2017c:26-37).
[82] Expiation and propitiation are intrinsically tied together. You cannot have one without the other. Macleod writes, "The expiation has meaning and value only as a means of propitiation. . . . To speak here of an expiation which does not propitiate would be meaningless". He adds, "In saying this, however, we have always to keep in mind that, in Christian terms, the expiation is offered to the God who is love, who already, indeed, loves sinners and is altogether predisposed to welcome the expiation offered to him" (Macleod, 2014:147; cf. 101–150; Burger, 2020b:168–169; see also Packer, 1973:161–180).
[83] About the metaphor of "ransom", Macchia writes, "He [i.e., Jesus] used the metaphor of a *ransom* (Mark 10:45), which meant a payment or offering made to deliver someone from captivity. The point of the ransom metaphor is not so much the payment, as though God needs to be paid off to show humanity mercy. Instead, the point is that the self-offering of Christ in the fulfillment of the Father's will to free humanity from its captivity to sin and death" (Macchia, 2018:263; see also Burger, 2020b:161, 170, 172).

2018:249–250).[84] Moreover, he freed them from absolute separation from God in hell.[85] Furthermore, he purified their conscience from dead works and sanctified them (Heb. 9:14; 19:1–18; Burger, 2017g:76–77).

In doing so, he laid the soteriological basis for the new covenant, enabling them to participate in the divine nature by living in the Father's presence and sharing in his filial status and communion of love with his Father (Heb. 8:1–13). As a result, he brought about a new exodus. In defeating sin by making atonement for Israel's sin, God demonstrated his righteousness and condemned sin in the flesh of Christ. In doing so, God demonstrated his faithfulness to his covenant with Israel by having a true Israelite deal with the problem of sin, death, and the devil and bring the blessing of Abraham, i.e., the redemption in Christ, to the nations as well as his faithfulness to his law that demanded that sin be punished with death (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:5–7, 21–26; 6:23; Burger, 2020a:171; Wright, N., 2004:51–59; 2013:835–846; 2018:295–351; 2020b:169). As a result, God's justice was also satisfied (Burger, 2020a:176). Because God wanted to use Israel to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations, the world also participated in the history of Israel's representative and is ransomed and reconciled in him (Jn. 1:29;[86] 2 Cor. 5:19;[87] 1

[84] However, as I wrote in the previous chapter, having rescued Israel from the curse of the law, as Israel's representative and Abraham's seed, Christ also fulfills Israel's calling to bring Abraham's blessing of being rescued from the curse of the law to the nations "before that curse could reach them" (van Bruggen, 2005:199; cf. 1999:201; O'Donovan, 1994:123–130, 134, 141; Wright, C., 1992:22, 44, 62–63, 125–135, 153–174, 182; 2006:65–66, 325, 342–344; Wright, 2013:495–537; cf. Burger, 2017f:27; 2018a:15).

[85] When Christ was forsaken by his Father, this was not just his subjective experience, but an absolute reality (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:479–480).

[86] Köstenberger writes, "Moreover, as God's lamb, Jesus takes upon himself the sin not merely of Israel, but of the entire world (cf. 1:10). . . . John makes clear that Jesus came to save the entire world (John 3:17; 1 John 2:2) and that he is the Savior of the world, not merely Israel (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14)" (Köstenberger, 2004:67–68).

[87] Martin writes, "The periphrastic tense (participle + verb ἦν, "was") denotes an element of contingency that, although the reconciliation is complete from God's side, there is the possibility that some people may not accept it . . . or that, with an eye on his readers, they may not have entered into the full experience of reconciliation" (Martin, 1986:154). Van Spanje writes, ". . . the fact that Christ died on behalf of and in place of all not only means that all died (verse 14), but also has as goal (cf. *hina*) that humanity will live for the other [like Christ]! However, this only becomes a reality in believers: those who live in Christ (indicated by *hoi zoontes*), also live for Christ" (van Spanje, 2009:158–159). Commenting on 2 Cor. 5:18–21, he adds, "If people do not accept God's [universal] act of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20), the reconciliation remains incomplete in some respects" (van Spanje, 2009:163; cf. 167–168). O'Donovan articulates the same idea when he writes, "The question that is asked of us, in our time is not: shall all mankind then be saved in Christ?—for that question has been answered by him in his time, and does not need the living of our lives to answer it further. The question is this: shall we ourselves be saved with all mankind in Christ?" (O'Donovan, 1986:125; Burger, 2008:461). Accordingly, Smits writes, "We thus distinguish between the Christological and the pneumatological moment of the reality of reconciliation. The former involves the reality of reconciliation *extra nos*, the latter the reality of reconciliation *in nobis*, that is, here and now" (Smits, 2021:15).

Jn. 2:2;[88] 4:14;[89] cf. Burger, 2008:546; O'Donovan, 1994:15; 1996:130, 136–137, 141–142).[90] Moreover, when Christ defeated death with his death on the cross, he not only redeemed humanity from the fear of death (Heb. 2:15; 1 Cor. 15:55; Rev. 1:18; 21:4), but he also enabled them to participate in the incorruptibility of his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Furthermore, when Christ defeated the devil with his death on the cross, he bound the devil by mortally wounding him and curtailing his power (Gen. 3:15; Lk 10:18; Jn. 12:31; Col 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 20:2–3).

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[88] Smalley writes, "As in the Gospel of John, the scope of divine salvation is ultimately regarded as all-inclusive. The fourth evangelist describes Jesus as the 'Savior of the world' (4:42; cf. 3:16); and here John refers to him as the one whose 'atoning sacrifice' relates to the sins of 'the whole world.'" He adds, "The adjective 'whole,' (περὶ) ὅλου, is intensive. The sacrificial offering of Christ is effective not just for the sins of the 'world' (which could refer to a section of it), and still less for 'our' sins (those of John's immediate circle) alone; it embraces the sins of the *whole* world" (Smalley, 1984:40).

[89] Smalley writes, "The writer maintains that Jesus the Son is 'savior of the world' (τοῦ κόσμου). The 'world' in this context means not only mankind in general, as the theatre of salvation . . . but also the world in *opposition* to God (5:19), in need of redemption. . . . In both cases the thought of the scope of salvation is potentially universal. . . . " (Smalley, 1984:253).

[90] The world participating in the history of Israel's representative and having its salvation in him could be considered a form of hypothetical universalism similar to the English hypothetical universalism (cf. Crisp, 2014:175–209; Moore, 2011:124–161). This universalism is considered to be hypothetical because "the work of Christ is universal in its sufficiency but applied to an elect number less than the total number of fallen humanity; hence *hypothetical* universalism" (Crisp, 2014:176). This distinction between the extent and the application of the work of Christ draws on the sufficiency/efficiency distinction first formulated by Peter Lombard (1096–1160). Lombard wrote, "He offered himself on the altar of the cross not to the devil, but to the triune God, and he did so for all with regard to the sufficiency of the price, but only for the elect with regard to its efficacy, because he brought about salvation only for the predestined" (cited by Allen, 2016:27). Allen writes, "Historically this statement indicated that Christ's death paid the price for the sins of the world but that the benefits of the atonement were only applied to the elect (those who believe)" (Allen, 2016:27). He adds, "The [sufficient/efficient] *concept*, however, is *at least* as old as Ambrose (AD 338–397)". This extrinsic sufficiency was modified and narrowed by later Reformers to an intrinsic sufficiency or intrinsic value of the sacrifice of Christ so that his death "'could have been' (instead of 'was') a ransom for the sins of all people" (Allen, 2016:27, cf. 27–31). Hypothetical universalism has always been part of the Reformed tradition. Muller writes, "Given that there was a significant hypothetical universalist trajectory in the Reformed tradition from its beginnings, it is arguably less than useful to describe its continuance as a softening of the tradition". He adds, "More importantly, the presence of various forms of hypothetical universalism as well as various approaches to a more particularistic definition renders it rather problematic to describe the tradition as 'on the whole' particularistic and thereby to identify hypothetical universalism as a dissident, subordinate stream of the tradition, rather than as one significant stream (or, perhaps two!) among others, having equal claim to confessional orthodoxy" (Muller, 2011:25; 2012:126–160; Crisp, 2014:178). It should be noted that "hypothetical universal has never been repudiated by a Reformed synod or council" (Crisp, 2014:178). For how "the position of English Hypothetical Universalism . . . was brought to bear powerfully upon the deliberations and final formulations of the Synod to the extent that the British Delegation were able to subscribe to the resulting Canons shortly before returning to England", see Moore, 2011:145; cf.144–148; Lynch, 2021:85–98; cf. 70–100. On options available at the Synod of Dort, see Thomas, 1997:128–159. On the Canons of Dordt representing "a balanced compromise statement of the Reformed doctrine of the extent of the atonement which accommodated the considerable varieties of thought on that subject within the international Reformed community", see Godfrey, 1975:171; see also Gatiss, 2018:156. Regarding the interpretation of universalist-sounding and particularist-sounding texts in Scripture, Crisp writes, "Those defending the definite-atonement position think that the particularist passages are somehow theologically more fundamental than the universalist-sounding ones. The latter should be understood in the light of the former, for God's purposes are not confounded by creaturely actions and God accomplishes all God set out to do in creation." He adds, "Hypothetical universalism presents readers of the biblical texts with a different way of thinking about the same material. Rather than privileging one set of passages over another, why not let them stand in tension?" (Crisp, 2014:197–198).

In addition, Christ's work of redemption with the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death is meant to evoke our response of faith (Lk. 7:47; Ac. 2:37; 2 Cor. 5:19–21; Jn. 13:15; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5; Heb. 12:1–2; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Jn. 2:6; 3:16; cf. van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017:467–470).[91] Moreover, his work of redemption was according to the plan of God (Isa. 53:10; Lk. 22:22; 24:26; Ac. 2:23; Eph. 1:3–11).

Sixth, when Christ is raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit and vindicated to be both God and Israel's true Messiah (Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16), God reversed the miscarriage of justice that had taken place when Jesus was innocently condemned to death. Moreover, Christ's resurrection from the dead is proof that as king he defeated Israel's and our real enemies: sin, death, and the devil and that our redemption is already realized and complete in him, although this has a hidden quality. Thus, when he rises from the dead with a glorified resurrection body, he does so as the first fruits of God's hidden, eschatological, incorruptible new creation in fulfillment of the promise of a new covenant (Jn. 11:25–26; Ac. 2:24; Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:20–23; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5, 18; cf. Ezek. 37:1–14; 36:33–38). Furthermore, by rising from the dead through the Holy Spirit, Christ can pour forth the Holy Spirit (Macchia, 2018:248).

Moreover, because Jesus rose from the dead as Israel's representative, Israel participated in his resurrection from the dead and was justified[92] in him and has its new life in him (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; Jn. 17:19).[93] In addition, victims of injustice have their vindication in Christ as well (Rom. 4:25; Burger, 2017c:36–37, 227–228, 233). Because God wanted to use Israel to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations, the world also participated in the resurrection of Israel's representative and has its new life in him because as Israel's representative, Christ is also the representative head of creation and humanity (cf. Burger, 2008:546; O'Donovan, 1994:13–15, 31, 57; 1996:142).[94]

Seventh, when Christ ascended into heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit, his life was hidden in the glory of the Father. From there he continues to participate in the drama of his Father's mission for his glory through a listening and thankful spirit of the filial openness and responsiveness as

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[91] This study uses the various models of atonement—through victory, satisfaction, and transformation—in a complementary manner. For an overview of the three models, see Aulén, 2003; Boersma, 2004:99–201; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:453–470. For the sacrament of penance being the background of the satisfaction model, see Burger, 2015:273–274; 2017c:26–28; 2017a:75–76. For how the satisfaction model isolates the cross from the rest of the history of Jesus Christ, e.g., his resurrection, the history of Israel, the kingdom of God, and eschatology, as well as our participation in the death of Christ, see Burger, 2017c:29–30; cf. 67–102, 135–139; 2020b:159–162. As an integrative concept, this study ties the three models together with the concept of Christ being Israel's substitute and representative (cf. Burger, 2017g:63; 2020b:158, 165). For a similar integrative concept, viz., participation, see Hastings, 2019. For an overview of the different biblical images for salvation forming one story of salvation, see Burger, 2017c:243–291; 2017a:61–79; see also 2014c:51–65.

[92] For being justified by faith, see the drama of the Holy Spirit.

[93] For being made alive in the Spirit, see the drama of the Holy Spirit.

[94] See the previous note.

the head and mediator of the new covenant and lord of the universe (Ac. 2:33; Eph. 1:20–22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:4; 1 Tim. 2:5). In doing so, he inaugurated the last days (Ac. 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; Ju. 18; 1 Jn. 2:18). As king, he rules as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and the great Son of David (Lk. 1:32–33; Ac. 2:34–35; Heb. 1:13), upholding and governing his body, his church (Mt. 18:20; 28:20; Jn. 16:13; Eph. 4:8; Rev. 2–3) and leading history to its ultimate fulfillment in the coming kingdom of God through his Word and Spirit (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). As priest, he intercedes for his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 2:16–18; 4:14–16; 7:25; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Jn. 2:1–2) and blesses them (Lk. 24:51; Eph. 1:3). As prophet, he continues to confront Israel and the nations with the Father's good news of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, urging them to repent and believe this good news or else face the fire of God's wrath in his coming judgment and be excluded from this kingdom (Jn. 10:11; Ac. 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 30–31; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 12:28; 2 Pet. 1:11; Jas. 2:5; Rev. 11:15).[95]

### 2.5. Participation in the life of God and the drama of the Holy Spirit

To outline participation in or dwelling in the life of God and the drama of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, I will first outline the drama of the Spirit as the giver of life. Second, I will sketch the drama of the Spirit as the communicator of direction. Third, I will outline the drama of the Spirit as the creator of a new community. Fourth, I will sketch the drama of the Spirit as the renewer of our humanity.[96]

#### 2.5.1. The drama of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following. First, the Spirit who gives life is the third person of the Trinity who eternally and perichoretically subsists in the generative and communicative being of God with his personal identity, perfecting divine acts in time as the producer and director of God's drama of his mission for his glory.

[95] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the work of Christ, see Balthasar, 1994:TDIV:205–423; Barth, 1956b:IV/1:3–394; 1958b:IV/2:3–422; 1961a:IV/3a:3–367; Bavinck, 2006:III:323–482; Beeke and Smalley, 2020:869–1180; Berkhof, 1996:331–411; Calvin, 1960:II:494–534; Frame, 2013:899–920; Grenz, 2000:339–356; cf. 256–260; Horton, 2011a:483–547; Jones, 2002:427–482; Kärkkäinen, 2013:291–403; Letham, 2019:545–594; Macleod, 2002:145–155; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:432–488; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:462–538; see also Vanhoozer, 2020:473–496).

[96] Formally, I am following van der Kooi and van den Brink who outline their pneumatology as: the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, the Book of God and of Humans, Renewal of God's Community, and Renewal of the Human Being (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:489–710). They also include eschatology in their pneumatology as the renewal of God's world (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:711–759).

Second, because God preserves his creation through the Spirit, the Spirit also works in human culture and history. This work has generally been referred to as God's common grace.[97]

Third, as the giver of life, the Spirit has a threefold relationship with Christ. Because the Father eternally generates or begets the Son in the spiration of the Holy Spirit and the Son is eternally generated or begotten by the Father in the spiration of the Spirit, Christ *proceeds* from the Spirit. Moreover, because the Spirit rests on Jesus, Christ is also the *bearer* of the Spirit. Furthermore, because the Spirit is distributed through the Father and the Son, the Father and Christ *send* the Spirit. This threefold relationship between the Christ and the Spirit entails that the Spirit, as the giver of life, is the one who draws us into the life of God, enabling us to participate in this life and partake of the divine nature by uniting us to Christ through having us putting him on through faith and cloth ourselves with him so that we participate in his status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father. It also entails that Christ cannot be separated from the Spirit or the Spirit from Christ (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:498, 505–506).

Fourth, as the giver of life, the Spirit is not only a person,[98] but also a gift. More precisely, he is the promised eschatological gift of the new covenant who empowers God's new covenant community to be a theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory made up of actors who bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity. As such, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present.[99]

### 2.5.2. The drama of the Holy Spirit as the communicator of direction

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the Holy Spirit as the giver of direction. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the communicator of direction in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.[100]

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[97] When Douma gives a summary description of Kuyper's understanding of common grace, he writes, "common grace is that favor of God which as *common* grace is not universal and found in everyone by nature, but is a conferred good within the circle of humanity, common to elect and non-elect; and which as common *grace* is not salvific, but only arrests sin and its consequences (and therefore the execution of Gen. 2:17)" (Douma, 2017:7).

[98] Earlier I wrote that the "eternal relations of origin that subsist within the one being of God is what is meant by the persons' of the Trinity". Thus, "[i]t is not as though the relations *exist between* the three persons. . . . Rather the persons *are* the relations" (Allison and Köstenberger, 2020:255–256; see also Vanhoozer, 2010:146–147).

