

“Everything or Nothing”: The Covenant Theology of Klaas Schilder
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appreciation.....	
Table of Contents.....	
Justification	
Chapter 1	<u>Dr. Klaas Schilder (1890-1952): Reformed Theologian.....</u>
1.1	The route from Kampen to Kampen
1.2	Polemical pen-warrior.....
1.3	Leader in the Liberation.....
1.4	“Everything or nothing”: The unique feature of a theologian and his theology.....
1.5	Covenant theologian?.....
Chapter 2	<u>The History of the Covenant.....</u>
2.1	Accent on the history and the unity of the covenant.....
2.2	The covenant of works and the covenant of grace.....
2.3	The old covenant and the new covenant
2.4	The covenant and the counsel of peace.....
Chapter 3	<u>The Structure of the Covenant.....</u>
3.1	A bilateral relationship.....
3.2	The forensic character of the covenant
3.3	The constitutive components of the covenant.....
3.4	Illustrated in connection with baptism.....
Chapter 4	<u>The Significance of Schilder’s Contribution regarding the Covenant.....</u>
4.1	Schilder’s unique contribution.....
4.2	The decree and the activity of God
4.3	Continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.....
4.4	Continuity between the old covenant and the new covenant
4.5	God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.....
4.6	Justice and fellowship
4.7	Promise and demand
4.8	Continuing significance
Summary	
Bibliography	

JUSTIFICATION

An Afrikaner undertaking to write on a subject as thoroughly Dutch as “K. Schilder on the covenant” must be able to explain his choice. Therefore we begin with a “justification” rather than the usual introduction. Besides, the first chapter is also of an introductory nature, for there we will discuss extensively the biographical and church historical background of the subject at hand.

Various considerations have led to choosing this topic.

Already as a young student I enjoyed the privilege of becoming acquainted with the ideas of Professor Dr. K. Schilder. Our professor in Reformational philosophy at the University of Orange Free State, the late Professor Dr. P. de B. Kock, was familiar with Schilder's publications and had deep appreciation for them.¹ During this period it was especially the sermons of Dr. Kock (he was also minister of the Word in the Dutch Reformed Church) and his brother, Rev. F. A. Kock,² that invigorated me because they were “different” from the usual sermons. Later I would discover that this was typical “redemptive-historical” preaching! Only after I became a minister did the opportunity arise to undertake a substantive study of the theology of Schilder. For this undertaking, Dr. C. van der Waal, who served as minister of the Free Reformed Church in Pretoria before he passed away, provided wonderful assistance with his encouragement and with his comprehensive knowledge of the background of this somewhat “foreign” (to me at this stage) Reformed thought world.

¹ In 1965, when I was a first-year student, Dr. Kock gave an address on the covenant for the Dutch Reformed Admission Society at the University of Orange Free State. At that time it was published under the title, “For you and for your children,” in *Tussen ons*, the magazine of the Admission Society. Later it was published, together with comments by Dr. C. van der Waal, in *De Reformatie* 43 (17 and 24 February 1968), with the title “Die pluimsaad waai ver. . . I en II.” In this address, the covenant views of Kuyper and Schilder were contrasted, and the speaker chose for the view of the latter. In his *Christelike wysbegeerte. Inleiding* (1975), pp. 30-43, Kock provided an excursus dealing with the covenant problematic, where he discussed the distinction between “religion” and “faith.” There he referred explicitly to Schilder.

² Cf. this remarkable formulation that he supplied in an article entitled, “Ons tussenkerklike verhoudinge,” in *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* 26 (1957): 19-25: “I believe that I am warranted in arguing, on the basis of a study of the developments and directions within Reformed theology in the Netherlands in the recent past, that the theological direction of De Kock [sic, S.A.S.] and Kampen today find their logical continuation in the so-called Liberated churches or Schilder group, but the Reformed Church in South Africa desires to know nothing about this and refuses to believe any good about it!”

Gradually it dawned on me that this interest in Schilder and the Liberation³ was not as strange as it seemed at first glance. For until 1944 we in the Dutch Reformed Church had maintained close ties with the yet-undivided Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, although thereafter we maintained official ecclesiastical and theological contacts with only the “synodical” (that is to say, the non-Liberated) Reformed Churches.⁴ So I had to retrace a bit of history in order to pick up once more the broken ties with people like Schilder. Moreover, I gradually discovered that two streams can be distinguished within the Reformed church history of the Netherlands during the first half of the twentieth century, often abbreviated as “old A” (coming from the 1834 Secession) and “old B” (coming from the 1886 Doleantie). In theological contexts, these two directions are usually referred to as “Kampen” (with its theological school) and “Amsterdam” (with its Free University). Because the theological influence of “Amsterdam” is stronger among us than that of “Kampen,” it was especially Schilder's use of the starting points associated with “old A” that severely perplexed me initially. Quite honestly, I was unaware of this critique of Abraham Kuyper! But later I sensed that this variant of Reformed theology in the Netherlands did not need to be so foreign to us. It is interesting to know that the Dutch Reformed Church maintained correspondence with the churches of the “old A” position in the nineteenth century.⁵ Through Schilder I came into contact with a neglected part of my own Reformed background.

Beside this historical tie there is also the confessional tie that binds us to Reformed churches in the Netherlands.⁶ This brings with it the fact that we will never be able to separate ourselves entirely from the Netherlands—not even in a time when official ecclesiastical (and political) ties are broken. Nor when the once-reliable Netherlands contacts (for example, those with the Free University) embarrass us not only politically, but also confessionally! It is true that

³ This term refers to the 1944 church split among the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

⁴ Cf. B. J. Odendaal, *Die kerklike betrekkinge tussen Suid-Afrika en Nederland 1652-1952*, pp. 234ff., for the correspondence between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands from 1892-1952. The reason why the ties with the “Liberated churches” were summarily broken after the war does not become clear from Odendaal's investigation.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 226ff., for the correspondence between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Christian (Seceded) Reformed Church from 1852-1869. On p. 234 Odendaal wrote: “Nowhere in the Acts of Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church does there appear anything pointing to the discontinuing of correspondence” with these churches. This fact is all the more remarkable because the Reformed Church in South Africa (born from the 1834 Secession in the Netherlands) had separated from the Dutch Reformed Church already in 1859.

⁶ The three South African churches (Ned. Geref., Geref., and Nederduitsch Hervormd) fully subscribe, even as most Reformed churches in the Netherlands, to the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

our confessional ties with especially the Free University extend deeply and widely.⁷ With all due appreciation for what this institution has meant for us in the past, it must nevertheless be noted that its current “renewing” change of course has occasioned an ever widening chasm between it and us.⁸ In view of the fact that we can no longer orient ourselves simply to this type of Reformed theology in the Netherlands, it is natural that our sights must turn to other theological institutions in the Netherlands. Put another way: Our theological positions (especially in dogmatics) were in the past tied with an umbilical cord, as it were, to the Free University, so much so that now in the light of the changes occurring there, one must ask honestly: Were there not perhaps weak points in this dogmatics after 1920 that could have occasioned the change in course after 1960? To answer this question we must at least take a look at the great opponent of the Amsterdam dogmatician of that time, Professor V. Hepp. This opponent was Professor K. Schilder. In addition, even after 1940, when Professor G. C. Berkouwer began to teach dogmatics at the Free University, it was once again Professor K. Schilder who figured prominently in a certain sense as the counterpoint in the Reformed Churches.⁹ Anyone seeking to practice the discipline of contemporary dogmatics in a responsible manner cannot ignore the Netherlands, and therefore also Schilder.

This brings us directly to yet another motivation for this investigation of the covenant in the theology of K. Schilder. One need say hardly a word about the importance of the doctrine of the covenant as such for Reformed dogmatics. This is obvious, and fortunately is recognized everywhere in our land. But when one investigates the (valuable) studies undertaken among us in this connection, one is struck by the reality that the position of Schilder and his associates has occasionally been entirely silenced, and in any case has rarely received adequate consideration with a view to arriving at an independent evaluation of his views.¹⁰ This gives evidence of an

⁷ One need only to compare the names of the following well-known Dutch Reformed professors in dogmatics who all received their doctoral degrees from the Free University (listed in chronological order): B. B. Keet (1914, under the direction of H. Bavinck); A. B. du Preez (1933, under the direction of Professor V. Hepp); F. J. M. Potgieter (1939, under the direction of Professor V. Hepp); J. A. Heyns (1953, under the direction of Professor G. C. Berkouwer); and W. D. Jonker (1955, under the direction of Professor G. C. Berkouwer). The same applies to the other theological disciplines as well.

⁸ Cf. for a well-considered and balanced position regarding this “renewing,” J. A. Heyns, *Die huidige stand van die gereformeerde teologie in Nederland en ons verantwoordelikheid* (1971).

⁹ Berkouwer was, among other things, the president of the synod that in 1944 deposed Schilder from his office as professor.

¹⁰ C. van der Waal correctly pointed this out in his series of articles, “Zuid-Afrikaanse stemmen over verbond en wedergeboorte I-X,” in *De Reformatie* 31 (1956), pp. 282ff. There he showed with an abundance of material that

unscientific attitude that is not to our credit. Silencing a part of Reformed theology in the Netherlands only because the other side does this does not bring us one step further theologically! On the other hand, the fact that we ourselves have been so intensively engaged with the doctrine of the covenant, simultaneously contradicts the fallacy that the problems surrounding covenant and baptism are supposedly typical intramural disputes in the Netherlands. For us in South Africa as well, this hot subject remains relevant even today!¹¹

Still another reason why an investigation of Schilder's theology is worthwhile is the scientific form of such a study. Schilder was certainly an exceptional theologian, as we hope to show. Although he was not always so systematic in his approach, it is precisely this fact that poses a great challenge to the investigator. Since with Schilder so many issues usually converge, like the rays of the sun being gathered and focused under a magnifying glass, to understand one of his sentences occasionally requires a significant amount of reading. His wide-ranging scope can serve as an entrance into early Reformed theology—something, incidentally, that is studied too little—as well as into modern (pre-war) German theology. This wide-ranging scope brings with it, however, another problem. One continually gets the impression that one is actually doing Schilder an injustice as one seeks to provide a summary of his wide-ranging ideas. For that reason, I must limit myself to what he has specifically written about the covenant, while recognizing the danger that I cannot always do justice to every aspect of his theology. This is also the reason for occasionally providing extensive quotations in especially the second and third chapters. But from these quotations the reader may at least savor the enjoyment of hearing Schilder himself!

the Reformed Church as well as the Dutch Reformed Church in this land throughout the past forty years chose resolutely for the “synodical” view of the covenant, along with a virtually universal rejection of the “Liberated” position. With respect to the Reformed Church, Van der Waal referred to the two publications of P. J. S. de Klerk, *Kerk en verbond* (1943), and *Belofte en eis van die genadeverbond* (1949), as well as to the unpublished M. Div. essay of K. S. de Vries-van Wyk, *Die vraagstuk van die inwendige en uitwendige genadeverbond* (n.d.). With regard to the Dutch Reformed Church, Van der Waal appealed for his judgment to, among other things, the unpublished Th. M. Thesis of F. M. van Smit, *Die wedergeboorte* (Stellenbosch, 1948). One could add other examples to this list. I would mention here one study done after the publication of the article of Van der Waal. In 1958 L. L. J. Visser submitted an unpublished dissertation to the University of Stellenbosch, written under the direction of Professor B. B. Keet and Professor F. J. M. Potgieter as co-examiner, *Die verbond in die teologie van Karl Barth*. In this work of 366 type-written pages, the name of K. Schilder was not mentioned once!

¹¹ During 1980 articles and letters appeared in *Die Kerkblad* (Reformed Church), showing that in this church, tensions existed regarding how the connection between covenant and evangelism must be viewed. During 1981 an entire debate was conducted in *Die Kerkbode* (Dutch Reformed Church) regarding infant baptism and conversion.

At this point we must also provide a justification for another matter, namely, the method of our treatment. Initially my intention was to limit myself strictly to Schilder's view of the covenant, avoiding the exhausting church conflict surrounding the Liberation. It soon became evident, however, that Schilder's own life and theology were so intertwined with this conflict that the two could not be separated. Therefore our first chapter is devoted to K. Schilder's life and work, seen against the background of a segment of Dutch church history that he himself lived and influenced. A justification for our choice of the title "Everything or Nothing" is also provided in chapter 1.

The next two chapters constitute the actual heart of this investigation. There Schilder's covenant perspective is systematized and analyzed. Chapter 2 provides a longitudinal portrait of the covenant, which is to say: it deals with the history of the covenant. Chapter 3 provides a latitudinal portrait of the structure of the covenant.

In the last chapter, several central themes in Schilder's covenant perspective are evaluated in the light of the criticisms that were elicited. Then we investigate the possibilities of relating these themes to contemporary discussions about the covenant, for the purpose of determining the significance of Schilder's contribution.

One final comment should be made here. Schilder wrote so much that it would have sufficed for me to restrict myself to published sources. But as this investigation grew in its scope, it became clear that the unpublished sources, an important part of which are his lecture notes, occasionally contain such characteristic formulations that these could not be omitted from our investigation. But it should always be kept in mind that those unpublished sources were put into print apart from any oversight of Schilder. For that reason I have attempted as far as possible to avoid basing any cardinal argument merely on a formulation in one of those sources.

CHAPTER 1

DR. KLAAS SCHILDER (1890-1952): REFORMED THEOLOGIAN

“There is no person in the world who ever became famous, but that he had to be explained and understood, at least partially, in terms of the time in which he lived, but also partially in terms of his own personality, in terms of what the Father of spirits had bestowed upon him individually and uniquely.”

K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur* (1948)

1.1 The route from Kampen to Kampen

17 January 1934 was a special day for the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. And that day was filled with no less significance for the 43-year old doctor, Klaas Schilder. For on this day he was installed as professor of dogmatics at the denomination's Theological College.

Perhaps Schilder the theologian is better known today on the basis of his efforts surrounding 1944. For he was one of the key figures in the so-called “Liberation” [vrijmaking] of that time, the ecclesiastical conflict that led to a split in the Reformed Churches. To obtain a somewhat complete and balanced view of the life and work of Schilder, one must begin by looking at the Schilder of ten years prior to the Liberation. It has been observed that at this point, he was in the prime of his life, and the apex of his professional labors.¹

Thus it was no surprise when in 1933 the Synod of Middelburg appointed Dr. K. Schilder as the successor of Professor A. G. Honig. In fact, he was appointed unanimously, without even

¹ J. Stellingwerf, in *Opbouw*, 2.17 (1 August 1953): “By the standard of outward glory and honor, the apex of Schilder’s life was reached during the years 1930-1935. In 1932 the three-volume *Christus in Zijn Lijden* appeared; *Jezus Christus en het mensenleven*, under the title *Jezus Christus en het cultuurleven*, reprinted in 1948 as *Christus en cultuur*. In 1933 Schilder obtained his doctoral degree and was appointed professor. On the occasion of the centennial of the 1834 Afscheiding [Separation or Secession], on 20 June 1934 Schilder delivered an address to the board of governors and faculty of the Theological College in Kampen, and on 11 October 1934 a second address for the national memorial congress in Utrecht. In 1935 his important book was published, *Wat is de hemel?*, as well as the famous pamphlet, *Ons aller moeder, Anno Domini, 1935*.

a double nomination.² Naturally this did not mean that Schilder felt altogether comfortable occupying such a status of that time! Quite the opposite appeared from the course of his life. But at that time the churches among whom he served saw him to be the Reformed theologian who would be in a position to defend the Reformed legacy in the face of emerging dialectical theology. This expectation the new professor fulfilled immediately with his inaugural address, “Barthiaansche Existentie-Theologie contra de Gereformeerde geloofsgehoor-Theologie.”³ This subject dominated his theological labor during the first years of his professorate.

Ten years later, Professor Dr. K. Schilder would become certainly the most controversial figure in the Reformed Churches, but in 1934 he was the rising star among these churches.⁴ Usually only the most gifted and hardest working ministers were crowned with an ecclesiastical professorate. The same was true in this case. Schilder’s *return to* Kampen brought a fitting conclusion to his twenty years in the ministry (1914-1933). But the route *from* Kampen (where he had been born and raised) *back to* Kampen was no tranquil, idle path. Through persevering study covering a broad terrain, the young Rev. Schilder had developed during this period into a skilled theologian. Already by 1934 most of Schilder’s insights—including those pertaining to the covenant—had matured. Therefore it is necessary at this point to sketch with broad lines this route—*from* Kampen *to* Kampen.

