




RESEARCH ARTICLE

The body and the image of God in Bavinck and the Reformed orthodox

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Abstract

This article examines Herman Bavinck’s inclusion of the body in the image of God in comparison with the positions of Reformed orthodox theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It demonstrates that while it is uncommon for earlier figures to consider the body to be properly included within the image, Bavinck’s position is not unprecedented and applies lines of reasoning consistent with the tradition’s anthropological convictions. First, an embodied *imago Dei* is advanced by sources such as the *Leiden Synopsis* and Petrus van Mastricht. Second, the Reformed orthodox in general adhere to the conviction that human beings are a body–soul unity, and that the image of God includes the uprightness of the whole person, positions that lead to the body being related in some way to God’s image. Therefore, while Bavinck’s account of an embodied image is a unique contribution, it is nonetheless in continuity with the tradition he receives.

Keywords: Herman Bavinck; body; image of God; Reformed orthodoxy; theological anthropology

As recent scholarship in the field of theological anthropology has devoted attention to the essentiality of the body in the human person – be it in relation to the *imago Dei*, faculty psychology or human ontology – Herman Bavinck has often served as an important conversation partner.¹ His holistic anthropology, including his doctrine of an embodied image of God,² has influenced a number of scholarly voices within the

¹See, for instance, Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), pp. 55–78; Joshua R. Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), pp. 79–108; Joshua R. Farris, ‘A Substantive (Soul) Model of the *Imago Dei*’, in Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (eds), *The Ashgate Research Guide to Theological Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 165–78; Oliver Crisp, ‘A Christological Model of the *Imago Dei*’, in *The Ashgate Research Guide to Theological Anthropology*, pp. 217–32; Matthew A. Lapine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020); Seung-Goo Lee, ‘Calvin and Later Reformed Theologians on the Image of God’, *Unio Cum Christo* 2/1 (2016), pp. 135–47.

²This term is from Jessica Joustra, ‘An Embodied *Imago Dei*: How Herman Bavinck’s Understanding of the Image of God Can Help Inform Conversations on Race’, *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11 (2017), pp. 9–23.

tradition with regard to doctrinal, pastoral and cultural matters.³ What has largely been left out of such discussions, however, is an in-depth analysis of Bavinck's position in relation to earlier Reformed orthodox theologians in his insistence of the body's inclusion in the *imago Dei*. To be sure, some comparisons have been made between Bavinck and his predecessors in this position. Berkouwer, for example, finds in Bavinck evidence that the Reformed tradition has finally broken away from a longstanding dualistic understanding of the image of God.⁴ In more recent contributions, Sutanto draws lines of continuity between Bavinck and the *Leiden Synopsis*;⁵ and Joustra identifies in Bavinck's embodied image an important Reformed resource for engaging matters of race and diversity, while recognising Bavinck's own position departs from his later influences on the doctrine.⁶ This observation – that there is discontinuity between former theologians and Bavinck on the relationship between the body and the image – indicates that questions about the relationship between his model and his sources still remain.

In light of this state of affairs, this article argues that Bavinck's inclusion of the body within the *imago Dei* has precedents within his theological heritage from among the Reformed orthodox of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This will be demonstrated by highlighting two loci of continuity between Bavinck and his forbears. First, the doctrine of an embodied image of God is present in some Reformed scholastic sources, such as Petrus van Mastricht and the *Leiden Synopsis*. Second, Bavinck makes use of his tradition's holistic anthropology. His view of human nature as a psychosomatic unity, which is shared in general by the earlier Reformed orthodox, is a logical precondition for his inclusion of the whole person in the image. Related to this, Bavinck asserts human beings image God in their bodies insofar their members contribute to the ethical component of the image, an element which led earlier Reformed theologians to relate the body to the *imago Dei*. This article will first note the Reformed orthodox positions on the body and the image and human nature as a psychosomatic unity before attending to Bavinck's formulations in relation to that tradition.

The body and the *imago Dei* in the Reformed landscape

For many Reformed orthodox theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though the body is often said to be in some way related to the *imago Dei*, it is nonetheless excluded from the proper seat of the image.⁷ Instead, God's image is generally

³See, for instance, Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 65, 68–70; G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 76–7; Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Lapine, *The Logic of the Body*, p. 211; Joustra, 'An Embodied *Imago Dei*', pp. 9–23.