[99] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the Spirit as the giver of life, see Barth, 1975:I/1:448–465; 1956b:IV/1:718–845; Bavinck, 2008:IV:29–95; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:I:366–368, 940–944, 1065; Berkhof, 1996:95–99; Calvin, 1960:I:138–140; III:537–542; Frame, 2013:477–479, 923–963; Grenz, 2000:105–106, 357–378, 405–422; Horton, 2011a:551–586; 2017b:29–40; Jones, 2002:II:497–501; Kärkkäinen, 2016:43–118, 263–311; Letham, 2019:86–91; Macleod, 2002:197–207; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:489–532; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:294–297, 578–589.

[100] For this grammatical reconceptualization, I have drawn on what I wrote in chapter 2, section 2.1 (the nature of Scripture) and section 2.2. (the nature of hermeneutics).

First, because God's being is a dynamic communicative activity between the Father, Son, and Spirit and because God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity reveals his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity, God is communicatively present in this world, encountering us in Christ through the Holy Spirit through a variety of means to draw us into his divine life.[101]

Second, because God's being is a dynamic communicative activity between the Father, Son, and Spirit and because God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity reveals his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity, God sends his Son into this world to embody his communicative action to draw people into the new covenant community and have them participate in his divine life in Christ.

Third, because God's being is a dynamic communicative activity between the Father, Son, and Spirit and because God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity reveals his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity, Scripture is God's communicative action in and through which he is present in Christ through the Holy Spirit and speaks as a communicative agent, addressing and engaging those who hear and read it through a wide variety of divine communicative acts, drawing them into an ever-deeper communion with himself in Christ (Vanhoozer, 2002:35; cf. 9–13, 202, 291–292; cf. Huijgen, 2019b:24–31). This gives to God's communicative action a mystagogical orientation, i.e., it is intended to guide and draw believers into the mystery of their participation in the divine nature by uniting us to Christ through putting him on through faith and clothing ourselves with him so that we participate in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.[102]

Fourth, because Scripture is the inspired script, transcript, and prescript that witnesses to the unfolding drama of God's mission for his glory in Christ through the Holy Spirit, it is a reliable and authoritative means through which he dialogically engages Israel and humanity with his speech acts and

[101] For Calvin on God's accommodation in his revelation, see Huijgen, 2011. For an analysis and evaluation of various models of revelation, see van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:171–181. For Horton's understanding of general revelation as an independent source of revelation alongside special revelation, see chapter four, section 1.8.2.

[102] Billings writes, "Interpreting Scripture cannot be reduced to method or technique, because it is nothing less than a part of our life of participation in Christ through the Spirit, a means by which God nurtures our love of God and neighbor" (Billings, 2010:195). On the fourfold sense in connection with reading Scripture and how this fourfold sense can be reconfigured to give a fourfold perspective on how the reader is included in the theodrama of Scripture, see chapter 2, section 2.3.

prompts them to participate faithfully and fittingly[103] in the theodrama that is being played out in the history of this world and the history of their lives.[104]

Fifth, because God sent Scripture on a mission to verbalize his communicative action to draw Israel and the nations into his new covenant community and have them participate in his divine life in Christ, as he sent his Son on a mission to embody his communicative action to achieve the same goal, Scripture is located in the drama of redemption. This is further illustrated by the fact that as God's communicative action in Christ was accompanied by the Spirit and required the Spirit to extend his communicative action, so his communicative action in and through Scripture is accompanied by the Spirit and requires the Spirit to extend Christ's communicative action (Vanhoozer, 2005:60, 70–71, 228).[105]

Sixth, because Scripture contains the unified speech act of a single speaker through speech acts of different human authors, Scripture is not only a trustworthy witness to God's revelation but is itself also a trustworthy revelation (Vanhoozer, 2005:38, 147, 267, 276).[106] This entails that meaning is stable in Scripture.[107]

Seventh, because the Word of God was embodied in Jesus Christ in the New Testament and because of the continuity of God's acts in his Word, later revelations can be typologically prefigured in earlier texts. Moreover, because of the close relationship between Christ, the incarnate Word of God, in whose image God wants to transform us, and the Scriptures as the Word of God, the Spirit can use his Word to transform us into the image of Christ, for the more we see the glory of Christ in Scripture, the

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[103] For fitting participation involving creative improvisation in new situations, see chapter 2, section 3.2. There we also wrote, "In addition to having Scripture directing the church to creatively improvise in new situations so that it wisely meets new challenges and deals with new problems in a way that is faithful to the authorial intent of God's divine discourse in Scripture, the church has the 'classic productions' or 'masterpiece theater' of the ecumenical councils and the 'classic productions' or 'regional theater' of the confessional theology of their own denomination and those of other denominations" (Vanhoozer, 2005:449–453; 2009:174–175; 2014b:147–149). These masterpiece and regional theatrical productions have relative authority in the church.

[104] The "Bible has authority in the church because it testifies to the saving acts of God in Israel, in Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit. . . . The authority of the Bible therefore rests on the salvific character of its content. It is soteriologically determined. If we can say that God is spoken of in the history of Israel and the history of Jesus and the Spirit, then the Bible is the book in which this speaking is reduced to a written form" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:564–565). Because Christ is the foundation of our Christian faith, the Bible is foundational in a secondary sense (cf. 2 Cor. 1:19-20). For more on Christ being the foundation as opposed to different forms of foundationalism, see chapter 2, section 2.2.

[105] Because Scripture is located in the drama of redemption, it is located within the drama of the Holy Spirit. See also Grenz, 2000:379–404; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:533–571.

[106] The canon developed around the testimony of God's saving acts in Scripture. "The authority of the Bible is grounded in its recognition by the church. *The acceptance of this list of books in the fourth century was a matter of taking stock of the actual situation, of the pattern of practice that had developed in the reading and liturgical use of these writings*" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:564).

[107] In chapter 2, I wrote, "Because the perlocutionary effect [of God's speech acts in Scripture] refers to the effects or significance of the meaning of a speech act, it does not change the determinate meaning of the speech act. It simply shows that significance or application is abundant in the meaning of Scripture for all the different readers of Scripture" (see chapter 2, section 2.3).

more we can be transformed in his image. In this way, the Holy Spirit directs and forms the readers and interpreters of Scripture into actors who participate in the drama of God's communicative activity of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that he enacts on the stage of his creation (cf. Vanhoozer, 2012:797; Burger, 2017g:59–60).[108]

### 2.5.3 The drama of the Spirit as the creator of a new community

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the Holy Spirit as the creator of a new community. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the creator of a new community in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, the church is the preliminary or provisional[109] visible form of God's eschatological new creation created by the Holy Spirit and formed by putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him so that it is no longer we who live but Christ Jesus who lives in us (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; 6:15; Eph. 2:15; Rev. 21:5).[110]

Second, as God's eschatological new creation created by the Holy Spirit and formed in union with Christ through faith, the church is God's new covenant community or reconstituted Israel that bears the Spirit for the sake of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations by being the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory through performing and bearing witness to the communicative intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. When Gentiles come to faith in Christ and are grafted into reconstituted Israel, the Spirit wants to use the beauty of God's eschatological creation to draw non-Christian ethnic Jews to jealousy and bring them to faith in Christ.

Third, because the church as God's new creation is formed in union with Christ through faith, the essence of the church is being a partaker of the divine nature by putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him so that we participate in the Son's status of sonship and his communion of

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[108] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the Spirit as the communicator of direction, see Balthasar, 1990b:TDII:102–115; 2005:TLIII:61–104; Barth, 1975, I/1:88–186; 1956:I/2:442–830; Bavinck, 2003:I:283–494; Beeke and Smalley, 2019:177–480; Berkhof, 1996:34–40; Calvin, 1960:I:35–99; Frame, 2013:519–693; Grenz, 2000:132–139, 379–404; Horton, 2011a:151–219; Jones, 2002:57–148; Kärkkäinen, 2014:7–178; Letham, 2019:52–65, 185–267; Macleod, 2002:9–36; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:157–199; 533–571; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:20–116; see also Treier, 2020:546–561.

[109] For the expression "preliminary" and "provisional", see van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:582, 593; see also Pauw, 2020:526.

[110] In chapter five, I wrote that "the reality of the new covenant partly has a hidden and contested character and is open to further eschatological realization in the future". As a result, "the church is a mixed community because not all church members are regenerate or remain faithful until the end, and the process of the writing of the law on the heart is unfinished, and the consequences and effects of sin are still felt notwithstanding the promise of complete forgiveness" (Burger, 2019:296). For an overview of conceptually understanding union with Christ, see Campbell, 2012; Macaskill, 2013; Thate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell, 2018.

love with the Father in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith because the Holy Spirit has joined the church to Christ through faith. This implies that the church's essence is hidden with Christ in God and has its identity in being a partaker of the divine nature in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:21, 23; Col. 3:3; 1 Jn. 3:2).[111]

Fourth, because the essence of the church as God's new creation is its being a partaker of the divine nature in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the church is dependent upon Christ through the Holy Spirit, as certain metaphors for the church indicate (Jn. 15:1–8; 1 Cor. 3:9–10, 16; 12:27; Eph. 2:19–22; 5:23–32; 1 Pet. 2:5; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:581; cf. 573–580).

Fifth, Christ himself cultivates and nurtures becoming a partaker of the divine nature in him in his new creation through his Word and Spirit.[112] For this cultivation and nurturing, Christ primarily uses the drama of proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments,[113] through which he rescripts his new creation by giving it his mindset [114] for fitting participation in or performance of the drama of his mission for his glory that is being played out in the history of this world and in the history of the lives of the members of God's new creation (Rom. 12:2).[115] The Spirit uses the drama of the proclamation of the Word by enabling them to hear the voice of God addressing them to form and transform them. The Spirit uses the drama of the sacrament of baptism by visibly proclaiming their incorporation into God's new covenant community through symbolically performing their participation in the drama of the history of Christ's death and resurrection by being sprinkled with or immersed in water, emphasizing the rescripting of their lives because they have died to their old identity derived from Adam and have arisen to their new "*ex-centric* [identity], derived from Christ, [their] new life-center" (van der

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[111] Thus, the essence and identity of the church is "not in institutional forms, organization, and offices, nor in active and engaged persons, but in the action that issues from God himself" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:593).
[112] "This phrasing does not mean that God directs *either* through the Word *or* through the Spirit, but that Word and Spirit are closely related. The Word proceeds from the work of the Spirit, and the Spirit brings that Word to us" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:596). "Word" should not be limited to a thought, but "is address and communication in the fullest sense; it may be a gesture or a way of looking at someone. This broad meaning of Word becomes immediately clear when we look at John 1:14. There we read that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:594; cf. 597). Barth speaks about the threefold form of the Word of God: the Word of God preached, the Word of God written, and the Word of God revealed (Barth, 1975:I/1:88–120).
[113] Even though Christ is sacramentally present everywhere, there is an intensification of his sacramental presence in his new covenant community in general and in the means of grace in particular.
[114] De Bruijne writes, "The church as a whole receives a new collective 'mentality,' just as, . . . the church is said to be a new creation not of individuals but of the church. God does not transform a collection of loose individuals but a people called into the world as a body. Therefore, knowledge of God's will can only arise and grow in the context of the Christian congregation" (de Bruijne, 2001:141).
[115] While the drama of the proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments are the primary means of grace through which Christ cultivates and nurtures becoming a partaker of the divine nature in him through the Spirit in his new creation, rescripting our lives so that we become fitting participation the drama of his mission for his glory, he also uses other means for this cultivation, nurturing, and rescripting. Through the Spirit, Christ also uses "counseling, governing, the services of the diaconate, prayer and intercession, brotherly love, the interaction of the charismata, praise, and song and music" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:593; cf. 624–625).

Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:604). The Spirit uses the sacrament of the Lord's Supper by proclaiming their being forgiven and sanctified as members of God's new exodus community through symbolically performing their participation in the drama of the history of Christ's death and resurrection by eating bread and drinking wine together, emphasizing their intent to seek their identity eccentrically in Christ, allowing this death and resurrection to rescript their lives on their journey to the sabbath rest of the kingdom of God. Because the drama of the proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments are intended to guide and draw members of God's new creation into the mystery of their participation in the divine nature and have their lives rescripted by this participation, the drama of the proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments have a mystagogical orientation.

Sixth, in addition to equipping and guiding God's new creation for fitting participation in or performance of the drama of his mission for his glory by cultivating and nurturing the members of this new creation to become partakers of the divine nature in him through his Word and Spirit by means of the drama of proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments, the Holy Spirit equips God's new covenant community for this task by pouring out gifts (*charismata*) on it (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12–14; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). These gifts include the offices Christ gives to his church for the sake of the upbuilding of the church and the salvation of the world by keeping its members connected to Christ and maturing in him (Eph. 4:11–16).

Seventh, as the preliminary visible form of God's eschatological new creation created by the Holy Spirit and formed around Christ, the church is a pilgrim community that is on its way to the sabbath rest of the kingdom of God (Heb. 11:16; 1 Pet. 1:1).[116] On its journey, it bears witness to the resurrection life of God's new creation that has its unity and holiness in Christ (Jn. 17:11, 21–23; Eph. 4:4–6; Jn. 17:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:10; 5:26), creatively and imaginatively extending the meaning of the script, transcript, and prescript of God's drama of his mission for his glory in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama. In doing so, it participates in Christ's office of prophet, priest, and king, performing its prophetic task,[117] its priestly life of love, and its (kingly) eschatological hope by being "grounded in heaven"[118] while living its life here on the stage of this creation that is busy passing away (1 Cor. 7:31), always watchful and ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Lk. 12:37–40; Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thess. 5:6; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet.

[116] For the church as a pilgrim community, see Horton, 2011a:11, 32, 47, 75, 91, 111, 535–536, 736; Clapp, 1996; 2018; Pauw, 2020:526.
[117] For an example of prophetically speaking into our Western culture, see Blenk et al., 2020. The authors entitle their article "Christians talk about hope, but not about repentance, and that conversation is urgently needed".
[118] For "grounded in heaven", see Allen, 2018.

4:7; Rev. 16:15) and calling others to be watchful and ready as well or else face the fire of God's coming judgment and be excluded from the Sabbath rest of God's coming kingdom of heaven. [119]

### 2.5.4 The drama of the Spirit as the renewer of our humanity

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the Holy Spirit as the renewer of humanity. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the renewer of our humanity in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, because God's being is a dynamic communicative activity between the Father, Son, and Spirit and because God's communicative activity in the economic Trinity reveals his communicative activity in the immanent Trinity, God draws humanity into his intratrinitarian life, making people partakers of his divine nature, by effectually addressing and engaging humanity with his Word and Spirit, uniting them to Christ through faith, declaring them to be righteous and renewing their lives in him.[120]

Second, the Spirit does this by working in and through our humanity and personhood by opening and illuminating our hearts,[121] enabling us to hear and understand[122] the Word that is spoken to us, persuading[123] us from within that it is Christ's voice we are hearing, and writing the Word that is spoken

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[119] For more on the relationship between Christ and culture, see chapter 4, section 1.8.2. For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the Spirit as the creator of a new community, see Balthasar, 1991b:GLVI:225–416; 1990a:GLVII:33–543; 1993:TDIII:361–446; 1994:TDIV:453–469; 2005:TLIII:255–411;Barth, 1956a:I/2:831–954; 1956b:IV/1:718–825; 1958b:IV/2:695–936; 1961b:IV/3b:780–950; 1969:IV/4:1–212; Bavinck, 2008:I:271–585; Berkhof, 1996:551–658; Calvin, 1960:IV:1011–1521; Frame, 2013:1017–1072; Grenz, 2000:461–570; Horton, 2011a:711–903; Jones, 2002:593–688; Kärkkäinen, 2017:233–483; Letham, 2019:612–647, 705–723; Macleod, 2002:243–285; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:572–644; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:677–818; see also Moore-Keish, 2020:528–545; Pauw, A.P. 2020:514–527.

[120] Regarding the primacy of God in his dialogical interaction with humanity, Vanhoozer writes, "The effectual call is the Spirit's ministering the word in such a way that hearers freely and willingly answer God by responding with faith" (Vanhoozer, 2010:374–375).

[121] Regarding the Spirit opening our hearts, Hoglund writes, "I contend . . . that when one considers how Luke uses the term 'opening' in Luke 24:31–32 for the giving of hermeneutic understanding of Jesus' identity in the Old Testament, the divine action to 'open' Lydia's heart in Acts 16:14 can be understood as both necessary and sufficient. The opening of her heart resulted inevitably in her paying attention to Paul's message". He adds, "Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the Twelve later that evening, the Lord 'opened' Lydia's heart within the process of discernment and understanding" (Hoglund, 2016:207).

[122] Understanding is middle-voiced and thus something we come to experience from the inside as Christ gives himself to us through the Spirit. Vanhoozer writes. "In the context of grammar, 'voice' indicates the relation of a subject to the action of the verb". Moreover, "The middle voice is neither a *doing* nor a *being-done-to* but a being caught up in a process—or in the case of soteriology, a person (Christ)—in which one is nevertheless active". Thus, "[t]o say 'I understand,' for example, is to say that one is neither simply active ('doer') nor simply passive ('done to') but rather that one is both active and caught up in a larger process: understanding is both a (mental) 'doing' and a 'happening.'" Accordingly, God bring[s] about change in a person's heart and mind [dialogically] *precisely by bringing about understanding* (Vanhoozer, 2010:76, 283, 426, 373).