Klaas Schilder lived the first twenty-four years of his life in the quiet and quaint city of Kampen. There he was born into a nondescript home on 19 December 1890, and baptized in the National Reformed Church [Hervormde Kerk]. His father, Johannes Schilder, passed away in 1896 at the age of thirty-five. His mother, Grietje Leijdekker (1854-1926), then went back to the

² In a memorial essay in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 29, D. van Dijk mentions that the well-known Dr. K. Dijk was also nominated, but withdrew his name, “in honorable acknowledgement of the suitability of Dr. Schilder which surpassed his own.”

³ This address was never published, but its content was largely incorporated in an extensive footnote in Schilder’s *De dogmatische beteekenis der “Afscheiding” ook voor onzen tijd*, published in the same year. Cf. W. G. de Vries, *Calvinisten op de tweesprong*, p. 68. Schilder’s associates at that time who worked with him in publishing *De Reformatie* gave the following enthusiastic account of the speech: “It was Professor Schilder at his best. Penetrating; erudite; exceedingly concise; laced with notes of uplifting congeniality; with a few sentences of oppressive obscurity (but that was due to the fact that we listeners could not follow it so easily).” C. Tazelaar and J. Waterink, in *De Ref.* 14.16 (19 January 1934), p. 122.

⁴ G. Puchinger, *Ontmoetingen met theologen*, p. 259. This claim can be justified still further by recalling that it was none other than Schilder who in October 1934 gave, shall we say, the main address for the centennial commemoration of the Secession, in Utrecht. Cf. the commemorative volume, *Van’s heeren wegen*. Other theologians spoke as well, but Schilder spoke on the same day as the famous national leader Dr. H. Colijn.

Reformed Church [Gereformeerde Kerk], where she had been a member before she married. It must have required significant effort to provide her children with a decent upbringing. With the help of friends, the young Schilder received an opportunity to attend the Reformed Gymnasium in Kampen. There this dreamy, sensitive son developed into an astute student. From 1909-1914 he was enrolled as a student in the Theological College, where he received instruction from Professors L. Lindeboom, M. Noordt zij, A. G. Honig, H. Bouwman, J. Ridderbos, and T. Hoekstra.⁵

It is well-known that during his studies, the young Schilder underwent a crisis of faith. This was to be expected! With his extraordinary aptitude for both classical and modern languages, he read everything: Goethe, Dante, Nietzsche, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Dostojevsky. Already then he was gripped existentially by everything happening around him. After Schilder's death, C. Veenhof, who had known Schilder intimately, provided a description of this period in his life:

Anyone who knew Schilder also knew that he could have become a crater from which demonic powers spewed their fire and ashes over humanity. He could have become a person who climbed and slipped restlessly under the spell of an idolatrous adoration of beauty. He could have grown up to become a seer, a prophet who was genial, fanatical, full of burning passion, one who could have sent thousands of people to destruction by the satanic power of false prophecy.⁶

Fortunately the Lord preserved him from this outcome, and by His grace Schilder kept the faith. But his literary interest continued. In those years of theological training, when he contributed to a number of volumes of the student yearbook, sponsored by the student body whose name was

⁵ J. D. Boerkoel wrote in *De Bazuin*, 103 (1960) and 104 (1961), an extensive series of articles, dealing especially with the recollections from his youth of the young Klaas Schilder. These articles were written very subjectively, which makes it difficult to distinguish between fact and impression. For biographical details, cf. R. H. Bremmer, "Schilder," in *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, 2nd ed., vol. 6, and "Schilder," in *Biografisch Lexicon voor het geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme*, vol. 1. The volume published after Schilder's death, *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, contains several valuable biographical essays, like that of C. Veenhof (pp. 9-21) and of Rudolf van Reest (p. 25). The most complete biography that has appeared to date is the more popular work of Rudolf van Reest (the penname of K. C. van Spronsen), *"Opdat zij allen één zijn." Prof. dr. K. Schilder in zijn strijd om Woord en Kerk*, 2 vols. (Eng.: *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga [Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990]).

⁶ *Op. cit.*, in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 10.

“Fides Quaerit Intellectum,” Schilder published, in addition to essays, poems in Dutch, German, Latin, and Greek.⁷ This linguistic aptitude would later stand him in good stead. Some have claimed that he could read Latin as easily as Dutch. His literary-philosophical interest would surface in his later works.

Theologically, however, Schilder was shaped entirely by the historic Theological College, established in 1854 by the churches of the Secession (1934). Schilder enrolled in this institution in 1909, only four short years after the famous 1905 Synod of Utrecht. By means of the so-called pacification formula, this synod had succeeded in finding a satisfactory solution for the tensions that had dominated the Reformed Churches since 1892. In 1892 the churches from the Secession of 1834 (then led by Rev. Hendrik de Cock and others)—with a few exceptions—joined with the churches from the Doleantie of 1886 (then led by Dr. A. Kuyper and others). But for a long time after this union, “A”-churches (from the Secession) and “B”-churches (from the Doleantie) continued to exist alongside each other in various places. These tensions centered on certain speculations of Dr. A. Kuyper, especially those regarding baptism and regeneration, which unleashed vigorous reaction from Kuyper’s opponents.⁸ Especially Professor L. Lindeboom was a well-known and courageous contender for preserving the Secession tradition as that had come to expression in the theological school in Kampen.⁹ In 1902 the famous dogmatician from Kampen, Dr. H. Bavinck, departed for Amsterdam to succeed Dr. A. Kuyper as professor of dogmatics at the Free University. This marked the virtual end of Kampen’s independent training. But Lindeboom and others succeeded in enabling “Kampen” to continue functioning. Without doubt we may assume that he would have influenced his students to continue holding the tradition of the Secession in honor.¹⁰

⁷ Cf. the bibliography of K. Schilder compiled by J. v. d. Hoeven, in *Almanak van het Corpus Studiosorum in Academia Campensi 1953*, pp. 122ff.

⁸ From the abundance of literature, cf. the important books of R. J. Dam, B. Holwerda, and C. Veenhof, *Rondom 1905*, and E. Smilde, *Een eeuw van strijd over verbond en doop*.

⁹ For a brief description of the life of L. Lindeboom, cf. W. G. de Vries, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75. In *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, R. H. Bremmer also wrote about Lindeboom’s attitude toward Kuyper: “Lindeboom was one of the few who were unafraid of Kuyper but opposed him when necessary.”

¹⁰ Cf. the commemorative article about Lindeboom that Schilder published in *De Ref.* 13 (1933): pp. 114-115. There he emphasized that Lindeboom had nevertheless insisted that the Secession needed the Doleantie. This claim was made over against the Christian Reformed Churches [Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken], who had refused to join the union of 1892. Schilder wrote pointedly: “God be praised: not a sect, but the church has buried Lindeboom.” Schilder wrote about Lindeboom also in the *Jaarboek ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken*, 1934, pp. 398-405.

From the viewpoint of church history, Schilder's time as a student was an eventful time, but certainly for that reason also stimulating with a view to the study of Reformed theology. In that situation, someone like Dr. A. G. Honig, professor of dogmatics, exercised decisive influence upon his student Schilder. Honig sought self-consciously to bring about a synthesis within dogmatics between Kuyper (as representative of the "B"-churches) and Bavinck (as representative, especially in his early period, of the "A"-churches). He testified of this ideal in his famous *Handboek van de Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Schilder expressed great appreciation for this endeavor,¹¹ although there was this difference between him and his teacher: whereas Honig (a devoted pupil of Kuyper) proceeded from the position associated with the "B"-churches without ignoring that of the "A"-churches, Schilder tied himself more self-consciously with the "A"-position without denying the gains of the "B"-position.

Each of Schilder's professors contributed something to his theological development. In addition to the two who have been mentioned, Schilder had great appreciation in particular for Professor T. Hoekstra. From this professor he adopted particular homiletical insights (especially with regard to the formal construction of a sermon) which he would defend throughout the rest of his life.¹²

So it was that in 1914 the young Schilder moved into the parsonage of the Reformed Church in Ambt-Vollenhoven, having recently married Ms. Anna Johanna Walter. Here he could devote himself as a preacher to his life task: preaching the eternal Word of God to the people of his day. And "his day" was an interesting time. In terms of Reformed theology in the Netherlands, the giant figures of Kuyper and Bavinck—both of them still living—dominated the stage. In terms of world history, this year marked the beginning of World War I. Equipped with his sturdy schooling in Reformed theology, and with his sensitive antennae tuned to contemporary events, the budding theologian could begin publishing.

¹¹ Cf. Schilder's characterization of his teacher reported by S. Greijdanus: "In memoriam Prof. Dr. A. G. Honig" (published in *Jaarboek ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, 1941, pp. 457-470): "If anyone was a man of peace, it was *Prof. Honig*" (p. 458), and: "Honig's spirit of pacification" (p. 461)—with reference to events after 1892. For more information about the relationship between Honig and Schilder, cf. the articles of J. Kamphuis, "Afscheid van Honig (1-3)," in *De Ref.* 57 (17-21 October 1981), pp. 33ff.

¹² After his death, Schilder wrote about Hoekstra in *Jaarboek ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken*, 1937, pp. 421-431.

In addition to his articles for the church paper, one of his first publications was *Wat is de hel?* (1919). In that work he self-consciously allied himself with the reliable theology of Kuyper and Bavinck. At the same time, however, he also discussed less familiar figures like Dante and Goethe. Remarkably, with an eye to his later work, the theme of “beginning at the beginning” already began to surface. To understand the historical origin of hell, one needed to return to Paradise.¹³ At this point, however, Schilder did not yet discuss hell in the context of the covenant, as he would do explicitly in subsequent editions of this work.

Kuyper died in 1920, and Bavinck in the year thereafter. This date serves, then, to mark the beginning, as it were, of a new period of the history of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.¹⁴ In this same year, *De Reformatie* was founded, with which Schilder labored from the very beginning.¹⁵ This magazine was intended to function as the mouthpiece of the so-called “youth movement” [“beweging der jongeren”], an effort of younger theologians targeting a spirit of self-accomplishment that had hindered the progress of the Reformed Churches.¹⁶ It quickly became evident that this movement was not unanimous about the exact course of renewal. Later (in 1950) Schilder himself observed that around 1920 there was a loud cry “for renewing and expanding, and reflecting, and grounding, but nobody knew where, what, and why.”¹⁷ Around 1926, then, this mixed movement fractured in at least two discernible directions: on the one hand, those sympathetic to Dr. J. G. Geelkerken and others, who wanted so much renewal that that Scripture and confessions (according to their opponents) were endangered; and on the other hand, those who indeed opposed the reigning conservatism, but then on the basis of Scripture and confessions. Stated another way: the former group sought renewal by broadening the Reformed position, whereas the latter wanted to achieve the same goal of renewal by a more radical application of the Reformed principle. Schilder declared himself to be a member of the latter group.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Rudolf van Reest devotes the first chapter of his book, “*Opdat zij allen één zijn*,” 1: 9-88 [ET: 21-92], to a description of this new period.

¹⁵ W. G. de Vries describes in detail the origin of this magazine (*op. cit.*, pp. 107-115). Involved among the leading figures at that time were, among others, Dr. B. Wielenga and Dr. V. Hepp.

¹⁶ R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, pp. 253-255.

¹⁷ Written in his important article, from a biographical perspective: “De reformatie van ‘De Reformatie’,” in *De Ref.* 26 (7 October 1950), p. 3.

Until 1926, Schilder published works that were largely literary and philosophical. At the same time he continued delving exegetically into the message of the Bible. One example of this phase was his *Licht in den rook* (1923),¹⁸ “Eros of Christus” (in *Christelijk letterkundigen studiën*, 1926) and *Bij dichters en Schriftgeleerden* (1927). He was also interested in social-political developments, as is evident in *De Openbaring van Johannes en het sociale leven* (1924).¹⁹ In 1926 the Synod of Assen rendered its significant decision against the position of Dr. J. G. Geelkerken regarding Genesis 2 and 3. When he deliberately sided *with* the position of the synod and *against* Dr. Geelkerken, Schilder came into his own *theologically*.²⁰ Evidence of that was his 1928 pamphlet, *Een hoornstoot tegen Assen?*, in which he made it clear that the central issue involved in the struggle of that time was the acknowledgement of the reality of God’s revelation in history, and in connection with that, the reliability of Scripture.

During this same period, Rev. Schilder participated in discussions in two other areas as well.

The first involved the polemic with the Christian Reformed [Christelijke Gereformeerden]. They had accused the Reformed Churches of unthinkingly following the theology of Dr. A. Kuyper. In his column “Op en om ons erf,” in *De Bazuin*, Schilder devoted many pages to refuting this accusation. In 1925, two books came from Schilder’s pen: *Gereformeerd Farizeïsme?* and *Dr. A. Kuyper en het “neo-Calvinisme” te Apeldoorn veroordeeld?* The latter work in particular involved the issue of long-standing contention in the Reformed doctrine of the covenant, namely, presupposed regeneration. In light of Schilder’s later radical rejection of this “Kuyperian” view of the matter, Schilder’s critics frequently observed that in 1925 he had still defended Kuyper. In the interests of fairness, it must be admitted that even later, Schilder maintained that at a minimum Kuyper’s position can be viewed as Reformed, even though at numerous points this position needed to be criticized.²¹ Nonetheless, what

¹⁸ Third revised edition, 1952.

¹⁹ Second edition, 1925, and the third expanded edition, 1951.

²⁰ J. Kamphuis discussed in detail the role played by the events of 1926 in Schilder’s development, in his essay “Concentratie op wat hoofdzaak is,” in *Verkenningen*, vol. 2, esp. pp. 171ff. For a brief overview of the events surrounding “Assen” and of Schilder’s participation in this debate (with references to the relevant literature), cf. also W. G. de Vries, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-27.

²¹ For this criticism of Schilder, cf. Smilde, *Een eeuw van strijd over verbond en doop*, pp. 301-303, with reference to what Schilder wrote in *De Bazuin*, 1927-1928. Schilder defended himself in a letter to the synod on 13 December 1943, as to why earlier he *could* defend the declaration of 1905, but later he *could no longer* defend it. Cf.

particularly interests us at this point is the fact that by historical circumstances and ecclesiastical relationships, Schilder was compelled to dig more deeply into theological questions, including those involving the doctrine of the covenant.

The other discussion in which Rev. Schilder participated during this period was the one involving the emerging dialectical theology.²² The prominent Dutch advocate of this theology, Dr. Th. L. Haitjema, was the target of Schilder's attack. In the volume of collected essays, *Tusschen "Ja" and "Nee"* (1929), Schilder explained his position. Here he also displayed the results of his study of the philosophical concept of "paradox." In fact, the entire field later treated in Schilder's dissertation was being explored here in a preliminary way. Calvin was set over against Barth. So we can see that the origin of this interest in "paradox" lay clearly in contemporary church history.

In this same year Schilder formulated more clearly his characteristic view of "redemptive-historical" preaching of the Bible's historical material.²³

The background of this view lay not only in the decade of the 1930s,²⁴ but must be explained in terms of the development of Schilder's thinking in the 1920s as well. Already as early as 1926 Schilder treated the Pentecost event very clearly in a redemptive-historical sense.²⁵ The first three installments of his unfinished Bible devotional *Goud, wierook en myrrhe*, appeared in the same year,²⁶ in which the author related the Old and New Testaments in various

Acta van de Generale Synode (1943-45), pp. 359-360: "I myself have defended these pronouncements against criticism from the side of the Christian Reformed, when they ascribed to our churches views which could not have been held and when people from that side appealed to these views *as justification for continuing to live as church in isolation*. I could do this in good conscience, because no confessional character was ascribed to the declaration of 1905, and I judged that anyone who stood on the foundation of the Three Forms of Unity must live together with us for the sake of the Lord's will." However, once the authority of "divine revelation" was granted to a debatable declaration, Schilder could no longer accept the synodical decision: "If the requirement of a signature is maintained, then the die is cast."