⁴Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, pp. 76–7.

⁵Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2024), p. 22.

⁶The influences Joustra names are Augustine and Calvin. Joustra, 'An Embodied *Imago Dei*', pp. 14–15. In distinction from Joustra, Ziegler posits that Bavinck's embodied account of the image of God is a summary of traditional Reformed teaching, of which Calvin is a representative. Philip Ziegler, "'Those He Also Glorified': Some Reformed Perspectives on Human Nature and Destiny", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32 (2019), p. 168.

⁷On this position, in addition to those discussed below, see also John Weemes, *The Portraiture of the Image of God in Man*, 3rd edn (London: T.C. for John Bellamie, 1636), p. 64.

identified with the spiritual and rational nature of the soul,⁸ together with its natural righteousness and holiness.⁹ Opponents for these authors in their argumentation include the Lutheran theologian Osiander, who believed humans bear the image of the pre-incarnate Christ,¹⁰ and the Anthropomorphites, who taught that God has a body.¹¹ Their rejection of the latter error is indicative of a prominent concern of the Reformed orthodox understanding of the body's relationship to the *imago Dei*. For them, it is dubious that something corporeal might formally image an incorporeal God. Peter Martyr Vermigli articulates this view simply: 'This image is not properly meant in relation to the body, since God is not corporeal.'¹² John Calvin likewise insists on the image's incorporeal nature. Even though he concedes the body may indeed bear witness to the *imago Dei*, he nevertheless says this can only be said 'provided it be regarded as a settled principle that the image of God, which is seen or glows in these outward marks, is spiritual'.¹³ Zacharias Ursinus, though not addressing the relation of the body to the image in this context, also privileges the 'spiritual and immortal nature of the soul' as the image's substance.¹⁴

Later Reformed scholastics reason along similar lines. Wilhelmus à Brakel, for instance, argues that the image can cohere in the soul alone since God is a Spirit.¹⁵ Francis Turretin likewise opposes the body's formal inclusion within the image of God and refutes a potential objection by reasoning,

If human members are attributed to God in the Scriptures, it does not follow that the image is to be placed properly in these, since they are ascribed to him after the

⁸A comment from Helm reads, 'According to the unanimous verdict of the Reformed theologians of this era, to possess an intellect is to possess the image of God.' Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards*, p. 79.

⁹One taxonomy amongst the Reformed orthodox explicates the image *antecedently* in the soul's spirituality and rationality, *formally* in its righteousness and holiness, and *consequently* in immortality and the exercise of dominion. See, for instance, Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), pp. 56–7; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service: In Which Divine Truths Concerning the Covenant of Grace Are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and Their Practice Advocated, as Well as the Administration of This Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*, trans. Bartel Elshout (Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), pp. 323–5; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* [hereafter *IET*], vol. 1, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), pp. 465–6.

¹⁰See for instance John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), I.xv.3; Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard, 2nd American edn (Columbus, OH: Scott & Bascom Printers, 1852), p. 30.

¹¹Francis Turretin, *IET* 1, pp. 465–6.

¹²Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*, ed. and trans. Joseph C. McLelland (Landrum, SC: The Davenant Institute Press, 2018), p. 40.

¹³Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xv.3. To be sure, there are a variety of interpretations of Calvin's position. Some, most notably Van Vliet, read him as including the body in the image. Jason Van Vliet, *Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p. 248. See also Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, p. 42.

¹⁴Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 30. Along with Calvin, Ursinus is a target of criticism from Berkouwer for his failure to include the body in the image. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, pp. 76–7.

¹⁵À Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, p. 323.

manner of men (*anthropopathōs*) and must be understood in a manner becoming God (*theoprepōs*) not formally and properly, but figuratively and analogically.¹⁶

For Turretin, in other words, anthropomorphic language in Scripture is no license to locate the image of God in the body.