[123] I am aware that "[t]he Synod of Dort denies that regeneration comes about 'by moral suasion' (*morale suasionem*), which it defines as a mode of operating that, 'after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted.'" (Hoglund, 2016:186). Thus, "[o]nly God persuades, but he does so through discourse" (Hoglund, 2016:187). For Calvin on the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, see Calvin, 1960:I:78–80).

into our hearts (Lk. 24:45; Jn. 6:44–45; 10:3, 27; Ac. 16:14; 2 Cor. 3:14–16; 4:6; Eph. 1:17–18; cf. Jer. 31:33).[124]

Third, by drawing humanity into his intratrinitarian life, making us partakers of his divine nature, he breaks open our enclosed selves and relocates[125] our subject in the risen and ascended Christ and subjectively renews our understanding by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ, enabling us to discern "what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2) with the perspective of the mind of Christ.[126] This implies that the effectual call and regeneration are two sides of one coin (Hoglund, 2016; Horton, 2007a:220–242; Vanhoozer, 2010:370–377).

Fourth, because the Spirit relocates our subject in the risen and ascended Christ, our Christian self is constituted by Christ living his moral life in and through us as "the principal moral agent" in our lives through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 15:5; Gal. 2:20; Macaskill, 2019:2).

Fifth, because our Christian self is constituted by Christ living his moral life in and through us, our union with Christ in his death and resurrection is the source of our renewal through forgiveness and transformation (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20).[127]

Sixth, because the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ as the source of our renewal through forgiveness and transformation, there is no need to formulate an order of salvation where the Holy Spirit applies the so-called benefits of Christ in a certain order, such as election, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.[128] Instead, this order can be reformulated along the lines of "God's eternal love for us in Christ", the "gift of Christ for those who believe the good news of Christ", the "transformation of our lives through the effect of Christ in our lives", and the "completion of this at the second coming, when we will be conformed to Christ" (Burger, 2017c:247).

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[124] Regarding the possibility of God dialogically engaging those who are spiritually dead, Hoglund writes, "Reformed theology means by passivity that humans are radically dependent for the first and decisive act of God, yet has sought to leave room for the continued use of human reason and consciousness. Spiritually dead does not mean the same thing as Lazarus's deadness". He adds, "A communicative approach to the effectual call agrees that there is dependence on God for the first moment of new spiritual life (and every subsequent moment), but this must be understood to mean that no living person is passive in every sense". He concludes, "God the Spirit takes up a person's activity and channels or directs it to appropriate ends by means of a convincing and transforming encounter with the divine word of witness. The Spirit bridges the hermeneutic gap in converting change. This is unmediated in the sense that no independent entity stands in between, but it takes place within the medium of speaking, hearing and coming to understand" (Hoglund, 2016:164)

[125] About the use of the verb *pisteuoo* plus the preposition *eis* in the gospel of John, Morris writes, "Faith, for John, is an activity which takes men right out of themselves and makes them one with Christ". He adds, "While believing and abiding are not connected in so many words (though cf. 12:46) they clearly mean much the same" (Morris, 1971:336).

[126] When the Holy Spirit subjectively renews our understanding by giving us the *nous* or mind of Christ, we need to remember what I wrote earlier that knowledge of God's will can only arise and grow in the context of the Christian congregation to whom the Holy Spirit also gives the mind of Christ. For hermeneutics and the mind of Christ, see also chapter 2, section 2.2.

[127] For Horton's understanding of justification as the engine of the order of salvation, see chapter 4, section 1.7.

[128] For Horton's understanding of the order of salvation, see chapter 4, section 1.7.

This order of salvation does justice to the organic unity of salvation where our complete salvation is communicated at once through union with Christ who is clothed with his benefits.

Seventh, putting on Christ and clothing ourselves with him through faith involves seeking our salvation outside of ourselves by entrusting ourselves completely to Christ so that we are drawn into the life of God in Christ and become partakers of the divine nature in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Eighth, the Holy Spirit enables those who have been drawn into the life of God through faith to persevere[129] and be conformed unto the image of Christ because God has elected them to eternal salvation in Christ according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:3–6, 11; Rom. 8:29–30).[130] This implies that, according to the good pleasure of his will, God passes by those to whom he does not give faith and leaves them in their sin for which they are justly condemned (1 Pet. 2:8).[131]

Ninth, the goal of being elected to put on Christ through faith and becoming a partaker of the divine nature in Christ through the Holy Spirit is to participate faithfully and fittingly in the intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification that is being performed on the stage of this world and in the history of our lives by bearing witness to the eschatological resurrection life of God's new creation in a cruciform, resurrectional, and ascensional manner as Christ performs in us what he had performed for us. When the stage of this world is completely dismantled, those who have been effectively drawn into the life of God through faith will continue to participate faithfully and fittingly in the intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification that will be performed on the stage of a new creation.[132]

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[129] Because of the risk of apostasy, Scripture calls us to be faithful and persevere (Mt. 24:13; Rom. 11:20; 1 Cor 10:11–12; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 3:7–19; 4:11; 6:4–8; 10:26–31; 2 Pet. 2:18–22; Rev. 2:10, 17, 25–26). About the warning passages in Hebrews, van Bruggen writes, "The setting of the statements in Hebrews about being permanently lost upon the abandonment of faith is one of exhortation and warning. These statements are primarily intended to sharpen the readers' grasp of the seriousness of faith and the gospel *so that* they will continue to believe in Jesus" (van Bruggen, 2010:261; see also Fanning, 2007:218–219).

[130] "From the ontic [i.e., referring to time and space] angle God's election precedes all history, or rather it comprises all history, just as God's eternity comprises our time. Seen from a noetic perspective, 'election' comes to mind only as the final word. That is, the doctrine of election is not the main element in our thinking but an important auxiliary that ensures that grace remains grace and that we always realize how we owe our salvation from beginning to end to the triune God" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:702). For placing the drama of eternal election near the end of the drama of renewal, see also Calvin, 1960:III:920–987). Horton places the drama of predestination before the God who creates (Horton, 2011a:309–323). He also operates with a covenant of grace that is governed by the doctrine of election, see chapter 4, section 1.5.

[131] Regarding the good pleasure of God and human responsibility with regard to reprobation, Douma emphasizes the following. "That the reprobate are *rejected* takes account of their sin and guilt; that *they* are rejected (and not also others) rests entirely in God's good pleasure" (Douma, 2017:326). Thus, while there is a parallelism between election and reprobation regarding the good pleasure of God, there is no parallelism with regard to the origin of faith and unbelief. While God is the source of faith, unbelief has its own source in the sinful human heart.

[132] For systematic theological overviews of the drama the Spirit as the renewer of our humanity, see Balthasar, 1982:GLI:131–425; 1993:447–461; Barth, 1956b:IV/1:531–718; 810–846; 1958b:IV/2:546–694; 1969:IV/4:3–40; Bavinck, 2006:III:27–270; cf. 2004:II:337–405; Berkhof, 1996:413–549; cf. 100–125; Calvin, 1960:III:537–849; cf. IV:850–987; Frame, 2013:923–1014; cf. 216–230; Grenz, 2000:432–460; Horton, 2011a:551–710; cf. 309-323; Jones, 2002:511–591; Kärkkäinen, 2016:201–415; Letham, 2019:597–616, 648–705, 724–750, 768–789; Macleod,

### 2.6. Participation in the life of God and the drama of the return of Christ in glory

The theodramatic biblical narrative outlined in the previous chapter generates the drama of the return of Christ in glory. Grammatically reconceptualizing the speech acts of the drama of the return of Christ in glory in terms of theodramatic imagination and action entails the following.

First, because the goal of God's creation is the elevated life of creation and humanity participating in the incorruptibility and immortality of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God, the drama of the return of Christ in glory is meant to bring about the consummation of this goal.

Second, the consummation of this goal includes the beatific vision. Because humanity has been drawn into the divine life in Christ, this beatific vision is a mediated vision of God (Mt. 5:8; Jn. 1:14, 18; 10:38; 14:7, 9–10; 17:22–24; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Heb. 1:2–3; 1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 22:4; Bavinck, 2008:IV:685; Boersma, 2018:409–420).[133] However, this mediated vision of God does not mean that we will not see the essence of God, because when God reveals himself, he reveals his essence or nature.[134] This is especially the case when he reveals himself essentially in Jesus Christ (Huijgen, 2011:183–184; Bintsarovskyi, 2019:23).[135]

Third, because humanity needs to repent and believe to inherit this life or else face the fire of God's coming judgment and be excluded from this kingdom, the delay of the return of Christ in glory is a time in which God is patient because he does not wish that "any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). The binding of Satan so that he should not deceive the nations is also a manifestation of this same patience.[136]

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2002:157–242; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:645–710; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:573–676; see also Billings, 2020:497–451.

[133] For Calvin's ambiguity on whether the beatific vision is mediated through Christ, see Billings, 2011:80–86.

[134] Because seeing the essence of God in Christ is a vision accommodated to our human finiteness, seeing the essence of God in Christ does not entail plumbing the depth of God's essence.

[135] Because for Horton, participation in the divine nature is not a participation in the essence or being of God, but only in his energies, the beatific vision would not be a vision of the essence of God in Christ, but only of his energies. See chapter 4, section 1.6.

[136] Christ's defeat of the devil on the cross is depicted as the binding of the devil for a thousand years in the book of Revelation "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended" (Rev. 20:3). After the thousand years are over, "he will be released for a little while" (Rev. 20:3). About the thousand years, Morris writes, "We should take this symbolically. One thousand is the cube of ten, the number of completeness. We have seen it use over and over again in this book [i.e., Revelation] to denote completeness of some sort and John is surely saying here that Satan is bound for the complete time that God has determined": Morris, 1987:229). About the binding of Satan, he writes, "Here he says specifically that Satan was restrained, not from all evil, but from *deceiving the nations* during *the thousand years.* From verse 8 we see that this means that Satan cannot gather the nations for the final cataclysm" (Morris, 1987:229; see also van de Kamp, 2000:437). About Satan being released for a little while, Morris writes, "The period of restraint will end, for Satan *must* (*dei*) be loosed, though only *for a short time*. This is God's way of bringing on the End and because it is God's plan Satan *must* be released" (Morris, 1987:229–230).

Fourth, because Christ urged his church to wait and be watchful to be prepared for his return, the time between the first and second coming of Christ ought to be marked by a readiness to meet Christ (Mt. 25:1–13) through prayer for his return (Rev. 22:17) and being faithful and wise servants who creatively and innovatively make something beautiful of what Christ has entrusted them to their care (Mt. 25:14–30; cf. 31–46).

Fifth, because the time preceding the return of Christ in glory is characterized by the appearance of many antichrists and an increase in lawlessness during which time many will fall away from the faith, this time involves the church in an intense spiritual battle against the forces of evil (Eph. 6:10–12). While Christ in principle defeated the devil with his death on the cross (D-Day), the church will not be able to celebrate V-Day until Christ returns in glory and God crushes the head of the serpent.[137]

Sixth, because when Christ returns in glory, he will impartially judge the living and the dead according to what they have done, members of God's new covenant community need to abide in Christ through faith in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith so that Christ can generate his own life of the obedience of faith in them through the Holy Spirit. In this way, Christ rewards his own work in us when he rewards us according to our works.[138]

Seventh, when Christ condemns those who did not participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory in listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, they will experience what appears to be "the endless dissolution of the personality by a condemning conscience",[139] "the agonizing awareness of God's displeasure",[140] "the loss, not merely of God, but of all good, and everything that made life seem worth living",[141] and "self-condemnation and self-loathing"[142] which they themselves have chosen (Packer, 1973:138–139; cf. Mt. 16:24–27; Jn. 3:18–19).[143]

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[137] For the analogy of D-Day and V-Day, see Cullmann, 1964:84.

[138] For Paul, there is no theological tension or paradox between being justified by faith and judged according to works because for him the contrast is not faith and works, but faith and not having faith. Accordingly, Yinger writes, "This [lack of tension between justification by faith and being judged by works] is easily explainable when one realizes that the apostle Paul has inherited a way of speaking and thinking about divine judgment according to deeds which itself felt no such tension." He adds, "Those who had already been justified by grace through faith in Christ were expected (by God's grace and the Holy Spirit, of course) to live righteous lives as well. That is, their righteousness by faith would manifest itself in obedience, in works; though not necessarily in sinless perfection" (Yinger, 1999:290; cf. van Bruggen, 2006:51). While Yinger does not want to call this judgment of our works a second justification, others have (e.g., Calvin, 1960:III:811–812).

[139] See "their worm does not die" (Mk. 9:48).

[140] See "the fire is not quenched" (Mk. 9:43, 48; Lk. 16:24)

[141] See "outer darkness" (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

[142] See "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51).

[143] Packer writes, "These things are, no doubt, unimaginably dreadful, though those who have been convicted of sin know a little of their nature. But they are not arbitrary inflictions; they represent rather, a conscious growing into the state in which one has chosen to be. The unbeliever has chosen to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference". He adds "Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God's action in wrath is to *give men what they choose,* in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less" (Packer, 1973:138–139). About those who have never heard of Christ, I

Eighth, when Christ acquits and vindicates those who did participate in the drama of God's mission for his glory in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, they will experience the goal for which they were created by being the theatre of God's drama of his mission for his glory made up of actors who bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit and who represent this status and communion by performing and bearing witness to Christ's glorious presence on earth through a listening and thankful filial spirit of openness so that God becomes visible on earth because they are a people where heaven and earth meet.[144]

### 3. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking about the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

Having recapped the nature of doctrine and structure, I answered that question by sketching the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. First, I outlined the drama of God as Trinity and the drama of God as God. Second, I sketched participation in the life of God and the drama of the creation of the heavenly stage of the theodrama, the drama of the creation of the earthly stage of the theodrama, the drama of providence, the drama of the creation of humanity, and the drama of the fall into sin. Third, I outlined participation in the life of God and the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants. Fourth, I sketched participation in the life of God and the drama of the person of Christ and the drama of the work of Christ. Fifth, I outlined participation in the life of God and the drama of the Spirit as the giver of life, as the communicator of direction, as the creator of a new community, and as the renewer of our humanity. Sixth, I sketched participation in the life of God and the drama of the return of Christ.

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wrote in the previous chapter that when Gentiles by nature or spontaneously do what the law requires (Rom. 2:14–16), they do so because somehow the influence of the written law of God makes itself felt in their lives. I also wrote that because every human being has an innate sense of God, no one is without excuse (Rom. 1:18–20). Regarding a sense of punishment that every human has, I referred to what Paul writes in Rom. 1:32.

[144] For systematic theological overviews of the drama of the return of Christ, see Balthasar, 1998:TDV:19–521; Bavinck, 2008:IV:587–729; Berkhof, 1996:659–738; Calvin, 1960:III:987–1008 ; Frame, 2013:1075–1097; Grenz, 2000:571–659; Horton, 2011a:906–990; Jones, 2002:689–748; Kärkkäinen, 2017:1–230; Letham, 2019:817–907; Macleod, 2002:287–333; van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:711–759; van Genderen and Velema, 2008:819–886; see also Holmes, 2020:609–620.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL AND PROPERLY SHAPING OUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND PRACTICE

The overarching research question of this study is: How can outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre incorporate a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a way that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture?

The sixth question that arises from our overarching question, then, is: How do the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture?

To answer this question, I will first summarize the central features of the social imaginary[1] of our secular[2] culture. Second, I will explain the relationship between our imagination and our plausibility structure.[3] Third, I will sketch the benefit of reimaging apologetics. Fourth, I will outline how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel so that we become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture. Fifth, I will sketch how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction for properly shaping our Christian identity to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture. Sixth, I will outline how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

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[1] In chapter one, I used Taylor's definition of the social imaginary: "the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings . . . often not expressed in theoretical terms, [but] carried in images, stories, legends, etc." (Taylor, 2007:171–172). Thus, a social imaginary is the way ordinary people intuitively imagine meaning and significance.

[2] In chapter one, I used Taylor's third sense of "secular" that is concerned with the shift in the conditions of belief or the plausibility structures of society and that answers the question, "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?" (Taylor, 2007:25).

[3] In chapter one, I defined a plausibility structure as what a society considers to be believable primarily based on how well it fits with its social imaginary.

