Herman Bavinck, 'Reformed Dogmatics,' Vol. 2, 'God and Creation,' Ed. John Bolt, Trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 406-439.

8

CREATION

The doctrine of creation, affirming the distinction between the Creator and his creature, is the starting point of true religion. There is no existence apart from God, and the Creator can only be known truly through revelation. Biblical religion rejects both pantheistic emanationism as well as Manichaean dualism, though each have had Christian and philosophical proponents. Along with materialist explanations of the universe, these are not scientific in character but rather are religious worldviews masquerading as science. The sophisticated philosophical systems of Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and others fail to satisfy human religious need and are riddled with internal contradictions. To them all the Christian church confesses simply "I Believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." This creation is properly said to be ex nihilo, *"out of nothing," thus preserving the distinction in essence between the Creator and the world and the contingency of the world in its dependence on God. The triune God is the author of creation rather than any intermediary. The outgoing works of God are indivisible, though it is appropriate to distinguish an economy of tasks in the Godhead so that the Father is spoken of as the first cause, the Son as the one by whom all things are created, and the Holy Spirit as the immanent cause of life and movement in the universe. Scripture does relate the creation in a special way to the Son through the categories of Wisdom and Logos. The Son is the Logos by whom the Father creates all things; the whole world is the realization of an idea of God. The creation proceeds* from *the Father* through *the Son and* in *the Spirit so that, in the Spirit and through the Son it may return to the Father. Creation also means that time has a beginning; only God is eternal. As creatures we are necessarily* in time, *and speculation about pretemporal or extratemporal reality is useless speculation. The purpose and goal of creation is to be found solely in God's will and glory. It is especially in the Reformed tradition that the honor and glory of God was made the fundamental principle of all doctrine and conduct. A doctrine of creation is one of the foundational building blocks of a biblical and Christian worldview. Creation is neither to be deified nor despoiled, but as the "theater of God's glory" it is to be delighted in and used in a stewardly manner. It is God's* good *creation.*

[250] The realization of the counsel of God begins with creation. Creation is the initial act and foundation of all divine revelation and therefore the foundation of all religious and ethical life as well. The Old Testament creation story is of a beauty so sublime that it not only has no equal, but all thinkers, including such natural scientists as [Georges] Cuvier and [Alexander] von Humboldt, vie with each other in extolling it. "The first page of the Mosaic document is of greater consequence than all the volumes written by natural scientists and philosophers" (Jean Paul).[1] Subsequently, that [act of] creation comes to the fore again and again throughout the history of revelation.

From the very first moment, true religion distinguishes itself from all other religions by the fact that it construes the relation between God and the world, including man, as that between the Creator and his creature. The idea of an existence apart from and independent of God occurs nowhere in Scripture. God is the sole, unique, and absolute cause of all that exists. He has created all things by his word and Spirit (Gen. 1:2–3; Ps. 33:6; 104:29–30; 148:5; Job 26:13; 33:4; Isa. 40:13; 48:13; Zech. 12:1; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; etc.). There was no substance or principle of any kind to oppose him; no material to tie him down; no force to circumscribe his freedom. He speaks and things spring into being (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:9; Rom. 4:17). He is the unrestricted owner of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19, 22; Ps. 24:1–2; 89:11; 95:4–5). There are no limits to his power; he does all he sees fit to do (Isa. 14:24, 27; 46:10; 55:10–11; Ps. 115:3; 135:6). "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 11:3). The world is the product of his will (Ps. 33:6; Rev. 4:11); it is the revelation of his perfections (Prov. 8:22f.; Job 28:23f.; Ps. 104:1; 136:5f.; Jer. 10:12) and finds its goal in his glory (Isa. 43:16ff.; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6).

This teaching of creation, which occupies a preeminent and pivotal place in Scripture, is not, however, presented as a philosophical explanation of the problem of existence. Most certainly it also offers an answer to the question of the origin of all things. Yet its significance is first and foremost religious and ethical. No right relation to God is conceivable apart from this basis; it positions us in the proper relation to God (Exod. 20:11; Deut. 10:12–14; 2 Kings 19:15; Neh. 9:6). It is therefore of eminent practical value, serving to bring out the greatness, the omnipotence, the majesty, and the goodness, wisdom, and love of God (Ps. 19; Job 37; Isa. 40). The teaching of creation therefore strengthens people's faith, confirms their trust in God, and is a source of consolation in their suffering (Ps. 33:6f.; 65:5ff.; 89:11; 121:2; 134:3; Isa. 37:16; 40:28f.; 42:5; etc.); it inspires praise and thanksgiving (Ps. 136:3ff.;

1. Ed. note: Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), more commonly known simply as Jean Paul after his hero Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was a popular German novelist who significantly influenced the German Romantic movement as well as the Scottish historian and writer Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). In view of Jean Paul's tendency toward nature pantheism, it is rather remarkable that Bavinck cites him here at the beginning of his section on creation. For a discussion of Jean Paul as a (pre)Romantic novelist, see Alan Menhennet, *The Romantic Movement* (London: Croon Helm; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1981), 172–85.

148:5; Rev. 14:7); it induces humility and meekness and makes people sense their smallness and insignificance before God (Job 38:4f.; Isa. 29:16; 45:9; Jer. 18:6; Rom. 9:20).

CREATION AND ITS RELIGIOUS ALTERNATIVES: PANTHEISM AND MATERIALISM

[251] The doctrine of creation is known only from revelation and is understood by faith (Heb. 11:3). As we know, Catholic teaching contends that it can also be discovered from nature by reason,[2] and the Vatican Council even elevated this doctrine to the status of a dogma.[3] But the history of religions and philosophy does not support this claim. Islam, indeed, teaches a creation from nothing but borrowed this doctrine from Judaism and Christianity.[4] Pagan cosmogonies, which are at the same time theogonies, are all polytheistic. They all assume the existence of a primordial stuff, whether it is construed as chaos, a personal principle, a cosmic egg, or something like it. Finally, they tend to be either emanationistic, so that the world is an emanation from God; or evolutionistic, so that the world becomes ever more divine; or dualistic, so that the world is a product of two antagonistic principles.[5] Nor is the Chaldean Genesis *[Enuma Elish]*, which for that matter offers striking parallels to that of the Old Testament, an exception to this rule. It is also a theogony and has Bel fashion the world from Tiamat, who chaotically stores all things within herself.[6] Greek philosophy either materialistically seeks the origin of things in a material element (Ionian school; Atomists), or pantheistically in the one eternal immutable being (Eleatic school), or in eternal becoming (Heraclitus, Stoa). Even Anaxagoras, Plato, and Aristotle never rose above a dualism of spirit and matter. God, to them, is not a creator but at best a fashioner of the world *(dēmiourgos)*. Though the Scholastics sometimes asserted that Plato and Aristotle taught a creation out of nothing, this view was rightly rejected by others—Bonaventure, for example.[7] The Greeks knew of a *physis* (nature), *kosmos* (world), but not of a *ktisis* (creation). Christianity gained a victory over this pagan theogony and cosmogony in its controversy with Gnosticism, which to explain sin predicated the existence of an inferior god alongside the

2. T. Aquinas, *Sent.*, II, dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 2; idem, *Contra gentiles,* II, 15; J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit vertheidigt* (Münster: Theissing, 1863), II, 795f.; M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1933), II, 5–6; J. B. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* 2d ed. (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1881–1900), V, 64f.

3. "Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei filius,* on the Catholic Faith," ch. 2, can. 2, in *Documents of Vatican Council I, 1869–1870,* selected and trans. John F. Broderich (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1971).

4. O. Zöckler, *Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1877–79), I, 426f.

5. O. Zöckler, "Schöpfung und Erhaltung der Welt," *PRE*^{3}, XVII, 681–704.

6. H. H. Kuyper, *Evolutie of Revelatie* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1903), 37–38, 117f.; cf. also ch. 10 (below): "Earth: The Material World," including discussion of the *Enuma Elish.*

7. Bonaventure, *Sent.*, II, dist. 1, p. 1, art. 1, qu. 1; cf. J. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* V, 29–30.

supreme deity, or an eternal *hylē* (matter). Pagan explanations of the origin of things, however, have kept surfacing also in Christian centuries. It is already stated in Wisdom of Solomon 11:17 that God's all-powerful hand "created the world out of formless matter" *(amorphos hylē),* and the same expression occurs in Justin Martyr.[8] But in this connection Justin has in mind the later so-called *creatio secunda,* and in another place he expressly also teaches the creation of matter.[9] Just as Gnosticism emerged in the second century, so also, after the Council of Nicaea, Manichaeism arose, which explained sin similarly by assuming the existence of an original evil being in addition to the true God.[10] This dualism was widely disseminated in Christianity, reaching even the Priscillians in Spain, and again surfacing in the Middle Ages among the Bogomils and Cathari.

Not only dualism but also pantheism acquired its interpreters. Under the influence of Neoplatonism, Pseudo-Dionysius taught that the ideas and archetypes of all things existed eternally in God, whose superabundant goodness moved him to confer reality on these ideas and to impart himself to his creatures.[11] In his creatures God as it were emerged from his oneness, multiplying himself and pouring himself out in them,[12] so that God is universal being,[13] the very being of all things.[14] But he adds that God nevertheless maintains his unity[15] and is all in all inasmuch as he is the cause of all.[16]

The same ideas recur in Erigena. Though he repeatedly and expressly teaches a creation out of nothing,[17] what makes his system pantheistic is the way he relates the four natures to each other. The first nature, which creates and is not created, that is, God, by thinking brings forth out of nothing, that is, from within himself, the ideas and forms of all things in the divine Word.[18] This Word is the second nature, which is created and creates. This second nature is created nature *(natura creata)* insofar as it is brought forth by God, and it is creative *(creatrix)* insofar as it is itself the cause and potency of the real world. For this second nature is not really and substantially distinct from the third nature—the phenomenal world, which is created and does not create: the former is the cause, the latter the effect; but it is the same world viewed one moment in the eternity of the Word of God and the next in the temporality

8. Justin Martyr, *Apology,* I, 10 and 59.

9. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* 5; idem, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks,* 23; K. G. Semisch, *Justin Martyr: His Life, Writings, and Opinions* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1843), II, 336.

10. See Augustine, *The Writings against the Manichaeans,* vol. 4 of *NPNF (1);* cf. K. Kessler, "Mani, Manichaer," *PRE*^{3}, XII, 193–228.

11. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names,* ch. 4, 10.

12. Ibid., ch. 2, 10.

13. Ibid., ch. 5, 4.

14. Ibid., *The Celestial Hierarchy,* ch. 4, 1.

15. Ibid., *The Divine Names,* ch. 2, 11.

16. Ibid., *The Celestial Hierarchy,* ch. 5, 8.

17. John Scotus Erigena, *On the Division of Nature,* bk. III, V, 24, 33.

18. Ibid., III, 14, 17.

of the world.[19] It is God himself who first, in the ideas, creates himself, then flows down into his creatures and becomes all in all in order finally to return to himself in the fourth nature, which does not create and is not created.[20] And the cause of this process is the goodness of God,[21] his drive to become all things.[22]

Outside of the Christian world pantheism was propagated by the philosophers Avicenna (1036) and Averroes (1198); [among Muslims] by Sufism, which viewed the universe as an emanation of God; and among Jews by the Kabbalah.[23] Toward the end of the Middle Ages and at the dawn of the modern era, all these pantheistic, dualistic, emanationistic ideas freely crisscrossed among mystics, theosophists, and Anabaptists, such as [Joichim of] Fiore, Amalric of Bena, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Libertines, [Meister] Eckhart, Tauler, Servetus, Frank, Schwenkfeld, Bruno, Paracelsus, Fludd, Weigel, and Böhme. Even Socinianism only taught a creation from formless matter (*amorphos hylē*),[24] thus abstractly positing the finite and the infinite alongside and over against each other, such that the former could not possibly be the effect of the latter.