²² Bremmer, "Schilder," in *Biografisch lexicon*, p. 315, writes: "S[childer] was the first Reformed theologian after Bavinck who engaged in intellectual debate with German theology."

²³ Cf. the dissertation of Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and principles in preaching historical texts*, which provided a detailed historical and theological discussion of the entire dispute between redemptive-historical and exemplaristic [moralistic] preaching. He went so far as to call Schilder the "originator" of the redemptive-historical approach (p. 241).

²⁴ As Greidanus suggested, *op. cit.*, chapter 2, pp. 22ff.

²⁵ *De Ref.*, 21 May 1926, reprinted in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 1: 71ff.

²⁶ Reprinted in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 1: 87ff.

ways, en route to a characteristic redemptive-historical interpretation. In this context his 1927 essay is also important: “The Celebration of Christmas and Redemption-History.”²⁷ Schilder’s magisterial trilogy, *Christ In His Suffering* (1930), was in a certain sense the culmination of his focused exegetical study. This work offered a broadly developed demonstration of his redemptive-historical method, in the sense that in contrast to the common preaching about Jesus as the perfect example, Schilder place heavy emphasis on the office of Christ as Mediator of the covenant.²⁸ Naturally this perspective was developed more broadly during the 1930s and thereafter.²⁹ But we must emphasize at this point that Schilder had acquired these insights already before 1930. This genial grasp must be explained by the course of development we have traced above. Traditional Reformed theology had always emphasized the history of revelation. To mention but one significant contributor, J. van Andel had applied this approach in his well-known book on the history of revelation, *Handleiding bij de beoefening der gewijde geschiedenis* (3rd ed., 1905; 6th ed., 1932). Schilder was able to draw upon this and, stimulated by his confrontation with the thought of Geelkerken and Barth, to develop this understanding further. This much can be established, that Schilder’s characteristic view of salvation history was not drawn from the German school of salvation-historical theology.³⁰

Meanwhile Schilder was serving as minister in various churches: after Ambt-Vollenhove (1914) he went to Vlaardingén (1916), Gorinchem (1919), and Delft (1922). In 1925 he served as minister in Oegstgeest. During this period (1927) he personally met the famous Dr. Karl Barth at the home of the Leiden church historian Professor Dr. A. Eekhof.³¹ During this period Rev. Schilder published an enormous amount, in periodicals and books, but he was far from an ivory tower theologian. He stood firmly with both feet in the swirling currents of life in his day. Even

²⁷ Reprinted in *Om Woord en Kerk*, 1: 246-252. In his *Zien in de toekomst* (p. 55), J. Kamphuis mentioned Schilder’s “exceptionally large contribution” to Reformed preaching, and mentions the need “to assemble the many materials on the subject that are scattered about . . . so they are again made accessible to us and the next generations.”

²⁸ The first two volumes of this trilogy were reprinted in 1949 and 1951, after Schilder had thoroughly revised them during the years of World War II (when he was forced “underground” due to the German occupation).

²⁹ For an overview of what Schilder wrote in this connection, cf. the dissertation of S. Greidanus mentioned earlier, pp. 245-247.

³⁰ In fact, the term “redemptive-historical” used by K. Schilder and associates must be clearly distinguished from the term “Heilsgeschiede” employed by Barth and his associates (cf. the dissertation of Greidanus, p. 21, where he referred to the dissertation of C. Trimp, *Om de oeconomie van het welbehagen*).

³¹ Puchinger, *Ontmoetingen met theologen*, pp. 258-259.

outside his own ecclesiastical circle he maintained personal contact with various ecclesiastical leaders.³²

In 1928 he accepted the call to the city congregation in Rotterdam-Delfshaven. The consistory of this congregation granted him a study leave, so that during two periods of nine months each, he could complete his academic study at the Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen, Germany. Remarkably, this committed Reformed scholar did not obtain his degree from the Free University in Amsterdam! The reason for that, as he himself explained, lay in the fact that already in 1930 he had become so entangled in conflict with Professor V. Hepp (the dogmatics professor at the Free University, successor of Bavinck) that he could not possibly have studied there.³³ For Schilder it must have been a special experience to study at this foreign university. There he could expand and deepen his (limited Kampen) outlook. From a close vantage point he could observe not only other churches and theologians, but also emerging national-socialism.³⁴ He who would later devote himself to theology studied mostly philosophy in Erlangen, especially with Professor Dr. E. Herrigel, an expert in Buddhism. Because of Schilder's interest in the role of "paradox" in Eastern thought, he was also fascinated by its far-reaching mysticism. Schilder's interests were wide-ranging and he possessed an amazing capacity for associative thinking!

On 3 March 1933 Schilder earned his doctoral degree *summa cum laude*, with the dissertation *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des "Paradoxon". Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Calvins und des nach-kierkegaardschen Paradoxon* [On the conceptual history of the "paradox." With regard to Calvin and the post-Kierkegaardian paradox].³⁵ In addition to treating Kierkegaard

³² Stellingwerf (in *Opbouw*, 11, no. 12) mentioned what Schilder himself had written in *De Ref.*, namely, that in addition to Barth, he had met Rev. G. H. Kersten (Gereformeerde Gemeenten) and Johannes de Heer. He also had enjoyed contacts with Christian Reformed [Christelijke Gereformeerde] professors and ministers.

³³ Cf. the open letter from Schilder to Professor H. H. Kuyper, published as an appendix in *De Ref.* of 29 May 1936. The struggle with Hepp at that time involved the editorship of *De Reformatie*, but various differences in their doctrinal views also played a role.

³⁴ Cf. C. Veenhof's article in *Gedenkt uw voorgangers*, p. 15, for what Schilder wrote to his friend Veenhof during this time. J. Veenhof also supplied several pieces of information about Schilder's study in Erlangen, in his article, "Trillhaas en Schilder," in *Opbouw*, 5 (28 July 1961): 125-127. He mentioned, among other things, the attention to Schilder's dissertation that H. Schroer gave in his own dissertation, *Die Denkform der Paradoxalität als theologisches Problem* (Göttingen, 1960).

³⁵ Regarding this work, J. Waterink, for instance, stated in *De Ref.* 13 (10 March 1933): "I do not hesitate to say already at this point that we may see Schilder's dissertation as one of the most significant demonstrations of contemporary scientific theology."

himself, Schilder also investigated the religious philosophy of Rudolf Otto as well as dialectical theology. The final chapter was devoted to Calvin. Using Calvin's words, Dr. Schilder expressed his own position, which may be summarized this way: God's speaking to man is not paradoxical; in his revelation He accommodates Himself to us; therefore, His revelation, though not adequate, is nevertheless pure; in speaking to us, He does not transcend the *laws* of human thought (which He himself had created), but He does transcend our *sins* of thought. In this context Schilder competently critiqued and opposed the early Barth, in his transcendentalist stage.

With this, Schilder's path *from Kampen back to Kampen* was almost complete. Several months after he obtained his doctorate he was appointed to be professor at his *alma mater*. One can say that his appearance on the theological scene was meteoric. When he became a professor, he landed almost immediately as it were with an explosive effect on the battleground of the ecclesiastical struggle of the 1930s. From that point forward, he was embroiled in controversy. He moved through the history of that period like a whirlwind. In the remainder of this chapter, and in the following chapter, the subjects that have already surfaced will be discussed repeatedly. From all of this it will become evident that his route *from Kampen back to Kampen* decisively impacted his stay *in Kampen* which lasted for the rest of his life.

1.2 A polemical pen-warrior

From the history described in the previous section, it is already evident that Schilder had exceptional journalistic skills.³⁶ Already as a minister he had engaged in debates with a number of people: Christian Reformed [Christelijke Gereformeerde] colleagues, Barthians, Geelkerken and his followers. During this period his polemic was directed especially *beyond* his own ecclesiastical circle, although the struggle against Geelkerken originally began inside his own church, of course. That polemic against outsiders (e.g., Barth and national-socialism) continued after he became a professor. In the present section we will give more attention to this. But it is remarkable that after becoming a professor, he also began to write polemically *within* his own

³⁶ Puchinger, *Ontmoetingen met theologen*, wrote: "For Schilder deserves to be mentioned among the great journalists who served the anti-revolutionary or Reformed movement in our nation" (p. 140). Bremmer, in his entry on Schilder in *Biografisch lexicon*, also mentions Schilder's "admirable linguistic capacity."

ecclesiastical circle. He took aim especially at the “Kuyperians,” such as his colleagues of the Free University, Professors H. H. Kuyper and V. Hepp. This exhausting journalistic debate was related to ecclesiastical developments in the Reformed Churches during the 1930s, in which the theology of A. Kuyper played a major role. So we need at this point to review the entire matter of the relationship between Schilder and Kuyper.

Because Schilder’s own theological views developed in the midst of, and largely as a direct result of, this controversy, the remaining chapters of this study require that we outline the main points of Schilder’s journalistic polemic here.

The manner in which Schilder defined his own position in the theological discussion of the early 1930s becomes clear in his well-known work, *Wat is de hemel?* (1935).³⁷ This book presents, as it were, the new professor’s analysis of what was going on in the theological world of that time. After a brief review of medieval theology, he discussed Hegel and Kierkegaard (along with Barth, Althaus, and Tillich). The author himself believed in the *praesentia salutis*, referring to the transcendent God who works immanently in beginning, middle, and end of history.³⁸ Surprising is his emphasis on the *history* of heaven (chapter 5). Taking the trustworthiness of Scripture as his starting point, Schilder described this history as *covenant* history. Under the heading, “The Great Lord’s Supper,” all the “stages” of covenant history are discussed in chapter 7: the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, the covenant of nature, and the covenant of peace. So in terms of their basic content, Schilder’s perspective on the covenant had been formulated already in 1935. This work is at the same time characteristically Schilderian, in this sense, that everything was always discussed together! Characteristic as well was that he demarcated his own position not only over against Barth and dialectical theology, but also over against Dr. A. Kuyper. In the concluding chapter, Kuyper’s theory of common grace was subjected to thorough criticism.³⁹ “Schilder between Kuyper and Barth”—this title could serve to describe Schilder’s entire theology, provided that the word “between” is not understood to mean a balanced intermediate position, but rather an independent position that he came gradually to

³⁷ In 1954, after his death, a second edition was published, featuring some minute changes in the first chapter, such that it is useful to cite the first edition. Note, however, that the pagination of the two editions differs.

³⁸ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 63.

³⁹ Cf. *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 290. It was Schilder’s intention, despite maintaining his criticism, not only to preserve Kuyper’s intention, but also to give it a more stable foundation (p. 295).

clarify through his formulations in contrast to Kuyper, on the one hand, and in contrast to Barth, on the other hand.

In terms of his relation to Kuyper, Schilder definitely underwent a development. For, in the first quarter of the 20th century, Kuyper largely dominated the Reformed theological scene in the Netherlands.⁴⁰ Naturally, from his Kampen background Schilder knew of another Reformed tradition (“old A”). But throughout his early publications he employed without objection characteristically Kuyperian expressions, like “common grace” or “mystical union.”⁴¹ Initially he appeared to have no criticism of Kuyper’s doctrine of the covenant, either. On the contrary, as we mentioned earlier, he always defended Kuyper against the Christian Reformed Churches [Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken]. It was especially Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace that eventually drew Schilder’s criticism.⁴² In addition, Kuyper’s teaching concerning the pluriformity of the church, especially the way it was defended by the “Kuyperians,” brought Schilder’s pen into motion.⁴³ So as the years went by, Schilder came to realize that Kuyper needed to be criticized at more than one point. But his was always loyal criticism. Schilder continued to admire the broad lines that Kuyper had drawn from his “general cosmological” starting point, as Schilder termed it. One need think only of Kuyper’s famous adage that there is no square inch in all of reality of which Christ does not say: This is mine! Schilder criticized the doctrine of common *grace* precisely in order to emphasize more strongly the matter of common *calling*. In 1932 already he wrote the significant essay, “Jesus Christ and cultural life.”⁴⁴ And in 1936 he engaged in an extended debate with Dr. O. Noordmans, who had accused him of going

⁴⁰ C. Trimp, “The pattern of Calvinism,” in *De dienst van de mondige kerk* [The service of the emancipated church], p. 10: “Without knowing Kuyper, you cannot know your own time, and you will never be able, for instance, to ‘locate’ and appreciate the struggle of Dr. K. Schilder.”

⁴¹ A comparison between the first and second editions of *Christus in zijn lijden* shows that Schilder purged as much of that Kuyperian terminology as possible from the later edition.

⁴² Cf. the dissertation of J. Douma, *Algemene Genade* [Common grace], especially pp. 185-203, for an account of the development in Schilder’s thinking with respect to the issue of common grace.

⁴³ The frequency with which Schilder wrote against the pluriformity of the church is clear from the three volumes entitled *De Kerk* [The church] compiled by J. Kamphuis from articles and brochures by Schilder. Volume 1 contains two extensive series on “The pluriformity of the church and epigonism” (pp. 303ff.; pp. 384ff.). Volume 2 contains two more series, one on baptism and pluriformity (pp. 285ff.), and another on pluriformity and synods (pp. 425ff.). And volume 3 contains a series of three articles (pp. 141ff.) and another series of eight articles (pp. 251ff.)—all concerning this same issue!

⁴⁴ This appeared in the volume *Jezus Christus en het menschenleven* [Jesus Christ and the human life]. In 1948, Schilder published this in a more elaborate form in his widely read (and opposed!) book *Christus en Cultuur*. That work has been reprinted numerous times, even after Schilder’s death; the most recent edition appeared in 1977, with explanatory annotations by J. Douma, who simplified the original text where necessary.

much further yet than Kuyper himself in his attempt to arrive at a (Christian) philosophy of culture.⁴⁵ At that time (1937), Schilder expressed himself about his relationship with Kuyper as follows: “. . . we too stand in the difficult position of having to disagree with him on certain points in order to preserve Kuyper’s fundamental ideas. . . . Indeed, there are dangers here; and only someone wishing to turn the celebration of Kuyper’s memory into a stupored fantasy can close his eyes to these dangers.”⁴⁶ One might well say that, however critical and independent he may have been, throughout his entire life Schilder remained Kuyper’s student.⁴⁷ This student was constantly discussing subjects that had first been raised by his teacher: common grace, pluriformity of the church, and (later) covenant and baptism.⁴⁸

In this connection, it remains somewhat remarkable that Schilder quoted relatively infrequently from Bavinck. While there was a great similarity between Bavinck and Schilder in terms of the method of dogmatics, with regard to the substantive content of his own labor in the field of dogmatics, Schilder dealt more intensively with Kuyper.⁴⁹ This is the more remarkable since one can find in Bavinck the same ideal that motivated Schilder, namely, the goal of finding a synthesis between “the piety of the Secession and the ideals found among Kuyper and his

⁴⁵ These articles of Noordmans and Schilder originally appeared in *De Reformatie*, and were published, together with other valuable background material, by G. Puchinger, under the title, *Een theologie in discussie*. Noordmans claimed (p. 54) that Schilder had built such a strong connection between Christianity and culture that general revelation no longer served as the bridge across which unbelievers enter the church, but rather as the ramp by which Christians leave the church! In his answer to Noordmans, Schilder wrote, among other things (pp. 122-123): “What I desire with regard to ‘common grace’ is not ultimately anti-Kuyperian, but rather seeks to remove some inconsistencies from what Kuyper *essentially* wanted, in order yet to preserve the long-standing tree planted by the real Kuyper by pruning a few of its ugly branches.”

⁴⁶ *De Reformatie*, 29 October 1937, the Kuyper-commemorative issue. In his book, *Opdat zij allen één zijn*, 1:167 [ET: 162], Rudolf van Reest summarized Schilder’s intention this way: “But what Schilder opposed in Kuyper’s work was only that which he regarded as in conflict with Scripture and the confessions. Schilder took aim at the scholasticism in Kuyper in order to be able to preserve Kuyper as reformer of the Church.”

⁴⁷ J. Kamphuis, in his article “Critische sympathie” (in *Almanak F.Q.I. 1953*), pp. 105-106, wrote that Schilder “. . . knew himself to be a student of Kuyper, and wanted only to build positively on the legacy Kuyper had left behind.”