### 1. The social imaginary of our secular culture

In chapter one, I outlined certain features of our secular culture and certain characteristics of the church within this culture.[4] With regard to our secular culture, I outlined the following features. First, our secular culture is a culture in which people live as enclosed, individual "buffered selves" within an immanent frame of life in a natural and material world that has lost contact with the transcendent beyond themselves. Second, our secular culture is an expressive culture in which people pursue authenticity by following their own desires and defining for themselves what it means to be human. Third, our secular culture is an experiential culture that seeks its sources of morality and truth within itself through experience. Story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and the expression and explanation of these personal experiences. Fourth, our secular culture is a distracted culture because it is a technological culture. Fifth, even our secular culture is a culture where any ultimate belief, including belief in God, is one option among others and thus contestable and contested because of the change in the social imaginary and plausibility structures of society, our secular culture is a culture that has not forgotten its experience of the transcendent. Accordingly, it experiences the cross-pressures of "openings to transcendence" and "the closure of immanence" in its search for meaning, significance, and fullness.

As for the church within our secular culture, many have a faith that could be described as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." They perceive the God of the Christian faith as a God who is not involved in their lives but who wants them to be good so that they will feel good. Furthermore, as I described in that chapter, Christians often live with a partial Jesus who determines their past but not their present. Moreover, because many in the Christian church have difficulty perceiving their world in biblical terms, they experience a disconnect between the world they live in and the world depicted in Scripture. Consequently, many are more formed by the social imaginary of the secular culture they live in than the imaginary of Scripture because they do not use this biblical imaginary as their main plausibility structure to understand their life in this world.

### 2. The imagination and our plausibility structure

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture by speaking into and connecting with it, then it is of utmost importance that we appeal to the imagination. As we saw in chapter two, the imagination is a cognitive faculty through which we perceive and make sense of our lives in this world. As such, it functions as a wholistic integrative organ of meaning that can perceive and explore possible ways of being in the world and to be captivated by these possibilities. Moreover, as we saw in chapter one, one of the main reasons it was natural for most premodern people to believe in God was because of the way they imagined their social surroundings, while many postmodern secular people today merely

[4] In chapter one, I noted that the features of the social imaginary of our secular culture are not monolithic.

consider belief in God to be an epistemological option because of the way they imagine their social surroundings. A change in the social imaginary led to a change in the plausibility structures or what people consider to be believable. Thus, appealing to the imagination, as a cognitive faculty through which we perceive and make sense of our lives in this world, is crucial for effectively communicating the gospel in our secular culture.[5]

We also saw in chapter two that a theodramatic imagination is the ability to see the drama of God's mission of intratrinitarian glorification on earth as in heaven and our participation in or performance of this drama of mutual glorification as a unified drama through our union with Christ through faith. We also saw that one of the benefits of comparing doctrine to drama is that it appeals to the imagination so that doctrine can be considered to be dramatic or theatrical direction for fitting participation in the drama of God's mission of mutual glorification on earth as in heaven. This implies that if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture by speaking into and connecting with it so that it resonates[6] with its social imaginary, then it is essential to appeal to our theodramatic imagination.

What is true for effectively communicating the gospel in our secular culture is also true for enabling the church to effectively communicate this gospel. As we saw in chapter one, one of the reasons many in the church are more formed by the social imaginary of the secular culture they live in than the imaginary of Scripture is that they do not use this biblical imaginary as their main plausibility structure to understand their life in this world. This may also be one of the reasons why many in the Christian church often live with a partial Jesus who determines their past, but not their present. Thus, to be able to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, it is also vitally important to encourage Christians to use their theodramatic imagination.[7]

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[5] Appealing to the imagination does not secure an "epistemic *obligation*" to believe, but gives "epistemic *permission*" to believe (Bailey, 2020:7). While Horton does believe that the Christian faith as an unfolding drama "captivates the heart and imagination, animating and motivating our action in the world" (Horton, 2011a:19), I have not found in his writings any explicit treatment of the imagination as a wholistic integrative organ of meaning that can perceive and explore possible ways of being in the world.

[6] In the previous chapter, I wrote that the soul "is essentially a receptive and affective reality that functions like a sounding board through which we experience the resonances or vibrations of ourselves and others, such as God, other human beings, and the world in which we live". For the importance of resonance as a point of contact between religious expressions and reality, see Thiessen, 2012. For the importance of resonance in communicating with our secular culture, see Rosa, 2019; Root, 2021:151–262.

[7] Drawing on Taylor, Bailey considers secularity to be "an imaginative crisis and an imaginative opportunity" (Bailey, 2020:54).

### 3. Reimagining Apologetics

Since it is of utmost importance that we appeal to the imagination if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture by speaking into and connecting with it, then it will be beneficial to reimagine apologetics.[8] About reimagining apologetics, Bailey writes,

> By *reimagining apologetics*, I mean simply an approach that takes the imaginative context of belief seriously. Such an approach prepares the way for Christian faith by provoking desire, exploring possibility, and casting an inhabitable Christian vision. When successful, it enables outsiders to inhabit the Christian faith from the inside, feeling their way in before attempting to criticize it by foreign standards. Whether a person ultimately embraces the vision that is being portrayed, imaginative engagement cultivates empathy. It enables a glimpse, even if just for a moment, of the possibilities that Christian faith facilitates for our life in the world (Bailey, 2020:4).

Regarding the Christian faith, he writes,

> By *Christian faith* I mean a holistic pattern of life. This includes the embedded practices that make belief intelligible (prayer, worship, hospitality, peacemaking, creation care, etc.), as well as the felt sense of what belief means for everyday life. In other words, to be a Christian is not simply to believe a list of propositions but also to experience the world through the lens of a meaningful vision. This vision is a theodrama in which the world of meaning has been gifted to our perception, and ultimate reality is personal, revealed most fully in Jesus Christ. Intellectual assent remains an essential part of the mix. The personal and relational does not exclude its propositional character. But beliefs should not be extracted from the imaginative context in which they become believable. Indeed, it is impossible to separate my faith (what I believe and in whom I trust) from my desire (what I love and what I wish to be the case) and my imagination (what I feel is possible), as well as from my concrete, lived reality (the way that my faith is tested and maintained in the course of everyday life) (Bailey, 2020:4–5).[9]

This study assumes this integrated approach of apologetics.[10]

### 4. Directions for effectively communicating the gospel[11]

In chapter two, I outlined that doctrine reconceptualises the speech acts of Scripture into "thought-acts" or "mental habits" through which we interpret and experience God's speech acts in Scripture and in Jesus

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[8] See the title of Bailey, 2020: *Reimagining Apologetics*. For an overview of traditional apologetics, see Boa and Bowman, Jr., 2006.

[9] This corresponds to what Thiselton writes about belief: "Belief, then, is *action-oriented, situation-related*, and embedded in the *particularities and contingencies* of everyday living". Drawing on Wittgenstein, he writes, "Wittgenstein would call this relationship between belief, life, and action on of 'internal' grammar. *Action, contingency, particularity*, and the *public world of embodied life* constitute part of the very grammar of what it is to *believe* (Thiselton, 2007:21; see also Bailey, 2020:5).

[10] About this integrated apologetic approach, Bailey writes, "I want to make it clear that in proposing an imaginative approach I am not arguing that all other apologetic models be replaced. Still less am I calling for apologetics to end. I am offering what I hope will be a supplement to other forms of apologetics. . . . " (Bailey, 2020:5). For C.S. Lewis on a similar approach, see Williams, 2021.

[11] The order of the directions goes from the drama of God, the drama of creation, the drama of Israel and the divine-human covenants, the drama of Christ, the drama of the Holy Spirit, and the drama of the return of Christ. The directions given concern the central elements in each drama and how they can resonate with our secular culture.

Christ in terms of theodramatic imagination and action. To demonstrate how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for communicating the gospel in ways that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators[12] of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, I will first outline how the drama of God gives direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that the gospel is a trinitarian drama in which the three persons of the Trinity enact their perfect life on earth as it is in heaven and in which we also participate.

Second, I will sketch how the drama of God gives direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that the gospel gives us knowledge of God's being as a God of love who desires communion with the other.

Third, I will outline how the drama of creation gives direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God.

Fourth, I will sketch how the drama of the fall into sin and the drama of the election of Israel and the divine-human covenants give direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity.

Fifth, I will outline how the drama of the election of Israel and the drama of Christ give direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative.

Sixth, I will sketch how the drama of Christ gives direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with victims of injustice and perpetrators of injustice.

Seventh, I will outline how the drama of Christ and the Holy Spirit gives direction for effectively communicating that the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present.

Eighth, I will sketch how the drama of God, the drama of creation, and the drama of the return of Christ give direction for effectively communicating the gospel by appealing to our imagination to see that

[12] In chapter one, I gave the following definition of theology: "Theology is critical reflection on the practice of the church aimed at helping to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ as clearly as possible and to enable the members of the church to live in Christ and in the Spirit in communion with God and with each other to the glory of God (Burger, 2008:7)".

when Christ returns, he will judge the living and the dead according to what they have done as well as usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation.

### 4.1. Emphasize that the gospel concerns the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in this drama

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to emphasize that the gospel concerns the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in or performance of this drama. It is important to emphasize this because our secular culture is a culture where people seek the meaning, significance, and fullness of their lives in a natural and material world that has lost contact with the transcendent beyond themselves. However, because they miss an overarching narrative beyond the narrative of human flourishing within a natural and material world, they often suffer from a sense of malaise because the ordinary can feel so flat and empty.

At the same time, however, our secular culture is a culture where all ultimate beliefs, including belief in God, is one option among others. As a result, it has not forgotten its experience of the transcendent. Consequently, it experiences the cross-pressures of "openings to transcendence" and "the closure of immanence" in its search for meaning, significance, and fullness.

However, it is possible to have the gospel resonate[13] with this search for meaning, significance, and fullness experienced in a culture that can feel flat and empty, on the one hand, and experiences openings to transcendence, on the other. The drama of God reminds us that the gospel concerns God enacting his eternal generative and communicative life of glorification on the stage of this world as the unfolding drama of his mission for his glory. On earth as in heaven! As such, the Father initiates divine acts as the playwright or author of a drama, the Son effects these divine acts as the protagonist of the drama, and the Spirit perfects them as the producer and director of the drama.

Accordingly, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by emphasizing that the gospel concerns the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in or performance of in this drama, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture's search for meaning, significance, and fullness experienced in a culture that can feel flat and empty, on the one hand, and experiences openings to transcendence, on the other.

### 4.2. Accentuate that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to accentuate that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other. It is important to accentuate this because our

[13] "Have the gospel resonate" refers to how the *structure* of the contours of my theodramatic systematic theology facilitates the gospel resonating with how humanity experiences its secular culture. Determining the perlocutionary effect would require field research.

secular culture is an individualistic culture in which people want to do their own thing and discover and define for themselves what it means to be human. However, this individualism does result in a loss of communion and the loneliness and fragmentation of their lives.

The church has not escaped the influence of this individualistic culture because many in the Christian church experience their Christian faith in an individualized consumer manner because they embrace a moralistic, therapeutic, deistic understanding of the Christian faith in which they believe that God is not involved in their lives. He really only wants them to be good so that they will feel good.

However, it is possible to have the gospel resonate in this loss of communion, loneliness, and fragmentation as well as this individualized, consumer, moralist, therapeutic, deistic experience of the Christian faith. The drama of God reminds us that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other and that he is involved in the life of this world as the three persons of the Trinity enact their perfect life on earth as it is in heaven.

When they do, they enact their attributes or properties. Because love binds all of God's communicative attributes together in perfect performative harmony, God is immanently and transcendently present and involved in the enactment of his perfect life on earth as a God who fundamentally is love by living for the other and desiring communion with the other. The Holy Spirit draws us into this divine communion of love, enabling us ontologically to participate in this communion of love by uniting us to Christ through having us putting him on through faith and clothing ourselves with him so that we participate in his status of sonship, his communion of love with the Father, and his ministry of love in this world as members of his body.

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other, because this emphasis can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture's loss of communion, loneliness, and fragmentation. Moreover, we need to appeal to the imagination in this manner, because this emphasis can help moralistic, therapeutically-oriented, deistic Christians to understand that God is more than a God who wants us to be good and feel good.

### 4.3. Assert that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to assert that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels. It is important to assert this because our secular culture is a culture in which people live as enclosed, individual, rational, buffered selves within an immanent frame of life. As such, people imagine a boundary between their inner self and their external world that enables them to block out divine and demonic influences that might impinge upon their lives. As a result, they consider the world and themselves to be innately self-sufficient. Furthermore, they no

longer consider meaning to be embedded in the external world, but within themselves, enabling them rationally to create their own meaning from within their inner self.

However, at the same time, many in our secular culture experience the immanent frame of life to be haunted with memories of the transcendent influencing life in this world. Because this is the case, there is a possibility to have the gospel resonate with these memories of the transcendent. The drama of creation reminds us that Father voluntarily created a heavenly and an earthly stage for his theodrama in Christ through the Holy Spirit to live in their loving presence and participate in the drama of their intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification. After having created, he continues to be communicatively involved with the heavenly and earthly stage of his theodrama by providing for it in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the heavenly and earthly stages of the theodrama have a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) porous relationship with God by living in his loving presence and participating in his life through living and moving and having its being in God.

Moreover, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created angels to live in their loving presence and participate in the drama of their intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification so that heaven and earth become a place for an ontological porous communion in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by asserting that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels because this can facilitate the gospel's resonating with the memories of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience.

### 4.4. Highlight that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to highlight that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity. It is important to highlight this because what we said about our secular culture being a culture in which people live as enclosed, individual, rational, buffered selves within an immanent frame of life who no longer imagine meaning to be embedded in the external world but within themselves, enabling them rationally to create their own meaning from within their inner self, leads to a pursuit of authenticity in which people follow their own desires to be authentic and thus true to themselves instead of being obedient to external norms, institutions, and values.[14]

However, it is possible to have the gospel resonate with this expressive, individualistic pursuit of authenticity by the buffered self. The drama of fall into sin reminds us that the devil subverted and

[14] Douma rightly notes, "By the way, have you ever noticed how much authentic people look alike? And that they all seem to have roughly the same personal desires? How authentic is that really?" (Douma, 2017:52).

opposed the playwright's theodramatic intention by manipulating Adam and Eve to freely turn away from God and not to participate in the communicative drama of the intratrinitarian glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith but rather be driven by their own agenda instead of God's.

In doing so, they intentionally rejected living in porous relationship with God and ontologically participating in the communicative drama of intratrinitarian glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith so that the splendour of God's perfect life became visible on earth as it is in heaven. Instead, they became autonomous buffered selves, unresponsive to the playwright's dialogical interaction, incurred God's wrath, lost the glory they once possessed, and became subject to death.

Because all of humanity participated in Adam's distrustful rebellion and the consequences of his rebellion, every human being by nature is self-enclosed and curved in on themselves with a natural tendency to unthankfully be estranged from God and driven by their own agenda and standards, independent of God, unreceptive to his voice, and subject to death.

However, the drama of the election of Israel and the divine-human covenants reminds us that Israel's function in the drama of God's mission for his glory is not simply typological and pedagogical, but essential because God chose Israel to deal with the problem of brokenness caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity. They were to do this by bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations through being the theatre of the drama of his intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification and bearing witness to what is in Christ in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. In this way, they would also show the nations what authentic humanity looks like. Israel continues to have an abiding place as the theatre of God's drama of intratrinitarian mutual glorification because God's new covenant is a covenant with Israel in its representative Messiah so that Israel can bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations and deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity.

Accordingly, the drama of the election of Israel and the divine-human covenants reminds us that covenants are redemptive instruments with missional intent through which God rescues the drama of intratrinitarian mutual glorification and moves this drama forward to its eschatological fulfillment, because God mostly made covenants to deal with problems of uncertainty regarding the fulfillment of his creational purpose.

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by highlighting that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity, because this can facilitate the

gospel resonating with our secular culture's expressive, individualistic pursuit of authenticity by the buffered self.

### 4.5. Point out that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to point out that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative. It is important to point this out because the brokenness of our world and of the people in this world is the result of humanity imagining they can pursue authenticity by following their own desires instead of being obedient to an external norm and because God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity.

However, the gospel can resonate even more with the self-sufficient buffered self's pursuit of authenticity. The drama of the election of Israel and the divine-human covenants reminds us that, even though God elected Israel to deal with the problem humanity created by bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations through being the theatre of the drama of God's intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification, Israel failed in this calling, and doing so, also failed to manifest to the nations what authentic humanity looks like. The drama of Christ, however, reminds us that because Israel failed to deal with the problem caused by humanity's fall into sin, God sent his own Son as the authentic human being to deal with this problem as Israel's and humanity's substitute and representative by offering the Father the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. As a result, the world has its justification and sanctification in Christ. This gives our redemption a single soteriological structure because it is located completely in him as the only authentic human being.[15]

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by pointing out that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the self-sufficient buffered self's pursuit of authenticity.

### 4.6. Accentuate that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with victims of injustice and perpetrators of injustice

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need accentuate that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with perpetrators and victims of injustice. It is important to accentuate this because one of the manifestations of the brokenness that results from an

[15] For Horton's twofold soteriological structure and an extrinsic appropriationist understanding of salvation, see chapter 4, section 1.5 and section 2.

expressive, individualistic pursuit of authenticity is injustice, such as social injustice, economic injustice, political injustice, religious injustice, and environmental injustice. This injustice involves both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice.