Pantheism was nevertheless again restored to a position of honor in modern philosophy by Spinoza. In his view, the one substance is the eternal and necessary efficient and immanent cause of the world; the world is the explication of the divine being, and particulars are the modes by which the divine attributes of thought and extension are determined in a particular way.[25]

Toward the end of the eighteenth century this philosophy found increasing acceptance and was elevated by Schelling and Hegel to *the* system of the nineteenth century. The biblical doctrine of creation was rejected in toto. Fichte wrote: "The assumption of a creation is the basic error of all false metaphysics and religious teaching and particularly the archprinciple of Judaism and paganism."[26] Schelling called creation out of nothing a "cross to the intellect" and firmly opposed it.[27] In his first period he taught an absolute identity between God and the world. The two are related to each other as

19. Ibid., III, 8.

20. Ibid., III, 4, 20.

21. Ibid., III, 2, 4, 9.

22. Ibid., I, 12.

23. A. Stöckl, *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1864–66), II, 28, 92, 181, 237.

24. O. Fock, *Der Socinianismus nach seiner Stellung in der Gesammtentwicklung des christlichen Geistes* (Kiel: C. Schröder, 1847), 482.

25. B. Spinoza, *Ethics,* part I.

26. J. G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben* (London: Trübner, 1873), 160. Ed. note: A new German edition of this work was published in 1970 by Meiner in Hamburg. The essay is also found in J. G. Fichte, *Characteristics of the Present Age: The Way towards the Blessed Life: Or, the Doctrine of Religion* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1977). For a discussion of Fichte's essay, see H. Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 26–28.

27. F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke,* I/2, 44f.; I/8, 62f. Ed. note: Bavinck's references to Schelling that are to works incorporated into the new unrevised but abridged and repaginated *Ausgewählte Werke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968) will be cited with the full title of the work as well as Bavinck's original reference. Since this is not a complete edition of Schelling's original *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart & Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher, 1856–61), writings not included in the new edition will be cited as *Werke,* using Bavinck's original reference.

essence and form; they are the same, but viewed from different perspectives. God is not the cause of the All, but the All itself, and the All, accordingly, is not in process of becoming but something eternally existing, *en kai pan.*[28] But in his later period, thanks to Baader, he came under the influence of Böhme and thus under that of the Kabbalah and Neoplatonism, and began to look for the world's ground in the dark nature of God. Theogony and cosmogony are most intimately connected. Just as God raises himself from his undifferentiated state—by the opposition of the *principia,* nature (*Urgrund, Ungrund,* darkness) and intellect (word, light),—to the level of Spirit, love, and personality, so these three are simultaneously the potencies of the world. The dark nature in God is the principle of blind confusion, the matter and ground of the created world insofar as it is chaos and has a chaotic character. But also at work in that world is the potency of the divine intellect, which introduces light, order, and regularity into it. God meanwhile manifests himself as Spirit in the spirit of mankind and achieves full personality in the spirit of mankind.[29]

Hegel, too, openly acknowledged his adherence to pantheism, not in the pantheism that regards finite things themselves as God but in the pantheism that in the finite and accidental sees the appearance of the absolute, the fossilized idea, frozen intelligence.[30] This pantheism passed from philosophy into theology. Schleiermacher rejected the distinction between creation and providence and considered the question concerning whether the world was temporal or eternal a matter of indifference, provided the absolute dependence of all things on God was upheld.[31] Similarly, in Strauss, Biedermann, Schweizer, and others, God is no more than the eternal immanent cause and ground of the world.[32]

28. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Werke,* III, 13f. ("Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie," *Werke* I/4, 117f.); idem, *Werke,* I/5, 24f., 365f., 373f.; idem, *Ausgewählte Werke,* III, 698f. ("System der gesammten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere," *Werke,* I/6, 174).

29. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Werke,* IV, 303f. ("Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menslichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände," *Werke,* I/7, 359f.); idem, *Werke,* II/2, 103f.; II/3, 262f.

30. G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke,* vol. 9 (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1958), 49–54 (*System der Philosophie,* part 2: *Die Naturphilosophie,* §§247–51: "Begriff der Natur," *Werke,* VII, 23f.). Ed. note: When possible, references to Hegel's writings will be cited from the modern Stuttgart edition or a published English translation. The title of Hegel's work and Bavinck's original citation from Hegel's *Werke* will be given in parentheses.

31. F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith,* ed. H. R. MacIntosh and J. S. Steward (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), §§36, 41.

32. D. F. Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre,* 2 vols. (Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 1840–41), I, 656f.; A. E. Biedermann, *Christliche Dogmatik* (Zürich: Füssli, 1869), §§649f.; A. Schweizer, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1877), §71; O. Pfleiderer, *Grundriss der christlichen Glaubens und Sittenlehre* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1888), §84; J. H. Scholten, *Dogmatices christianae initia,* 2d ed. (Lyons: P. Engels, 1858), 111; S. Hoekstra, *Wijsgerige Godsdienstleer,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam: van Kampen, 1894–95), II, 174.

Alongside this pantheism there also emerged a materialism that seeks the final elements of all being in eternal (without beginning) and indestructible material atoms, and attempts to explain all phenomena of the entire universe in light of atomic processes of mechanical and chemical separation and union in accordance with fixed laws. This materialism had its roots in Greek philosophy, was reintroduced in modern times by Gassendi and Descartes, and was advocated by the British and French philosophy of the eighteenth century. It appeared in the nineteenth century, not as the fruit of scientific study, but as the product of philosophical reflection in Feuerbach, who can be called the father of materialism in Germany. After 1850, as a result of a variety of incidental causes, it found acceptance at least for a time among such natural scientists as Vogt, Büchner, Moleschott, Czolbe, and Haeckel.[33]

[252] It needs to be said, first of all, that neither pantheism nor materialism is the result of exact science but of philosophy, of a worldview, of systems of belief. Neither of them is "knowledge" in the strict sense of the word. Granted, materialism loves to pass itself off as an exact science, but it can be easily demonstrated that, both historically and logically, it is the fruit of human thought, a matter of both the human heart and the human head. For the origin and end of things lie outside the boundaries of human observation and research. Science presupposes existence and rests on the foundation of what has been created. In that regard pantheism and materialism are in the same position as theism, which acknowledges the mysterious origin of things. The only question, therefore, is whether pantheism and materialism can replace this mystery with an intelligible explanation. This demand may well be made of both since they both reject the doctrine of creation on account of its incomprehensibility and view it as a "cross to the intellect." Is it indeed the case that pantheism and materialism do a better job of satisfying the intellect than theism and therefore deserve preference? Actually, in the history of humankind both systems have repeatedly made their appearance and again and again have been abandoned; they have so often been subjected to serious and effective criticism that no one can now accept them solely because they are so satisfying to the intellect. Other motives play the decisive role here. If the world did not originate by an act of creation, then certainly there must be some other explanation. And in that case—excluding dualism—there are only two options available here: either one explains matter from mind, or mind from matter. Pantheism and materialism are not pure opposites; rather, they are two sides of the same coin; they constantly merge into each other and only differ in that they address the same problem from opposite directions. Thus, both run into the same objections.

Pantheism, in confronting the transition from thought to being, from idea to reality, from substance to modes, has produced nothing resembling a solution. Indeed, it has assumed various forms and described that transition by different names. It conceives the relation of God to the world as that of *en kai pan* ("one

33. F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus,* 8th ed. (Leipzig: Baedekker, 1908).

and many"), of nature bringing forth and nature already born (*natura naturans* and *naturata*), of substance and modes, of existence and appearance, of the universal and the particular, of the species and specimens, of the whole and its parts, of idea and objectification, of the ocean and its waves, and so forth; but for all these words it has said nothing about the relation. From the pantheistic perspective it is incomprehensible how "being" emerged from "thought," how multiplicity came from unity, how matter proceeded from mind. This has become abundantly clear from the systems of Schelling and Hegel. There was certainly no lack of words in these systems [as the following characteristic phrases illustrate]: The idea assumes form, incarnates itself, objectivizes itself, passes into another mode of being; it splits off and differentiates itself; it freely decides to release and to realize itself, to turn into its opposite.[34]

This solution, however, proved so unsatisfying to both Schelling and Hegel that they frequently spoke of a "breakaway" or "defection" from the absolute by which the world originated.[35] No wonder, therefore, that Schelling in his second period and so also Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and others, gave primacy to the will and primarily conceived the Absolute as nature, will, and drive. The pantheistic identity of thought and being proved to be in error, all the more because "Substance," the "Idea," the "All," or however pantheism may designate the Absolute, is not a fullness of being but pure potentiality, an abstraction without content, a mere nothing. And this is supposed to be the explanation of the riches of the world, the multiplicity of the existent! Let those believe it who can! Kleutgen, accordingly, is right on target when he writes: "The difference between pantheistic speculation and that of the theist . . . is this: whereas the former, starting with assumptions—as obscure as they are unprovable—about the divine being, ends in open contradictions; the latter, proceeding from a sure knowledge of finite things, gains ever-higher kinds of insights, until it encounters the Incomprehensible, not losing its grip on the fact that the One whom it recognizes as the eternal and immutable Author of all things is far above our thought processes in his essence and works."[36]

In the case of materialism the origin of things remains similarly unexplained. While pantheism pictures the universe as proceeding from one ultimate principle

34. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Werke,* I, 386f. ("Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur, Einleitung," *Werke,* I/2, 62f.); idem, *Ausgewählte Werke,* III, 119f., 153f. ("Bruno oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Dinge," *Werke,* I/4, 223f., 257f.); G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia of Logic (with the Zusätze),* trans. T. F. Geraets et al. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1991), 306–7; idem, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature,* trans. M. J. Petry (London and New York: Allen Unwin, Humanities Press, 1970). Ed. note: Bavinck's references are to Hegel, *Werke,* VI, 413ff.; VII, 23ff., which comprises §§243ff. (likely through §252) of Hegel's *System der Philosophie,* found in vols. 8–10 of Hegel's *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1958).

35. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Werke,* III, 614ff. ("Philosophie und Religion," *Werke,* I/6, 38f.); G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* trans. E. B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Trübner, 1895), II, 311–12 (*Werke,* XII, 177).

36. J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit,* II, 884.

and therefore preferably presents itself today as monism,[37] materialism assumes a multiplicity of "principles." But according to materialism, these ultimate "principles" of all things are nothing other than indivisible particles of matter. Now, if the proponents of this worldview remained true to this fundamental thesis of theirs, they would have no warrant for attributing to these atoms a single metaphysical and transcendent predicate. On the materialist position, rightly considered, it is not permissible to speak of "eternity," "uncreatedness," "the indestructibility of atoms," or even of "matter" and "energy." If one says that the world originated from material atoms, one should remain true to that position. Atoms, after all, since they are elements of the empirical world, can only have empirical and not metaphysical properties. The concept of atom, by definition and as such, in no way implies that it is eternal and indestructible. Those who regard atoms as the ultimate "principles" of all being cut themselves off from the road to speculation and metaphysics and must empirically explain the world solely from those empirical atoms. The materialist can only say that experience teaches that atoms do not come into being or cease to exist; he has no warrant, however, for speaking of the atoms' metaphysical nature and metaphysical properties. Natural science, to which the materialist always makes his appeal, has to do as such with the finite, the relative, with nature and its phenomena; it always starts out from nature, assumes it as a given, and cannot penetrate to what lies behind it. The moment it does this it ceases to be physics and becomes metaphysics. But materialism is not true to itself when it immediately ascribes to atoms all sorts of properties that are not part of the concept itself and are not taught by experience. Materialism, accordingly, is not an exact science nor the fruit of rigorous scientific research, but a philosophy that is built up on the denial of all philosophy; it is inherently self-contradictory; it rejects all absolutes and makes atoms absolute; it denies God's existence and deifies matter.