While many of the Reformed orthodox of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in this way deny that human beings image God in their bodies in the proper sense, this understanding is not unanimous. Two notable seventeenth-century sources explicitly locate the image of God in the body.¹⁷ The first is *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (*Leiden Synopsis*) which argues that ‘the whole man in both soul and body “is created in the image of God and according to his likeness”’.¹⁸ This is so because the whole person as originally made in perfect uprightness held a ‘closer approximation to God [*propriorem ad Deum accessum*]’.¹⁹ Human nature was composed in such a way that its entirety was ordered to immortality and conformity to God’s will. In the intellect, humanity was made with outstanding knowledge, in the will, freedom from sin, in the affections, compliance with the intellect and will, in the body, with ‘upright and wholesome actions [*rectae sanctaeque actiones*]’.²⁰ For the *Synopsis*, the whole human being was made to image God in ‘wisdom, holiness, and justice’,²¹ something to which both body and soul contributed. As such, both body and soul are included in the *imago Dei*.

The second source is van Mastricht, who interprets the image of God as a ‘conformity of man whereby he in measure reflects the highest perfection of God’.²² This conformity is found in the whole essence of humanity in both body and soul, even if the soul does so more perfectly.²³ Addressing the objection that something corporeal cannot image an incorporeal God, van Mastricht qualifies that the body is part of the *imago Dei* ‘not in the material crassness of our members, but in their formal perfection’,²⁴ in which the highest virtues of God are eminently obtained in the body.²⁵ He

¹⁶Turretin, *IET* 1, pp. 465–6.

¹⁷Bucanus is another figure who includes the body in the image of God, writing that the image ‘hath not only being in the soule, but also in the body’ and that ‘the image of God was not in the soule alone, or the bodie alone, but in the whole man’. William Bucanus, *Institutions of Christian Religion* (London: George and Leonell Snowdon and R. Field, 1606), p. 100. For commentary on this, see Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology & the Creation Covenant*, rev. edn (Lansvale: Tulip Publishing, 2019), p. 112n3. See also William Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), p. 106; and the sources cited in Lee, ‘Calvin and Later Reformed Theologians on the Image of God’, p. 144n65.

¹⁸*Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation*, vol. 1, ed. Dolf te Velde, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 13.36.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 13.37.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13.38.

²¹*Ibid.*, 13.42.

²²Petrus Van Mastricht, *The Works of God and the Fall of Man*, vol. 3 of *Theoretical-Practical Theology* [hereafter *TPT*], ed. Joel Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), p. 285.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 285–6.

²⁴*Non sane in membrorum nostrarum materiali crassitie; sed in formali eorundem perfectione.* Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia: qua, per singula capita theologica, pars exegetica, elenctica et practica, perpetua successione conjugantur*, vol. 1 (Ex officina Thomae Appels, 1699), p. 379, emphasis original; cf. *TPT* 3, p. 285.

²⁵Van Mastricht, *TPT* 3, p. 285.

adds that the operations of the body – such as seeing and hearing – display what belongs to God infinitely and simply.²⁶ In short, van Mastricht sees the entirety of human nature as reflecting in an analogical way God's perfections such that the whole of human essence is the *imago Dei*.²⁷ To summarise, while many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox theologians exclude the body from the proper seat of the image of God, this position is nonetheless present. Bavinck's own doctrine of the embodied image, then, is not without precedent in his tradition.

Not far from the image: the whole person and the Reformed orthodox

The Reformed orthodox, while generally wary of an embodied image of God, are more explicitly holistic in their approach to human nature as a whole.²⁸ Their widespread affirmation of the human person as a psychosomatic unity means the body is rarely, if ever, entirely discarded from the *imago Dei* and thus helps trace lines of reasoning that are also present in Bavinck's own doctrine.

Among the Reformed orthodox, though there exist differences of opinion on the way in which the body and soul operate and relate to each other, there is widespread unity in the view that they together constitute human nature.²⁹ One example of this is John Owen, who draws attention to the natural, intimate union of body and soul in human nature to highlight just how strong our desire to behold the glory of Christ must be in order to yearn to depart from the body to be with the Lord (cf. Phil 1:23).³⁰ Ursinus says God made soul and body 'to constitute, by this union, one person',³¹ while Herman Witsius points to the resurrection of the body to stress the essential unity of body and soul in the essence of humanity.³² Turretin reasons in the inverse direction, presupposing human nature's body-soul unity to infer the necessity of a bodily resurrection.³³ Calvin also, despite his comment that the body is the soul's 'prison house',³⁴ nevertheless asserts, 'that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be

²⁶Ibid., pp. 285–6.

²⁷Ibid., p. 286.