However, the gospel can resonate with the experience of these different forms of injustice resulting from an individualistic pursuit of authenticity by accentuating that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with victims of injustice. The drama of Christ is that when the Father sent Christ into the world with the loving intent to redeem Israel and creation from the powers of evil, he was not only opposed and ridiculed but also needed to be eliminated. In the process of being eliminated, Jesus became the victim of horrendous injustice when he, though innocent, was condemned to death as a blasphemer and crucified as a political threat. In being opposed and eliminated as an innocent victim because he got in the peoples' way, Jesus identified with victims of injustice. However, God reversed the miscarriage of justice Jesus suffered when he vindicated him by raising him from the dead and vindicating humanity in him. As a result, both perpetrators and victims of injustice have their vindication in Christ.[16]

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with victims of injustice and perpetrators of injustice because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the experience of different forms of injustice resulting from an individualistic pursuit of authenticity.

### 4.7. Affirm that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to affirm that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present. It is important to affirm this because our secular culture is a culture where people have no other goals than human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world, while at the same time our culture feels haunted in some ways by transcendence.

However, the gospel can resonate with this quest for human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world while at the same time experiencing this world as haunted in some ways by transcendence. The drama of Christ reminds us that because Christ was conceived and born through the Holy Spirit and anointed with the Holy Spirit, he is the bearer of the eschatological Spirit through whom he will bring God's drama of intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification to fulfillment and have humanity and creation flourish by filling them with his Spirit.

It also reminds us that Christ baptized the church with his Spirit as the climax of his ministry and the fulfillment of Israel's hope of the promise of the new covenant where creation and humanity would

[16] It is, of course, good news for the victims of injustice that unconverted perpetrators will be judged and condemned.

flourish according to God's ideal. As such, the Holy Spirit is the promised eschatological gift of the new covenant who empowers God's new covenant community to be the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory, made up of actors who bear witness to what is in Christ. The Holy Spirit does this by creating this new covenant community, communicating direction to it, and increasingly transforming its members by drawing them into God's intratrinitarian life in Christ and making them partakers of his divine nature where their humanity flourishes as God intended them to flourish.

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by affirming that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the quest for human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world while at the same time experiencing this world as haunted in some ways by transcendence.

### 4.8. Stress that when Christ returns, he will judge the living and the dead according to what they have done, as well as usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation

If we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to stress that when Christ returns, he will judge the living and the dead according to what they have done as well as usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation. It is important to stress this because our secular culture is a culture where people have no other goals than human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world, while at the same time our culture feels haunted in some ways by transcendence.

However, the gospel can continue to resonate with this haunted quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame. The drama of God reminds us that the three persons of the Trinity enact their perfect life on earth as it is in heaven, making the world a place where heaven and earth meet.

The drama of creation reminds us that God created the world and humanity so that they could participate in the enactment of their perfect life on earth by living in his loving presence and having a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) relationship with him in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The drama of creation also reminds us that God created humanity with an innate sense of God that includes a sense of God's judgment.

The drama of the return of Christ reminds us that when Christ returns, he will judge the living and the dead according to what they have done. Moreover, he will usher in a new heaven and new earth where humanity and creation will be glorified and participate in God's intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification in Christ through the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

Thus, if we want to communicate the gospel effectively in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by stressing that Christ will judge the living and the dead according to what they have

done, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences in its haunted quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame. Moreover, because Christ will usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation when he returns, this can also facilitate the gospel resonating with humanity's quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame.

### 5. Directions for properly shaping our Christian identity[17]

In chapter two, I argued that doctrine is a form of spiritual formation that prompts us to imaginatively and creatively understand and perform our identity in Christ by having us put on Christ through faith and cloth ourselves in him so that we act out the perfection of God's eternal life in Christ and do heaven on earth. To demonstrate how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for properly shaping our Christian identity that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, I will first outline how the drama of creation gives direction for properly shaping our Christian identity because it appeals to our imagination to see that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Second, I will sketch how the drama of Christ and the drama of the Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian identity because they appeal to our imagination to see that the essence of the church is hidden with Christ in God.

Third, I will outline how the drama of Christ and the drama of the Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian identity because they appeal to our imagination to see that the generative source of our authentic humanity is our union with Christ through faith.

Fourth, I will sketch how the drama of creation gives direction for properly shaping our Christian identity because it appeals to our imagination to see that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul.

Fifth, I will outline how the drama of the Spirit gives direction for properly shaping our Christian identity because it appeals to our imagination to see that our corporate identity as church is inherently missional.

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[17] The order of the directions goes from directions concerning humanity in general (including the church) to directions concerning the church in particular. In the directions for humanity (including the church), the order of the directions goes from the essence of humanity to the generative source of humanity to the receptive and responsive soul of humanity. The directions given concern central elements in each drama and how they can resonate with our secular culture.

### 5.1. Emphasize that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith

If we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to emphasize that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith. It is important to emphasize this because our secular culture is a culture that seeks the essence of humanity in a rebellious and unthankful autonomous spirit of being self-enclosed and unresponsive to God.

However, because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self, the gospel can resonate with this rebellious and unthankful autonomous spirit of being self-enclosed and unresponsive to God. The drama of creation reminds us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created human beings to live in their loving presence and participate in the drama of their intratrinitarian communicative activity of mutual glorification so that heaven and earth become a place for an ontological porous communion in the life of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, it reminds us that humanity is created for this ontological porous communion in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith because humans are created according to the model or standard of Christ, i.e., as sons of God who participate in Christ's status of sonship, his communion of love with the Father through the Spirit, and his ministry of love in this world through the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they are called to represent this status, communion, and ministry by enacting their ontological identity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith as kings and priests who participate in and bear witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation. This is the essence of their being human.[18]

Thus, if we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to appeal to the imagination by emphasizing that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in or dwelling in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the rebellious and unthankful autonomous spirit of being self-enclosed and unresponsive to God because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self.[19]

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[18] For Christianity as the true humanism, see Howard and Packer, 1998; Zimmermann, 2012. For faith in a Person and not in a book, see Webber, 1999; see also Webber, 2006.

[19] For Horton's understanding of how the drama of God and the drama of creation can lead to the gospel shaping our Christian self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image, see chapter three, section 3.2.1.1. and chapter four, section 2. For his understanding of how the drama of God and the drama of creation can lead to the

### 5.2. Accentuate that the essence of our humanity is hidden with Christ in God

If we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to accentuate that the essence of our humanity is hidden with Christ in God. It is important to emphasize this because our secular culture is a culture that imagines the essence of humanity to be located in immanent frame that has lost contact with the transcendent.

However, because of the echoes of transcendence that are also experienced within the immanent frame, the gospel can resonate with imagining the essence of humanity to be located in the immanent frame. The drama of Christ reminds us that when Jesus arose from the dead as the first fruits of God's new creation, this resurrection life had a hidden and mysterious quality about it. Moreover, because the church and humanity arose with Christ from the dead, both the church and humanity's life also have a hidden quality about it. Furthermore, when Christ ascended into heaven, a cloud concealed Jesus from the disciples' sight, symbolizing that his life as the ascended Christ is a life hidden in the glory of the Father.

In addition, because God's new covenant community ascended with Christ into heaven, the life of this new covenant community also has a hidden quality about it since this life is now hidden with Christ in the glory of the Father. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that because the church as God's new creation is formed in union with Christ, the essence of the church is being a partaker of the divine nature.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that the essence of our humanity is hidden with Christ in God because this emphasis can facilitate the gospel resonating with our culture, in spite of its imagining that the essence of humanity is located in the immanent frame, because of the echoes of transcendence that are also experienced within the immanent frame.

### 5.3. Assert that the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith

If we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to assert that the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith. It is important to assert this because the buffered self imagines a boundary between her internal self and her external world so that she can control and manipulate the external world through her instrumental reason instead of imagining her internal and external world to be interdependent. Accordingly, humanity considers itself to be self-sufficient in its pursuit of human flourishing within their

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gospel shaping the nature of our union with Christ and our Christian identity in such a way that we only have an outward or extrinsic union with Christ, see chapter three, section 3.2.1.2. and chapter four, section 2.

immanent frame of life. It is also important to accentuate this because our ecclesiastical culture within our secular culture is a culture where Christians often live with a partial Jesus who determines their past, but not their present.

However, the gospel can resonate in an ecclesiastical culture where Christians live with a partial Jesus. Moreover, because of the cracks in the imagined boundary, the gospel can resonate with this imagined self-sufficiency. The drama of Christ reminds us that when Christ offered the Father the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death through the Holy Spirit as Israel and humanity's substitute and representative, Israel and all of humanity participated in this sacrifice and was redeemed in him. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that when the Holy Spirit draws Israel and humanity into God's intratrinitarian life through uniting them to Christ through faith, God makes them partakers of his divine nature. In doing so, he breaks open their enclosed selves, relocates their subject in the risen and ascended Christ, and subjectively renews their understanding by giving them the *nous* or mind of Christ. As a result, humanity's Christian self is constituted by Christ living his moral life in and through them through the Holy Spirit.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we also need to appeal to the imagination by asserting that the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith because this assertion can facilitate the gospel resonating with humanity's imagined self-sufficiency due to the cracks in the imagined boundary between the self and their external world. Moreover, we also need to appeal to the imagination by asserting that, because the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith, Christians cannot live with a partial Jesus.

### 5.4. Highlight that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul

If we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to highlight that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul. It is important to accentuate this because a side effect of people imagining that the material world in which they exclusively seek meaning, significance, and fullness in human flourishing is the only world there is can be that they imagine themselves to be exclusively material beings. Accordingly, they imagine that "all our acts can be reduced to brain functions that cease when we die" (van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017:270.

However, because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self, the gospel can resonate with this imagined disappearance of the soul. The drama of creation reminds us that the three persons of the Trinity created humanity in their image and likeness as communicative agents who can bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

It reminds us further that humanity is able to bear witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith because we are created with a porous soul that is an ontological spiritual reality distinct from the physical body.[20] This porous ontological reality is essentially a receptive and affective reality through which we experience the resonances of ourselves and others, such as God, other human beings, and the world in which we live. Our souls respond affectively, rationally and volitionally to the resonances they receive.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to appeal to the imagination by highlighting that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul through which we experience the resonances of ourselves and others, such as God, other human beings, and the world in which we live, because this emphasis can facilitate the gospel resonating with our culture's imagined disappearance of the soul because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self.

### 5.5. Point out that our corporate identity as church is inherently missional

If we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to point out that our corporate identity as church is inherently missional. It is important to point this out because the immanent frame of our secular culture is characterized by the cross-pressures of the malaise of immanence and the memory of transcendence. As such, people experience both "openings to transcendence" and "the closure of immanence" in their search for meaning, significance, and fullness.

However, precisely because there are these cross-pressures, the gospel can resonate with the memory of transcendence. The drama of the Spirit reminds us that the church is the preliminary or provisional visible form of God's eschatological new creation, created by the Holy Spirit and formed in union with Christ. It also reminds us that, as God's eschatological new creation, the church is God's new covenant community or reconstituted Israel that bears the Spirit for the sake of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations by being the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian identity shaped in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God, we need to appeal to the imagination by pointing out that our corporate

[20] In chapter six, I spoke about humanity being an anthropological duality, not a dualism because the latter implies a hierarchy between body and soul.

identity as church is inherently missional, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence experienced in the cross-pressures of the immanent frame.

### 6. Directions for properly shaping our Christian practice[21]

In chapter two, I argued that doctrine is not only a mental habit that imaginatively and creatively directs us in understanding our identity in Christ. It is also a mental habit that imaginatively and creatively directs us to increasingly become what we are in Christ. As such, our Christian identity leads to Christian practice or performance that bears witness to what is in Christ.

To demonstrate how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice,[22] I will first outline how the drama of Christ and the drama of the Holy Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that when God's people gather together for public worship, this worship is essentially theodramatic worship in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the main actors continually incorporating the members of their new creation as actors into the plot of their unfolding drama.

Second, I will sketch how the drama of Christ and the drama of the Holy Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the drama of the proclamation of the Word has a mystagogical orientation.

Third, I will outline how the drama of the Holy Spirit gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the drama of the sacraments has a mystagogical orientation.

Fourth, I will sketch how the drama of the Holy Spirit gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that God's communicative action in and through Scripture has a mystagogical orientation.

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[21] The order of the directions goes from directions concerning practices of the church in general as a creature of the Word (*creatura verbi divini*) and the mystagogical nature of preaching, the sacraments, and the reading of Scripture to directions concerning practices of the church in particular. The directions given concern central elements in each drama and how they can resonate with our secular culture.

[22] For beliefs informing and nurturing Christian practices, see Volf and Bass, 2002. For the spiritual power of habit, see Michel, 2021; Smith, 2013:75–99; 2016. Smith writes, "At the heart of my argument is the conviction that our incarnating, accommodating God meets us in and through [our] creaturely conditions. Just as God's revelation accommodates itself to the hermeneutical conditions of our finitude, so the transforming Spirit of God meets us as the finite creatures of habit we are. The sanctifying Spirit condescends to meet us as narrative, imaginative, ritual animals, giving us practices and liturgies for our sanctification" (Smith, 2013:33).

Fifth, I will outline how the drama of the creation of humanity, the drama of the election of Israel and the covenants, and the drama of the Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him is the fundamental practice that helps us become effective communicators of the gospel.

Sixth, I will sketch how the drama of God, the drama of creation, and the drama of the Holy Spirit give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the fundamental affect of faith is the fear of the LORD.

Seventh, I will outline how the drama of Christ gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the practice of being a member of the church involves a life of solitude and prayer.

Eighth, I will sketch how the drama of the Holy Spirit gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the practice of being a member of the church involves praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ninth, I will outline how the drama of the Holy Spirit gives direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the practice of being church involves being a community where life flourishes by living for the other.

Tenth, I will sketch how the drama of creation, the drama of Christ, the drama of the Holy Spirit, and the drama of the return of Christ in glory appeal to our imagination to see that the practice of being a member of the church involves participating in and bearing witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Eleventh, I will outline how the drama of creation, the drama of Christ, the drama of the Holy Spirit, and the drama of the return of Christ give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice by appealing to our imagination to see that the practice of being church involves being a watchful and waiting community ready to meet the Christ when he returns in his glory.

Having our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture is of paramount importance because of the many people who consider themselves to be spiritual, but not religious,[23] because our secular culture is a

[23] As we saw in chapter one, "The phrase 'spiritual but not religious' is the contemporary way of trying to explain some sort of connection to God, separate from, in tension with, or in opposition to religious institutions" (Bass, 2013:87).

technologically distracted culture that tends to foster a superficial experience of beliefs,[24] and because belief formation often occurs through belonging, behaving, and believing (Bass, 2013:102–214).[25]

### 6.1. Emphasize the practice of theodramatic worship

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to emphasize the practice of theodramatic worship. This is important because our secular culture is an expressive, experiential culture in which story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and in the expression and explanation of these personal experiences because we have a narrative identity.

However, the gospel can resonate with this expressive, experiential, narrative identity.[26] The drama of Christ reminds us that after his ascension into heaven, Christ continues to participate in the drama of his Father's mission for his glory through filial openness and responsiveness as the head and mediator of the new covenant. As such, he upholds and governs his church as king, intercedes for his people and blesses them as priest, and continues to confront his people with the Father's good news of the coming kingdom of heaven as prophet, urging them to repent and believe.

The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that Christ carries out his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king primarily through his Word and Spirit in the drama of the proclamation of the Word and the drama of the administration of the sacraments. Through these means, he rescripts his new creation by giving it his mindset for fitting participation in or performance of the drama of his mission for his glory that is being played out in the history of this world and in the history of the lives of the members of God's new creation.

The drama of Christ reminds us that because we are seated with Christ in heaven, we participate in the drama of Christ as the priestly mediator of worship, glorifying the Father in heavenly worship when

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[24] Because the church lives in a technologically distracted secular culture, it does not escape this influence. However, because of the formative power of habit, the practices of the church structurally facilitate encouraging a deeper experience of belief. For evangelism that stresses taking one's place within the body of Christ, see Webber, 2003.

[25] Bass writes, "Long ago, before the last half millennium, Christians understood that faith was a matter of community first, practices second, and belief as a result of the first two" (Bass, 2013:203). This is not to say that the Spirit cannot mix up the order in his own way, should he please to do so. However, Bass unnecessarily plays belief-centred faith and experience-centred faith off against each other (Bass, 2013:109–111, 120–128, 210–214). The price she is willing to pay for this is her dream of an interfaith awakening where Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have the freedom to experience God on their own terms and in their own ways. She writes, "On the stage of awakening, I imagine Christians carrying high the cross, all the different varieties with their Bibles, prayer books, icons, and rosary beads; Jews holding the Torah; Muslims bearing the Qur'an; Buddhists with their Dharma wheel; Native peoples beating their drums; and so on, each group cheering its own flag. . . . But when the time comes [Isa. 2:2–4], we will all be one in communion with God, in harmony with the cosmos, loving each other" (Bass, 2013:268).