One can state this in even stronger terms: if materialism wants to explain all things from matter, it lacks all warrant for speaking of atoms. Atoms have never been observed; no one has ever seen them; empirical research has never brought them to light. They are originally of a metaphysical nature and for that reason alone should be contraband to materialism. Further, as metaphysical substances they are caught up in an antinomy that has not yet been resolved

37. On pantheism, see H. Ulrici, "Pantheismus," *PRE*[1], 64–77; M. Heinze, "Pantheismus," *PRE*[3], XIV, 627–41; J. I. Doedes, *Inleiding tot de Leer van God* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1870), 61f.; C. W. Opzoomer, *Wetenschap en Wijsbegeerte* (Amsterdam: Gebhard, 1857), ch. 1; A. Pierson, *Bespiegeling, Gezag, en Ervaring* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1885), ch. 1; L. W. E. Rauwenhoff, *Wijsbegeerte van den Godsdienst* (Leiden: Brill & van Doesburgh, 1887), 205f.; S. Hoekstra, *Wijsgerige Godsdienstleer*, II, 73ff.; A. Kuyper, "Pantheism's Destruction of Boundaries," *Methodist Review* 52 (1893): 520–35, 762–78; I. van Dijk, *Aesthetische en ethische Godsdienst*, in vol. 1 of *Gesammelten Schriften* (Groningen, 1895); P. H. Hugenholtz, *Ethische Pantheisme* (Amsterdam: van Holkema & Warendorff, 1903); A. Bruining, "Pantheïsme of Theisme," *Teylers Theologische Tijdschrift* (1904): 433–57. Ed. note: Bavinck adds that this last article was "opposed by De Graaf, op. cit., 165–210," which is likely a reference to the same journal, *Teylers Theologische Tijdschrift*.

by anybody. They are material and (we are told) at the same time indivisible, immutable, infinite in number, eternal, and indestructible. And in addition to all this, if matter itself—the matter assumed as the principle that explains the entire universe—were only known and comprehensible! But exactly the essence and nature of matter is the most mysterious thing of all. It totally eludes our cognitive grasp. It is easier for us to conceive and imagine the nature of spirit than the nature of matter. Matter is a word, a name, but we do not know what we mean by it. We face here a mystery as great in its kind as the existence of spirit, which on account of its incomprehensibility is rejected by materialism. However, if we assume that atoms exist and that they are eternal and immutable, we have not yet done anything to explain the world by that assumption. *How* did the world originate from those atoms? If the now-existing or a preceding world had a beginning, there must be a cause by which the atoms were set in motion, and in the kind of motion that resulted in the present world. But this motion cannot be explained from matter, for all matter is by nature inert and only starts moving as the result of an impulse from without. Materialism, however, cannot accept a prime mover existing independently of matter. So the materialist has no choice but to also declare motion, change, or with [Heinrich] Czolbe, even this existing world to be absolute and eternal (like the atom).

Materialism wraps itself in ever greater contradictions: it confuses the physical with the metaphysical, becoming with being, mutability with immutability, time with eternity, and speaks of infinite space, infinite time, and an infinite world as though it were not the most absurd self-contradiction. Finally, it has been shown, repeatedly and by various parties, that materialism remains utterly unable to explain how purely material, and therefore unconscious, inanimate, unfree, aimless atoms could produce that spiritual world of life, consciousness, purpose, religion, morality, and so on, which surely thrusts itself upon our inner consciousness with no less force than the physical world upon our senses. And it seems that little by little this criticism is beginning to have some kind of impact on the materialists themselves. The materialism that arose from pantheism in the previous century is increasingly reverting to pantheism and even incorporating a variety of mystical elements into itself. The "life force," which for a long time was rejected, once again has its defenders. Atoms are now pictured as being alive and animated. Haeckel again speaks of a "spirit in all things," of a "divine force," a "moving spirit," a "world soul" that indwells all things. In this pantheistic monism he is looking for the connection between religion and science. But in so doing, materialism is itself openly admitting its powerlessness to explain the world: in its impoverishment the mechanism of the atoms again cried out for help from the dynamic principle.[38]

38. On materialism, in addition to M. Heinze, "Materialismus," *PRE*[3], XII, 414–24, and the literature cited there, see C. Gutberlet, *Der mechanische Monismus: Eine Kritik der modernen Weltanschauung* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1893); W. Ostwald, *Die Überwindung des wissenschaftliche Materialismus* (Leipzig:

CREATIO EX NIHILO

[253] Against all these movements the Christian church unitedly held fast to the confession: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." And by creation it meant that act of God through which, by his sovereign will, he brought the entire world out of nonbeing into a being that is distinct from his own being. And this is, in fact, the teaching of Holy Scripture. The word *bārāʾ* originally means to split, divide, or cut (used in the Piel for the clearing away of forests, Josh. 17:15, 18), and then to fashion, bring forth, create. Like the Dutch word *scheppen,* which originally means "to form" (cf. the English "to shape"), the Hebrew word by itself does not imply that something was brought into existence out of nothing, for it is frequently also used for the works of providence (Isa. 40:28; 45:7; Jer. 31:22; Amos 4:13). As used in Psalm 104:30 *bārāʾ* is a synonym for and alternates with *ḥāraš, yāṣar, and ʿāśāh.* But it differs from them in that *bārāʾ* is always used to denote divine "making" and never with reference to human activity, is never accompanied by an accusative of the matter from which something is made, and therefore everywhere expresses the greatness and power of the works of God.[39] The same is true of the New Testament words *ktizein* (Mark 13:19), *poiein* (Matt. 19:4), *phemelioun* (Heb. 1:10), *katartizein* (Rom. 9:22), *kataskeuazein* (Heb. 3:3–4), and *plassein* (Rom. 9:20), and of the Latin word *creare.* These words also do not by themselves express creating out of nothing. The expression "to create out of nothing," accordingly, is not literally derived from Scripture but first occurs in 2 Maccabees 7:28, where it is stated that God made heaven and earth and everything in them out of nonbeing (*ouk ex ontōn epoiēsen;* Vulg.: *fecit ex nihilo*). Some scholars dispute that this expression may be understood in the strict sense and have given it a Platonic interpretation. It is nevertheless worth noting that the author does not speak of *mē on,* that is, a nothing that could not exist *(nihilum privativum),* a matter devoid of quality and form, but of *ouk on,* a nothing that does not exist *(nihilum negativum).* It is not even certain, moreover, that the author of the Wisdom of Solomon (11:17) taught the eternity of a formless matter; the passage can very well be understood to refer to the "secondary creation,"[40] just as is the case in Justin Martyr.

However this may be, Scripture leaves no doubt about the matter in question. Though it does not use the term "creation out of nothing," it clearly teaches the matter. Some scholars certainly do believe that Genesis 1:1–3, too, actually

Veit, 1895); J. Reinke, *Die Welt als That,* 4 vols. (Berlin: Paetel, 1905); M. Verworn, *Naturwissenschaft und Weltanschauung: Eine Rede,* 2d ed. (Leipzig: Barth, 1904); T. Lipps, *Naturwissenschaft und Weltanschauung* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1906); R. Otto, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1905); A. Kuyper, "Evolution," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996): 11–50; H. Bavinck, "Evolutie," in *Verzamelde Opstellen* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 105–20. Ed. note: An English version of Bavinck's views on evolution can be found in his "Creation or Development," *Methodist Review* 61 (1901): 849–74.

39. Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis,* trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 74.

40. Augustine et al., in J. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* V, 44.

proceeded from an original, uncreated chaos. They argue that because *brʾšt* (in the beginning) is in the construct state, they can translate verses 1–3 as follows: "In the beginning when God created heaven and earth—now the earth was a formless void . . .—then God spoke and said: 'Let there be light.'" Therefore, according to this view, verse 2 presupposes the existence of a formless and vacuous earth in God's act of creating.[41] But this translation is not acceptable.[42] In the first case, the sentence thus acquires the length of a period, which is rare in Hebrew; it is not expected immediately at the beginning and in the style of Genesis 1; and it puts much too strong an accent on the creation of light.[43] Furthermore, the construct state of *bĕrēʾšît* ["in the beginning," Gen. 1:1] does not require this translation because it also occurs in the same form without suffix or genitive in Isaiah 46:10 (cf. Lev. 2:12; Deut. 33:21). In the third place, it would be strange if, while the initial clause would say that God still had to create heaven and earth, the intermediate clause already dubbed chaos with the name "earth" and made no mention whatever of the state of heaven. To this we must add that this translation, even if it were correct, in no way teaches the eternity of this desolate earth but at most leaves this issue open.

This overall view militates against the whole spirit of the creation narrative. Elohim is not presented in Genesis 1 as a cosmic sculptor who, in human fashion, with preexisting material, produces a work of art, but as One who merely by speaking, by uttering a word of power, calls all things into being.[44] And with that view the whole of Scripture chimes in. God is the Almighty, who is infinitely higher than all creatures, and who deals with his creatures in accordance with his sovereign good pleasure. He is the absolute owner, the *qōnēh* of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19, 22), who does whatever he pleases, and to whose power there is no limit. He speaks and it comes to be, he commands and it stands forth (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:9; Isa. 48:13; Rom. 4:17). Further, all things in Scripture are described over and over as having been made by God and as being absolutely dependent on him. He has created all things, heaven, earth, the sea, and all that is on them and in them (Exod. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; etc.). Everything has been created by him (Col. 1:16–17), exists only by his will (Rev. 4:11), and is of him, through him, and unto him (Rom. 11:36). Moreover, at no time or place is there even the slightest reference to an eternal formless matter. God alone is the Eternal and Imperishable One. He alone towers above processes of becoming and change. Things, by contrast, have a beginning and an end and are subject to change. [In Scripture] this is expressed in anthropomorphic

41. According to Ewald, Bunsen, Schrader, Gunkel, and others; see H. Schultz, *Alttestamentliche Theologie,* 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896), 570f.

42. Ed. note: This is the translation adopted by the NRSV, but see its note.

43. R. Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1893), 456; J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994 [1885]), 387 n. 1.

44. Reinke, *Die Welt als That,* 481ff., mistakenly asserts that Moses has no knowledge of a creation out of nothing, and that such a creation out of nothing would in any case be at variance with the law of the constancy of energy.

language. God was there before the mountains were brought forth, and his years never come to an end (Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:25–26); he chose and loved [his own] from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; John 17:24; cf. Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:5; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). And though in Romans 4:17 there is no express mention of creation, it does teach that God calls and summons *ta mē onta,* the things that possibly do not yet exist, as if they did exist, *hōs onta.* Existence or nonexistence are alike to him. Hebrews 11:3 announces even more clearly that God has made the world so that what is seen is not made *ek phainomenōn,* from that which appears before our eyes. By this revelation a "formless matter" is totally ruled out; the visible world did not proceed from what is visible but rests in God, who called all things into existence by his word.