⁴⁸ In his *Diktaat Encyclopaedie* I-V, Schilder kept returning to Kuyper again and again throughout the entire period of his professorate (1934-1950), naturally with all of his critical reservations concerning, e.g., Kuyper’s “archetype-ectype” paradigm.

⁴⁹ Regarding the method used in dogmatics, in the article of J. Kamphuis cited previously, pp. 76-78, the author calls it a “historical critical” method. W.G. de Vries claimed, in his “Epilogue” for Schilder’s *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 4: 285: “Although I believe that Bavinck had more influence on him than Kuyper, nevertheless, by scrupulously tracing out Kuyper’s train of thought, and consequently often partially or entirely abandoning Kuyper at certain points, Schilder knew how to translate Kuyper’s spiritual legacy into a living reality for our time.” This is probably an accurate assessment.

associates of re-Christianizing Western European culture.”⁵⁰ This situation illustrates something that was true of Schilder’s theology in other respects: he was much more the restless polemicist theologian who was continually interacting with the actual discussions of his day (like Kuyper), rather than the serene ivory tower theologian who could write a virtually timeless, well-balanced dogmatics (like Bavinck). Moreover, in the 1930s Kuyper’s theology was *the* controversial subject of discussion, whereas during that period Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* had been, as it were, elevated above criticism, at least in Reformed circles.

Much more could be said about the relationship between Kuyper and Schilder. Someone made the witty remark that what Schilder himself had written in his dissertation (1933) about the relationship between Barth and Kierkegaard could be applied as well to the relationship between him and Kuyper: “If the best student is the one who adopts the fundamental concepts of his teacher, then purges them of foreign additions and thereby overcomes the inconsistencies of the master, then K. Barth is Kierkegaard’s best student.”⁵¹ Be that as it may, this relationship was fleshed out especially in Schilder’s ongoing polemic with those who wanted to canonize Kuyper. This struggle occurred amid the turbulence of the 1930s in the Reformed Churches. On one side were the traditionalists who, afraid of any renewal, wanted to maintain the complete Kuyperian system at all cost. Especially in the theological faculty of the Free University, men like Professor H. H. Kuyper and Professor V. Hepp worked in this direction. On the other side, during the 1930s a broad reformational movement had emerged among the Reformed Churches which was striving for Scriptural renewal. Despite differences of emphasis, this movement exhibited unanimity between Professors H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven (“the philosophy of the law idea”) at the Free University, and the theological work of Professor K. Schilder and others.⁵² This reformational movement sought to liberate Reformed people from the misery of

⁵⁰ Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* [Herman Bavinck and his contemporaries], p.274.

⁵¹ Stellingwerf, cited article in *Opbouw*, vol. 2, 25 April 1958. The quote had appeared in Schilder’s dissertation, p. 325.

⁵² Sidney Greidanus, *op. cit.*, chapter 2 (pp. 22ff.) provides an illuminating discussion of the so-called “new direction” during the 1930s, and the reaction it elicited from its opponents. In his article, “Vrijmaking,” in *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (2nd ed., vol. 6), C. Veenhof characterized this period as follows: “This period was marked by, among other things, a powerful theological and philosophical effort, which aroused interest and exercised great influence throughout wide circles of church members.” This effort featured heavier emphasis on exegesis. “As a result, the theological labor of K. Schilder and S. G. de Graaf, together with the philosophical work of H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, obtained an increasingly strong hold on the minds of church people. Someone like A. Janse was urging people to read Scripture more concretely.”

both scholastic objectivism and its inevitable corollary: mystical subjectivism. During this period, both dangers were threatening the Reformed Churches.

Naturally a number of other motives played a part, as well, such as the characteristic sentiment of uncertainty that arose in the period between the two world wars. This was indeed a complex time. Schilder remained convinced that precisely in this kind of situation vigorous polemics needed to be waged so that opponents would understand one another's positions clearly.⁵³ Just how vigorously the struggle was waged comes to light especially in the unceasing stream of polemical articles that flowed from Schilder's pen against those who pursued interdenominational cooperation aimed at promoting international Calvinism.⁵⁴ Participating in this debate were especially Professors Hepp and Kuyper, who had to deal weekly with Schilder's razor-sharp criticism. Throughout the same period ongoing conflicts arose among the editors of *De Reformatie*. First, Professor V. Hepp discontinued as editor in 1930, followed by C. Tazelaar and J. Waterink in 1935.⁵⁵ From then on until the end of his life, K. Schilder was the sole editor of this periodical, and it became "his" magazine. Schilder was not polemicizing on his own behalf, something that is evident from the fact that the number of subscribers to *De Refomatie* in those years grew steadily, though this may perhaps have been due more to the principled explanations concerning national-socialism that Schilder provided during these years.

When such a fierce polemic broke out among professorial colleagues, this meant that serious problems lay ahead. In 1935, the consistory of the Reformed Church in The Hague (West) sent a request to the curators of the two theological institutions of the Reformed Churches

⁵³ Quite characteristic is what he wrote in *De Ref.*, 14 (21 June 1935): "Some are asking: As the world is burning, how can people polemicize like this? I ask: As the world is burning—especially because of this kind of view of 'religion'—how can people pacify like this?" In this same year he wrote as the heading above the third page of his pamphlet entitled "*Ons aller moeder*": "Polemics: the means unto God's ecumenical peace." (This was later reprinted in *De Kerk*, 2:156.) From this period came also this famous Schilderian aphorism: "In my firm opinion nowadays no one is converted who refuses to polemicize [Naar mijn stellige mening bekeert zich heden niet, wie niet polemiseert]" (*Tolle lege*, 2: 121).

⁵⁴ W. G. de Vries devoted his extensive dissertation (more than 400 pages!) to this subject: *Calvinisten op de tweesprong. De Internationale Federatie van Calvinisten en haar invloed op de onderlinge verhoudingen in De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in de dertiger jaren van de twintigste eeuw* [Calvinists at a fork in the road. The International Federation of Calvinists and its influence on the mutual relations within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the 1930s]. It is interesting to note that the Calvinists in South Africa played an important role in this connection, since the initiative was taken in South Africa for the first interdenominational conference in 1929, with the cooperation of all three Africaner denominations. Professor V. Hepp visited South Africa in 1934 (pp. 16ff.).

⁵⁵ A detailed account was given by W.G. de Vries, *Calvinisten op de tweesprong*, pp. 115-122; 202-234.

(in Kampen and at the Free University), asking the brothers to try to put an end to the unsavory polemics of these professors.⁵⁶ But K.S. and his opponents continued waging their journalistic warfare unabated. Finally these controversies came to the 1936 Synod of Amsterdam for discussion. In the debate on 9 September, Professor H. H. Kuyper stated that he had serious problems with the “new views” being promoted in the Reformed Churches. He spoke of “beardless lads” who had discarded Kuyper and Bavinck. Professor Schilder also participated in the debate and declared, among other things, that he viewed this day as one of the darkest in the history of the Reformed Churches.⁵⁷ The synod appointed a committee with representatives from both intellectual parties—Hepp as well as Schilder, among others. The committee was to report to the next synod about the following controversial points of doctrine: common grace, the covenant of grace, the immortality of the soul, the pluriformity of the church, the union of both natures of Christ, and self-examination.

This synodical decision hardly spelled the end of the conflict; it merely signaled the beginning of a new phase in the war. The committee split into two. Already before the synod of 1936, Professor Hepp had begun publishing a series of pamphlets with the provocative title, *Dreigende Deformatie* [Threatening Deformation]. He addressed precisely those controversial subjects about which the committee was to report to the following synod. The fourth one in the series is particularly relevant here. For in this essay, Hepp refuted Schilder’s criticism (without mentioning him by name or giving citations!) of the Kuyperian doctrine of common grace. Schilder felt compelled to defend his position. He responded to Hepp with a long series of fifteen articles in *De Reformatie*.⁵⁸ Although the title of the series was “common grace,” Schilder was really addressing what he termed “Professor Hepp’s un-Reformed view of the covenant.” It would disturb the logical order of this section if we were to summarize these articles at this point. But it should be emphasized here that Schilder was forced by historical circumstances, and driven by his conviction about polemics, to study the doctrine of the covenant more deeply for himself. Involved in these polemics in the 1930s was not simply the doctrine of the covenant,

⁵⁶ Van Reest, *op. cit.*, 1: 186-187 [ET: 178-179]. Many church members shared the sentiment of Dr. H. Colijn: it would be preferable that the professors, as in the 17th century, would wage their polemic in Latin!

⁵⁷ G. Janssen, *De feitelijk toedracht* [The actual course of events], pp. 7-11 and 267ff. A report of the session of 9 September was published in *De Reformatie*, 14 (18 September 1936).

⁵⁸ *De Reformatie*, 18 (5 November 1937 and subsequent issues): “Professor Hepp’s misunderstanding concerning common grace.”

and yet it is remarkable that the volumes of *De Reformatie* between 1937 and 1940 were filled with long series of articles on the covenant.

The ecclesiastical conflict that erupted in 1936 led to the infamous synodical doctrinal decisions in 1942, the result of which was the Liberation [Vrijmaking] that occurred in 1944. We will discuss this history in the next section of this chapter.

Meanwhile, we return to Schilder's polemic: in the 1930s his militant pen was aimed not only at internal affairs. He also wrote extensively about external affairs, such as his opposition against national-socialism. So Schilder fought on all fronts simultaneously, defending the Reformed heritage against various attacks from within as well as from without. It is interesting to note that at the same synod of 1936 it was also decided that members of the Reformed Churches were not allowed to support the national-socialist movement in the Netherlands. Concerning this decision as well, Schilder and Hepp had serious differences. In contrast to his opponent, Schilder was a fierce supporter of this particular synodical decision. He explained his reasons in his pamphlet, *Geen duimbreed*.⁵⁹ The question may well be asked whether this difference of political convictions between Schilder and H. H. Kuyper did not play a role as well in further disturbing ecclesiastical relationships. On one hand—the situation at that time was so complicated—in terms of this issue, Schilder stood on the same side as Karl Barth, who also strongly opposed the Hitler regime. But with respect to his theological position, Schilder vigorously polemicized against Barth as well, precisely during this period!

Already before his professorate, Schilder had crossed swords with Barth and his supporters in the Netherlands. He opposed Barth's a-historical approach in particular, as is apparent from his earlier publications.⁶⁰ Later, Schilder hammered on that same anvil. At the centennial commemoration of the Secession, in 1934, he drew a parallel between the conflict of

⁵⁹ This title was a particularly astute choice. Schilder wanted thereby to declare that no Reformed person may make any concession at all to this ideology. At the same time he thereby professed his personal connection to the fundamental ideas of Dr. A. Kuyper (cf. the latter's famous adage, "There is not a thumb's breadth. . ." [geen duimbreed]). After the war (in 1945), another publication of Schilder appeared in this connection: *Bezet bezit* [Occupied possession]. This was a reprint of his articles in *De Reformatie* at the beginning of the war (June through August 1940).

⁶⁰ Cf. *Bij dichters en Schriftgeleerden* [Among poets and scribes] (1927), p. 106: "Barth has 'murdered' a beautiful Reformed theological discipline, namely, the discipline of *historia revelationis*, the history of divine (special) revelation."

1834 and that of a century later. He found that in both cases the Canons of Dort were endangered, especially the confession that grace proceeds *from* God, but then genuinely proceeds *with* man as well—in regeneration and sanctification.⁶¹ Schilder held firmly to the *praesentia salutis*, the presence of God in history. In his struggle against interdenominational Calvinism, mentioned earlier, he focused once again on the theologian Haitjema, whom Hepp and others viewed as a Calvinist.⁶² In Schilder's eyes, Haitjema was a Barthian. An unbridgeable chasm existed between Calvin and Barth, because they explained the relationships between nature and grace, and between creation and redemption, completely differently. Moreover, both in his essay entitled *Tusschen "Ja" and "Neen"* [Between "yes" and "no"] (1929) and in his dissertation (1933), Schilder repeatedly criticized dialectical theology on the basis of his objections against its concept of "paradox."⁶³ This fierce polemic—apart from all of his criticism of Barth and associates—proves without contradiction how intensively Schilder had studied dialectical theology.⁶⁴ To be sure, Schilder nowhere subjected what Barth had written regarding the

⁶¹ Cf. his series of articles in *De Reformatie*, 14-15, "Comments concerning history and its relevance or irrelevance," 21 September 1934 and following. In the last part of his essay, *De dogmatische beteekenis der "Afscheiding" ook voor onzen tijd* [The dogmatic significance of the "Secession" for our day as well], he elaborated on this subject, for instance on p. 35: "Only the blind do not see that a completely different view regarding the essence and significance of *history* divides us, and a thoroughly different view regarding the relationship between theology and philosophy, and an absolutely different view concerning the relationship between eternity and time, between God and man, and in connection with that, also concerning revelation and its aspects."

⁶² Cf. W. G. de Vries, *Gereformeerden op de tweesprong*, p. 265.

⁶³ In his essay, "Der Kampf des holländischen neo-Calvinismus gegen die dialektische Theologie" [The battle of the Dutch neo-Calvinism against dialectical theology], Haitjema himself referred to this. This essay appeared in the collection entitled *Theologische Aufsätze, Karl Barth zum 50. Geburtstag* [Theological essays on the occasion of Karl Barth's 50th birthday] (1936). So Barth was aware of Schilder's criticism of his theology, but as far as I know, he never responded to it. Later, in 1951, in the preface of his *Church Dogmatics*, III/4 [ET: p. xiii; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961], he dropped a sharp comment in passing against the Dutch "neo-Calvinists" who accused him of monism. This did not bother him all that much, he said, adding: "But it is going too far that in their attacks, obviously to offend me the more, they so far forget themselves as to use unrepeatable terms in disparagement of W. A. Mozart. In so doing they have, of course, shown themselves to be men of stupid, cold and stony hearts to whom we need not listen." Although he does not name Schilder, it can be assumed that he was nevertheless referring to what Schilder had written in his *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* 3: 378 (1950): "And thus the end of the early Barth is celebrated by the later Barth himself. And Mozart, that freemason and pantheistic flautist and funeral guest (Matt. 11!) of the Buddhistic all-is-one-music, Mozart, so admired by Barth." In 1955, in the preface to his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth returned to the neo-Calvinists of the Netherlands, where he expressed appreciation for Berkouwer's book *De triomf der genade in de theologie van Karl Barth* [The triumph of grace in the theology of Karl Barth]. He added mockingly: if only that group of people would not say anything bad about Mozart again!

⁶⁴ In his *Dictaat Dogmatiek* (1934-1936), Schilder discussed the *locus de peccato* [on sin] and defended the historicity of the covenant of works over against Barth's view of Paradise history. Also in his *Diktaat Ethiek* (1934-1937) he dealt particularly with E. Brunner's *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* [ENG??The commandment and the precepts]. Even a study of his *Schriftoverdenkingen* [Meditations on Scripture] from the early 1930s shows how he continually wrestled against dialectical theology. To mention just one example: in the piece entitled "Continuity and judgement" (*De Reformatie*, 5 January 1934), he wrote particularly against the opposition, found in dialectical theology, between God's judgment and human history. There is also a *Dictaat "Credo"* [Notes on the Apostles'

covenant to a systematic critique, but instead made a number of isolated comments. But from his intellectual wrestling with Barth's theology, the Scriptural covenant perspective obtained greater clarity for Schilder, especially in two aspects. On one hand, over against Barth's neglect of history, Schilder placed heavy emphasis on the history of the covenant: the continuity between protology and eschatology, between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, between the first and the last Adam. On the other hand, as a result of his attentive tracking of Barth's development, Schilder acquired greater clarity regarding the structure of the covenant. For in his first, transcendentalist stage, Barth had strongly emphasized God's wrath. Later, however, hardly a trace of this emphasis can be found in his theology. At that point he spoke only about God's love. For Schilder, this development confirmed his prediction that any deity who begins by expressing only wrath later will express wrath no longer.⁶⁵ Perhaps it was in part a result of this course of events that in his own covenant perspective, Schilder devoted so much attention to this aspect of divine wrath and vengeance as structural elements of the covenant. But with this we have landed in the middle of the next chapter of this study: the *history* of the covenant and the *structure* of the covenant.