²⁸On the question of the 'holistic' anthropology of the Reformed orthodox, Cooper's definition of holism is useful: 'Holism...affirms the functional unity of some entity in its totality, the integration and interrelation of all the parts in the existence and proper orientation of the whole. It views an entity as a single primary functional system, not as a compound system constructed by linking two or more primary functional systems. It recognizes entities as phenomenological and existential unities.' John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Dualism-Monism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 45. In other words, by this definition the varying understandings of the body-soul relationship and even the seeming devaluation of the body (in some) need not discount the Reformed orthodox anthropology, broadly conceived, as being functionally holistic. Cooper clarifies that there are two levels to the issue: 'One is the functional holism and phenomenological unity of personal-bodily existence. The other is how that holistic unity is brought about. There is nothing about a contemporary Cartesian mind-brain dualism which would preclude the functional holism of life as I and my psychologist experience it.' Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, p. 212.

²⁹See Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards*, pp. 55–78.

³⁰John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, vol. 1 of *The Works of John Owen*, eds William H. Goold and Charles W. Quick (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), p. 282–3.

³¹Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 28.

³²Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on What Is Commonly Called the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Donald Fraser (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1993), p. 422.

³³Turretin, *IET* 1, p. 483.

³⁴Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xv.2.

beyond controversy'.³⁵ Hence, though there is reluctance to place the body within the image of God proper, and though there is a diversity of views on body–soul relations, Reformed orthodox theologians are in widespread agreement on the psychosomatic composition of human nature.

This understanding often leads to the affirmation of some relation between the body and the image of God. Vermigli aptly encapsulates the Reformed orthodox understanding of the body's relation to the *imago Dei* when he asserts, 'the body is not far from the likeness of God'.³⁶ Indeed, on account of these theologians' understanding of human nature as a psychosomatic unity, the body is rarely, if ever, totally unrelated to the image of God. Reformed expositions of the substance of the *imago Dei* often maintain that, even if the body is not properly located within the image, it may be tangentially yet significantly related. For Turretin, the image of God shines forth in the body not formally but consequentially, that is, as its effect.³⁷ Witsius says similarly that 'the lustre of that image' adorns 'even [the human being's] very body'.³⁸ For Matthias Martinius, though the image of God is primarily located in the soul, it is also located in the body 'in a secondary sort of way'.³⁹ Whether the image glows in the body as its rays, the body is a consequence of the image or the body is secondarily included in the image, the Reformed orthodox understanding of human nature as a psychosomatic unity often led to some sort of relation between the body and the *imago Dei*.

These instincts also implicate the body in the *imago Dei* by virtue of the dimension of righteous conformity inherent in the image. For the Reformed orthodox, because the image is so tightly interwoven with original righteousness,⁴⁰ talk of uprightness and holiness in relation to humanity in the image of God is ubiquitous.⁴¹ Indeed, while the spiritual substance of the soul may serve as the seat of the *imago Dei*, its form or content is frequently construed as the rectitude corresponding to original righteousness.⁴² Moreover, the Reformed orthodox at times depict the image of God as the uprightness of the *whole human being*, implicating the body in addition to the soul. Ursinus is representative of this view, arguing that a component of the image is 'the purity and integrity of the whole man'.⁴³ The Canons of Dort reason similarly, saying that the whole person made in God's image was originally upright and holy in all things.⁴⁴ In other words, for these theologians the body contributes to and is therefore implicated in the image of God insofar as the body is included in the whole human being's conformity in righteous obedience to the will of God. Hence, once again, the body is 'not far from the image' according to the Reformed orthodox.

³⁵Ibid., I.xv.2.

³⁶Vermigli, *Philosophical Works*, p. 44.

³⁷Turretin, *IET* 1, p. 465.

³⁸Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, p. 57.

³⁹Matthias Martinius, *De Creatione Mundi Commentariolus* (Brema: Apud Johannem Wesselium, 1613), p. 97; quoted in Heinrich Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, rev. and ed. E. Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), p. 237.

⁴⁰Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics* [hereafter *RD*], ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 553–40.

⁴¹See, for instance, The Heidelberg Catechism, 3.6. Key biblical texts for this reasoning are Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24.

⁴²See, for instance, À Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, pp. 323–5; Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, pp. 56–7; Turretin, *IET* 1, pp. 465–6.