[254] This teaching of Scripture was most pointedly expressed in the words *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and was thus understood and passed on by Christian theology from the beginning.[45] But among Gnostics and Manichaeans, theosophists and naturalists, pantheists and materialists, this teaching has at all times been disputed. Especially Aristotle's dictum, *"Ex nihilo nihil fit"* (nothing is made from nothing), has been advanced against it. But this polemic is entirely groundless. In the first place, this rule of Aristotle is not at all as simple as it looks. Every moment of the day we confront phenomena that are not reducible to present factors: history is not a simple problem of arithmetic; life is not the product solely of chemical combinations; the genius is something other and more than the child of his time; and every personality is an original. But aside from these things and taken with a grain of salt, this rule of Aristotle is not unacceptable. Theology has never taught that nonbeing is the father, source, and principle of being. Perhaps redundantly, it has repeatedly added that the expression *ex nihilo* was not the description of a preexisting matter from which the world was made, but it only meant that what exists, once did not exist, and that it was only called into existence by God's almighty power. Hence, the expression *ex nihilo* is on a level with the term *post nihilum:* the preposition *ex* does not designate [the cause] but only excludes a material cause; the world has its cause, not in itself, but only in God.[46]

The expression *ex nihilo* was eagerly preserved in Christian theology only because it was admirably suited for cutting off all sorts of errors at the root. In the first place, it served as a defense against the paganistic notion of a formless stuff *(amorphos hylē),* from which not even Plato and Aristotle were able to extricate themselves. In paganism a human being is bound by matter, subject to sensuality and nature worship; he cannot grasp the idea that the mind is free and above matter, and even much less that God is absolutely sovereign, defined by nothing other than his own essence. Over against this view, the

45. Pastor (Shepherd) of Hermas, I, *Vision* 1.1; *Theophilus to Autolycus,* II, 4; Tertullian, *The Prescription against Heretics,* 13; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* II, 10.

46. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* II, 14; Augustine, *Confessions,* XI, 5; XII, 7; idem, *Literal Meaning of Genesis,* I, 1; Anselm, *Monologion,* ch. 8; T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.,* I, qu. 45., art. 1, and so forth.

doctrine of creation out of nothing teaches the absolute sovereignty of God and man's absolute dependence; if only a single particle were not created out of nothing, God would not be God. In the second place, this expression rules out all emanation, every hint of an essential identity between God and the world. Granted, the Scholastics wrote repeatedly about an emanation or procession of all existence from a universal cause and also occasionally of the creature's participation in the being and life of God. But in saying this they did not mean "emanation" in the strict sense, as if God's own being flowed out into his creatures and so unfolded in them, like the genus in its species. They only meant to say that God is a self-subsistent necessary being *(ens per essentiam),* but the creature is existent by participation *(ens per participationem).* Creatures indeed have a being of their own, but this being has its efficient and exemplary cause in the being of God.[47]

The teaching of creation out of nothing maintains that there is a distinction in essence between God and the world. The creation does not exist as a result of a passage of the world from being in God to being outside of God, nor from being without God to being by God, but from nonexistence into existence. The world is certainly no anti-God; it has no independent existence, and remains in God as its ongoing immanent cause, as will have to be demonstrated later in the teaching of preservation, against Manichaeism and Deism. But according to the teaching of Scripture the world is not a part of, or emanation from, the being of God. It has a being and existence of its own, one that is different and distinct from the essence of God. And that is what is expressed by the term *ex nihilo.* Nevertheless this term too has been misused by philosophy. Just as Plato understood *mē on* (nonbeing) as an eternal unformed substance, so Erigena even described God as *nihilum* insofar as he transcends all categories and limitations, all existence and being; "since, then, he is understood to be incomprehensible, he is not undeservedly called 'nihilum' on account of [his] surpassing excellence" *(dum ergo incomprehensibilis intelligitur, per excellentiam nihilum non immerito vocitatur).* And if he brings forth everything out of nothing, that then means that he "produces essence from his own—as it were—'superessentiality,' [and] lives from his own 'supervitality.'"[48] Even odder was the way Hegel in his *Wissenschaft der Logik* dealt with this concept when he defined "nothingness" as "nonbeing that is simultaneously a kind of being, and a being that is simultaneously nonbeing," a nothingness that is at the same time everything, namely, in potentiality, and nothing specific concretely.[49]

Christian theology is diametrically opposed to this conceptual confusion in philosophy. It understands "nothingness" to be purely negative and rejects all emanation. Still, even in emanation there is an element of truth that,

47. T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.,* I, qu. 45, art. 1; J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit,* II, 828ff., 899f.

48. Erigena, *On the Division of Nature,* III, 19–20.

49. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of Logic,* 139–45 (*Wissenschaft der Logik,* in *Sämtliche Werke,* IV, 87–118; ed. note: Bavinck's own pagination in his note is to *Werke,* III, 64, 73f., when it should be *Werke,* III, 77–108).

without violating the essence of God, is especially maintained by the biblical doctrine of creation far better than in philosophy. The doctrine of creation out of nothing, in fact, gives to Christian theology a place between Gnosticism and Arianism, that is, between pantheism and Deism. Gnosticism knows no creation but only emanation and therefore makes the world into the Son, wisdom, the image of God in an antiquated sense. Arianism, on the other hand, knows nothing of emanation but only of creation and therefore makes the Son into a creature. In the former the world is deified; in the latter God is made mundane. But Scripture, and therefore Christian theology, knows both emanation and creation, a twofold communication of God—one within and the other outside the divine being; one to the Son who was in the beginning with God and was himself God, and another to creatures who originated in time; one from the being and another by the will of God. The former is called generation; the latter, creation. By generation, from all eternity, the full image of God is communicated to the Son; by creation only a weak and pale image of God is communicated to the creature. Still, the two are connected. Without generation, creation would not be possible. If, in an absolute sense, God could not communicate himself to the Son, he would be even less able, in a relative sense, to communicate himself to his creature. If God were not triune, creation would not be possible.[50]

THE CREATOR IS THE TRIUNE GOD

[255] Holy Scripture, accordingly, teaches that the Triune God is the author of creation. Scripture knows no intermediate beings. In the case of the plural in Genesis 1:26, the Jews thought of angels. The Gnostics saw proceeding from God a series of aeons that played a creative role. The Arians made the Son an intermediate being between Creator and creature who, though created, nevertheless himself created as well. In the Middle Ages many [scholars] were prepared to accept a cooperative role for the creature in the act of creation. They arrived at this thesis because in the church the forgiveness of sins and the dispensing of grace were inherent in [ecclesiastical] office so that a priest performing the Mass could change the bread into the body of Christ and so become "a creator of his own creator" *(creator sui creatoris)* (Biel). It is for this reason that Peter Lombard says in his doctrine of the sacraments that God could also "create some things through some person, not through him as 'author' but as minister with whom and in whom he worked."[51] Some, such as Durand, Suárez, and Bellarmine, followed him, but others, like Thomas, Scotus, Bonaventure, Richard, and so on, dissented.[52] Reformed theologians, who more than Catholic and Lutheran scholars resisted every tendency to

50. Athanasius, *Against the Arians,* I, 12; II, 56, 78.

51. P. Lombard, *Sent.*, IV, dist. 5, n. 3.

52. T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.*, I, qu. 45, art. 3; J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit,* II, 849f.; J. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* V, 89f.

commingle the Creator and the creature, agreed with the latter.[53] Scripture exclusively attributes the act of creation to God (Gen. 1:11; Isa. 40:12f.; 44:24; 45:12; Job 9:5–10; 38:2f.). It is what distinguishes him from false gods (Ps. 96:5; Isa. 37:16; Jer. 10:11–12).

Creating is a divine work, an act of infinite power and therefore is incommunicable in either nature or grace to any creature, whatever it may be. But Christian theology all the more unanimously attributed the work of creation to all three persons in the Trinity. Scripture left no doubt on this point. God created all things through the Son (Ps. 33:6; Prov. 8:22; John 1:3; 5:17; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:3) and through the Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6; Job 26:13; 33:4; Ps. 104:30; Isa. 40:13; Luke 1:35). In this context the Son and the Spirit are not viewed as secondary forces but as independent agents or "principles" *(principia),* as authors *(auctores)* who with the Father carry out the work of creation, as with him they also constitute the one true God.

This doctrine of Scripture did not immediately come into its own in the Christian church. Initially the Logos was too frequently viewed as an intermediate being who effected the linkage between God and the world while the person and work of the Holy Spirit initially fell completely into the background. But Irenaeus already pointed out that in the act of creating God needed no alien instruments, nor did he use the angels for that purpose, but had his own hands: the Logos and the Holy Spirit, by whom and in whom he created all things.[54] The doctrine of creation as the work of the whole Trinity was clearly developed by Athanasius and the three Cappadocians in the East, and by Augustine in the West. No creature, says Athanasius, can be the efficient cause *(poiētikon aition)* of creation. So then, if the Son with the Father creates the world, he cannot be an extradivine created demiurge, as Arius thinks, but has to be the very own Son of the Father, the "proper offspring of his own being" *(idion gennēma tēs ousias autou).*[55] But where the Logos is, there the Spirit is also, and so "the Father through the Word and in the Spirit creates all things" *(ho patēr dia tou logou en tō pneumati ktizei ta panta).*[56] Augustine puts it even more strongly: "By this supremely, equally, and immutably good Trinity all things are created" *(ab hac summe et aequaliter et immutabiliter bona trinitate creata sunt omnia)* so that the entire creation bears "the stamp of the Trinity" *(vestigium trinitatis).*[57] This teaching has thus become the common property of Christian theology as a whole[58] and of the

53. G. Voetius, *Select disp.*, I, 556f.; *Synopsis purioris theologiae,* X, 14; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* V, qu. 2; J. H. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae,* VI, 14; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia,* III, 5, 20; C. Vitringa, *Doct. christ.*, II, 81–82.

54. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* IV, 20.

55. Athanasius, *Against the Arians,* II, 21f.

56. Athanasius, *Ad Serap.*, III, 5.

57. Augustine, *Enchiridion,* 10; *On the Trinity,* VI, 10; *City of God,* XI, 24; *Confessions,* XIII, 11.

58. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* I, 8; T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.*, I, qu. 45, art. 6; M. Luther, *The Smalcald Articles,* I.1; J. Calvin, *Institutes,* I.xiv, xx.

various confessions as well.[59] It was contradicted only among those who also rejected the church's dogma of the Trinity, at best believed in a creation by the Father through the Son, but in no way recognized in that creation the common work of the three divine persons. Among the dissenters were the Arians, Socinians, Remonstrants, Rationalists, and, in more recent times, Martensen, van Oosterzee, and particularly Doedes.[60]

The two dogmas stand and fall together. The confession of the essential oneness of the three persons has as its corollary that all the outward works of God *(opera ad extra)* are common and indivisible *(communia et indivisa)*. Conversely, all opposition to the trinitarian work of creation is proof of deviation in the doctrine of the Trinity. The crucial point here is that, with Scripture and church fathers, like Athanasius, we make a sharp distinction between the Creator and the creature and avoid all gnostic mingling. If in Scripture the Son and the Spirit act as independent agents *(principia)* and "authors" *(auctores)* of creation, then they are partakers of the divine being. Furthermore, if they are truly God, then they truly take part in the work of creation as well. The Arian doctrine, on the other hand, wraps itself in insoluble difficulties. It cannot be denied that Scripture teaches that creation is a work of the Father through the Son. Now, if the Son is viewed as a person outside the divine being, there is validity to the objection that no meaning can be attached to creation by the Father through the Son. Scripture says it, but what can it mean? Did the Father charge the Son to create? But then the Son is the real Creator. Did the Father and Son jointly create all things? But then it is not creation by the Son.[61]

The doctrine of the Trinity provides true light here. Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity. It is one God who creates all things, and for that reason the world is a unity, just as the unity of the world demonstrates the unity of God. But in that one divine being there are three persons, each of whom performs a task of his own in that one work of creation. Not in the sense that the creation is mainly attributable to the Father and less so to the Son and Spirit, nor in the sense that the three persons work independently side by side, supplementing each other's work and constituting three separate efficient causes of creation. The practice of speaking of three associated causes *(tres causae sociae)* therefore encountered

59. Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion,* nos. 202, 227, 231–32, 355, 367, 598; H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatorum* (Leipzig: Iulii Klinkhardti, 1840), 87, 331, 341. Ed. note: In addition, Bavinck here cites J. T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche,* 5th ed., 38, 299. Likely he is referring to the Augsburg Confession, art. III, and the Smalcald Articles, art. IV, found in *The Book of Concord: or The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* trans. Henry Jacobs (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1908), I, 38, 311.