[26] On the importance of narrative for apologetics, see McGrath, 2012:138–148. He writes, ". . . stories can give answers to what philosopher Karl Popper calls 'ultimate questions' . . . [such as] 'Who am I?' What is the point of life? What can I do to make a difference?'" (McGrath, 2012:139).

we come to worship together on earth. This includes participating in the drama of prayer and song in heaven in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by emphasizing that the practice of being church involves the practice of theodramatic worship because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the expressive, experiential, narrative identity that characterizes our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of theodramatic worship for themselves in the community of faith.[27] This practice can be cultivated by imagining that worship is a theodramatic activity in which we are being "touched by the sacred" (Immink, 2014). This practice of theodramatic worship is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by joining us to Christ's theodramatic worship in heaven in us as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.2. Accentuate the practice of mystagogical preaching

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to accentuate the practice of mystagogical preaching. It is important to affirm this because at one time people imagined the ontological structure of creation to be enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels, having a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) porous or open relationship with God so that they were vulnerable to his presence and the presence of angels, either good or bad. Our secular culture is still haunted in some ways by these memories of transcendence.

However, the gospel can resonate with these echoes of transcendence. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith involves seeking our salvation outside of ourselves by entrusting ourselves completely to Christ so that we are drawn into the life of God in Christ and become partakers of the divine nature in Christ through

[27] For the eschatological nature of worship, see Saliers, 1994. For enchanted worship, see Boersma, 2021; de Ruijter, 2021; Schmemann, 2018. For worship ordered by the pattern of Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return, see Webber, 2004. For an analysis of what our enactment of the liturgy says about the God we worship, see Wolterstorff, 2015. For an analysis of the relationship between human and divine agency in the enactment of the liturgy, see Wolterstorff, 2019. For a liturgical analysis of "the social imaginary embedded in Christian worship", see Smith, 2009:155–213. For how liturgical practices form our imagination and sanctify our perception by "re-story-ing our being-in-the- world", see Smith, 2013:161; cf. 101–192; see also Saliers, 1998. Interacting with Smith, Vanhoozer helpfully writes, "Yet, we become disciples not simply by participating in Christian liturgical practices but by participating in—living into and acting out—Scripture's canonical practices and, yes, Christian doctrine (see 1 Tim 4:16)" (Vanhoozer, 2019:56). Burger writes, "Participation in these practices [i.e., the liturgy of the church] is useless when we are not born again of water and Spirit. The Spirit has to blow on these practices to make them salutary. At the same time, the Word of God is the seed of regeneration, and the Holy Spirit works with and through the Word." He adds, "Hence, the best someone can do to receive formation as someone with a new perspective is conversion to participation in the Christian life with the prayer that the Spirit will give new life in those forms. Participation in Christian practices will lead to participation in Christ and to sharing in his perspective" (Burger, 2017a:70).

the Holy Spirit. It also reminds us that God makes us partakers of his divine nature by effectually addressing and engaging us with his Word and Spirit, uniting us to Christ through faith and renewing our lives in him. Moreover, it reminds us that Christ guides and draws us into the mystery of our participation in the divine nature primarily through the drama of the proclamation of the Word. In doing so, he relocates our subject in him and subjectively renews our understanding by giving us his *nous* or mind so that he lives his life in and through us as the main actor in our lives.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves the practice of mystagogical preaching because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical preaching for themselves in the community of faith.[28]

This practice of mystagogical preaching can be cultivated by preaching not only what Christ has done *for* us, but also what he does *in* us as we put him on through faith and clothe ourselves with him so that it is no longer we who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in us.[29] This practice of faith is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating his own participation in or dwelling in the life of God in us as we abide in him through faith.[30]

### 6.3. Stress the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to stress the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments. It is important to stress this because, as I wrote above, our secular society is still haunted in some ways by memories of transcendence.

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[28] Thus, the expression "mystagogical preaching" is not limited to preaching on the sacraments to initiate people into the life of the church after their baptism. For the latter, see Satterlee, 2002.

[29] For the drama of the proclamation of the Word, see Childers, 1999; Horton, 2002a:33–92; see also Webber, 2008. For a biblical-theological approach to preaching God's drama, see Lee, 2019. For sacramental preaching see Boersma, 2016. For preaching as listening to the voice of God, see de Ruijter, 2013. For a comprehensive model for transformational preaching, see Anderson, 2017. For a spiritual homiletic and spiritual formation, see Douma, 2014. For the meaning of meditation for the homiletic process, see Douma, 2000. For determining the purpose or fallen condition focus of a text, see Chappell, 2005:48–52. For religious involvement in hearing sermons, see Pleizier, 2010. For preaching Christ to the heart, see Keller, 2015:157–187.

[30] For the danger of a one-sided emphasis on the sermon in a worship service, de Bruijne writes, "In the church service, it [is] no longer the sermon that [should] receive all the emphasis. Every church service . . . is at its core praise and should, therefore, as a rule, include the celebration of the Lord's Supper. . . .You do not come to church first of all to get something but to bring something". He adds, "But you are only truly human when you put God first. And the human activities in which you do and practice that par excellence are prayer and praise. In these, you renounce yourself and give yourself with Christ as an offering to God". He concludes, "God-centered praise detaches you from the idols of spiritual need-fulfillment and spiritual market mechanisms. You learn to shed your consumer attitude in church because you didn't come here first of all to get something. You came to bring yourself" (de Bruijne, 2019a).

Again, the gospel can resonate with these echoes of transcendence. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ not only primarily uses the drama of the proclamation of the Word for the cultivation and nurturing process so that we become partakers of the divine nature in him in his new creation, but he also uses the administration of the sacraments for this purpose. Through the administration of the sacraments, he also rescripts his new creation by giving it his mindset for fitting participation in or performance of in the drama of God's mission for his glory.

The drama of the Holy Spirit also reminds us that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ uses the drama of the sacrament of baptism for this by visibly incorporating of believers and their children into God's new covenant community through symbolically performing their participation in the drama of the history of Christ's death and resurrection. By immersing them in or sprinkling them with water, he emphasizes that they have died to their old identity in Adam and have arisen to their new identity in Christ. This dramatic rescripting of their lives highlights that their new identity now lies ex-centrally outside of themselves and in Christ as the new centre of their humanity.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit uses the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the cultivation and nurturing of the members of God's new covenant community so that they become partakers of the divine nature in Christ by visibly and tangibly proclaiming their being forgiven and sanctified through symbolically performing their participation in the drama of the history of Christ's death and resurrection by eating bread and drinking wine together.[31] In partaking of the Lord's Supper in faith, believers proclaim their intent to seek their identity outside of themselves in Christ, who is really present at the celebration through the Spirit, allowing his death and resurrection to rescript their lives on their journey to the Sabbath rest of the kingdom of God.[32]

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by stressing that the practice of being church involves the practice of a mystagogical

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[31] Burger writes, "Humans are material beings and physicality is essential to who we are. The sacrament is necessary in connection with that physicality". Rejecting the notion that God is not sacramentally present in impersonal things so that we should turn our eyes away from the elements of bread and wine, he suggests that we should actually turn our eyes towards them in faith. Thus, he writes, "The physical and material is good and necessary. The challenge is to see Christ not above or behind the material signs, but rather in bread and wine" (Burger, 2021a).

[32] When Jesus commands his follows to celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him, he uses the term *anamnesis*. "Much more than just the idea of recalling, *anamnesis* reflects the Hebrew word *zkr*, which is usually translated 'remember' and specifically implies that we live in the present and behave in the present in light of our memory. . . . This act of remembrance is one in which the past shapes, informs, and penetrates the present. . . We live now . . . as a people for whom everything has altered" (Smith, 2005:38–39; see also Moore-Keish, 2020:537–538). Vander Zee writes, "It [*anamnesis*] is not just a call to historical memory, but a call to present participation in the saving events of history" (Vander Zee, 2004;210). Billings rightfully observes that this remembrance is part of "broader framework—one in which [we] are hungry for Christ and need to be nourished by Christ via the Spirit" (Billings, 2018:17). Regarding the mystery of the hidden but real presence of Christ at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, see Calvin, 1960:1362–1363, 1371–1372 [IV.17.3; 17.11].

understanding of the sacraments, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments themselves in the community of faith. This practice can be cultivated by entering into the symbolic narrative of our participation in the drama of God's mission for his glory and have our imaginations formed by this symbolic narrative (Billings, 2018). This practice is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating his own participation in or dwelling in the life of God in us as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.4. Highlight the practice of the mystagogical reading of Scripture

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to highlight the practice of the mystagogical reading of Scripture. Again, it is important to stress this because our secular culture is cross-pressured between "openings to transcendence" and "closure of imminence".

Once again, the gospel can resonate with these echoes of transcendence. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that Scripture is located in the drama of redemption. It also reminds us that Scripture is God's communicative action, in and through which he is present in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, drawing us into an ever-deeper communion with himself in Christ as he increasingly forms Christ in us. Moreover, it reminds us that Scripture is the reliable script, transcript, and prescript through which God dialogically engages us with his speech acts and prompts us to participate, faithfully and fittingly, as actors in the drama of his intratrinitarian activity of mutual glorification who enact his perfect life on earth as it is in heaven.[33] Accordingly, God's communicative action in and through Scripture does not end with Scripture, but in us.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by highlighting that the practice of being church involves the practice of the mystagogical reading of Scripture, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the cross-pressures of "openings to transcendence" and "closure of imminence" that our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical reading of the Scriptures themselves in the community of faith. This practice can be cultivated through the practice of *lectio divina* (Bianchi,

[33] In an interview, Eugene Peterson says, "When we approach the biblical text, instead of asking, 'What does it mean?' — which is what people usually do — we should ask, 'What is it doing? How do I enter into this? How does it enter into me?'" He adds, "You know, it's surprising: We have Jesus as the centerpiece of what we're doing, but he almost never talked in terms of explaining. He was always using enigmatic stories and difficult metaphors. He was always pulling people into some kind of participation. It's essential for us to develop an imagination that is participatory" (Overstreet, 2018).

1996; Douma and Grün, et. al., 2019; Douma and Kroon, et.al. 2010; Foster, 2005; Stinissen, 1999) and the practice of a spiritual reading of Scripture (Boersma, 2017; Foster and Helmers, 2008; Huigen, 2019; Peterson, 2006). However, this practice of a mystagogical reading of Scripture is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating Christ's own reading of the Scriptures in our lives as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.5. Focus on the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to stress the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is important to accentuate this because our secular culture continues to experience transcendent feelings.

However, the gospel can resonate with these transcendent feelings. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that, as the giver of life, the Holy Spirit is the promised eschatological gift of the new covenant who empowers God's new covenant community to be a theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory. He does this by drawing us into the life of God, enabling us to participate in this life and partake of the divine nature by living in God's loving presence and sharing in the Son's status of sonship, his communion of love with the Father, and his ministry of love in this world.

As the communicator of direction, the Spirit dialogically engages and prompts us to participate faithfully and fittingly in the theodrama that is being played out in the history of this world and the history of our lives. As the creator of a new community, the Spirit sustains the church in Christ. As the renewer of our humanity, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ through faith and renews our lives in him.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by stressing that the practice of being church involves praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the feelings of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience when those who are not Christians experience the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit themselves in the community of faith. This practice can be cultivated through a spirituality of receptivity (Troost, 2008). This practice is ultimately cultivated as the Spirit forms Christ in us by generating Jesus' own being filled with the Spirit in us as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.6. Accentuate the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to focus on the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him. It is important to focus on this because our

secular culture is an expressive, experiential culture in which story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and in the expression and explanation of these personal experiences because we have a narrative identity. It is also important to accentuate this because our ecclesiastical culture within our secular culture is a culture where Christians often live with a partial Jesus who determines their past, but not really their present.

However, the gospel can resonate in this sort ecclesiastical culture. Moreover, it is also possible to have the gospel resonate with this expressive, experiential, narrative identity. The drama of the creation of humanity reminds us that humanity's being created in the image of God entailed their participation in the divine nature by participating in Christ's status of sonship and his communion of love with the Father. We also saw that this issued forth in their representing God by performing their ontological identity through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

The drama of the election of Israel and the divine-human covenants reminds us that God chose Israel to be the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory by performing and bearing witness to the communicative intratrinitarian act of mutual glorification through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

The drama of the Spirit reminds us that the church is God's new covenant community that bears the Spirit for the sake of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

This listening and thankful spirit of the filial openness and responsiveness of faith involves seeking our salvation outside of ourselves by entrusting ourselves completely to Christ so that we are drawn into the life of God in Christ and become partakers of the divine nature in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, when we seek our salvation outside of ourselves in Christ by putting him on through faith and clothing ourselves with him, we receive the mind of Christ as Christ does in us what he has done for us, enabling us to bear witness to what is in him.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by focusing on the fact that practice of being church involves the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, experiential culture in which story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and in the expression and explanation of these personal experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves in the community of faith. Appealing to the imagination in this manner will also cultivate living with a whole Jesus and not just with a partial Jesus who determines our past, but not our present.

This practice of faith can be cultivated through a spirituality of receptivity (Troost, 2008; see also Peterson, 2010). It can also be cultivated by accentuating Christian virtues and character formation in the life of Christian discipleship (de Bruijne, 2015; Vos, 2015; Wright, 2010). This practice of faith is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating Jesus' own listening and thankful spirit of the filial openness and responsiveness of faith as well as his own character in us as we abide in him through faith and so bear witness to what is in Christ (Mt. 27:43; Jn. 5:30; Heb. 2:13; Allen, 2013:83–89; Mackasill, 2013:187).

### 6.7. Affirm the practice of the fear of the LORD

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to accentuate the practice of the fear of the LORD. It is important to give prominence to this because people in our secular culture have not forgotten that at one time people imagined the ontological structure of creation to be enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels, having a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) porous or open relationship with God so that they were vulnerable to his presence and the presence of angels, either good or bad. Because they have not forgotten, our secular culture is still haunted in some ways by these memories of transcendence.

However, the gospel can resonate with these echoes of transcendence. The drama of God reminds us that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other. This God is the LORD who performs the splendour of his perfect life as the God who communicatively acts in a compassionate, gracious, faithful, and loving manner, but also performs the splendour of his perfect life as the God who communicatively acts in a just and holy manner by punishing the guilty.

The drama of creation reminds us that the Father voluntarily created the earthly stage of his theodrama in Christ through the Holy Spirit so that it has a "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) porous relationship with God by living in his loving presence and participating in his life through living and moving and having its being in God. Humanity, created in the image of God, also has this ontological porous relationship with God.

The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that the Holy Spirit gives life to creation and humanity, communicates direction to humanity, creates a new community, and renews humanity.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves the practice of the fear of the LORD because this practice can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture that is still haunted in some ways by their memories of transcendence when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the fear of the LORD in the community of faith. This fear of the LORD is a reverent and

attentive filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith that is evoked by living in the glorious and sacred presence of God. It can be synonymous with the obedience of faith.[34]

This practice can be cultivated by attentively practicing the presence of God (Booram and Booram, 2019; Lawrence, 1977; Troost, 2013; 2017; 2019; Warren, 2016; Wilson, 2021) as well as by the practice of Sabbath keeping (Peterson, 2005:109–118; see also Bass, 2005). This fear of the LORD is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating Jesus' own fear of the Lord (Isa. 11:2) in our lives as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.8. Emphasize the practice of solitude and the conversational life of prayer

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to affirm the practice of a life of solitude and a conversational life of prayer. It is important to highlight this because our secular culture is an expressive, individualistic culture.

However, because of the cracks in the buffer of these self-enclosed people, the gospel can resonate with this expressive individualism. The drama of Christ reminds us that Jesus increasingly became strong in the Spirit. It also reminds us that the Spirit used the practice of prayer and solitude for him to become strong in the Spirit. Accordingly, Jesus often spent time alone with his Father in private prayer. Moreover, Jesus publicly prayed with and for his disciples as well as for his enemies. Furthermore, when Jesus ascended into heaven, he has continued his life of prayer, interceding for his people. This life of prayer and solitude was the effect of his listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by affirming that the practice of being church involves the practice of solitude and a conversational life of prayer because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, individualistic culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of solitude and a conversational life of prayer in the community of faith. This may especially be the case for those who engage in the meditative practice of mindfulness. This life of prayer and solitude can be described as the

[34] Peterson writes, "The fact that fear-of-the-Lord cannot be precisely defined is one of its glories—we are dealing with something that we cannot pin down, we inhabit mystery, we can't be cocksure about anything, we cultivate an attentive and reverent expectation before every person, event, rock, and tree. Presumption recedes, attentiveness increases, expectancy heightens". He adds, "Fear-of-the-Lord . . . turns everything we do into a life of 'breathing God'" (Peterson, 2005:44). De Bruijne writes, "In my view, this [i.e., the fear of the Lord] is the fundamental affect of faith in Christian spirituality. Whoever knows the fear of the Lord responds to the real presence of God himself" (de Bruijne, 2011a:69; see also 2014:44–47). Waltke writes, "What notes are to music and the alphabet is to reading, the fear of *I AM* is to attaining wisdom" (Waltke, 2007:160; see also 1992:17–33). See also Reeves, 2021.

practice of a conversational relationship with God and can be cultivated through a life of contemplative prayer (Johnson, 2017; Willard, 2012).[35]

This practice is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating Jesus's own conversational life of prayer in our lives as we abide in him through faith.[36] This understanding of the drama of Christ facilitates speaking into and resonating with the echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the immanent frame of our secular culture that is searching for meaning, significance, and fullness. It also facilitates speaking into and connecting with an ecclesiastic culture within this secular culture that perceives the God of the Christian faith as a God who is not involved in people's lives and who wants them to be good so that they will feel good.