⁴³Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 30.

⁴⁴Canons of Dort, III/IV.1; <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort>.

Up to this point, it has been shown that the body's proper inclusion within the image of God is uncommon but not altogether absent in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox. Further, their holistic understanding of human nature as a psychosomatic unity implicates the body in the image in various ways, including as its consequence or by virtue of its contribution to the rectitude of the whole person. Therefore, Bavinck's embodied image, to which the article now turns, has some precedents within his tradition through the figures that fully include the body in the *imago Dei*, the holistic human nature in Reformed orthodox formulations and the implications of human nature being a psychosomatic unity.

Bavinck, the body and the Reformed tradition

For Bavinck, 'the whole human person is the image of the whole Deity'.⁴⁵ In his conception, no perfection in God and no part of human nature is left out of the image; the whole person as a body-soul unity images the triune God.⁴⁶ To understand this distinction in relation to earlier Reformed orthodox conceptions, this article will compare his doctrine of the image of God with those of the *Leiden Synopsis* and van Mastricht before demonstrating how his account of human nature as a psychosomatic unity, which contains consistencies with the Reformed orthodox more generally, contributes to his doctrine of the embodied image. In making historical comparisons, however, it should be noted that perhaps the most direct influence on his understanding of the *imago Dei* is his own system of thought. Indeed, the inclusion of the body in the image of God is a consistent application of his organic motif, the idea that all of created reality in its manifold components constitutes a unity-in-diversity as a reflection of the triune God.⁴⁷ Further, it is worth noting as we relate Bavinck's position to his tradition that his citations throughout his discussion of the aspects of the *imago Dei* in *Reformed Dogmatics* give little indication as to his direct influences in including the body in the image. At the conclusion of his discourse on the embodied image, he does cite a handful of sources from various traditions, but they are of differing opinions on the body and the image of God.⁴⁸ This list includes the *Leiden Synopsis* and van Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, which are discussed below.

First, of the Reformed orthodox, Bavinck's doctrine of an embodied image of God is in most direct continuity with the *Leiden Synopsis* and van Mastricht, given their explicit inclusion of the body in the image. With regard to the former, it should be noted that Bavinck edited an edition of the *Synopsis* during his pastorate and was openly influenced by the work as a whole.⁴⁹ While remaining modest on claims about the decisive influence on his doctrine of the image in particular, commonalities with the *Synopsis*

⁴⁵Bavinck, *RD* 2, pp. 533, 554.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 532–3, 555.

⁴⁷This motif is explicated in James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Biblical and Religious Psychology*, ed. Gregory Parker Jr., trans. Herman Hanko and Gregory Parker Jr. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2024), p. 84; Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, eds and trans. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton and Cory Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), pp. 67, 72; Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, p. 130.

⁴⁸Bavinck, *RD* 2, p. 560n79.

⁴⁹Hank van den Belt and Mathilde de Vries-van Uden, 'Herman Bavinck's Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*', *The Bavinck Review* 8 (2017), pp. 105–6; *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, ed. Herman Bavinck (Leiden: Donner, 1881). For further commentary, see Cameron D. Clausing, *Theology and*

can still be observed. On human ontology for instance, Bavinck, like the Leiden divines, makes a similar soul–spirit distinction,⁵⁰ maintains the intellect and will as the two faculties of the soul⁵¹ and asserts the soul as the ‘life-principle [*levensbeginsel*]’ of the body.⁵² On the image of God, Bavinck not only is consistent with the *Synopsis* on including the body, but also in linking immortality,⁵³ dominion⁵⁴ and humanity’s estate in paradise with the image.⁵⁵

In defence of the body’s inclusion in the *imago Dei*, Bavinck is also in clear continuity with van Mastricht. One similarity is found with regards to qualifications to the body’s inclusion. Like van Mastricht, Bavinck asserts that though the body is included, the image of God nevertheless is more evident in the soul.⁵⁶ There are also a couple of arguments where van Mastricht’s influence on Bavinck is clear. In one defence, Bavinck says like van Mastricht that the body images God ‘in its formal perfection [*perfectio formalis*], not in its material substance as flesh’.⁵⁷ In *The Wonderful Works of God*, Bavinck applies another argument from van Mastricht in saying that the body can be said to image God because Scripture applies our embodied activity to God in an anthropomorphic way. Van Mastricht writes, ‘For this reason most of our members are asserted throughout Scripture for God: face, eyes, hands, heart, feet, and so forth. For the eyes’ faculty of seeing, the ears’ of hearing, the hands’ of operating, without any imperfection, and with the highest eminence of perfection, altogether belong to God’ (Ps 94:9).⁵⁸ Bavinck writes likewise:

Hence all those activities which we accomplish by means of the body, and even the physical organs by which we accomplish them, can be ascribed to God. Scripture speaks of his hands and feet, of his eyes and ears, and of so much more, in order to indicate that all that man can achieve by way of the body is, in an original and perfect way, due to God. He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? (Psalm 94:9)⁵⁹

While Bavinck does not directly cite van Mastricht in these texts, he does reference him when making these same two arguments in an unpublished manuscript from 1884, ‘De

History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck: Revelation, Confession, and Christian Consciousness (Oxford: OUP, 2024), pp. 147–57.

⁵⁰Bavinck, *RD 2*, p. 556; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.32.

⁵¹Bavinck, *RD 2*, pp. 556–7; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.32.

⁵²Herman Bavinck, *Beginselen der psychologie* [hereafter *BP*], 2nd edn (Kampen: Kok, 1923), p. 165; Herman Bavinck, ‘Foundations of Psychology’ [hereafter *FP*], ed. John Bolt, trans. Jack Vanden Born, Nelson Kloosterman and John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 9 (2018), p. 225; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.24. These commonalities are observed in Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, p. 22.

⁵³Bavinck, *RD 2*, p. 560; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.39.

⁵⁴Bavinck, *RD 2*, pp. 560–1; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.41.

⁵⁵Bavinck, *RD 2*, p. 561; cf. *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 13.44. This link in Bavinck is more explicit than in the *Synopsis*.

⁵⁶Bavinck, *RD 2*, p. 555; cf. Van Mastricht, *TPT 3*, pp. 285–6.

⁵⁷*Het menschelijk lichaam maakt niet in zijne stoffelijke substantie, als ααρξ, maar wel...in zijne perfectio formalis, deel uit van het beeld Gods.* Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* [hereafter *GD*], deel 2, 3e druk (Kampen: Kok, 1918), p. 602; Bavinck, *RD 2*, p. 560; cf. Herman Bavinck, *The Duties of the Christian Life*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Ethics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), p. 166; Van Mastricht, *TPT 3*, p. 285.

⁵⁸Van Mastricht, *TPT 3*, p. 285.

⁵⁹Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), pp. 194–5.

mensch, Gods evenbeeld'.⁶⁰ It is thus evident that in these particular defences of an embodied *imago Dei*, Bavinck draws from the resources of his Dutch Reformed predecessor. In short, Bavinck's reasoning regarding an embodied image of God contains a number of resonances with the *Leiden Synopsis*, while others are specifically drawn from Van Mastricht.

Second, with regard to his Reformed predecessors more broadly, Bavinck's similar holistic account of human ontology – that is, his view that both body and soul are essential to human nature – is important for his holistic account of the image of God. While he includes in full what his theological forbears often only did tangentially, he remains in continuity with his tradition on the psychosomatic unity of human nature and uses this point to inform his doctrine of the *imago Dei*. What constitutes the whole person logically precedes what constitutes the image. For him, body and soul 'are most closely related, most intimately connected, by nature and from the very first moment intended for each other and uniquely designed for each other. In a certain sense, they have flowed together to constitute a third nature, which we call human nature.'⁶¹ Because of this, 'The person as soul cannot be outside of the body. This applies to his essence as well and, thus, to the image of God.'⁶² In these lines of reasoning, Bavinck not only clearly sets himself in contrast with dualistic conceptions of human nature, but also reasons from human nature to the image.⁶³ If human essence just *is* to be God's image, then what constitutes human essence constitutes the image of God.⁶⁴ Bavinck therefore takes a position that is consistent with earlier Reformed thought – namely, that human nature is a psychosomatic unity – to reason toward including the body within the image of God. Yet while his predecessors tended to go only so far as to say the body bears witness to the *imago Dei* as its rays or sparks, Bavinck goes one step further to say that insofar as the human being is a body–soul composite, both body and soul together are properly the image of God.