60. H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics,* trans. W. Urwick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), §61; J. J. van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics,* trans. J. Watson and M. Evans (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874), §56; J. I. Doedes, *De Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis* (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1880–81), 121ff.

61. J. I. Doedes, *Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis,* 128.

widespread resistance.[62] While there is cooperation, there is no division of labor. All things originate simultaneously from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The Father is the first cause; the initiative for creation proceeds from him. Accordingly, in an administrative sense, creation is specifically attributed to him. The Son is not an instrument but the personal wisdom, the Logos, by whom everything is created; everything rests and coheres in him (Col. 1:17) and is created for him (Col. 1:16), not as its final goal but as the head and master of all creatures (Eph. 1:10). And the Holy Spirit is the personal immanent cause by which all things live and move and have their being, receive their own form and configuration, and are led to their destination, in God.[63]

[256] Still, while the creation is a work of the whole Trinity, it cannot be denied that in Scripture it also stands in a peculiar relation to the Son, one that deserves independent discussion. The Old Testament repeatedly states that God created all things by his Word (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6; 148:5; Isa. 48:13), that he established the earth by Wisdom and by his understanding spread out the heavens (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12; 51:15). But that Wisdom is also represented personally as the advisor and master worker of creation. God acquired and possessed Wisdom, arranged and searched it out, in order that by it as the beginning of his way, as the first principle of his work, he might create and organize the world. And in that way it was with him even before the creation, worked along with him in the process of creating, and delighted in the works of God's hands, especially in the children of men (Prov. 8:22–31; Job 28:23–27). This teaching is further elaborated in the New Testament. There we read not only that God created all things by the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17), but there Christ is called "the firstborn of all creation" (*prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs,* Col. 1:15), "the origin of God's creation" (*archē tēs ktiseōs tou Theou,* Rev. 3:14), the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of all things (Rev. 1:17; 21:6; 22:6), for whom all things have been created (Col. 1:16), in order to be again gathered up into him as the head (Eph. 1:10). In all these passages Christ has both soteriological and cosmological significance. He is not only the mediator of re-creation but also of creation.

The Apologists as yet did not know what to do with these ideas of Scripture. Subject as they were to Platonic influence, they frequently saw little more in the Logos than the "intelligible world" *(kosmos noētos)*. They associated the Logos most intimately with the world, saw his generation as being motivated by creation, and inadequately distinguished the birth of the Son from the creation of the world. They still wrestled with the gnostic idea that the Father is actually the secret and invisible Deity who is made manifest only by the Logos. Now,

62. O. Zöckler, *Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft,* 2 vols. (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1877–79), I, 621f., 679f.

63. F. H. R. Frank, *System der christlichen Wahrheit,* 3d rev. ed. (Erlangen and Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1894), I, 328f.; A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit,* trans. H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941 [1900]), 21; see above, pp. 318–22 (#229).

while this gnostic element was banished from theology by the ancient church fathers, notably Athanasius and Augustine, it kept creeping back in. The root from which this idea springs is always a certain dualism, a more or less sharp opposition between spirit and matter, between God and the world. God is invisible, inaccessible, hidden; the world, if not anti-God, is nevertheless "ungodly," "God-less," devoid of deity. What is needed to reconcile this basic opposition is an intermediate being, and that being is the Logos. In relation to God he is the cosmic idea, the image of the world, the intelligible world *(kosmos noētos);* and in relation to the world he is the actual Creator, the principle of the possibility that a world is in the making. Among the Hernhutters [Moravians] this notion resulted in the eclipse of the Father and the idea of Christ as the real Creator. Re-creation swallows up creation and grace nullifies nature. Various mediating theologians teach that the Logos is the world in its basic idea, and that it "belongs to the very being of the Son to have his life not only in the Father but also in the world; as the heart of the Father he is simultaneously the eternal heart of the world, the eternal World-logos."[64]

This notion then automatically leads to a doctrine of incarnation apart from sin. The world as such is profane; creation is not really a divine work. For God to be able to create and for the world and mankind to be pleasing to him, he must view them in Christ. God could only have willed the world in Christ and for Christ. It is only in Christ as the head and central individual of the human race that we can be pleasing to God. In this view, the incarnation is necessary for the revelation and communication of God, and the God-man is the supreme goal of creation.[65] Ultimately, this train of thought culminates in the theory that the creation is necessary for God himself. Indeed, God as such is nature, the Ur-ground, the depth-dimension and primal silence of the world (*bythos* and *sigē*), but for him to become personality and spirit, he needs the creation. Creation is God's own history; cosmogony is theogony.[66]

This Gnosticism can only be fundamentally overcome when all dualism between God and the world is cut off at the root. Creation as a work of God is not inferior to re-creation; nature is not of a lower order than grace; the world is not profane of itself. Consequently, there was no need for an inferior divine being to enable the Father to create the world. The Christian church believes in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. The creation is absolutely no more the work of the Son than of the Father. All things are from God.

64. H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics,* §125; H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians,* trans. John C. Moore and rev. and ed. William P. Dickson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), 281–87 (on Col. 1:16).

65. I. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), III, 229–48; C. I. Nitzsch, *System der christlichen Lehre,* 5th ed. (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1844), 195; J. P. Lange, *Christliche Dogmatik,* 3 vols. (Heidelberg: K. Winter, 1852), II, 215; and especially P. F. Keerl, *Der Gottmensch, das Ebenbild Gottes,* vol. 2 of *Die Mensch, das Ebenbild Gottes* (Basel: Bahnmeier, 1866), 1ff. Ed. note: Bavinck cites only the series title and volume number in his reference.

66. F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke,* II, 2, 109.

And concerning the Son the Christian church confesses that he is not inferior to the Father, nor closer to creatures, but of one substance with the Father and the Spirit, and that together they are one true and eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth. But it is true that the Son plays a role of his own in the work of creation, something especially Augustine highlighted. Although he did not equate the ideas of things with the Logos as the Apologists had done, he did feel obligated to relate them to the Logos. Truly, the world was not eternal but the idea of the world nevertheless was eternally in the mind of God. The Father expresses all his thoughts and his entire being in the one personal Word, and the idea of the world consequently is contained in the Logos. Accordingly, the Logos can be called "a certain kind of form, a form which is not itself formed but the form of all things that have been formed" *(forma quaedam, forma non formata sed forma omnium formatorum).*[67] By this line of thought the significance of the Son for the creation can be established. First, there is the Father, from whom the initiative for creation proceeds, who thinks the idea of the world; but all that the Father is and has and thinks he imparts to, and expresses in, the Son. In him the Father contemplates the idea of the world itself, not as though it were identical with the Son, but so that he envisions and meets it in the Son in whom his fullness dwells. Contained in the divine wisdom, as a part and in sum, lies also the wisdom that will be realized in the creatures [to come]. He is the Logos by whom the Father creates all things.

The whole world is thus the realization of an idea of God; a book containing letters, large and small, from which his wisdom can be known. He is, however, not merely the "exemplary cause"; he is also the "creating agent" *(archē dēmiourgikē).* The word that God speaks is not a sound without content; it is forceful and living [performative]. The idea of the world that the Father pronounces in the Son is a seminal word *(ratio seminalis),* a fundamental form *(forma principalis)* of the world itself. For that reason the Son is called the beginning *(archē),* the firstborn *(prōtotokos),* the origin of the creation *(archē tēs ktiseōs),* the firstborn who sustains the creation, from whom it arises as its cause and example, and in whom it rests. Therefore, the word that the Father utters at the creation and by which he calls the things out of nothingness into being, is also effective, for it is spoken in and through the Son. And finally, the Son in a sense is also the final cause *(causa finalis)* of the world. Because in him it has its foundation and model, it is also created for him, not as its ultimate goal, but still as the head, the Lord and heir of all things (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). Summed up in the Son, gathered under him as head, all creatures again return to the Father, from whom all things originate. Thus the world finds its idea, its principle *(archē),* and its final goal *(telos)* in the triune being of God. The word that the Father pronounces in the Son is the full expression of the divine being and therefore also of all that will exist by that word as creature outside the divine being. And

67. Augustine, *Sermon* 117; *Freedom of the Will,* III, 16–17; *On the Trinity,* XI, 10; XV, 14; cf. Anselm, *Monologion,* 34; T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.,* I, qu. 34, art. 3; I, qu. 44, art. 3.

the procession *(spiratio)* by which the Father and the Son are the "active basis" *(principium)* of the Spirit also contains within itself the willing of that world, the idea of which is comprehended within the divine wisdom.[68] The creation thus proceeds from the Father through the Son in the Spirit in order that, in the Spirit and through the Son, it may return to the Father.

CREATION AND TIME

[257] From this perspective we may also derive some insight into the difficult problem of creation and time. Scripture tells us in simple human language that all things had a beginning. It speaks of a time before the birth of mountains, before the foundation of the world, before the aeons began (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:22; Matt. 13:35; 25:34; John 1:1; 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). In our own thinking and speaking we also cannot avoid the temporal form. From this human limitation, in fact, spring all the objections that arise over and over against a creation in time. Going back in our thinking, we finally come to the first moment in which all things have a beginning. Before that moment there is nothing but the deep silence of eternity. But immediately a multitude of questions arise in our mind. With what images will we fill up that eternity, and what kind of activity can there be if all the work of creation and providence is eliminated from consideration? The doctrines of the Trinity and the decrees offer us some hint of an answer, but detached from the world they no longer furnish content to our ideas. What did God do before the act of creation—he who cannot be conceived as an idle God *(Deus otiosus)* and is always working (John 5:17)? Did he change? Did he pass from idleness to activity, from rest to labor? How can creation, the transition to the act of creating, be squared with the immutability of God? And why did he only proceed to the work of creation after an eternity had already rushed by? How is there to be found, in all that time-transcending eternity, a moment in which God passed from not-creating to creating? And why did he choose precisely that moment? Why did he not begin creating the world aeons earlier?