### 6.9. Stress the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other[37]

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to emphasize the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other. It is important to affirm this because our secular culture is a culture whose only goal is the human flourishing of life within an immanent frame of life. This pursuit of human flourishing includes living for the other.

However, because this same culture is also an expressive, individualistic culture in pursuit of authenticity in which people follow their own desires to be authentic and thus true to themselves instead of being obedient to external norms, institutions, and values, it has no adequate moral sources to determine what authentically living for the other looks like.

The gospel can resonate with this pursuit of human flourishing which includes living for the other. The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that the church is the preliminary or provisional visible form of God's eschatological new creation created by the Holy Spirit and formed in union with Christ in which life begins to flourish the way God meant it to flourish. It also reminds us that the church is God's new covenant community or reconstituted Israel that bears the Spirit for the sake of bringing the blessing of Abraham to the nations by being the theatre of the drama of his mission for his glory, through performing and bearing witness to what is in Christ, by living for the other as God lives for the other in Christ. As such, the church is the eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet of Christ in this world.

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[35] For Horton's discouragement of the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality, see chapter three, section 3.2.2.1 and chapter four, section 2.

[36] Root writes, "In a theological sense, no person prays directly to God; no human words and actions can penetrate the very relationship that is God. But in the mystery of the hypostatic union, the mystery where Jesus is *the* person who shares completely in the divine and human, this Jesus prays our prayers" (Root, 2013:176).

[37] Since love is essentially living for the other, a community that "lives for the other" is a synonym for being "a community of love". By using love or living for the other as a sort of container concept, the other concepts that follow are examples of living for the other. These examples also illustrate what being a missional church entails.

Moreover, it reminds us that when Gentiles come to faith in Christ and are grafted into reconstituted Israel, the Spirit wants to use the beauty of the human flourishing of God's eschatological creation to draw non-Christian ethnic Jews to jealousy and bring them to faith in Christ.

Furthermore, the drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that the church is a pilgrim community on its way to the sabbath rest of the kingdom of God that creatively and imaginatively extends the meaning of the script, transcript, and prescript of God's drama of his mission for his glory in ways that develop the theodramatic action in new situations and reincorporate the new situation into the theodrama.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by emphasizing that the practice of being church involves the church being a community where life flourishes by living for the other because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the pursuit of human flourishing within an immanent frame when those who are not Christians experience the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other in the community of faith.[38]

This practice can be cultivated by being a community of hospitality (Butterfield, 2018; Pohl, 1999), a community of truth (Noble, 2018),[39] political engagement (de Bruijne, 2011b; de Jong, 2019; O'Donovan, 1996),[40] communion (Bonhoeffer, 2012; Dawn, 1992; Pohl, 2011; Smith and Pattison, 2014), forgiveness (Jones, 1995; McKnight, 2007; Volf, 2019), goodness (McKnight and Barringer, 2020), generosity (Berlin, 2016; Millard, 2015). It can also be cultivated through the practice of Sabbath keeping (Brueggemann, 2017; Dawn, 1989; 2006; Swoboda, 2018; Wirzba, 2006) and being a community of Christian cultural agents (Vanhoozer, 2007:15–60). This practice is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating his own life of love or living for the other in us as we abide in him through faith.[41]

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[38] In being a community that lives for the other, we need to remember that "this side of the eschaton, even as the church's sanctification takes place, it remains, like the wider world, besieged and entangled by vices and weakness" (Boulton, 2011:220).

[39] In being a community of truth, the church bears a disruptive witness (Noble, 2018). Van de Beek uses stronger language when he speaks about prophetically unmasking the lies of our secular culture (van de Brink, 2001).

[40] Being a community of political engagement includes prophetically addressing current political issues, unmasking the so-called political gospels as counterfeit gospels, encouraging authorities to honor God, seeking the wellbeing of the community with words and deeds (de Bruijne, 2011b:383–387). About addressing current political issues, de Bruijne writes that this is not done to "reform existing society into a kingdom form [but for the sake of] a missionary appeal" (de Bruijne, 2011:384). With regard to what political engagement concretely looks like, he writes, "The church already speaks publicly in its assembly where God is 'publicly called upon' (Lord's Day 38 HC). Pastors can use encounters and write letters. Christians can frequent opinion pages or websites and engage missionally in public debate. Theologians can practice public theology. Missionaries can protest against injustice. Local church councils can raise issues with their municipal councils" (de Bruijne, 2011:385–386; see also de Jong, 2019:19).]

[41] For Horton's understanding of how the drama of the church leads to a compartmentalization of the Christian life by driving a wedge between activities in the common and the sacred realm, see chapter three, section 3.2.2.2. and chapter four, section 2.

### 6.10. Accentuate the practice of kingly rule and priestly care of creation

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to accentuate the practice of the kingly rule and priestly care of creation. It is important to stress this because our secular culture is a culture whose only goal is the human flourishing of life within an immanent frame of life. This pursuit of human flourishing includes a heightened concern for the preservation of this planet through creation care.

However, the gospel can resonate with this pursuit of human flourishing that includes this heightened concern for the preservation of this planet through creation care. The drama of creation reminds us that all things were created in Christ and that all things hold together in him. It also reminds us that because creation is the porous dwelling place of God in Christ through the Spirit, created reality can ontologically participate in God's trinitarian act of mutual glorification and be a theatre of God's glory. Moreover, it reminds us that humanity's being created according to the image of Christ issued forth in their calling to represent this ontological status as kings and priests who participate in and bear witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith as they cultivate creation and consecrate it to God. Furthermore, the drama of creation reminds us that humanity refused to do this, because they were driven by their own agenda and standards, which led to the breakdown and degradation of creation.

The drama of Christ reminds us that when Christ dealt with the problem of sin, death, and the devil with the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of his death, he redeemed creation from the powers of evil. It also reminds us that when Christ arose from the dead with a glorified resurrection body, he did so as the first fruits of God's hidden, eschatological, incorruptible new creation in fulfillment of the promise of a new covenant. Accordingly, there is hope for creation.

The drama of the Holy Spirit reminds us that when the Spirit renews humanity by giving them the mind of Christ, they can participate in and bear witness to Christ's kingly rule and priestly care for creation in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.

The drama of the return of Christ in glory reminds us that creation and humanity will experience the goal for which they were created by participating in the incorruptibility and immortality of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the Sabbath rest of the kingdom of God.

Thus, if we want our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves our kingly rule and priestly care of creation, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with humanity's heightened concern for the preservation of this planet through creation care when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the kingly rule and priestly care for creation in the community of faith.

This practice can be cultivated by a renewed sense of gratitude for the blessing and gift of the world we are allowed to live in as well as a renewed sense of gratitude for the responsible position we have within God's creation (Wirzba, 2015; Francis, 2015; 2020; see also Burger, 2020b; Zizioulas, n.d.; 2006). Moreover, it can be cultivated by reappropriating the drama of creation and reimagining it as participating in God's trinitarian act of mutual glorification and recognizing that humanity participates in this trinitarian act of mutual glorification as faithful, patient, and hopeful stewards of creation (cf. Wilson, 2013).[42] This practice is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating his own kingly rule and priestly care for creation in us in him as we abide in him through faith.

### 6.11. Give prominence to the practice of being watchful and waiting community

If we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to give prominence to the practice of being a watchful and waiting community. It is important to emphasize this because of the echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the immanent frame of our secular culture.

However, the gospel can resonate with these echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the immanent frame of our secular culture. The drama of creation reminds us that God's goal in creation is the elevated life of creation and humanity participating in Christ in his incorruptibility and immortality through the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God.

The drama of Christ reminds us that Christ called Israel to repent and believe the good news of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven or else face the fire of God's coming judgment and be excluded from this kingdom. It also reminds us that after Christ ascended into heaven, he continued to confront Israel and the nations with the Father's good news of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven to make ready a people to meet him when he returns.

The drama of the Spirit reminds us that as the preliminary visible form of God's eschatological new creation formed around Christ through the Holy Spirit, the church is a pilgrim community on its way to the Sabbath rest of the kingdom of God.

The drama of the return of Christ in glory reminds us that the return of Christ is meant to bring about the consummation of God's creational goal of a glorified humanity and a glorified creation participating in the drama of God's mission for his glory by bearing witness to the communicative activity of mutual glorification in the immanent Trinity.

Thus, if we want to have our Christian practice shaped in a manner that helps us to become effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, we need to appeal to the

[42] About the danger of environmental moralism, see de Bruijne, 2019b.

imagination by giving prominence to the fact that the practice of being church involves being a watchful and waiting community ready to meet the Christ when he returns in his glory, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the immanent frame of our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience this practice of being a watchful and waiting community in the community of faith.

This practice can be cultivated by emphasizing that the nearness of the kingdom is ultimately not a matter of whether it is here or not, but whether we are prepared to enter this kingdom when Christ returns (van Bruggen, 2014b). It can also be cultivated by the regular prayer for the coming of the kingdom. This practice of being a watchful and waiting community is ultimately cultivated by the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us by generating his own prayer for the coming kingdom in us as we abide in him through faith.

## 7. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice in a manner that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.

Having summarized the central features of the social imaginary of our secular culture and explained the relationship between our imagination and our plausibility structure, I answered that question by sketching how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction for clearly communicating the gospel. We saw that it does so through appealing to the imagination by emphasizing that the gospel concerns the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in or performance of this drama, because this facilitates it resonating with this search for meaning, significance, and fullness experienced in a culture that can feel flat and empty, on the one hand, and experiences openings to transcendence, on the other.

Second, it does so through appealing to our imagination by accentuating that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other, because this facilitates it resonating with our secular culture's loss of communion, loneliness, and fragmentation. Moreover, appealing to the imagination in this manner can help moralistic, therapeutic deistic Christians understand that God is more than a God who wants us to be good and feel good.

Third, it does so through appealing to our imagination by asserting that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the memories of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience.

Fourth, it does so through appealing to our imagination by highlighting that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with our secular culture's expressive, individualistic pursuit of authenticity by the buffered self.

Fifth, it does so through appealing to our imagination by pointing out that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the self-sufficient buffered self's pursuit of authenticity.

Sixth, it does so through appealing to our imagination by accentuating that Jesus is the authentic human being who identified with victims of injustice and perpetrators of injustice, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the experience of different forms of injustice resulting from an individualistic pursuit of authenticity.

Seventh, it does so through appealing to our imagination by affirming that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the quest for human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world while at the same time experiencing this world as haunted in some ways by transcendence.

Eighth, it does so through appealing to our imagination by stressing that Christ will judge the living and the dead according to what they have done, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence they experience in their haunted quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame. Moreover, appealing to the imagination by stressing that Christ will usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation when he returns, which also facilitates the gospel resonating with humanity's quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame.

Having outlined how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel, I sketched how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction properly shaping our Christian identity.

We saw that it does so through appeal to the imagination by emphasizing that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the rebellious and unthankful autonomous spirit of being self-enclosed and unresponsive to God because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self.

Second, it does so through appealing to the imagination by accentuating that the essence of our humanity is hidden with Christ in God, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with our culture,

which imagines the essence of humanity to be located in the immanent frame, because of the echoes of transcendence that are also experienced within the immanent frame.

Third, it does so through appealing to the imagination by asserting that the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with humanity's imagined self-sufficiency as a result of the cracks in the imagined boundary between the self and their external world. Moreover, appealing to the imagination in this manner facilitates the gospel resonating with Christians who imagine they can live with a partial Jesus.

Fourth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by highlighting that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul through which we experience the resonances of ourselves and others—such as God, other human beings, and the world in which we live—because this facilitates the gospel resonating with our culture's imagined disappearance of the soul because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self.

Fifth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by pointing out that our corporate identity as church is inherently missional, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence experience in the cross-pressures of the immanent frame.

Having outlined how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity, I sketched how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give direction for properly shaping our Christian practice.

It does so through appealing to the imagination by emphasizing that the practice of being church involves the practice of theodramatic worship, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the expressive, experiential, narrative identity that characterizes our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of theodramatic worship for themselves in the community of faith.

Second, it does so through appealing to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves the practice of mystagogical preaching, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical preaching for themselves in the community of faith.

Third, it does so through appealing to the imagination by stressing that the practice of being church involves the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments themselves in the community of faith.

Fourth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by highlighting that the practice of being church involves the practice of the mystagogical reading of Scripture, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the cross-pressures of openings to transcendence and closure of imminence that our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical reading of the Scriptures themselves in the community of faith.

Fifth, it does so by appealing to the imagination through focusing on the fact that the practice of being church involves praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the feelings of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience when those who are not Christians experience the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit themselves in the community of faith.

Sixth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves with him, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, experiential culture in which story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and in the expression and explanation of these personal experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves in the community of faith. Moreover, appealing to the imagination in this manner can also facilitate living with a whole Jesus and not just with a partial Jesus who determines our past, but not our present.

Seventh, it does so through appealing to the imagination by affirming that the practice of being church involves the practice of the fear of the LORD, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture that is still haunted in some ways by their memories of transcendence when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the fear of the LORD in the community of faith.

Eighth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by emphasizing that the practice of being church involves the practice of solitude and a conversational life of prayer, because this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, individualistic culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of solitude and a conversational life of prayer in the community of faith.

Ninth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by accentuating that the practice of being church involves the church being a community where life flourishes by living for the other, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the pursuit of human flourishing within an immanent frame by living for the other when those who are not Christians experience the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other in the community of faith.

Tenth, it does so through appealing to the imagination by stressing that the practice of being church involves our kingly rule and priestly care of creation, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with humanity's heightened concern for the preservation of this planet through creation care when those

who are not Christians experience the practice of the kingly rule and priestly care for creation in the community of faith.

Eleventh, it does so through appealing to the imagination by giving prominence to the fact that the practice of being church involves being a watchful and waiting community ready to meet the Christ when he returns in his glory, because this facilitates the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the immanent frame of our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience this practice of being a watchful and waiting community in the community of faith.

A concluding chapter will determine whether the central theoretical argument of this study can be sustained.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This study developed a theological framework that gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture. It did so by outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in or dwelling in the life of God with Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre. In outlining these contours, this study entered into conversation with Michael Horton's covenant or federal theology that has the concept of the covenant as its integrative centre. The purpose of entering into conversation with covenant theology was to determine which theology with its integrative centre is better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture. In doing so, this study has filled a gap in the theological literature.[1]

The central theoretical argument of this study was formulated as follows: because God's fundamental relationship with humanity does not imply a covenant ontology, but an ontology of participating in or dwelling in God's loving presence in Christ by the Holy Spirit through a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith, a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in or dwelling in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre is structurally better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture than Horton's model of federal theology. Because this theodramatic systematic theology incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants, a participatory ontology or an ontology of mutual indwelling and a covenant ontology are not mutually exclusive, but intimately intertwined.

In this chapter, I will determine whether this central theoretical argument can be sustained, offer suggestions for further research, and draw a final conclusion. To do so, I will first diagram[2] consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. Second, I will diagram[3] implications the systemic problems in Horton's federal theology can have for his communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity

[1] In chapter one, I wrote that at this time there is no systematic theology with participation in the life of God as its integrative centre. I also wrote that at this time there is no theodramatic systematic theology.
[2] Since I did not diagram consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice in chapter three, this diagram also functions as a visual overview of what I wrote in that chapter for the sake of clarity.
[3] Same as previous note.

and practice. Third, I will diagram[4] how the contours of my theodramatic systematic theology give direction for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our identity and practice that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. Fourth, I will determine why the central theoretical argument of this study can be sustained. Fifth, I will offer suggestions for further research. Sixth, I will draw a final conclusion.

### 1. Consequences[5] the design[6] of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice

When I answered the second question that arose from my overarching question, viz. how does the structural design of Michael Horton's systematic theology give direction to our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice, I answered that question by outlining consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice. These consequences can be found in section four of that chapter. They can be diagramed as follows.

| **Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for our communication of the gospel** | **Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for the shape of our Christian identity** | **Consequences the design of Horton's theology can have for the shape of our Christian practice** |
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| Horton's covenant ontology can lead to contrasting a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology in which a legal/ethical participation in the life of God and an ontological participation in the life of God are mutually exclusive. | Horton's narrowing of the gospel to the forgiveness of sins can shape the nature of our self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image. | Horton's narrowing of the gospel to what happened for us outside of ourselves can lead to a discouragement of the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality as a means of cultivating our participation in God's covenantal counterdrama drama of redemption. |

[4] Same as two previous notes.
[5] For the positive features of Horton's federal theology, see chapter three, section four and chapter four, section two.
[6] In chapter three, I wrote that since the structure of a systematic theology organizes the various doctrines of Scripture into a coherent whole in a communicative effective or pedagogical manner for the sake of the spiritual formation of the members of the church, the word "design" is used in this study to include both form as well as content.