Just as with the relationship between Schilder and Kuyper, so too one does not easily exhaust examining the relationship between Schilder and Barth. In both cases, there was not really a dialogue; Kuyper had already died, and Barth never responded to Schilder (apart from the reaction mentioned in footnote 63). Schilder waged his polemic more against "Kuyperians" and "Barthians." As we showed above, Kuyper's theology had placed an unmistakable stamp on that of Schilder. Whether the same can be said of Barth's influence on Schilder, is an altogether different question. Some of Schilder's opponents from his own ecclesiastical circle answered this question affirmatively: his "dynamic" concept of church displayed at least a formal similarity to dialectical theology.⁶⁶ Theologically and ecclesiastically, Schilder and Barth came from different

Creed] by Schilder, in which the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed are discussed in response to Barth's book entitled *Credo*. As notes (published, like all the other notes of his lectures, without Schilder's oversight), these are, however, not very valuable.

⁶⁵ Referring to his own *Tusschen "Ja" en "Neen"* and *Tusschen dichters en Schriftgeleerden*, Schilder wrote in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* 2: 368: "The prediction was made that dialectical theology, which in its first phase made a 'category' out of 'wrath,' would in fact thereby have eliminated it. . . ."

⁶⁶ P. J. Richel, *Het kerkbegrip bij Calvijn* (dissertation for the Free University under the direction of Professor Hepp, 1942), pp. 70-71. The fact that Schilder's thought was relevant during this time appears from the fact that this doctoral candidate took the trouble of opposing Schilder throughout his dissertation. On p. 179 mention is even

worlds. Insuperable differences divided them, as Schilder indicated especially with regard to their respective doctrines of Scripture and their views of history. Yet, they lived in the same time period: Barth was only four years older than Schilder. One can even find some remarkable points of similarity between them. To mention just a few: Both theologians wanted the radical abolition of the traditional distinction between “general” and “particular.” Both could say with equal conviction: only where Christ is, there alone is grace. But for Barth this “there alone” ultimately meant: for all people, whereas Schilder insisted: only for members of the covenant. Taking into account all of their differences, it is still interesting to discover that in fact Schilder, like Barth, also rejected general revelation. A connection can even be drawn between the resistance of these two theologians to psychologizing in sermons: Barth’s “theological exegesis” and Schilder’s “redemptive-historical preaching.” Whatever the case may be, however, these examples illustrate nothing more than accidental similarities, for Schilder was not dependent on Barth for any of his views.

Schilder the polemical pen-warrior—“between” Kuyper and Barth. At bottom, Schilder had discovered—as strange as this may sound—the same weakness in both of his great opponents: subjectivism! Schilder identified dangerous mystical tendencies in the position of the Kuyperian V. Hepp.⁶⁷ At the same time he was thoroughly convinced that there are remarkable similarities between dialecticism and mysticism.⁶⁸ According to Schilder, both these subjectivistic tendencies are shipwrecked by the objective truth of the trustworthy Word of Scripture. And in his polemics, he sought to safeguard this starting point.

1.3 A leader in the Liberation

made of Schilder’s “dynamic concept of the covenant,” and similarly Schilder is mentioned in connection with Barth’s dynamic concept of the church.

⁶⁷ In his *Diktaat Encyclopaedie 2*: 21ff., Schilder treated the entire discussion between S. Greijdanus, Hepp, and others, with regard to the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* (about which Hepp had just written a dissertation for his doctoral degree). He returned to this issue in his extensive treatment of Lord’s Day 7, Question 21 (What is true faith?), found in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus 2*: 490ff. The conclusion found on p. 495 is interesting: “Hereby both ‘objectivism’ and ‘subjectivism’ are rejected.”

⁶⁸ *Wat is de hel?*, 3rd ed., p. 223, note 79. In a volume of notes from Schilder’s lectures on philosophy, which I have in my possession (the authenticity of which is difficult to verify), the same position was explained with reference to Schleiermacher and Barth.

It is impossible in the space of a few paragraphs to sketch the occasion for and unfolding of the Liberation. Two aspects of that history, however, touch upon this study, and must therefore receive some attention. The first is the part that Professor Dr. K. Schilder played in that history. To be sure, many more people than he and his direct opponents were involved in this ecclesiastical conflict, but he was undoubtedly one of its key figures. The Liberation introduced a new stage in the course of his eventful life. His theological insights, especially regarding the covenant, were thereby sharpened. The other aspect to be noted at this point is the fact that it was precisely this difference of opinion regarding the doctrine of the covenant—even though much more was involved, especially differences of opinion regarding church polity—played a decisive role in the Liberation.⁶⁹

We mentioned earlier that Schilder was appointed by the synod in 1936 as a member of a committee mandated to investigate the so-called doctrinal differences, and that in the subsequent period Schilder defended himself extensively against V. Hepp with respect to his own understanding of the covenant. During that time there was a lively discussion of the covenant, with numerous responses from every side. When Dr. J. Thijs published a series of articles in *De Heraut* (a weekly magazine edited by H. H. Kuyper), Schilder himself took the same opportunity to offer a substantive response in *De Reformatie*.⁷⁰ This was in 1938. In the same year, the conversation with Thijs was continued, and the year thereafter supplemented with an extensive review of Aalders' new book, *Het verbond Gods*.⁷¹ This series of articles clearly illustrates how, in the heat of the ecclesiastical struggle, Schilder had studied with focused attention the doctrine

⁶⁹ The title of the unpublished licentiate essay by H. van der Walt, submitted to the University of Stellenbosch in 1968, *Verbond en Vrymaking*, offered insightful clarity regarding this issue.

⁷⁰ Thijs wrote in *De Heraut*: "Geloof en Doop I-X," 9 January – 6 March 1938 (no. 3129-3137), and Schilder responded in *De Reformatie*, 18, with the following series:

- 17 June 1938: "Verborgene en geopenbaarde dingen"
- 24 June 1938: "Ontkrachting van het verbond"
- 1 July 1938: "Het karakter van het verbond aangetast"
- 8 July 1938: "Herinnering aan Coccejus?"
- 15 July 1938: "Coccejaansche opvattinge in 'De Heraut' af te wijzen"
- 22 July 1938: "Van Coccejus terug naar de theologen van de bloeitijd"
- 9 September 1938: "Het Schriftbewijs van 'De Heraut' inzake de verbondsleer"
- 16 September 1938: "De oude en de nieuwe diatheke I"
- 23 September 1938: "De oude en de nieuwe diatheke II"
- 30 September 1938: "Verbondswraak?"

⁷¹ The new series against Thijs, "Verbondswraak I-VI," began immediately with the first issue of volume 19 (7 October 1938). The book of Professor. G. Ch. Aalders was reviewed under a similar title, "Het verbond Gods I-X," 19 (7 July 1938) and following.

of the covenant in both early and recent authors. Meanwhile, in the spring of 1939 he made his first trip to the United States of America. Throughout his life, Schilder rarely took a vacation, so he truly enjoyed this trip. His time was filled with giving speeches, lectures, and sermons. He met numerous sympathizers in America, including a number in the Christian Reformed Church who supported his position.⁷² There was significant discussion about the covenant in America as well. After his return to the Netherlands, Professor Schilder repeated, in a series of lectures, the addresses he had given when in America.⁷³

So Schilder was thoroughly prepared to report to the Synod of Sneek 1939 regarding the differences of theological views. Originally, however, this had not proceeded smoothly with the synodical committee investigating the matter. Already in 1938 Professor S. Greijdanus had asked to resign from the committee, especially because in his pamphlet series, entitled *Dreigende deformatie*, fellow committee member Professor V. Hepp had publicly accused other committee members of deviating from the confession. Committee members Professors K. Schilder and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven felt compelled to submit a separate minority report, chiefly for the same reason.⁷⁴ Relationships, especially between Schilder and Hepp, were certainly strained.

Meanwhile World War II had broken out across Europe. Precisely during this time when the synod began dealing with the reports mentioned earlier, Schilder was imprisoned in Arnhem,

⁷² Van Reest, “*Opdat zij allen één zijn*,” 1: 234-246 [ET: 220-230], provided a lively account of this trip. Precisely during this time that the English translation of *Christus in zijn lijden* began to appear in America. Cf. the bibliography supplied by v. d. Heuven in *Almanak* 1953, p. 127. For an understanding of the current ecclesiastical and theological situation, cf. also the farewell that Dr. K. Dijk wrote to Schilder as he was embarking on this trip (*De Bazuin*, 86 [23 December 1938]): “It is the tone of their [the Americans’, S.A.S.] heartfelt confidence that, in the treatment of the subjects that have been announced, you will draw the Reformed lines tightly, as you have done here in response to the error of Barthianism and the entire philosophy of paradox; in terms of the weakening of church and covenant, even as you have observed the dilution occurring in many circles; in terms of the principles of the National-socialist movement and the Christian Democratic Union, who have discovered you to be a powerful opponent, and no less in terms of any weakening of the authority of Holy Scripture, cooperation with which was a threat among our churches in 1926.”

⁷³ *Diktaat Americana*, pp. 6-18, where he discussed especially what Professor Geerhardus Vos was teaching about the covenant at the time in Grand Rapids. It is interesting to note that in this same year (1939), a reprint appeared in the Netherlands of Professor Vos’s important address given in 1891, “De verbondsleer in de Gereformeerde Theologie.”

⁷⁴ G. Janssen, *De feitelijke toedracht*, pp. 12ff. The report that Janssen mentioned on p. 13, note 1, is the famous *Van “oorzaken” en “redenen,”* in which Schilder and Vollenhoven set forth their objections against the committee. The *content* of the minority report (regarding the issues of self-examination and covenant) Schilder himself published in *De Ref.* 21 (13 October 1945 and later): “Insinuaties inzake het zelfonderzoek I-V” (reprinted in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* 2:499-520) and 10 November 1945 and later: “Is er eenstemmigheid over het genadeverbond? I-IV.”

from August until December of 1940. This arrest had occurred because he had written so voluminously and so vehemently against the German occupying forces. The publication of *De Reformatie* had to be suspended (from 16 August 1940 until 6 July 1945), since Schilder had been judicially forbidden to engage in “every literary or journalistic activity.”⁷⁵ One can well imagine how this prohibition against writing must have affected someone like Schilder—precisely in this time of raging ecclesiastical conflict!

On 10 December 1940, Professor Schilder again became a free man, and was able to continue giving lectures. On 13 July 1942, however, he was forced to “go underground” for the sake of his personal safety. Until August 1944, he lived for the most part at a secret location, and in any case could not afford to appear in public. Two months before he had gone into hiding, the ongoing synod, gathering at that time in Utrecht, decided to continue dealing with the doctrinal differences—despite urgent appeals *not* to do so on account of the tense wartime situation. One month later, on 8 June 1942, the synod made its famous doctrinal decision (regarding, among other things, the covenant of grace).⁷⁶

This synodical pronouncement, which corresponded in large measure with that of the Synod of Utrecht 1905, initially caused no observable dissatisfaction. But when the synod published an explanation of it (authored by Drs. G. Ch. Aalders, G. C. Berkouwer, J. Ridderbos, and Rev. S. J. Popma), it became clear that a particular Kuyperian understanding of the covenant must be seen to lie behind this decision. In addition, the synod decided that theological candidates for the ministry were obligated to agree with the doctrinal pronouncement. The result of this was that a subsequent synod needed to assemble in Utrecht several months later, in June 1943) in order to deal with a flood of protests against its decisions, and especially against the binding character of those decisions. Protests were submitted by, among others, Professor S. Greijdanus, Dr. M. B. van ’t Veer, and Rev. D. van Dijk—all of them known supporters of Professor Schilder. His own role and possible contribution in relation to these objections are difficult to reconstruct. For he was lodging at a secret location, though it was also known that

⁷⁵ Cf. W. G. de Vries, *K. Schilder als gevangene en onderduiker*, especially pp. 10 and 43.

⁷⁶ For our exposition in this section, we have used especially the work of Janssen, although this was repeatedly compared with other sources. For the sake of background, it is perhaps helpful at this point to provide the text of the synodical doctrinal pronouncement concerning the covenant of grace (Janssen, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-269): “1. ENG VAN REEST???”

while in hiding there he had conducted vigorous and extensive correspondence with numerous people.

At that point, as was its custom, the synod appointed a committee mandated to examine the protests. Its report was published as *Praeadvies van Commissie I*.⁷⁷ This again proved, to the protesters at least, that the synod was simply maintaining the Kuyperian understanding of the covenant as the Reformed position. Their protests were therefore, as was to be expected, rejected by the synod. Nevertheless, discussions occurred between the synod and the protesters. The latter group of brothers formulated the famous *Verklaring van Gevoelen* (*Explanation of Sentiments*), in which they explained their view of covenant and baptism clearly and unambiguously.⁷⁸ Professor Greijdanus had a decisive hand in the formulation of this document. The degree to which Professor Schilder was involved in this response is not known. During this time, his involvement was characterized more by his growing objections *on the basis of church polity* against the actions of the synod.⁷⁹

From 17 December 1941 onward, he had persistently refused to cooperate any further with any of the activities of the synod. He was convinced that the fact that he had been publicly accused of holding deviating positions, together with the fact that he had been prohibited from writing so that he was unable to defend himself, had made such cooperation impossible for him. In this kind of issue Schilder could be immovable, for the sake of what he perceived as just and righteous. Moreover, he also had objections against the legality of the synod which had continued meeting from 1939 until 1942 without a mandate from any local church. Against the background of this objection, Schilder and others stood in opposition to the so-called “new” church polity (in contrast to the “Doleantie” church polity) that had gradually entered into the

⁷⁷ A report of some bulk, with more than 70 pages, authored by Drs. A. D. R. Polman, F. W. Grosheide, and J. Ridderbos. After the war, and thus also after the Liberation (vrijmaking) in 1945-1946, Schilder reviewed this report critically with his students in his lectures. His lecture notes, *Dogmahistorie Praeadvies*, contain the report of this review. In his letter of 13 December 1943 to the synod (cf. note 21 above), Schilder gave an account of his substantive objections against the *Toelichting*: “According to my understanding this appeal [to the Reformed fathers, S.A.S.] is almost persistently incorrect; it ignores important elements; it casts particular views in a twisted image; yes, even to the point of making a person say the exact opposite of what he actually said.” (Cf. the cited *Acta*, pp. 358-359.)

⁷⁸ C. Veenhof, as one intimately involved with this *Explanation*, discussed extensively its origin in his *Om de “Unica catholica”*, pp. 198ff. For the sake of clarity the ten main points of the *Explanation* were reproduced here once more (*Verklaring van gevoelens, met enkele bijlagen*, pp. 8-15):

“We believe...ENG???”

⁷⁹ Cf. the chapter entitled, “De kerkrechtelijke geschillen,” by Janssen, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-106.

life of the Reformed Churches under the leadership of Professor H. H. Kuyper.⁸⁰ In October 1942 he advised the Kampen consistory in writing not to recognize the decisions of the synod.⁸¹ Schilder simultaneously informed the synod in writing concerning his objections.⁸²

Schilder objected against the new synod of 1943 as well, not so much against the content of the doctrinal pronouncements as against their binding character. It cannot be denied that the synod itself had been put in a difficult position. On 13 December 1943, Schilder sent a circular letter to all the consistories in which he declared very sharply that unless the synod turned back from its wreckless path, “the die is cast.” With that language he was seeking to plead for a solution whereby the synod would not have to compel acceptance of the doctrinal pronouncements. But the synod had begun to view the entire dispute more in the light of a crisis of authority.⁸³ For that reason, on 16 December 1943 the synod decided “that nothing may be taught in our churches that does not fully agree with the doctrinal pronouncements that have been adopted.” With that, the fat was in the fire. When in January 1944 Schilder sent a copy of a letter from him to the synod to all the consistories, the synod viewed that as an attempted schism. They informed Schilder of this and requested him to provide categorical “yes” or “no” answers to five questions. The main thread of these questions was whether he would conform to the synodical decisions. When after a brief time of reflection he refused to respond, the synod saw itself compelled to suspend him initially for a period of three months, which was extended later for another month. That decision was made on 23 March 1944 and was based on what Article 80

⁸⁰ The main issue in this argument was the authority of the synod in Reformed church polity, an issue that had been in discussion already since the deposition of Dr. Geelkerken (by the Synod of Assen in 1926). Professor Schilder and his supporters appealed to particular statements of Professor F. L. Rutgers (for example, in his *De rechtsbevoegdheid onzer Plaatselijke Kerken*), but the synod emphatically rejected this appeal. Cf. *Toelichting op het Synode-besluit tot schorsing van prof. dr. K. Schilder*. Cf. also the dissertation of M. Bouwman, *Voetius over het gezag der Synoden* (under the direction of Professor H. H. Kuyper). W. D. Jonker provided a brief discussion of this incident in his *Om die regering van Christus in sy kerk*, pp. 28ff., along with a bibliography of relevant literature. Precisely in this context Schilder and others appealed to Article 31 of the Church Order of Dort: every decision of a broader assembly must be examined by the consistory and ratified (confirmed), before it can be viewed as valid. Regarding this, cf. Schilder’s essay, *Eerste- en tweedehands gezag*, in cooperation with P. Deddens. D. Nauta provided a brief summary in *Chr. Encyclopedie*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, s.v. “Oud en nieuw kerkrecht.” Cf. also the pamphlet by R. H. Bremmer and J. P. v. d. Stoel, *Overstemming of overeenstemming? Een bijdrage tot het verstaan van den kerkrechtelijken strijd in de Gereformeerde Kerken*.