All these questions have provoked a variety of answers. Pantheism attempted to furnish a solution by teaching that in God being and acting are one; that God did not become a Creator, but that creation itself is eternal. The world had no beginning; it is the eternal self-revelation of God. Furthermore, God did not precede the world in duration, but only in a logical sense, inasmuch as he is the cause of all things. Nature bringing forth *(natura naturans)* cannot be conceived apart from nature having been brought forth *(natura naturata)*, nor substance apart from modes and attributes, or idea apart from manifestation.[69] Related to this view is Origen's solution: rejecting the eternity of matter, he taught that all things

68. J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit,* II, 870.

69. J. Erigena, *The Divine Nature,* I, 73–74; III, 8–9, 17; B. Spinoza, *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy (Cogitata Metaphysica),* trans. Halbert Haine Briton (Chicago: Open Court, 1905), II, ch. 10; G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke,* VII, 25.

were created out of nothing by the Logos, but that God cannot be conceived as being idle. His omnipotence is as eternal as he is, and so he also began to create from all eternity. Not that the present world is eternal, but preceding it there were countless worlds, just as following it there will also be many.[70] This view, which actually comes from the Stoa,[71] was condemned by the church at the Council of Nicaea but has made numerous comebacks.[72] In this connection we must also mention the question—one frequently dealt with in scholasticism—whether the world could have been eternal. In defense of Aristotle, who taught the eternity of the world,[73] some answered this question in the affirmative.[74] But others like Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus, Henry of Ghent, Richard, Valentia, Toletus,[75] the Lutherans,[76] and the Reformed[77] firmly rejected this thesis. Only a very few considered an eternal creation a possibility.[78]

All these answers, however, fail to satisfy the mind. There is, of course, no difference over whether at this moment the world may have existed for millions of centuries instead of thousands of years. Nobody denies this in the abstract. But a very different question is whether the world could have existed eternally in the same sense as God is eternal. This, we have to say, is impossible, for eternity and time differ essentially. Kant saw an insoluble antinomy in the fact that on the one hand the world must have had a beginning because an infinitely past time is inconceivable, and on the other could not have a beginning because an empty time is similarly inconceivable.[79] The second part of the antinomy, however, is invalid: in the absence of the world there is no time, and therefore no empty time.[80] The

70. Origen, *On First Principles,* I, 2; II, 1; III, 5.

71. E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy,* rev. Wilhelm Nestle and trans. L. R. Palmer, 13th ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), §61, pp. 215–17.

72. R. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik,* 2d rev. ed. (Wittenberg: Zimmerman, 1867–71), §§61f.; H. Ulrici, *Gott und die Natur* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1862), 671f.; H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics,* §§65–66; J. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), III, 229–48; G. Wetzel, "Die Zeit der Weltschöpfung," *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie* 1 (1875): 582f.

73. E. Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics (Being a Translation from Zeller's Philosophy of the Greeks),* trans. B. F. C. Costello and J. H. Muirhead (London, New York, and Bombay, 1897), I, 469–77.

74. By Durandus, Occam, Biel, Cajetan, and also by Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theol.* I, qu. 46, art. 1–2; idem, *Contra gentiles,* II, 31–37; according to T. Esser, *Die Lehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquino über die Möglichkeit einer anfanglosen Schöpfung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1895). Eugen Rolfes, "Die Controverse über die Möglichkeit einer anfangslosen Schöpfung," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 10 (1897): 1–22; J. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* V, 134f.

75. Bonaventure, *Sent.,* I, dist. 44, art. 1, qu. 4; cf. D. Petavius, "De Deo," in *Theol. dogm.,* III, chs. 5–6.

76. J. Quenstedt, *Theologia,* I, 421; D. Hollaz, *Examen theol.,* 358.

77. J. Zanchi(us), *Op. theol.,* III, 22; G. Voetius, *Select. disp.,* I, 568; M. Leydecker, *Fax. verit.,* 140; J. Coccejus, *Summa theol.,* ch. 15; B. de Moor, *Comm. in Marckii Comp.,* II, 179; C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.,* II, 83; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* V, qu. 3.

78. F. Burmann, *Syn. theol.,* I, 24, 41.

79. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (1929; reprinted, New York: St. Martin's, 1965), 396–402.

80. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* III, 8; Athanasius, *Against the Arians,* I, 29, 58; Tertullian, *Against Marcion,* II, 3; idem, *Against Hermogenes,* 4; Augustine, *City of God,* XI, 6.

fact that we cannot imagine this and will always need such an auxiliary notion as a time before time is irrelevant and only derives from the necessity of our thinking in a temporal form. To eliminate time from our thinking is to eliminate our thinking and hence is impossible.

This leaves us with only the first part of Kant's antinomy: namely, that the world must have had a beginning. However endlessly it is extended, time remains time and never becomes eternity. There is an essential difference between the two. The world cannot be conceived apart from time; existence in time is the necessary form of all that is finite and created. The predicate of eternity can never, strictly speaking, be attributable to things that exist in the form of time. Similarly, the question whether God could not have created from all eternity is based on the identification of eternity and time. In eternity there is no "earlier" or "later." God *did* eternally create the world: that is, in the moment in which the world came into existence, God was and remained the Eternal One, and as the Eternal One he created the world. Even if the world *had* existed for an endless succession of centuries, and though millions of worlds *had* preceded the present one, it remains temporal, finite, limited, and therefore had a beginning. Origen's hypothesis in no way begins to solve the problem: the question remains absolutely the same; it is only shifted back a few million [or billion] years.

Even more baseless is the question of what God did before he created. Augustine, Luther, and Calvin answered it in the spirit of Proverbs 26:5 ["Answer fools according to their folly"].[81] It proceeds from the assumption that God exists in time, and that creation and providence are for him the strenuous labor of every day. But God dwells in eternity. He is pure actuality *(actus purissimus),* an infinite fullness of life, blessed in himself. Without the creation he is not idle, and involvement in it does not exhaust him. "In [God's] leisure, therefore, is no laziness, indolence, inactivity; as in His work is no labour, effort, industry. He can act while He reposes, and repose while He acts."[82]

The case is the same with pantheism. It is not, to be sure, as superficial as the Socinianism and the materialism that simply transmute eternity into a time endlessly extended forward and backward, and that are ignorant of the distinction between endless and infinite. Pantheism does not maintain that God is all things and that all things are God. It makes a distinction between "being" and "becoming," the nature that is bringing forth and the nature that has been brought forth (*natura naturans* and *natura naturata*), between substance and its modes, the All and all things, the idea and its manifestation, that is, between eternity and time. But pantheism has no answers to the questions "Wherein then does the difference exist?" "What connection is there between the two?" "How does eternity pass into time?" It certainly supplies enough words and images, but they do not permit any real thought. Theism,

81. Augustine, *Confessions,* XI, 2; J. Calvin, *Institutes,* I.xiv.1.

82. Augustine, *City of God,* XII, 17, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 400.

however, views eternity and time as two incommensurable magnitudes. We neither may nor can neglect either one of them; both of them urge themselves on our consciousness and powers of reflection. But we cannot clearly understand their interconnectedness. As living, thinking beings in time, we stand before the mystery of eternal uncreated being and marvel. On the one hand, it is certain that God is the Eternal One: in him there is neither past or future, neither becoming or change. All that he is is eternal: his thought, his will, his decree. Eternal in him is the idea of the world that he thinks and utters in the Son; eternal in him is also the decision to create the world; eternal in him is the will that created the world in time; eternal is also the act of creating as an act of God, an action both internal and immanent.[83] For God did not *become* Creator, so that first for a long time he did not create and then afterward he did create. Rather, he is the eternal Creator, and as Creator he was the Eternal One, and as the Eternal One he created. The creation therefore brought about no change in God; it did not emanate from him and is no part of his being. He is unchangeably the same eternal God.

On the other hand, it is certain, also to human thought, that the world had a beginning and was created in time. Augustine correctly stated that the world was not made in time but along with time,[84] as Plato and Philo and Tertullian[85] had already said before him, and as all theologians since have repeated. A time of idleness is inconceivable, nor was there a time before the world existed. Time is the necessary form of the existence of the finite. It is not a separate creation but something automatically given with the world, cocreated with it like space. In a sense, therefore, the world has always existed, for as long as time has existed. All change, then, occurs in it, not in God. The world is subject to time, that is, to change. It is constantly becoming, in contrast with God, who is an eternal and unchangeable being. Now these two, God and the world, eternity and time, are related in such a way that the world is sustained in all its parts by God's omnipresent power, and time in all its moments is pervaded by the eternal being of our God. Eternity and time are not two lines, the shorter of which for a time runs parallel to the infinitely extended one; the truth is that eternity is the immutable center that sends out its rays to the entire circumference of time. To the limited eye of the creature it successively unfolds its infinite content in the breadth of space and the length of time, so that creature might understand something of the unsearchable greatness of God. But for all that, eternity and time remain distinct. All we wish to confess is that God's eternal willing can and does, without ceasing to be eternal, produce effects in time, just as his eternal thought can have temporal objects as its content.[86]

83. Augustine, *City of God,* XII, 17; P. Lombard, *Sent.,* II, dist. 1, n. 2; Bonaventure, *Sent.,* II, dist. 1, art. 1, qu. 2; T. Aquinas, *Contra gentiles,* I, 82; D. Petavius, "De Deo," in *Theol. dogm.,* V, ch. 9, §9; V, ch. 13, §5; G. Voetius, *Select. disp.,* I, 565; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* V, qu. 3, 16.

84. Augustine, *Confessions,* XI, 10–13; idem, *City of God,* VII, 30; XI, 4–6; XII, 15–17.

85. Tertullian, *Against Marcion,* II, 3.

86. Thomas Aquinas, in J. Kleutgen, *Philosophie der Vorzeit,* II, 871.

The power of God's will, which is eternally one, caused things to come into being that did not exist before, yet without bringing about any change in him. God eternally wills things that will only take place after centuries or took place centuries before. And the moment it takes place there is change in things but not in him. [As Augustine has said:]

> But when one speaks of [God's] former repose and subsequent operation (and I know not how men can understand these things), this "former" and "subsequent" are applied only to the things created, which formerly did not exist and subsequently came into existence. But in God the former purpose is not altered and obliterated by the subsequent and different purpose; but [he continues] by one and the same eternal and unchangeable will he effected regarding the things he created, both that formerly, so long as they were not, they should not be, and that subsequently, when they began to be, they should come into existence. And thus, perhaps, he would show in a very striking way, to those who have eyes for such things, how independent he is of what he makes, and how it is of his own gratuitous goodness that he creates, since from eternity he dwelt without creatures in no less perfect a blessedness.[87]

CREATION'S GOAL

[258] Now if this world, which originated and exists in time, is distinct in essence from the eternal and unchangeable being of God, one is all the more insistently confronted by the question as to what moved God to call this world into existence. The Scriptures continually trace all the "isness" and "suchness" of God's creatures back to his will (Ps. 33:6; 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Matt. 11:25; Rom. 9:15ff.; Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; Rev. 4:11).[88] For us that is the ultimate ground, the end of all contradiction. "The will of God is the supreme law. The 'nature' of any particular created thing is precisely what the supreme Creator of the thing willed it to be."[89] To the question of why things exist and are as they are, there is no other and deeper answer than that God willed it. If someone should then ask Why did God will it? "he is asking for something that is greater than the will of God, but nothing greater can be found."[90] And this has been the position of the whole Christian church and of Christian theology.

Pantheism, however, is not satisfied with this answer and looks for a deeper ground. It then attempts especially in two ways to explain the world from the being of God. Either it presents that being as so superabundantly rich that the

87. Augustine, *City of God,* XII, 17, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library), 400; ed. note: The citation adapted here is longer than Bavinck's original.

88. In Rev. 4:11, the preposition *dia* is followed by the accusative and hence actually means "on account of." But here and elsewhere (Rev. 12:11; John 6:57; Rom. 8:10, 20; 2 Pet. 3:12) this meaning passes into that of "through" [an efficient cause] or of a dative.