One point at which this relationship can be explored in more detail is in the way the body is implicated in the image's dimension of the uprightness of the whole person. Like the Reformed orthodox before him, Bavinck maintains the holiness that corresponds to original righteousness as integral to the image of God.⁶⁵ Though not going as far as Lutheran theologians in locating the *imago Dei* completely in original righteousness,⁶⁶ Bavinck still upholds the image's component of moral rectitude that is lost in sin but restored in Christ.⁶⁷ In short, for Bavinck, like his Reformed predecessors, the *imago Dei* contains a component of moral uprightness by which the whole person

⁶⁰Herman Bavinck, 'Manuscript "De mensch, Gods evenbeeld"', (1884), inv.nr. 102 // Manuscripten met titel. Archief van Herman Bavinck, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. https://sources.neocalvinism.org/herman-bavinck-archive/?tp=1&id_series=106. I am grateful to Jennifer Patterson for providing a transcription of this manuscript.

⁶¹Bavinck, *FP*, p. 48.

⁶²*Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁶³'Dualistic' here is meant in the sense that the substances of body and soul are pitted against each other, or that only one is deemed essential to human nature.

⁶⁴Bavinck, *RD* 2, p. 530.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 553–4.

⁶⁶See, for instance, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, II (I): 'Of Original Sin'; The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, I.10–11; Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, Part I, vol. 7 of *Chemnitz's Works*, trans. Jacob O. C. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia House Publishing, 2008), p. 510.

⁶⁷Bavinck, *RD* 2, p. 550. This distinguishes what he refers to as the image in the broad and narrow sense Bavinck, *RD* 2, pp. 553–4.

reflects the holiness of God. This understanding helps inform his embodied image by way of his explication of the relationship between body and soul, to which this article now turns.

The soul, Bavinck argues, ‘must, by virtue of its nature, inhabit a body.’⁶⁸ It is ‘the life-principle [*levensbeginsel*] of the body, and from the outset maintains and moves it.’⁶⁹ It is ‘the form, the moving power, the foundation of the body; and the body is the matter, the material, and possibility of the soul.’⁷⁰ The body, meanwhile, is ‘an organ or instrument of service’,⁷¹ organised as an ‘instrument of the soul’.⁷² Sutanto observes that though this language may seem instrumentalist, Bavinck insists that body and soul exist in a reciprocal relationship with each other.⁷³ Though this body–soul union is mysterious, it is also ‘so intimate that one nature, one person, one self [*ik*] is the subject of both and all their activities. It is always the same soul that peers through the eyes, thinks through the brain, grasps with the hands, and walks with the feet.’⁷⁴ In other words, the unity of body and soul means a person’s thinking, willing and acting is inescapably embodied activity. These are all performed by the person as a body–soul unity.⁷⁵

For Bavinck, then, the righteous component of the image of God is necessarily an embodied righteousness. Discussing the body as part of the image of God, Bavinck says that it ‘is our earthly dwelling (2 Cor 5:1), our organ or instrument of service, our apparatus (1 Cor 12:18–26; 2 Cor 4:7; 1 Thess 4:4); and our “members” of the body are the weapons with which we fight in the cause of righteousness or unrighteousness (Rom 6:13).’⁷⁶ Yet the body contributes to the person’s righteousness not only through the performance of physical acts, but also through the activity of the intellect and will since ‘all [human] activities are bound to the body and dependent on it, not just the vegetative and animal [*vegetatieve en animale*] functions but also the intellectual ones of thinking and willing [*denken en willen*].’⁷⁷ Emotions, also, in accord with the reciprocal relationship between body and soul, are not one-directional but are affected by the body.⁷⁸ Thus, the righteousness of the whole person, which is inherent to the image of God, is very much an embodied righteousness. Like his Reformed predecessors, Bavinck’s holistic account of human nature implicates the body in the image of God by virtue of the component of the uprightness of the whole person. For Bavinck, though, the way in which body and soul operate together – such that the person necessarily thinks, wills and acts as a body–soul unity – means this a psychosomatic rectitude. Hence, he makes use of his tradition’s sentiments regarding human nature

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 559.

⁶⁹Bavinck, *BP*, p. 165; Bavinck, *FP*, p. 225.