⁸¹ C. v. d. Woude, “Vrijmaking,” in *Chr. Encyclopedie*, 2nd ed., vol. 6.

⁸² Schilder’s protracted correspondence with the synod was published by K. C. van Spronsen, in *De Waarheid luistert nauw*.

⁸³ In his conversation with Puchinger (*Is de gereformeerde wereld veranderd?*, p. 273), D. Nauta referred again especially to this letter of Schilder, and said: “. . . we who were at the synod understood that letter to be a revolutionary challenge.” That expression in Schilder’s letter was mentioned as something relevant also in *Toelichting op het Synode-besluit tot schorsing van prof. dr. K. Schilder*, p. 16.

of the Church Order termed the sin of schism. Professor Greijdanus was suspended during this same period as well. As late as 31 July 1944 yet another (secret) conversation occurred between members of the moderamen of the synod and Professor Schilder. But without success. On 3 August 1944 he was deposed by the synod from his office as professor and minister of the Word.

Eight days later a gathering of protesting church members was held in The Hague. As required, this occurred precisely when Schilder was able once again to appear in public.⁸⁴ Friends who during this period had kept close contact with him maintained that initially he had not kept up with ecclesiastical life in general, apart from the events at the synod. On the contrary, he suffered immensely on account of his deposition. But once he had been deposed, with the encouragement of his supporters he saw new possibilities for the future. With his own pen he had composed the *Act of Liberation and Return*, which he read to the historic gathering on 11 August 1944 in the Lutheran Church in The Hague.⁸⁵ In this document Schilder and his supporters explained their intention with the Liberation. In addition, Schilder gave an address to this same gathering, explaining this document, a report of which exists.⁸⁶ In the first part of the *Act of Liberation and Return* those who signed it declared in so many words that they considered the decision of the synod (that the seed of the covenant “are to be considered as regenerated”) to be in conflict with the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read that the secret things must be left to God, “. . . but the things that are revealed, namely, the promises and demands spoken by Him, His bestowal [toezegging] of the blessing together with His threat [aanzegging] of the wrath of His covenant, His embrace no less than His threat,” are given “to us and to our children.” In this manner, the signatories of the declaration wished to evaluate God and His working in the human heart “*only* from what He has *said*, not from what He thought and kept to Himself.” Anyone who is at all familiar with this document from Schilder can discern his hand directly involved in the composition of the *Act of Liberation and Return*. In his explanation of this particular point, Schilder again emphasized that the actual problem with the synodical decision was its binding character. Although he viewed the pronouncements of 1905 and 1942

⁸⁴ Van Spronsen answered the accusation that Schilder *refused* to meet with the synod. Such a meeting *could not occur*. Only after he had been deposed was it possible for the first time to appear in public again. Cf. N. Scheeps, *Interviews over 25 jaar Vrijmaking*, pp. 38-40.

⁸⁵ In the *Interviews* mentioned above, Dr. P. Jasperse told of the origin of this document. Its text can be found in the same book, pp. 122-128. It was also published in Janssen, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-280.

⁸⁶ *De redevoeringen van prof. dr. K. Schilder op 11 Augustus 1944 - I and II*, published by W. G. de Vries in *De Ref.*, 54 (11 and 18 August 1979).

both as being in conflict with the first question in the liturgical form for baptism (“sanctified in Christ”), there was in his view this difference: in 1905 a particular one-sidedness was rejected, but in 1942 an extra document with binding authority was being added to the existing Three Forms of Unity. Therefore, in the last part of the *Act of Liberation and Return*, it was again emphasized that its signatories were liberating themselves from the “illegitimate and ungodly depositions.” They refused to live as church under a scientific-theological yoke, but only under the yoke of Christ in obedience to his Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. In his explanatory address, Schilder added that it was not the signatories of the *Act of Liberation and Return* who were dividing the church, but the synod which had abandoned the basis agreed upon in 1892. This document and the action of 11 August 1944 displayed (intentional) similarity to the Secession of 1834. All of this set in motion a process whereby approximately 90,000 members of the Reformed Churches “liberated” themselves and began their own independent ecclesiastical life together. These “liberated” folk even refused to surrender the original name of the denomination. Initially, simply with a view to something as practical as a postal address, they were known as the Reformed Churches (maintaining Dort Church Order, Article 31). The other denomination was called the “synodical Reformed Churches.”

Regardless of how all of these tragic events are viewed, one must take note of the fact that the Liberated churches were the fourth largest denomination in the Netherlands at this stage, along with the Roman Catholics, the national Dutch Reformed Church, and the synodical Reformed Churches. This church split did not occur in an isolated little corner of the Netherlands.⁸⁷ And regardless of how one views the part played by Professor K. Schilder in all of this—as someone averse to every form of hierarchy in the church he definitely did not cut a figure of someone imbued with ecclesiastical royalty—he can nevertheless certainly be called a “leader” in the Liberation. Immediately after the Liberation, at his initiative a building for their own Theological College (on Broederweg in Kampen) was successfully acquired, where he was able to continue his work as professor of dogmatics. A new independent theological library had to be built from the ground up. And from 6 July 1945 Schilder served as the sole editor of *De*

⁸⁷ The fact that the conflict of the Liberated Churches attracted attention outside their own ecclesiastical circle was shown, for example, by the volume that J. G. Woelderink, who was a minister in the national Dutch Reformed Church, wrote in 1944: *Belofte en werkelijkheid*, in which he took the side of the Liberated. Even before the Liberation, his book *Het Doopsformulier* (1938) had exerted significant influence on those who later became Liberated.

Reformatie, which week after week provided pages full of instruction to the new church fellowship. In the early years after the Liberation, with renewed zeal Schilder devoted his tremendous capacities for work coupled with the application of all his powers to the consolidation of the Liberated Reformed Churches.

During the church conflict, and in the period thereafter, a virtually innumerable spate of pamphlets and booklets appeared from both camps. The doctrine of the covenant was discussed repeatedly in a large number of those publications. In this period Schilder himself published his volume, *Looze kalk (Untempered Mortar)*, in which he polemicized against the pamphlet written by Dr. J. Ridderbos, entitled *Kerkscheuring (Church Split)*. In his book, Schilder discussed extensively the topics that were relevant in those days, such as the internal and external sides of the covenant, conditions of the covenant, and the pronouncement of 1905.⁸⁸ In 1946 the synod of the (non-Liberated) Reformed Churches dealt once again with the doctrinal pronouncements of 1942 that had brought about such catastrophic consequences in the church. The result of this continued reflection was the so-called Vervangingsformule [Replacement Formula].⁸⁹ At first glance this appears to be a balanced formulation regarding covenant, baptism, and related issues, an honest attempt at reconciliation. But the ecclesiastical break was now final. This synodical statement was examined in its smallest details, weighed and found wanting. Schilder devoted no fewer than twenty-five editorials to it, entitled “A Fourth Form of Unity.”⁹⁰

One gets the impression that the last years of Schilder's life could hardly be called tranquil. As leader in the Liberation, he was naturally involved in various ecclesiastical matters. He needed to travel throughout the Netherlands continually in order to preach, give speeches, and provide advice. During this period he nevertheless found opportunity to make a second trip to America, this one in 1947. Unlike his first visit eight years earlier, many doors were closed to him. This time he took up contact particularly with the Protestant Reformed Churches, where he

⁸⁸ The first couple of volumes of the *Gereformeerd Weekblad* were literally filled with material about topics relating to the covenant. In vol. 1 (1945), cf. the column “Actuele dogmatische vragen,” by Dr. G. C. Berkouwer, and in vol. 2 (1946), the column “Onderzoekt de Schriften,” by Dr. J. Ridderbos. The latter column discussed the covenant (promise, conditions, election, etc.) without interruption. This was continued in vol. 3 (1947) as well.

⁸⁹ Cf. Janssen, *op. cit.*, pp. 196ff., for the history of its origin, and pp. 282ff. for the text of this Replacement Formula.

⁹⁰ *De Ref.*, 22 (9 November 1946 and following).

was also introduced to what Professor W. Heyns had written about the covenant. In this context Schilder published in 1950 an important series of articles, entitled “Concerning America,” in which he discussed critically the position of the American Rev. H. Hoeksema with regard to covenant and election.⁹¹ Throughout these final busy years of Professor Schilder's life, there was but one more work from his pen that is worthy of mention: his *magnum opus*, an exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism. In point of fact, he had begun writing this commentary already before the war,⁹² but now the entire project was organized more comprehensively. His intention was to explain the fifty-two Lord's Days of the Catechism in about twelve volumes. At the time of his sudden death in 1952, however, he had reached only Lord's Day 10. The completed volumes feature discussions of various aspects of Schilder's view of the covenant, some quite extensive.⁹³

On Sunday morning, 23 March 1952—exactly eight years after he was deposed by the synod—Professor Dr. K. Schilder passed away suddenly. In the last few months of his life, as a result of stress he had begun to suffer from heart disease. In the very same Kampen where sixty-one years earlier he had first opened his eyes to the light of life, he now closed them for the last time. From a human point of view his theological labor was not yet finished. Nor can it be claimed that, from a theological point of view, he had begun an entire movement. Few of his students have consistently maintained or developed his characteristic “Schilderian” perspective. His unexpected passing, along with that of Old Testament colleague Professor. B. Holwerda a mere six weeks later, left a huge chasm within the Liberated churches. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that until today, these churches have continued to travel their own theological and ecclesiastical path within the Dutch situation (and on a smaller scale in other countries of the world). In these circles the perspective of Schilder, particularly in regard to the covenant, play a significant role even today.

⁹¹ *De Ref.*, 26 (28 October 1950 and following); these articles were later published in pamphlet form as *Bovenschriftuurlijke binding – een nieuw gevaar?*

⁹² The first part of this work appeared as a weekly addendum to *De Reformatie* from 7 October 1938 to 10 November 1939. In the space of 296 pages, Lord's Days 1–4 were discussed. A second part appeared in the same manner from 24 November 1939 onward. In the middle of discussing Lord's Day 5, on p. 232, the series was abruptly discontinued on 16 October 1940 in light of the prohibition against publishing *De Reformatie*. Schilder himself said in the Preface to the second edition of volume 1 (1947) that the edition that had appeared earlier was now entirely revised and corrected. In essence, however, the same ideas had been formulated (more succinctly) in the first edition.

⁹³ Cf. § 1.5 (Covenant Theologian?) below.

1.4 “Everything or nothing”: The characteristic feature of a theologian and his theology

It is true that the theology of each theologian is closely connected to the church historical situation in which that theologian lived and formulated his theology. That such a truth applied especially to K. Schilder should be clear from the preceding section. In general it is likewise true that each theology is interwoven with the personality of the theologian behind it. This claim also applies especially to the man K. Schilder and to his theological labor.⁹⁴

Biographers of Schilder agree that his was a complex personality. Perhaps the reason for that must be sought in his extraordinary ability. Various writers do not consider it an exaggeration in the least to describe him as a genius.⁹⁵ From a linguistic point of view, genius is synonymous with complexity.

Schilder's personality can be approached from another point of view as well. He was intensively preoccupied with the theological and philosophical notion of “paradox.” In his own personality there was, however, something paradoxical, in the sense of an apparent contradiction. This paradoxical quality surfaced in his manner of polemicizing. Someone who can hardly be viewed as his supporter wrote that when Schilder was still a pastor, he had been engaged in an argument with Schilder. When he went to visit personally with Rev. Schilder, he was received with hearty friendliness—totally contradictory to the impersonalness of that vigorous argument. On that occasion Schilder supposedly said that here at the parsonage we meet each other

⁹⁴ J. Douma suggested that anyone seeking to summarize Schilder's doctrinal labor will need to write a biography of Schilder at the same time. “For his doctrine was tightly interwoven with his life. . . . Anyone reading Schilder's doctrinal writings gets to know his life as well.” Just as with Abraham Kuyper, in contrast with Herman Bavinck, Schilder always stood in front. His dogmatics was born out of his polemics. “For that reason the biography of the person of K. Schilder can almost coincide with that of the theologian K. Schilder” (“Nog sprekend nadat hij gestorven is,” [Still speaking after he has died], in *De Reformatie*, 52 [26 March 1977]).

⁹⁵ In his 1969 radio address (published in his book, *Een theologie in discussie [A Theology in Discussion]*) Puchinger spoke of Schilder as an astute theologian, a gifted journalist and polemicist (p. 13), and of his great theological ability and diversity (p. 14). Stellingwerf (in *Opbouw*, 2 [23 May 1958]) called Schilder a genius. So, too, Booy, Thijs and G.C. van Niftrik, in their conversation with Puchinger (in *Is de gereformeerde wereld veranderd? [Has the Reformed world changed?]*, pp. 176 and 373). Professor Dr. S. van der Linde once described Schilder as “perhaps the most brilliant figure ever to have held a teaching post in ‘Kampen’” (cited by Puchinger, *Ontmoetingen met theologen [Encounters with Theologians]*, p. 144). Dr. Louët Feisser described him as “a genius, but with blinders” (also cited by Puchinger, *Is de gereformeerde wereld veranderd?*, p. 216). In the same volume Puchinger reported Dr. W. K. van Dijk, professor of psychiatry, as saying that Schilder's ingeniousness “was both his greatness and his misfortune” (p. 389).

personally, as fellow Christians, “but when I am writing in *De Reformatie*, then I have nothing personal against you, but I am fighting about principles.”⁹⁶ Many opponents of Schilder could undoubtedly have had similar experiences with him. In personal relationships he was mild and patient, but in a fight he was fierce and immovable.

Those who know his work discover traces of paradox there as well. One observer described him as poetic and even as a romantic, on the one hand, yet rationalistic and even logicistic.⁹⁷ From his conflict with the synod around 1944 it is well known that he never expected to be suspended and deposed. In that way, he was naïve to some extent. But at the same time with full awareness he had driven the synod step by step to the point of having to make a decision about the “Schilder case.” So he was also calculating. On account of his intense involvement with everything happening around him, some people called him an existentialist. At the same time he was also accused of rationalism. So, he was “an existentialist with a neo-Kantian brain.”⁹⁸

To mention but one more observation: in one respect he was strongly inclined toward his tradition, but in another respect—for his own time—he was nonetheless hyper-modern!⁹⁹ He never denied his simple pedigree, leading a simple life. He bicycled many kilometers in wind and rain, since he never owned an automobile. But he also enjoyed life to the fullest. Especially good music and beautiful paintings spoke to his artistic nature. He was also a fine organist, though he had never received formal training in music. All of these (paradoxical) features taken together occasionally leave the impression that he was uncouth and a bit out of touch with reality. But who was more engaged and in tune with the events of his day than Schilder? All the facets of his many-sided (and incomprehensible) personality resulted naturally in him becoming, even before his death already, a controversial figure. A division of opinion formed around Schilder—some were repulsed permanently by his positions, while others were immeasurably stimulated by his perspectives.

⁹⁶ J. J. Buskes, in *Mensen die je niet vergeet* [*People You Never Forget*], pp. 40-48. On p. 44 Buskes registered this cruel judgment: “There was something schizophrenic here.” Buskes told the same story to Puchinger, recorded in the latter’s volume, *Hervormd-Gereformeerd, één of gescheiden?* [*National Reformed-Reformed: Are They One or Separated?*], pp. 329-330.