89. Augustine, *City of God,* XXI, 8.

90. Augustine, *De Gen. contra Manich.,* I, 2.

world automatically flows from it and, to the degree that the world distances itself from that being, approaches nonbeing (the *mē on*) and solidifies into sensible matter. This is the theory of emanation that originated in the East, spread especially in Persia and India, and then, in the systems of Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, also penetrated the West. Or it attempts to explain the world from God's poverty *(penia tou Theou),* not from his wealth *(ploutos).* God is so needy and unblessed that he needs the world for his own development. In himself he is pure potentiality who *is* nothing but can *become* anything. He has to objectivize himself and, by contrasting himself with the world, become "spirit" or "personality" in man. In himself God is not yet the Absolute; he only achieves this status through the world process. Being initially the implicit God *(Deus implicitus),* he gradually becomes explicit *(Deus explicitus).* The world, accordingly, is necessary for God; it is a necessary developmental component in his being. "Without the world God is not God." Over against this pantheism, which abolishes the personality of God and deifies the world, theism maintains the teaching that creation is an act of God's will. But that will is not to be construed as arbitrary volition. The will of God has indeed been so viewed in Islamic theology and in the thinking of Nominalists, Socinians, and Cartesians. There the world is a product of pure caprice. It exists, but it might just as well not have existed or have been very different. As a rule, however, Christian theology has avoided this extreme position and taught that, though the will of God in creation was totally free and all coercion and necessity is excluded, that divine will had its motives and God, in performing his external works, had his high and holy purposes.[91]

So there remains room for the question of what moved God to create the world; in other words: what goal did he have in mind for the creation? The answers to this question have varied. Many theologians have seen an adequate explanation for the world in God's goodness and love. Scripture, too, often speaks of the fact that God is good, that his goodness is manifest in all his works, that he loves all his creatures and wills their salvation. Furthermore, God could not be conceived as needing anything; he could not have created the world to receive something from it but only to give and communicate himself. His goodness, therefore, was the reason for creation. Plato, Philo, and Seneca already spoke along that line,[92] and Christian theologians often said as well that God did not create the world out of need but out of goodness, not for himself but for human beings. "God made the world not for himself but for man."[93] "If he were not able to make good things, he would possess no power at all; if, however, he were able but did not, there would be great blame."[94] But the God of all is good and excellent by nature. For a good being would be

91. Cf. above, pp. 237–45 (##208–9) [= H. Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God,* 232–41].

92. Plato, *Timaeus,* 29D; Seneca, *Letters,* 95; for Philo, see O. Zöckler's article, *PRE³,* XI, 643.

93. Tertullian, *Against Marcion,* I, 43; *Against Praxeas,* 5.

94. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis,* IV, 16.

envious of no one, so he envies nobody's existence but rather wishes everyone to exist in order to exercise his kindness.[95]

These pronouncements repeatedly alternated, however, with other statements in which God himself and his honor were designated as the cause and purpose of the creation. But humanism placed man in the foreground. Socinianism did not look for man's essence in communion with God but in his dominion over the earth. The doctrine of natural law, natural morality, and natural religion made man autonomous and independent from God. Leibniz taught that by his goodness, wisdom, and power God was morally bound to choose the best of the many possible worlds and to bring that into being. Kant, on grounds of practical reason, only appealed to God for help in supplying to man in the hereafter the eternal life to which his virtue entitled him. And thus, in the rationalism of the eighteenth century, man became the most interesting of creatures: everything else existed for him and was subservient to his perfection. Man was his own end *(Selbstzweck)* and all else, God included, only a means.[96] And even today many thinkers teach that God must impart reality to the idea of the world, which he deems necessary, for otherwise he would be selfish and not the highest love. Because he is good, he does not want to be blessed by himself alone, but establishes a kingdom of love and pursues the blessedness of his creatures, which for him is the ultimate goal.[97]

From a Christian viewpoint, however, this doctrine of man as *Selbstzweck* is unacceptable. Of course God's goodness also becomes manifest in creation, as Scripture repeatedly asserts. Still it is not correct to say that God's goodness requires the creation or else God would be selfish. Remember, God is the all-good Being, perfect love, total blessedness within himself, and therefore does not need the world to bring his goodness or love to maturity, any more than he needs it to achieve self-consciousness and personality. It is in the nature of the case, moreover, that God does not exist for the sake of man, and that man exists for the sake of God. For although man may in a sense be called *Selbstzweck* insofar as he, as a rational, moral being, may never be degraded

95. Athanasius, *Contra gentes,* 41; John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* II, 2; T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.,* I, qu. 19, art. 2; G. Voetius, *Select. disp.,* I, 558.

96. K. G. Bretschneider, *Systematische Entwicklung aller in der Dogmatik* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1841), 442f.; idem, *Handbuch der Dogmatik* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1838), I, 669; J. A. L. Wegschneider, *Institutiones theologiae christianae dogmaticae* (Halle: Gebauer, 1819), §95.

97. R. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik,* §49; I. Dorner, *System of Christian Doctrine,* II, 9–21 (§33); H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics,* §59; J. C. K. von Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis,* 2d ed., I, 205f.; K. F. A. Kahnis, *Die lutherische Dogmatik* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1861–68), I, 428; J. Müller, *Die christliche Lehre von der Sünde* (Bremen: C. Ed. Muller, 1889), II, 187f.; L. Schoeberlein, *Prinzip und System der Dogmatik* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1881), 628; G. Thomasius, *Christi Person und Werk* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1888), I, 44; James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World,* 7th ed. (Edinburgh: A. Elliot, 1904), 155; A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation,* trans. and ed. H. R. MacIntosh and A. B. MacCaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), 290–96; also Hermes and Günther, according to Kleutgen, *Theologie der Vorzeit,* I, 642.

into a "will-less" instrument, he is nevertheless fundamentally dependent on God and possesses nothing he has not received. God alone is Creator; man is a created being, and for that reason alone he cannot be the goal of creation. Inasmuch as he has his origin in God, he can also have his destiny only in God. And, finally, the theory that creation is grounded in God's goodness and has for its final end the salvation of man, is also at variance with reality. The universe is not, certainly, exhausted by its service to humanity and must therefore have some goal other than utility to man. The pedestrian utilitarianism and the self-centered teleology of the eighteenth century have been sufficiently refuted. The suffering and pain that is the daily lot of humanity cannot be explained in terms only of God's goodness. And the final outcome of world history, which speaks to us not only of the salvation of the elect but also of an eternal triumph over the ungodly, reveals attributes of God entirely different from his goodness and love.

Scripture, accordingly, takes another position and points to a higher goal. It says that all of nature is a revelation of God's attributes and a proclaimer of his praise (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19). God created man after his image and for his glory (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 43:7). He glorified himself in the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Exod. 14:17) and in the man born blind (John 9:3), and made the wicked for the day of trouble (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:22). Christ came to glorify God (John 17:4), and he bestows all the benefits of grace for his name's sake: redemption, forgiveness, sanctification, and so forth (Ps. 105:8; 78:9ff.; Isa. 43:25; 48:11; 60:21; 61:3; Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:6ff.). God gives his glory to no other (Isa. 42:8). The final goal is that all kingdoms will be subjected to him and every creature will yield to him (Dan. 7:27; Isa. 2:2–22; Mal. 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:24f.). Even on earth already he is given glory by all his people (Ps. 115:1; Matt. 6:13 KJV). Someday God alone will be great (Isa. 2:2–22) and receive glory from all his creatures (Rev. 4:11; 19:6). He is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega (Isa. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:8; 22:13). Of him, through him, and to him are all things (Rom. 11:36). On this basis Christian theology almost unanimously teaches that the glory of God is the final goal of all God's works. Although in its early years theologians especially featured the goodness of God as the motive for creation, still the honor of God as the final end of all things is not lacking. Athenagoras, for example, writes that it was "for his own sake and for the purpose of showing that his goodness and wisdom had been advanced in all his works, that God made man."[98] Tertullian says that God created the world "for the embellishment of his majesty."[99] This [emphasis on the] "glory of God" increasingly came into its own, especially in the medieval theology of Anselm, who made the honor of God the fundamental principle of his doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement,[100] but also in Lombard,

98. Athenagoras, *Resurrection of the Dead,* 12.

99. Tertullian, *Apology,* 17.

100. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo,* 11.

Thomas, Bonaventure, and others.[101] And we find the same teaching in the thought of later Roman Catholic theologians,[102] in that of the Lutherans,[103] and finally and particularly in the theology of the Reformed.[104] The difference between the Reformed on the one hand and the Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the other, is not that the former posited the honor of God, while the latter chose man as the final end of creation. It is rather that the Reformed tradition made the honor of God the fundamental principle of all doctrine and conduct, of dogmatics and morality, of the family, society, and the state, of science and art. Nowhere was this principle of the glory of God more universally applied than among the confessors of the Reformed religion.

But a twofold objection has been registered against God's glory as the final goal of all creatures. First, on this view God is made self-centered, self-seeking, devaluing his creatures, specifically human beings, into means. We already confronted this objection earlier and demonstrated that as the perfect good, God can rest in nothing other than himself and cannot be satisfied in anything less than himself. He has no alternative but to seek his own honor. Just as a father in his family and a ruler in his kingdom must seek and demand the honor due to him in that capacity, so it is with the Lord our God. Now a human being can only ask for the honor that is due to him in the name of God and for the sake of the office to which God has called him, but God asks for and seeks that honor in his own name and for his own being. Inasmuch as he is the supreme and only good, perfection itself, it is the highest kind of justice that in all creatures he seek his own honor. And so little does this pursuit of his own honor have anything in common with human egotistical self-interest that, where it is wrongfully withheld from him, God will, in the way of law and justice, even more urgently claim that honor. Voluntarily or involuntarily, every creature will someday bow his knee before him. Obedience in love or subjection by force is the final destiny of all creatures.

Another objection is that, in seeking his honor, God does need his creature after all. Since the world serves as an instrument of his glorification, there is something lacking in his perfection and blessedness. Creation meets a need in God and contributes to his perfection.[105] This objection seems irrefutable,

101. P. Lombard, *Sent.*, II, dist. I; T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.*, I, qu. 44, art. 4; I, qu. 66, art. 2; I, qu. 103, art. 2; idem, *Contra gentiles,* III, 17–18; idem, *Sent.*, II, dist. 1, qu. 2, art. 2; Bonaventure, *Sent.*, II, dist. 1, 2.

102. M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1933), II, 31f.; H. Th. Simar, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1879–80), 234f.; Kleutgen, *Theologie der Vorzeit,* I, 640–92; J. Schwetz, *Theologia dogmatica catholica,* 3 vols. (Vienna: Congregationis Mechitharisticae, 1851–54), I, 396f.; J. B. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie,* V, 151f.; G. Jansen, *Prael. theol.*, II, 319f.

103. J. Gerhard, *Loci. theol.*, V, c. 5; J. Quenstedt, *Theologia,* I, 418; D. Hollaz, *Examen theol.*, 360.

104. For example, Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in *Ethical Writings,* ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 399–536.

105. D. F. Strauss, *Christian Faith,* I, 633; E. von Hartmann, *Gesammelte Studien und Aufsätze* (Leipzig: Friedrich, 1891), 715.

though in all kinds of human labor there is an analogy that can clarify God's creative activity for us. At a lower level humans labor, because they have to; they are impelled to work by need or force. But the more refined the work becomes, the less room there is for need or coercion. An artist creates his work of art not out of need or coercion but impelled by the free impulses of his genius. "I pour out my heart like a little finch in the poplars; I sing and know no other goal" (Bilderdijk). A devout person serves God, not out of coercion or in hope of reward, but out of free-flowing love. So there is also a delight in God that is infinitely superior to need or force, to poverty or riches, which embodies his artistic ideas in creation and finds intense pleasure in it. Indeed, what in the case of man is merely a weak analogy is present in God in absolute originality. A creature, like the creation of an artist, has no independence apart from, and in opposition to, God. God, therefore, never seeks out a creature as if that creature were able to give him something he lacks or could take from him something he possesses. He does not seek the creature [as an end in itself], but through the creature he seeks himself. He is and always remains his own end. His striving is always—also in and through his creatures—total self-enjoyment, perfect bliss. The world, accordingly, did not arise from a need in God, from his poverty and lack of bliss, for what he seeks in a creature is not that creature but himself. Nor is its origination due to an uncontrollable fullness *(plērōma)* in God, for God uses all creatures for his own glorification and makes them serviceable to the proclamation of his perfections.