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| Horton's essence-energies distinction can lead to only having knowledge of God's works, but never of his nature or being. | Horton's essence-energies distinction can shape the nature of our Christian identity through our union with Christ in such a way that we only have an outward or extrinsic union with Christ. | Horton's two-kingdom theology can lead to a compartmentalization of the Christian life by driving a wedge between activities in the common and the sacred realm. |
| Horton's sharp contrast between law and grace can lead to the nature of our image of God beginning with God being a God of law and justice and then being is a God of mercy and grace. | Horton's understanding of justification as the forensic basis of our union with Christ and the generative source of the whole order of salvation can shape our Christian identity by constantly having us look to our justification as the source of our transformation instead of looking to our union with Christ as the source. | |
| Horton's foundational legal/ethical covenantal relationship with God can lead to humanity's foundational relationship with God and creation being characterized by earning God's blessing through obedience and meriting his curse through disobedience in a *quid pro quo* manner. | | |
| Horton's sharp distinction between law and gospel can lead to our always first needing to be confronted with the law and then the gospel because the law alone tells us that we are sinners while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved. | | |

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| Horton's doctrine of justification as the heart of his covenantal ontology can lead to focusing on the individual and narrowing the gospel and the use of the word "gospel" to the forgiveness of sins. | | |
| Horton's Christology and soteriology can lead to a twofold soteriological structure in which Christ, on the one hand, earns benefits for believers while, on the other hand, he applies those benefits to them through the Holy Spirit.<br><br>This can lead to Christians being thrown back on themselves, wondering whether the benefits of salvation are for them or not. | | |
| Horton's understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God can lead to the kingdom of God primarily entailing the rule of Christ, which is already present on this earth, although not in its consummated form. | | |
| Horton's understanding of the Mosaic covenant as essentially a republication of the covenant of creation/works God made with Adam in the Garden can lead to God's concrete dealing with Israel as a nation easily be missed and making it difficult to understand the existence of Israel as the consequence of the covenant God made with Abraham. | | |

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| Horton's understanding of the pretemporal covenant of redemption can lead to the nature of the new covenant being governed by God's decretal election. | | |

**2. Implications the systemic problems in Horton's federal theology can have for his communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice**

When I answered the third question that arose from my overarching question, viz. to what extent are the consequences of the design of Horton's federal theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice the result of systemic problems in his federal theology, I answered that question by drawing out implications these systemic problems can have for his communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice. These possible implications can be found in section two of that chapter. They can be diagramed as follows.

| **Systemic problems in Horton's federal theology** | **Implications these systemic problems can have for his communication of the gospel** | **Implications these systemic problems can have for his shaping of our Christian identity and practice** |
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| Humanity needs to be created in a covenant relationship since there can be no "natural" (i.e., inherently compatible) communion between God and humanity because of the distinction between the Creator and the creature and their metaphysical distance. | This can lead to a communication of a gospel that contrasts a covenant ontology and a participatory ontology in which a legal/ethical participation in the life of God and an ontological participation in the life of God are mutually exclusive. | |
| The unity of salvation is found in a pretemporal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. | This can lead to a communication of a gospel that considers the new covenant to be unconditional in its essence, but conditional in its administration. | |

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| | It can also lead to a communication of the gospel that considers those who have not yet been united to Christ through faith to be only externally related to the covenant. | |
| Humanity is constitutionally created in a covenant of works with a sharp contrast between law and gospel to demonstrate God's holiness and protect the integrity of the doctrine of justification. | This can lead to a communication of the gospel in which the nature of our image of God begins with God being a God of law and justice and then being is a God of mercy and grace.<br><br>It can also lead to a communication of the gospel in which we always first need to be confronted with the law and then the gospel because the law alone tells us that we are sinners while the gospel alone tells us that we are pardoned and saved. | This can lead to the shaping of the nature of our self-image first and foremost as a legal and ethical self-image. |
| God works out his plan of salvation in one overarching covenant of grace with a canonical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. | This can lead to a communication of the gospel in which the dynamics of the history of redemption in which God enters into a plurality of covenants with Israel, Israel's king, and Israel's fathers is not taken seriously.<br><br>It can also lead to a communication of the gospel in which the nation of Israel is considered to be an interlude or parenthesis that can be missed with the inauguration of the new covenant because its purpose in the history of redemption is simply typological and pedagogical. | |

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| | It can furthermore lead to a communication of the gospel in which the Mosaic covenant in some sense is a republication of the covenant of works in which Israel primarily has a revelatory function of revealing our human sinfulness. | |
| There is an ontological split between the essence and the energies of God in order to maintain the Creator-creature distinction. | This can lead to a communication of the gospel where we can never have any knowledge of God's being. | This can shape our Christian identity of our union with Christ in such a way that we only have an outward or extrinsic union with Christ. |
| Christ, as the head and mediator of the covenant of grace, fulfills the conditions of the covenant of works for elect sinners with his active obedience by perfectly fulfilling the obedience of the law required in the covenant of works.<br><br>With his passive obedience, Christ deals with the sanction of the covenant of works by bearing the curse of the law and satisfying God's justice for them.<br><br>In doing so, he purchased benefits of salvation for elect sinners which the Holy Spirit applies to them in a particular order when they believe in Christ. | This can lead to communication of the gospel that has a twofold soteriological structure and an extrinsic appropriationist understanding of salvation where Christ is not personally involved in one's obedience of faith.<br><br>This can lead to a communication of the gospel in which Christians risk being thrown back on themselves wondering whether the benefits of salvation are for them or not. | |
| Justification is the engine that drives the *ordo salutis.* | This can lead to a communication of the gospel that has an individualizing impact that narrows the gospel to the forgiveness of sins. | This can lead to the shaping of our self-image primarily as a legal and ethical self-image. |

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| God's judicial verdict of justification is the forensic basis of our union with Christ and the generative source of the transformative aspects of our union with Christ. | This can lead to a communication of the gospel has no forensic basis for God's declaration of justification.<br><br>This can also lead to a communication of the gospel where the proper use of the word "gospel" is restricted to what Christ has done *for* us and does not include in the use of this word what Christ does *in* us. | This can shape our Christian identity and practice by having us constantly look to our justification as the source of our transformation instead of looking to our union with Christ as the source.<br><br>This can also shape our Christian practice by discouraging the practice of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines of contemplative spirituality. |
| The cultural mandate is given to all humanity and is enabled by God's general revelation or natural law through his common grace.<br><br>The Great Commission or cultic mandate is given to the church and is enabled through special grace so that Christ rules in the world through general revelation and the church through special revelation. | | This can shape our Christian practice by appearing to compartmentalize the Christian life through artificially dichotomizing activities in the common and the sacred realm. |

**3. How the contours of my theodramatic systematic theology give direction for our communication of the gospel and the shaping of our Christian identity and practice**

When I answered the sixth question that arose from my overarching question, viz. how do the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates the biblical basis of a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture, I did so by outlining how the contours of such a theodramatic systematic theology give rise to emphases and practices that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture. The answer to this question was given in chapter seven. The answer can be diagramed as follows.

| **Directions for effectively communicating the gospel that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.** | **Directions for properly shaping our Christian identity that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture.** | **Directions for shaping our Christian practice that help us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture** |
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| Emphasize that gospel concerns the drama of God's mission for his glory and our participation in this drama.<br><br>Emphasizing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture's search for meaning, significance, and fullness experienced in a culture than can feel flat and empty, on the one hand, and experiences openings to transcendence, on the other. | Emphasize that the essence of our humanity is ontological participation in the life of God in a listening and thankful filial spirit of the openness and responsiveness of faith.<br><br>Emphasizing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the rebellious and unthankful autonomous spirit of being self-enclosed and unresponsive to God because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self. | Emphasize the practice of theodramatic worship.<br><br>Emphasizing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the expressive, experiential, narrative identity that characterizes our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of theodramatic worship for themselves in the community of faith. |
| Accentuate that God is a God of love who desires communion with the other.<br><br>Accentuating this can can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture's loss of communion, loneliness, and fragmentation as well as resonating with moralistic, therapeutic deistic Christians understanding that God is more than a God who wants us to be good and feel good. | Accentuate that the essence our of humanity is hidden with Christ in God.<br><br>Accentuating this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our culture imagining the essence of humanity to be located in the immanent frame because of the echoes of transcendence that are also experienced within the immanent frame. | Accentuate the practice of mystagogical preaching.<br><br>Accentuating this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical preaching for themselves in the community of faith. |
| Assert that creation is enchanted and suffused with the presence of God and angels. | Assert that the generative source of our authentic humanity is union with Christ through faith. | Stress the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments. |

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| Asserting this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the memories of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience. | Asserting this can facilitate the gospel resonating with humanity's imagined self-sufficiency because of the cracks in the imagined boundary between the self and their external world as well as facilitate resonating with Christians who imagine they can live with a partial Jesus. | Stressing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of a mystagogical understanding of the sacraments themselves in the community of faith. |
| Highlight that God's election of Israel and his divine-human covenants are meant to deal with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity.<br><br>Highlighting this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture's expressive, individualistic pursuit of authenticity by the buffered self. | Highlight that the core of our humanity is our receptive and responsive soul.<br><br>Highlighting this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our culture's imagined disappearance of the soul because of the cracks in the buffer of the autonomous self. | Highlight the practice of the mystagogical reading Scripture.<br><br>Highlighting this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the cross-pressures of "openings to transcendence" and "closure of imminence" that our secular culture experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the mystagogical reading of the Scriptures themselves in the community of faith. |
| Point out that Jesus is the only authentic human being who dealt with the problem caused by humanity's pursuit of authenticity as humanity's substitute and representative.<br><br>Pointing this out can facilitate the gospel resonating with the self-sufficient buffered self's pursuit of authenticity. | Point out that our corporate identity as church is inherently missional.<br><br>Pointing this out can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence experienced in the cross-pressures of the immanent frame. | Focus on the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit.<br><br>Focusing on this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the feelings of transcendence our secular culture continues to experience when those who are not Christians experience the practice of praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit themselves in the community of faith. |
| Accentuate that Jesus is the authentic human being who | | Accentuate the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves |

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| identified victims of injustice and perpetrators of injustice.<br><br>Accentuating this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the experience of different forms of injustice resulting from an individualistic pursuit of authenticity. | | with him.<br><br>Accentuating this this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, experiential culture in which story or narrative is central in the experience of the personal and the expression and explanation of these personal experiences when those who are not Christians experience the practice of putting on Christ through faith and clothing ourselves in the community of faith. |
| Affirm that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the future of God's glorified eschatological new creation breaking forth into the present.<br><br>Affirming this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the quest for human flourishing exclusively within a natural and material world while at the same time experiencing this world as haunted in some ways by transcendence. | | Affirm the practice of the fear of the LORD.<br><br>Affirming this can facilitate the gospel resonating with our secular culture that is still haunted in some ways by their memories of transcendence when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the fear of the LORD in the community of faith. |
| Stress that when Christ returns, he will judge the living according to what they have done as well as usher in the goal of creation where God will be all in all in the glorification of humanity and creation.<br><br>Stressing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence our secular culture experiences in its haunted quest for human flourishing exclusively within | | Emphasize the practice of solitude and conversational life of prayer.<br><br>Emphasizing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with an expressive, individualistic culture when those who are not Christians experience the practice of solitude and a conversational life of prayer in the community of faith. |

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| an immanent frame as well as facilitate it resonating with humanity's quest for human flourishing exclusively within an immanent frame. | | |
| | | Stress the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other.<br><br>Stressing this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the pursuit of human flourishing within an immanent frame when those who are not Christians experience the practice of being a community where life flourishes by living for the other in the community of faith |
| | | Accentuate the practice of kingly rule and priestly care of creation.<br><br>Accentuating this can facilitate the gospel resonating with humanity's heightened concern for the preservation of this planet through creation care when those who are not Christians experience the practice of the kingly rule and priestly care for creation in the community of faith. |
| | | Give prominence to the practice of being watchful and waiting community.<br><br>Giving prominence to this can facilitate the gospel resonating with the echoes of transcendence that are heard and experienced within the cross-pressures of the |

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| | | immanent frame of our secular culture when those who are not Christians experience this practice of being a watchful and waiting community in the community of faith. |

### 4. Why the central theoretical argument can be sustained

I am now able to answer why the central theoretical argument can be sustained, viz. that the contours of my theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre is better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture than Horton's model of federal theology. The answer is: *because of the theological misunderstandings and the consequences of the design of Horton's theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice and the theological understandings*[7] *and consequences in this study's theodramatic systematic theology for our communication of the gospel and the shape of our Christian identity and practice, the central theoretical argument of this study can be sustained.*

### 5. Suggestions for further research

In chapter five, I outlined the contours of a theodramatic biblical narrative that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporated a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in five acts. The unifying theme of this theodramatic biblical narrative is the drama of God's mission for his glory. It would be beneficial to research what a complete theodramatic biblical narrative that has

[7] These understandings remind me that the structural design of Heidelberg Catechism—a Catechism I grew up with and have learned to love very much—has as a consequence a limited presentation of the gospel. Having analyzed the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism with the use of Thorsten Latzel's foundational study (Latzel, 2004), Burger concludes that "the main question to which the Heidelberg Catechism is an answer [is]: how am I righteous before God?" (Burger, 2015:273). This is understandable because of the theological and pastoral questions the Catechism is giving a contextual and pastorally sensitive answer to. However, "[it] fosters . . . a spirituality that focuses on juridical and individual issues. In the 21st century, it is important to see the limitations of the Catechism, especially in churches heavily influenced by it. It is only partly helpful in understanding the communion with and participation in Christ which is spiritually so important. It's replotting of the story of the Bible might lead to a neglect of notions such as the kingdom of God and the mission of the church". Burger concludes, "Finally, it does not do enough to prevent an image of God that gives God's punishment too prominent a place. We need other presentations of the gospel to explain its significance. The gospel is richer than we can see in the perspective of the Heidelberg Catechism" (Burger, 2015:277-278).

participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporated a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants in five acts would look like.

In chapter six, I sketched the contours a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporated a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants. It would be beneficial to develop such a theodramatic systematic theology more fully.

In chapter seven, I outlined how the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre and incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and shaping our Christian identity and practice to help us become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the Christian gospel in our secular culture. It would be beneficial to do a field study to determine the perlocutionary effect the contours of this theodramatic systematic theology has in the life of various Christian congregations.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has answered its overall research question with its six sub research questions. In doing so, it has shown how outlining the contours of a theodramatic systematic theology that has participation in the life of God as its integrative centre can incorporate a reframed covenant theology in such a way that it gives direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice that helps us to become fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of the gospel in our secular culture. The central theoretical argument of this study has been sustained. Thus, because God's fundamental relationship with humanity does not imply a covenant ontology, but an ontology of participating in God's loving presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit, a theodramatic systematic theology that incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants and has participation in the life of God in Christ through the Spirit as its integrative centre is better able to give direction for clearly communicating the gospel and properly shaping our Christian identity and practice for the sake of becoming fitting participants in the life of God and effective communicators of this gospel in our secular culture than Horton's model of federal theology. Because this theodramatic systematic theology incorporates a reframed understanding of divine-human covenants, a participatory ontology and a covenant ontology are not mutually exclusive, but intimately intertwined.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Dirk (Dick) Moes was born on October 2, 1949, in Blokzijl, the Netherlands. Having immigrated with his parents to Canada in December 1956, he graduated from the Abbotsford Senior Secondary School, British Columbia, in 1968. He returned to the Netherlands in 1969 and graduated from a pre-seminary training program in Groningen in 1971. After having enrolled at the Theological University in Kampen in 1971, he graduated from this university with a Master of Theology degree in 1980. That same year, he returned to Canada and taught Bible at Credo Christian High School in Langley, B.C. until 1988. He entered into the ministry in 1989 and served the following three churches: the Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Watford, ON (1989-1993), the Canadian Reformed Church in Vernon, BC (1993-2001), and the Surrey Covenant Reformed Church in Surrey, BC (2003-2017). Since September 2017, Dick is pastor emeritus of the Surrey Covenant Reformed Church (United Reformed Churches in North America). In 2007, he obtained a Doctor of Ministry degree in Spiritual Formation and Leadership from the Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS), Trinity Western University's graduate school of theology, in Langley, BC. From 1983 to 2011, he edited *Evangel: the Good News of Jesus Christ*. From 1992 to 2002, he edited *Outreach*. Dick married Elsina on August 27, 1976. They have been blessed with five children and fourteen grandchildren. They live in Langley, British Columbia.