⁹⁷ W. K. van Dijk, in the conversation mentioned in note 95 above.

⁹⁸ Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie*, p. 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

A balanced scientific biography of Schilder must still be written. This will not be an easy task, however. This particular study (about the covenant in K. Schilder's theology) will permit us to make no more than these few assorted comments about Schilder's biography. Once more, the connection between Schilder as a man and his theology must always be kept in view; failing to do this will easily lead to a one-sided, and usually cynically condemning, evaluation of his work. That connection can may well come more clearly into view if we turn our attention at this point to his motivations and intentions, as man and as theologian. At the same time such an approach would offer an opportunity to clarify and to justify the choice of the title for this study.

Everything or nothing was the title Schilder himself gave to a collection of Scripture meditations written in 1936.¹⁰⁰ In his preface Schilder wrote that this theme had arisen in connection with modern theology with its notion of *Entscheidung* (decision). But many modern theologians turned their back on this theme because they remained caught in the dilemma, "Does the notion of 'everything or nothing' actually have to do with law or with gospel? Is it a phrase involving salvation or condemnation? A notion involving eternity or time? Does one encounter this within or outside of the historical relationships of our lives? Does one meet it along the route of the covenant, or at the salutary point where God's sovereignty intersects with human responsibility?" Over against these questions Schilder wanted to place various Scripture passages. "For if you are convinced, along with this writer," he wrote, "concerning the reality of revelation *history* and also concerning the reality of its fruits, then you can do nothing but condemn such dilemmas. 'Everything or nothing'—that is the content of the Word, and thus of the Scripture; thus of both law and gospel; it is the message whereby the Eternal One subjects himself to time in righteous grace, establishes the connections according to his decree, breaking every 'connection' that is of the 'flesh'; and therewith He points everyone to heaven and to hell. .

. . .¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ This collection was never finished or published. The fragmentary collection, consisting of thirty-seven "daily portions," was published by C. Veenhof in *Schriftoverdenkingen* (*Scripture Meditations*), 2.90ff. In 1948 Schilder tried once more to complete this work, but to no avail. As to the reason he never finished it, we are able only to speculate. Perhaps his first attempt (in 1936!) was doomed to failure because of the full-scale church struggle of that time. But in 1948 Schilder would have found a sufficient number of appreciative readers. Another possibility is that this is a characteristic example of Schilder's unsystematic approach. He simply could find no time to finish this collection.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 91-92. Schilder referred (p. 92) to Dr. Henrik Ibsen, "whose play entitled 'Fire' . . . sought to place before our spirit with compelling seriousness the theme of 'everything or nothing'."

In the first meditation, focusing on Matthew 13:12 (“For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away”), Schilder wrote that this saying is indeed a “fearsome” saying: “Beware, since each day brings you toward an absolute ‘everything,’ or toward an absolute ‘nothing.’ That’s how much each day means.” The real contrast in this text is between the “rich man” who, while losing everything, has received everything, and the “poor man” who is guilty because, while losing nothing, he refused to receive anything. “*Everything or nothing*—yes, the one who hears now receives a vision of Golgotha: everything or nothing. Hell opens up: *nothing*. Heaven beckons: *everything*. Crucified with Christ—becoming nothing; raised with Him—called to everything. The dying away of the old man: *nothing*. The resurrection of the new man: *everything*. Everything or nothing—in or out, life or death.”¹⁰²

The one speaking to us here is Schilder, the prophet-preacher, with his full message as he has discovered it in Scripture! Precisely with an eye to this theme serving as the title of an extensive study on Schilder’s understanding of the covenant, it is highly significant to observe that in the rest of that (unfortunately incomplete) collection, Schilder went on to discuss especially various aspects of the *covenant*.¹⁰³ Everything or nothing—this is the theme of the entire covenant between God and his people. Everything or nothing—these are the two poles of the field of tension wherein K. Schilder lived his own restless life. Everything or nothing—in all his actions, Schilder saw himself coming to stand before this inescapable decision. And this is a genuine dilemma: either everything or nothing. Who is in a position to choose one of those two and to bear the consequences of his choice? There is only one way out: in full obedience to

¹⁰² *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2.96.

¹⁰³ After Genesis 15 (the LORD’s covenant with Abraham) was discussed, Micah 6 (the LORD’s lawsuit against his covenant people) is discussed. We read on p. 114: “Anyone who knows them [referring to terror and calamity, SAS], however, through faith in the covenant of grace, also knows that this covenant does not make for careless people, but each day it awakens them in righteousness, because the *absolute seriousness* characterizing our actions and omissions is preached and understood only through the covenant. ‘Everything or nothing,’ that is the *covenant* theme.” To suffice with but one more illustration, this one in connection with Revelation 2:20, Schilder wrote on p. 170: “Anyone who but thinks of the forensic character of the covenant of the Lord with his people will now understand why *corruption* creeps also into the fellowship of the covenant by profiting from the presence of *adiaphora*. Though a person does not know precisely what God *says*, the first question is what He thinks or *wills*. To trivialize that will, as soon as one gets a ‘chance’ to do so where God has supplied no ‘letter,’ is to play a game with literalism, and worse: it is to transform the *covenant* with God into a *contract* with . . . an enemy whom one wants to dupe. . . . Woe to him who treats his God like this kind of enemy. . . .” Here, and in the subsequent meditations, Schilder draws out the ethical consequences of the covenant theme “everything or nothing.”

choose *for* that *everything*, in the power of Him who has done *everything* and equipped us unto *everything*. But anyone who then chooses for that *everything* must also realize beforehand that he himself will become *nothing*. . . . It is a dangerous thing to declare this truth about God. . . .”¹⁰⁴

Against the background of this deepest of all convictions held throughout his life, this absolute—if not absolutistic—feature of Schilder’s personality must be understood.¹⁰⁵ Naturally this sort of absolute posture must be explained in a positive sense. For then in absolute obedience to the demands of the Lord in his Word, the Christian realizes wonderful blessings in his life. There were plenty of examples of that positive-absolute in Schilder’s own life. A friend from his youth wrote upon his death of his (Schilder’s) absolute faithfulness and honesty.¹⁰⁶ For that reason he was so averse to every form of diplomatic church politics as well.¹⁰⁷ Even his ecclesiastical opponents honored him because he had taught his generation once again to fear God.¹⁰⁸

Schilder revealed his absolute seriousness in a very special way in his sermons. His remarkable preaching constituted one very heartfelt and moving appeal that his listeners never ever forget the wrath and the judgment of God.¹⁰⁹ Through his preaching, many people during

¹⁰⁴ In his volume *In memoriam prof. dr. K. Schilder*, Puchinger placed a photograph of the deceased with an aphorism of Junius, a Reformed theologian from the 17th century: “De Deo etiam verum dicere periculosum est” (“Even to speak the truth concerning God is dangerous”). Schilder himself referred to this Latin maxim in a footnote on p. 81 of his *Christus en Cultuur*.

¹⁰⁵ Bremmer, “Schilder,” in *Biografische lexicon*, wrote: “Schilder himself was characterized by absolute sympathy and absolute antipathy. . . . He was a man who gave himself to his work without rest and never calculated the personal risk associated with that.” De Vries also wrote (in *Calvinisten op de tweesprong*, p. 393) in connection with Schilder’s polemic during the 1930s against the Calvinistic Society: “For Schilder this involved the absolute word that the church as the house of God was called to speak.” De Vries was not critical of this absoluteness. Stellingwerf (in *Opbouw*, 2 [25 April 1958]) referred to what has already been termed Schilder’s Sermon on the Mount ethic: “Let our yes be yes, and our no be no, and everything beyond that is from the devil. That’s how Schilder talked, and that’s how he behaved, in war and in peace, in the ‘world’ and in the church.” This was a wordplay on Schilder’s farewell sermon in Oegstgeest in 1928, when he preached on Matthew 5:37 as his text.

¹⁰⁶ J. de Waard wrote: “What you saw and heard was always the genuine article” (“Een man een man, een word een word”), in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁷ C. Veenhof, in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ After Schilder’s death C. W. J. Teeuwen wrote an article reprinted in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*. We find on p. 114 these words of his: “Schilder’s uncomprehended personality with all its tensions, sins, and faults has demonstrated beyond measure in its relationships how deeply the Calvinist of the 20th century had *reason* genuinely to *fear* God Almighty with a very great fear. To that absolute motif Schilder remained faithful in terms of his own insights.” This is a balanced, and therefore correct, assessment.

¹⁰⁹ For a few examples, which can easily be multiplied, we refer to his sermon from 1926 on Amos 9:7-8, “False boasting shamed” (reprinted in *Preken*, 1.432ff.). G.C. Berkouwer referred to this same sermon in his book *Een halve eeuw theologie*, pp. 64-66 [ET: *A Half-Century of Theology*, trans. By Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids:

that time were confronted with the ultimate seriousness of human life in its relationship to God.¹¹⁰ Here we feel the pulsing heartbeat of his theological conviction, also with regard to the covenant. Everything or nothing!¹¹¹

Schilder's unalloyed disposition also drove him to insist repeatedly that a course of action once begun must be pursued to its ultimate consequences. When the same Reformed leaders who had earlier condemned Dr. Geelkerken on account of his deviating view of Scripture, shortly thereafter wanted to resume cooperating with him and his supporters in the interdenominational Calvinistic Society, for Schilder this went too far. Even a supporter of Geelkerken, Rev. Buskes, saw clearly that Schilder had drawn the full ecclesiastical consequences of the synodical decision of Assen (1926), but that the others (like V. Hepp and H.H. Kuyper) who wanted to cooperate with Geelkerken and company on an interdenominational basis, if they were to have been consistent, should have reconsidered their position in relation to the exegetical-doctrinal decision of Assen as well.¹¹² It is interesting that about forty years after 1926 (in 1967), the synodical Reformed Churches set aside the decision of Assen. In a certain sense, the ecclesiastical children of Hepp and Kuyper were thereby following the (exegetical-doctrinal) logic of their fathers' (ecclesiastical) position. Schilder's ecclesiastical children, however, now members of the liberated Reformed Churches, still to this day maintain what the opponents back then simply dubbed the "traditional" view of Scripture, in line with Assen 1926. In his absolute seriousness Schilder was already in those days convinced that this matter had involved deeply principal questions, questions that entailed the continuing existence of the church (as a Reformed church).

Eerdmans, 1977), 50-51], where he showed that the same motif concerning the finger of God in history energized both the early Karl Barth and Schilder.

¹¹⁰ Puchinger made this comment in connection with a letter from Rev. Schilder in 1931 to Professor A. Eekhof (in *Ontmoetingen met theologen*, p. 156). Puchinger wrote that this letter (reprinted on pp. 154-155) showed "his deep humanness, his open honesty and his strict seriousness also toward himself, all of which were tied to respect for God's Word and a deep sense of responsibility for bringing the Christian message."

¹¹¹ In his work *Opdat zij allen een zijn* (1: 127-140; ET: *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, translated by Theodore Plantinga [Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990], 123-138), R. Van Reest offers an enthusiastic description of Schilder's preaching style. Without having command of a pleasing voice, Schilder nevertheless stimulated his listeners with his content, with his staggering manner of bringing together in their close relationship various texts from Old and New Testament. His sermons were always constructed in a strongly synthetic manner (with a clear theme and, most often, three points), although he never wrote out his sermons. His church services often lasted two hours. And he was thoroughly consumed with his efforts to deliver everything on the pulpit.

¹¹² In his book *Calvinisten op de tweesprong* (especially pp. 80-83), De Vries described the position of Buskes. Of course Buskes absolutely did not agree with Schilder's (narrow ecclesiastical) position. Quite the opposite!

Such an absolute approach, however, entailed the danger that it can also work in a negative sense (counter-productively). Those negative-absolute features of Schilder may not be ignored. Not without reason he was accused of one-sidedness and rigidity. Due to his inclination toward being absolute he displayed a lack of ability to be sympathetic toward his opponents.¹¹³ “Thus he wounded people when instead he should have consoled them, he caused ruptures where he should have held things together,” accused an opponent after Schilder’s death.¹¹⁴ His emphasis on the forensic character of the covenant surely gradually led to Schilder view his longstanding involvement in polemics and in conflict as his sacred duty and calling. It cannot be denied that all of the fighting (among brothers!) nevertheless gave to others the impression of lovelessness. At this point Schilder does not need to be measured by an unbiblical sentimental view of love.¹¹⁵ The fact that Schilder really preferred written polemic to personal exchange reveals something of a weakness; it was as though he feared that in personal exchange he would have too easily made concessions. On the other hand, he naturally participated in public discussions quite fearlessly!

Schilder’s personality possessed something paradoxical. The unenlightened observer could easily accuse him of having sectarian traits. Did he not defend the purity of the true church with such zeal that ultimately he came to stand with his supporters in the isolation of a newly separated little church? Still, this was far from his intention. He continually emphasized the worldwide significance of Christ’s church-gathering work. In that sense Schilder was a genuinely ecumenical figure.¹¹⁶ Already in 1934 he emphasized that the Secession of 1834 did not have its own peculiar (for example, predestinational) principle, but that the Three Forms of Unity are a catholic confession.¹¹⁷ His famous essay “*Ons aller moeder*” anno Domini 1935

¹¹³ Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie*, 29.

¹¹⁴ C. W. J. Teeuwen, in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 115. On the same page, the writer commented that with Schilder the image of Christ with the whip in his hand overshadowed that of the beckoning Savior to whom everyone who was weary and heavy-laden (also in the church struggle!) could come.

¹¹⁵ J. Douma wrote (in *De Reformatie*, 52 [9 and 16 July 1977]) a review of the book written by W.G. de Vries, *K. Schilder als gevangene en onderduiker* (*K. Schilder as Prisoner and Hideaway*). Douma found that Schilder’s personal correspondence showed him to be much too concerned, at various moments during the church struggles, with his own prestige. “He fought . . . a good fight, even though that fight was not always fought well.”

¹¹⁶ The term is used here not in a modern, post-war sense. Before his death Schilder was able to witness the establishment of the World Council of Churches (in 1948, in Amsterdam!). Obviously he was a vigorous opponent of that kind of ecumenism. For example, see his article “Wereldraad van Kerken en Antichrist” (“The World Council of Churches and the Antichrist”) in *De Reformatie* 23 [12 June 1948]), republished in *De Kerk*, 3:221-226.

¹¹⁷ Cf. his “Beginsel, recht en betekenis der Afscheiding,” (“The Principle, Legitimacy, and Significance of the Secession”), written in 1934 and reprinted in *De Kerk*, 2:77-123. In his essay, *De dogmatische betekenis der*

(“*Mother of Us All*” in the year of our Lord 1935) was an intense appeal directed especially to the Confessionals within the national Dutch Reformed Church, that they not keep clinging to its evolving institutional form.¹¹⁸ This accounts also for his aggressive polemic during that same year against (the Kuiperian view of) the pluriformity of the church. Schilder could not tolerate the fact that Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and Christian Reformed Churches [Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken] continued existing quietly alongside each other as though nothing were wrong with that. In this sense, the subsequent Liberation of 1944 was intended as an ecumenical act, not a sectarian one. With its binding to a particular theological viewpoint the synod had embarked upon precisely that “ungodly path of sectarian, un-catholic self-directedness and separation.”¹¹⁹ Whoever shared this conviction viewed it as his calling to liberate himself from such an accursed course, precisely in order to be able to truly remain church.¹²⁰ Near the end of his life Schilder delivered an address for the Reformed Young Women’s Societies League day in Rotterdam, whose topic was *Your Ecumenical Task*.¹²¹ For this reason it was *not* as paradoxical as might appear at first glance, that Schilder himself requested that the high priestly prayer of Christ (John 17) would be read at his graveside.¹²² His epitaph (“That they may all be one”) was more than the decoration given by admirers to their deceased leader who in the end was alleged by many to have been nothing more than a church splitter. That epitaph verbalizes a Scriptural *motief*. Schilder’s view of the church and the application of it in practice may well be subject to criticism, but the intention that lay behind it must be respected.

afscheiding (*The Doctrinal Significance of the Secession*) from that same year, the concluding sentence was: “Together with him [namely the one who accepts the Three Forms of Unity, SAS] we will again know ourselves to be bearers of the faith of the church, good patriots, children of the Reformation, included within *ecumenical* Christendom.”