A CREATION-BASED WORLDVIEW

[259] From this perspective arises a very particular worldview. The word "creation" can denote either the act or the product of creation. From one's understanding of the act flows one's view of the product. Pantheism attempts to explain the world dynamically; materialism attempts to do so mechanically. But both strive to see the whole as governed by a single principle. In pantheism the world may be a living organism *(zōon),* of which God is the soul; in materialism it is a mechanism that is brought about by the union and separation of atoms. But in both systems an unconscious blind fate is elevated to the throne of the universe. Both fail to appreciate the richness and diversity of the world; erase the boundaries between heaven and earth, matter and spirit, soul and body, man and animal, intellect and will, time and eternity, Creator and creature, being and nonbeing; and dissolve all distinctions in a bath of deadly uniformity. Both deny the existence of a conscious purpose and cannot point to a cause or a destiny for the existence of the world and its history.

Scripture's worldview is radically different. From the beginning heaven and earth have been distinct. Everything was created with a nature of its own and rests in ordinances established by God. Sun, moon, and stars have their own unique task; plants, animals, and humans are distinct in nature. There is the most profuse diversity and yet, in that diversity, there is also a superla-

tive kind of unity. The foundation of both diversity and unity is in God. It is he who created all things in accordance with his unsearchable wisdom, who continually upholds them in their distinctive natures, who guides and governs them in keeping with their own increated energies and laws, and who, as the supreme good and ultimate goal of all things, is pursued and desired by all things in their measure and manner. Here is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches. In virtue of this unity the world can, metaphorically, be called an organism, in which all the parts are connected with each other and influence each other reciprocally. Heaven and earth, man and animal, soul and body, truth and life, art and science, religion and morality, state and church, family and society, and so on, though they are all distinct, are not separated. There is a wide range of connections between them; an organic, or if you will, an ethical bond holds them all together.

Scripture clearly points [to this bond] when it not only sums up the universe under the name of heaven and earth but also calls it *ʿôlām,* that is, a hidden, invisible, indefinite time in the past or future, aeon, eternity, the world (Eccles. 1:4; 3:11); and in the New Testament *kosmos* (John 1:10); *ta panta* (1 Cor. 8:6; 15:25f.); *ktisis* (Mark 10:6); *aiōnes* (Heb. 1:2), duration, lifetime, age, world (cf. *seculum* in connection with *sexus*), a human lifetime, world, and our word "world" [ME *weorld,* from OE *weoruld, worold,* human existence, age, or lifetime]. The words *ʿôlām* and *aiōnes* assume the idea that the world has duration, or age, that a history takes place in it which culminates in a specific goal. The Greek word *kosmos* and the Latin *mundus,* on the other hand, stress the beauty and harmony of the world. And in fact the world is both. Just as Paul simultaneously compares the church to a body and a building and speaks of a growing temple (Eph. 2:21), and Peter calls believers living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), so also the world is both a history and a work of art. It is a body that grows and a building that is erected. It extends itself in the "breadth" of space and perpetuates itself in the "length" of time. Neither the mechanical principle of materialism nor the dynamic principle of pantheism is sufficient to explain it. But whatever is valid in both is recognized in the doctrine of the world as the Scriptures teach it. It is to be regarded both horizontally and vertically. From the lowest forms of life it strives upward to where the light and life of God is, and at the same time it moves forward to a God-glorifying end. In that way it displays the attributes and perfections of God, in principle already at the outset, to an increasing degree as it develops, and perfectly at the end of the ages.

Augustine, the church father who most deeply understood these ideas, also presented the most elaborate account of them. In *The City of God (de civitate Dei)* he offers a Christian philosophy of history, demonstrates how the Christian worldview finds its truth and proof in history, and sketches the origin and essence of the heavenly city *(civitas coelestis),* both in its development and relation to the earthly city *(civitas terrena),* in its end as well as its

goal.[106] But at the same time he includes in it an account of the universe as a splendid harmony. In Augustine the world is a unity: the universe derives its name from the word "unity."[107] Nevertheless, that unity is not a uniformity but an infinitely varied diversity.[108] For God is the supreme being: supremely true, supremely good, and supremely beautiful. For that reason he created many creatures who in varying degrees partake of his being, truth, goodness, and beauty. "To some things he gave more of being and to others less and in this way arranged an order of natures in a hierarchy of being."[109] Appealing to the Wisdom of Solomon ("You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight," 11:20), Augustine states that all things are distinct in mode, species, number, degree, and order. And precisely by these qualities they bring about that world, that universe, in which God, in his good pleasure, distributes good things, and which on that account is a manifestation of his perfections.[110] For all that diversity can only be attributed to God, not to the merits of his creatures. "There is no nature even among the least and lowest of beasts that he did not fashion . . . the properties without which nothing can either be or be conceived."[111]

This worldview has been that of Christian theology in its entirety. The world is one body with many members. In the works of the church fathers, the unity, order, and harmony exhibited in the world is a powerful proof for the existence and unity of God.[112] God is the center, and all creatures are grouped in concentric circles and in a hierarchical order around him.[113] Thomas compares the world to perfectly keyed string music, whose harmonies interpret for us the glory and blessedness of the divine life. "Its parts are found to have been arranged just like the parts of a whole animal, which serve each other reciprocally."[114] "There is no spot in the universe," says Calvin, "wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory."[115] "Nothing in the whole world is more excellent, more noble, more beautiful, more useful, and more divine than the diversity of its many elements, the distinction and that order in which one is more noble than another and one depends on another, one is subject to another, and one receives obedience from another. Hence comes the adornment, beauty, and excellence of the

106. J. Biegler, *Die civitas Dei des heiligen Augustinus* (Paderborn: Junfermann, 1894).

107. Augustine, *De Gen. contra Manich.,* I, 21.

108. Augustine, *City of God,* XI, 10.

109. Ibid., XII, 2.

110. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta,* qu. 41; idem, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil,* I, 19; idem, *Literal Meaning of Genesis,* I, 9; II, 13; idem, *Confessions,* XII, 9; idem, *City of God,* XI, 33.

111. Augustine, *City of God,* XI, 15; cf. Konrad Scipio, *Des Aurelius Augustinus Metaphysik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1886), 31–80.

112. Athanasius, *Against the Arians,* II, 28, 48; idem, *Against the Heathen,* ch. 39.

113. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies;* idem, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies.*

114. T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.,* I, qu. 25, art. 6; idem, *Sent.,* II, dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 1.

115. J. Calvin, *Institutes,* I.v.1. Ed. note: The translation is that of F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I, 52.

whole world. Thence arise its many uses, usefulness, and benefits for us. Hence, the very goodness, glory, wisdom, and power of God shines forth and is revealed more brilliantly."[116] And for all of them the world is a theater, a "splendidly clear mirror of his divine glory."[117]

As a result of this worldview Christianity has overcome both the contempt of nature and its deification. In paganism a human being does not stand in the right relationship to God, and therefore not to the world either.[118] Similarly, in pantheism and materialism the relation of human beings to nature is fundamentally corrupted. One moment man considers himself infinitely superior to nature and believes that it no longer has any secrets for him. The next moment he experiences nature as a dark and mysterious power that he does not understand, whose riddles he cannot solve, and from whose power he cannot free himself. Intellectualism and mysticism alternate. Unbelief makes way for superstition, and materialism turns into occultism. But the Christian looks upward and confesses God as the Creator of heaven and earth. In nature and history he observes the unfathomability of the ways of God and the unsearchability of his judgments, but he does not despair, for all things are subject to the government of an omnipotent God and a gracious Father, and they will therefore work together for good to those who love God. Here, accordingly, there is room for love and admiration of nature, but all deification is excluded. Here a human being is placed in the right relation to the world because he has been put in the right relation to God. For that reason also creation is the fundamental dogma: throughout Scripture it is in the foreground and is the foundation stone on which the Old and New Covenants rest.

Finally, this doctrine rules out an egoistic theology and a false optimism. Certainly, there is an element of truth in the view that all things exist for the sake of man, or rather for the sake of humanity, the church of Christ (1 Cor. 3:21–23; Rom. 8:28). But that humanity has its ultimate purpose, along with all other creatures, in the glorification of God. To that end all things are subordinate. To that end all things, even sin and suffering, work together. And with a view to this end the world is functionally well organized. In scholasticism the question was sometimes asked whether God could make anything better than he actually made it. Abelard said no, because the goodness of God required that he always had to will the best, or else he would be selfish,[119] and Leibniz

116. J. Zanchi(us), *Op. theol.*, III, 45.

117. Cf. also Armin Reiche, *Die künsterlichen Element in der Welt-und Lebensanschauung des Gregor von Nyssa* (Jena: A. Kámpte, 1897), 221f.; Otto Gierke, *Johannes Althusius* (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1880), 60f.; T. Pesch, *Die grossen Welträthsel*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1892), I, 135f.; M. Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, II, 94f.; J. Heinrich and C. Gutberlet, *Dogmatik*, V, 173f.

118. R. Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 458: "The Hebrew man faces the world and nature in sovereign self-awareness. He has no fear of the world. But that posture is wedded to the strongest possible sense of responsibility. As God's deputy, but only as such, he is in charge of the world. He may not follow his own arbitrary impulses but only the revealed will of God. Paganism, on the other hand, oscillates between presumptuous misuse of the world and a childish terror before its powers."

119. P. Abelard, *Introduction to Theology*, III, ch. 5.

later reasoned along the same line. But in God we cannot posit any uncertainty or choice. He did not choose the best out of many possible worlds. His will is fixed from eternity. A creature as such can always be conceived as better, larger, or more beautiful than it actually is, because a creature is contingent and capable of development and improvement. And even the universe as a contingent entity can be conceived differently and better for us human beings. Thomas indeed said: "The universe cannot be better on account of the ideal order attributed to these things by God, in whom the good of the universe consists; if some one of these things were better, the proportion of the order would be ruined, just as when one string is overplayed, the melody of the cither is ruined." But he also added: "God could nevertheless make other things or add other things to the things that have been made, and that other universe would be better."[120] The nature of a creature is such that both in its "isness" and "suchness" it can only be thought as contingent. But to God this question does not exist. This world is good because it answers to the purpose he has set for it. It is neither the best nor the worst, but it is good because God called it so. It is good because it is serviceable, not to the individual human being, but to the revelation of God's perfections. And to the person who regards it so, it is also good, because it makes known to him the God whom to know is eternal life. Lactantius, accordingly, spoke truly when he said: "The world was made for this reason that we should be born. We are born, therefore, that we should know the Maker of the world and our God. We know Him that we may worship Him. We worship Him that we may gain immortality as a reward for our labors, since the worship of God rests on very great labors. Therefore, we are rewarded with immortality that, made like the angels, we may serve the Father and Lord Most High forever and be an everlasting kingdom for God. This is the sum of everything; this the secret of God; this the mystery of the world."[121]

120. T. Aquinas, *Summa theol.*, I, qu. 25, art. 6, ad. 3; cf. P. Lombard, *Sent.*, I, dist. 44; Bonaventure, *Sent.*, I, qu. 44, art. 1, qu. 1–3; Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments*, II, ch. 22; G. Voetius, *Select. disp.*, I, 553; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, III, 6, 11; J. H. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, VI, 21.

121. Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, VII, 6, trans. Mary Francis McDonald, Fathers of the Church 49 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1964), 488.