⁷⁰*De ziel is de vorm, de bewegende kracht, het beginsel van het lichaam, en het lichaam is de stof, de materie, de mogelijkheid der ziel.* Bavinck, *BP*, p. 42; Bavinck, *FP*, p. 49.

⁷¹Bavinck, *RD* 2, p. 559.

⁷²Ibid., p. 560.

⁷³Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, p. 12; Bavinck, *FP*, pp. 48, 214. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, eds. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018), p. 175; Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *RD*, p. 94; Joustra, ‘An Embodied *Imago Dei*’, pp. 16–17.

⁷⁴Bavinck, *GD* 2, p. 601; *RD* 2, p. 559.

⁷⁵Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, p. 12.

⁷⁶Bavinck, *RD* 2, p. 559.

⁷⁷Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, deel 4, 2e druk (Kampen: Kok, 1911), p. 677; *RD* 4, p. 616.

⁷⁸Bavinck, *FP*, p. 214.

and the righteousness of the whole person yet goes one step further in affirming an image of God that is fully embodied.

Conclusion

This article has outlined loci of continuity between Bavinck and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox theologians on the question of the body and the image of God. First, van Mastricht and the *Leiden Synopsis* give Bavinck's position historical precedent, and his reasoning is resonant with these sources. Second, the broader Reformed tradition's view of human nature as a psychosomatic unity informs Bavinck's doctrine of the embodied *imago Dei*. It does so in that for Bavinck what is proper to human nature is proper to the image of God. Bavinck also makes use of this aspect in Reformed orthodox anthropology by combining the tradition's emphasis on righteousness as part of the image along with his view of body–soul relations, such that the whole person's rectitude is necessarily embodied. Hence, while Bavinck develops the tradition in his articulation of the body's inclusion in the image God, he does so in a way that is consonant with certain strands of Reformed orthodoxy.

Indeed, it is worth clarifying by way of conclusion that Bavinck's construal of the embodied image of God is not simply a repackaging of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the image, but is a unique contribution to and from within the tradition. This article has noted lines of commonality that Bavinck shares with his forbears on this topic, yet one must also remember that this dogmatic reasoning occurs, as is noted above, within the context of his own unique theological framework and put forth in the context of his unique historical milieu. Such is the nature of his writings on theological anthropology more broadly. For instance, Bavinck makes use of the theory of the unconscious – a popular topic amongst philosophers and psychologists during his era of modernity – to put forth a theological account of human nature. Bavinck's use of these developments is a modern contribution to the anthropology of his theological heritage, yet it still maintains resonances with the Reformed and broader Christian tradition. He argues in his essay, 'The Unconscious', that this aspect of human nature is not a completely new discovery: 'the old [Christian-Aristotelian] psychology, though it never spoke of the unconscious, understood the matter thoroughly, at least in principle'.⁷⁹ He adds later that this modern theory of the unconscious is, in fact, 'a recovery of the old theory of the soul'.⁸⁰ In other words, Bavinck presents his understanding and use of the unconscious as a return to or unfolding of latent aspects of older formulations of theological psychology. This helps demonstrate that his contributions to anthropology more broadly are genuine developments advanced in continuity with his tradition. Such is the way we should think of his approach to the topic of concern of the present article:

⁷⁹The full quote reads: 'When one also considers [Protestant and Catholic] Scholasticism considered the soul to be a God-created, spiritual entity, which brought with it from the beginning all sorts of powers, (innate) habits, and gifts and was able through education and nurture to gain all kinds of acquired habits – then this provides sufficient proof that the old psychology, though it never spoke of the unconscious, understood the matter thoroughly, at least in principle.' Herman Bavinck, 'The Unconscious', in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 181.

⁸⁰The full quote reads: 'The theory of the unconscious that has gained such prominence in psychology of late is proof that the "psychology without a soul" is untenable, and in this respect is a recovery of the old theory of the soul, according to which soul and consciousness are distinct and consciousness is not the essence of the soul but a property.' *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Bavinck's inclusion of the body within the image of God, along with various lines of reasoning toward this conclusion, has precedents within the Reformed orthodox tradition. At the same time, his exposition of the doctrine is not a repackaging of what came before him, but a unique contribution to the topic.

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