¹¹⁸ This brochure was reprinted in *De Kerk* (2.153-237) as well. In that essay, Schilder argued, among other things, that no single ecclesiastical institution today may be called “our mother” in the sense in which Paul used the expression in Galatians 4:26. Schilder’s covenant perspective, in which human responsibility was fully respected, clearly determined his view of the church at this point.

¹¹⁹ Second paragraph of the *Acte van Vrijmaking* (*Act of Liberation*). Cf. the telling title of the book by H. J. Schilder, written during that period: *Op de grens van kerk en secte*. In this connection, cf. also the remarks of Kamphuis in *Zien in de toekomst*, pp. 66-67.

¹²⁰ C. Veenhof, *Om kerk te blijven* [*In Order To Remain Church*], pp. 229 and 245-247, emphasized especially that after the Liberation, Schilder attempted to resolve mutual quarrels within the circle of the Liberated, “as a man with a priestly heart” and with “caring eyes.”

¹²¹ This address appeared in *De Reformatie*, 26 (19 May 1951). The same address was published separately in the series of brochures entitled *Woord en Wereld* [*Word and World*]. It was subsequently reprinted in *De Kerk*, 3: 467ff. [ET: *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, Appendix III, pp. 445-458]. De Vuurbaak sold a tape recording of this address as well, virtually the only existing sound recording of Schilder’s voice.

¹²² In a letter to C. Veenhof in 1931; cf. *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 21.

Schilder's intention can be summarized by saying that he wanted to be nothing more and nothing less than a *Reformed* theologian. Therefore one can speak of the (unique) "theology" of Schilder only with great reserve.¹²³ He desired to do theology in obedience to Scripture and within the boundaries of the Reformed confessions.¹²⁴ Already in 1919 Schilder devoted one of his very first publications to a defense of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture: *Tegenstrijdigheden in den Bijbel?* [*Contradictions in the Bible?*].¹²⁵ Later Schilder twice provided a polemical justification of his self-conscious choice *for* the Reformed acceptance of the authority of Scripture: in 1926 against Dr. J. G. Geelkerken, and in 1931 against Dr. J. G. Ubbink.¹²⁶ He persistently maintained the same position against the Barthian view that a certain contradiction supposedly exists between the "form" [gestalte] and the "quality" [gehalte] of Scripture.¹²⁷ Obviously Schilder passed away long before the "new" view of Scripture¹²⁸ began to permeate Reformed circles. Therefore it cannot be said with certainty how he would have responded to it. But it is remarkable that although he did not hesitate to chart new paths with regard to a number of issues, when it came to the Reformed doctrine of the authority of Scripture he felt no need of revision.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, it is important to note that this heartfelt commitment to Scripture did not function for Schilder in a narrow and provincial manner. It was precisely his view of the covenant (which, unlike election, belonged to what God had revealed) that enabled him frequently to define Scripture in terms of God's *announcing* Word [*áánsprekende Woord*], directed to us in promise and demand. Scripture does not simply make a *pronouncement*

¹²³ Schilder would in fact not have done so. In an article that is quite significant from a biographical point of view, entitled "De reformatie van 'De Reformatie'" ["The Reformation of 'The Reformation'"] (*De Reformatie*, 26 (7 October 1950), he wrote: ". . . no [theological] 'spirit,' dear sir, no Bavinck-spirit, and no Kuyper-spirit, and no De Cock-spirit . . . but seek rather the confession wherein various expressions of 'spirit' are ordered in and by one letter . . . the Letter soaked with the Spirit, such a person is catholic and makes God's [people] catholics."

¹²⁴ "He did not want to be an *innovator* [*nieuwlichter*], but he was—precisely in holding fast the connection with his ancestors—a *reformer*" (thus J. Kamphuis in his article "Critische sympathie," in *Almanak F.Q.I.* 1953.

¹²⁵ Published in C. Veenhof, *Om Woord en Kerk*, 3: 51-95. S. Greidanus interacted critically with this little essay in his dissertation, *Sola Scriptura*, pp. 197ff.

¹²⁶ For Schilder's choice against Geelkerken, see § 1.1 above, and for that against Ubbink, see W. G. de Vries, *Calvinisten op de tweesprong*, pp. 143-157. In *De Ref.*, 12 (1932), Schilder wrote a series of ten articles against Ubbink's book, *De nieuwe belijdenis aangaande Schrift en kerk*.

¹²⁷ Cf., for example, *De Ref.*, 16 (4 October 1935),

¹²⁸ Cf. the dissertation of F. W. Buytendach, *Aspekte van vorm/inhoud-problematiek met betrekking tot die organiese Skrifinspirasie in die nuwere gereformeerde teologie in Nederland*, and the anthology by C. Trimp, *Betwist Schriftgezag*.

¹²⁹ J. Kamphuis, "Critische sympathie," in *Almanak F.Q.I.* 1953, declared with firm conviction: "Wherever else one can observe development in Schilder's thinking, *not on this issue!*"

[*úitspraak*] concerning the eternal weal and woe of these or those persons.¹³⁰ What would later come to be called, also in Reformed circles, the kerygmatic scopus of the Scripture text (in distinction from the scholastic view of revelation as the making known of objective truths), would have resonated with Schilder. He nowhere provided a developed doctrine of Scripture, but his comments about the use of Scripture in dogmatics clarified his position. He found the traditional use of Scripture proofs to be *the* weak point in Reformed dogmatics.¹³¹ What must function in dogmatics are not individual isolated verses, but the entire Scripture.¹³² Therefore he placed such high value on the *analogia fidei* (clearly understood in its “objective” sense) as a methodological principle for appealing to Scripture in dogmatics.¹³³ In this “free” approach there naturally lies the danger of speculation (going beyond the boundary of Scripture), and Schilder must be checked at several points. On account of this starting point he could make grateful use in his doctrinal labor of the improved results of Reformed exegesis in his own day. Not in a manner that was slavishly dependent, however, for he himself made occasional independent exegetical contributions. Moreover, he felt a special affinity for the exegesis of the illustrious New Testament colleague S. Greijdanus, who was his supporter in ecclesiastical debates as well.

Schilder desired to remain faithful in his theology to the ecclesiastical confessions as well. But then a clear distinction had to be made, according to him, between the nature of these confessions (as confessions) and the nature of theology (as a science).¹³⁴ From Schilder's

¹³⁰ This distinction functioned prominently in his *Bovenschriftuurlijke binding – een nieuw gevaar* [ENG??], for example, on p. 68, where he said this about the gospel: “No dogma, no pronouncement, but an official announcement.”

¹³¹ J. Kamphuis, “Critische sympathie,” p. 81, spoke of Schilder's “great freedom with regard to customary Scripture proofs,” and provide a number of examples, especially from Schilder's lecture notes, entitled *Kompendium Dogmatiek*. The following pronouncement from his *Capita Selecta* II: 84, can be added here: “Beware of doctrinal exegesis and exegetical dogmatics! All the professors here are compatriots. They all begin with the Confession. Occasionally there is the tendency to separate exegesis from dogmatics, but here one must be careful! As an exegete you cannot start with a blank slate. Begin with the content of faith. If one should then discern mistakes in that, then one should make this known by means of a gravamen.” A bit later, Schilder is reported to have said the following: “Scripture proofs are 50% more or less inaccurate. Occasionally a particular dogma cannot be proven with one particular ‘text,’ but rather it is evident because the *entire Scripture* talks in this way.”

¹³² For example, with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, cf. *Heid. Cat.* 3: 59, 64-65, and with regard to the doctrine of predestination, cf. *Heid. Cat.*, 4: 93. We find a characteristic statement, in connection with discussing the attitude of God, in *Heid. Cat.*, 4: 119: “Let Trommius derive no help from the disguise of the biblicist, who with his scrupulous reasoning wants to carry on as a theologian, but let him assist the latter at the funeral of the former.”

¹³³ Cf. Kamphuis, “Critische sympathie,” pp. 97ff. Against the dogma of evolutionism, Schilder wrote in *Heid. Cat.*, 3: 298: “We are appealing not to a separate ‘localized’ exegesis of Gen. 1:1, but rather to the *entirety* of Scripture; from its *whole* we turn again to its *parts*. . . .”

¹³⁴ In *De Ref.* 22 (18 January 1947), Schilder wrote about his conviction regarding this matter: “As churches we do not have our own theory of the covenant, our own theory of the sacraments, our own theory of the church.

definition of dogmatics, in contrast to that of Hepp, for example, it appears that he placed a high value on the critical function of dogmatics.¹³⁵ In that sense, Schilder was no confessionalist.

As a Reformed theologian Schilder was motivated thetically by his obedience to Scripture and confession. In addition, several other motivations played a dominant role in his theology, in an antithetical sense. Thus one could point out many places in his work, for example, where his anti-scholastic orientation came to expression. This surfaced, however, especially in his offensive against the traditional “archetype-ectype” paradigm.¹³⁶ In the same context one could refer to his anti-subjectivistic orientation, especially when he discerns in subjectivism an opposition between Word and Spirit.¹³⁷ In the conflict surrounding the doctrine of the covenant it was precisely this motif that played such an important role. Schilder's book, *Looze kalk*, was in large measure a vigorous contradiction of the position of J. Ridderbos, who had argued that the covenant came into existence at the point of the heart's renewal.¹³⁸ When someone like Hepp rejected the “sanctions” of the covenant, Schilder took the trouble of

Only the Three Forms of Unity. Anyone among us can agree or disagree about particular points with Heyns or Bouma or Hoeksema or Greijdanus or Schilder.”

¹³⁵ Kamphuis, “Critische sympathie,” in *Almanak F.Q.I. 1953*, recited this definition on p. 73: “[Dogmatics is] that science which, in subjection to the content and purpose of Holy Scripture, organizes the issues involved in the ecclesiastical-theological dogmata and systematically treats them in a sympathetic-critical reproduction of the content of the dogmata that have been established in the line of the ecumenical symbols.” On pages 75 and 88, Kamphuis clarified the difference between Schilder and Hepp. In his book, *Om Kerk te blijven*, especially on pp. 69ff., C. Veenhof discussed extensively, with many references, the confessional position of Schilder.

¹³⁶ Cf. his *Diktaat Encyclopaedie I-IV*, where he was occupied (for literally years on end) with a discussion of the object of theology, especially as that had been posited by Abraham Kuyper. Especially in volume II of those notes, he bluntly called this scholastic paradigm “neo-Platonist mysticism” (p. 6). Over against this “remnant of scholasticism” (p. 8), he posited the Reformed history of revelation, which gave legitimate place to the type-antitype paradigm. Cf. the summary of his lecture given as principal of the Theological College as well: “The *vitium originis* of the archetype-ectype paradigm in theology,” which he published in *De Bazuin* 85 (22 January 1937), and which concludes as follows: “Making this idea [of faith-obedience, S.A.S.] constitutive will once again give recognition to the significance of the history of revelation, also in specifying God's speaking and his *modi*, as well as in providing the boundary between *arcana* and *revelata*. Not only over against the Barthian existential philosophy . . . but also over against alien phenomena like this in Reformed theology attention will again need to be asked for the idea of ‘faith-hearing’.”

¹³⁷ In the same lecture notes, vol. II, pp. 21ff., we find a report of his extensive discussion of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, especially as that was set forth by Hepp. For the same debate, cf. also *Heid. Cat.* 2:485-496. Following Schilder's death, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven wrote an “In Memoriam” in *Phil. Ref.* 17 (1952), 149-150, where he said, among other things, that Schilder was “before everything else a theologian. And only then was he anti-subjectivistic.”

¹³⁸ Cf. *Looze kalk*, p. 27. The “protesters” judged that the “synodicals” had “by virtue of a deep-rooted *subjectivism* robbed the *Word* of its place of honor, in order to lay the emphasis and to seek a starting point in the subject, and from there (apparently in the Spirit, in reality as well) in the spirit. . . .”

exposing the subjectivism underlying this rejection.¹³⁹ With the same breath Schilder continually opposed mysticism. Just as in connection with the doctrine of the church he rejected the false dilemmas of visible-invisible and mystical-institutional,¹⁴⁰ he also rejected these false dilemmas with regard to the doctrine of the covenant.¹⁴¹ In opposition to all these “-isms” Schilder indefatigably and uncompromisingly emphasized the reliability of God's Word, of His promises and His demands and His threats. Anyone who, even while standing *within* the covenant, wishes to speak *about* the covenant must answer this summons: Everything or nothing!

1.5 Covenant theologian?

One could certainly consider it remarkable that no systematic study has appeared regarding the covenant in the theology of K. Schilder. His theology has already been the object of scientific investigation several times, at least partially. But his doctrine of the covenant came up for discussion in those studies only tangentially.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the covenant idea played an extremely important role for Schilder. Admittedly he nowhere presented a developed *locus de foedere*, or even published

¹³⁹ Subjectivism in the doctrine of the covenant must always tend toward dismissing the sanctions, and the agreed-upon stipulations, and the established covenant statutes, with the use of the ugly word 'juridical,' although in Reformed theology the word 'forensic' has come to be a much better, even a preferred idea: the latter term is designed to bury this 'juridical' apparatus in the things that belong (*merely*) to the 'external' side of the covenant, and fails to understand that anyone who reckons a 'Word of God' as belonging (*merely*) to the *external* is traveling more the Anabaptist rather than the Reformed path.” -- *Heid. Cat.*, 2: 381.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. for example *De Kerk* 3: 130.

¹⁴¹ *Looze kalk*, p. 39: “. . . the beloved discovery of mysticism, the exalting namely of the 'internal' (as being real) over against the 'external' (as though this were unspiritual). . . .”

¹⁴² A. C. de Jong, *The Well-meant Gospel offer. The views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder*, restricted himself to the question of the covenant promise. On p. 59 he wrote: “We aer, however, not interested in giving a complete analysis of Schilder's covenant views. Such a task lies beyond the scope of this study.” On p. 85 he wrote: “This study is not concerned with the detailed formulations of Schilder's views of the covenant.”

J. Douma, *Algemene genade. Uiteenzetting, vergelijking en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over 'Algemene genade'* provides a substantive analysis of Schilder's theology. But his doctrine of the covenant was not discussed extensively, except perhaps on pp. 155-159 (“The covenant relationship”) and on pp. 306-311 (“Christ and the covenant of grace”).

H. M. Kuitert, *De mensvormigheid Gods. Een dogmatisch-hermeneutische studie over de antropomorfisme van de Heilige Schrift* devoted extensive attention to the theology of Schilder, but then especially to his doctrine of God (pp. 19ff.) and his understanding of revelation (pp. 108ff.). In the thetical section of this dissertation Kuitert included a chapter entitled “God's Being as Being Covenant Partner” (p. 191), but (remarkably enough!) Schilder was not mentioned once in this context. So Schilder's *doctrine of the covenant* in reality has remained uninvestigated.

an outline of how he himself would have formulated the matter. As professor of dogmatics, after a brief discussion of the *locus de peccato*,¹⁴³ he continued until his death to deal systematically only with the *locus de Deo*.¹⁴⁴

In his lectures on symbolics, Schilder taught about the covenant, but then more in terms of its chronology than its logical dimension.¹⁴⁵ A good example of a systematic treatment of the covenant is an address that Schilder gave in 1944: “Main Issues in the Doctrine of the Covenant,”¹⁴⁶ but this is too small in scope to serve as a true outline of Schilder's thought.

Anyone who works through all of his writings, however, will discover the covenant everywhere. One can find already in the first edition of his trilogy on Christ's suffering (1930) important sections dealing with the covenant.¹⁴⁷ In that time such a treatment of issues relating to the covenant surely belonged to the Reformed legacy. But when in 1932 Schilder wrote that the covenant idea addresses every aspect of preaching, this was certainly an unusual claim.¹⁴⁸ In this period one can discern as well the comprehensive contexts within which Schilder reflected on the covenant. In his book, *What is Hell?*, eternal damnation was discussed in this context as well: all divine punishment (including hell) is covenant wrath, for all human sin is covenant breaking! In his book, *What is Heaven?* (1935), which some call his “compendium of dogmatics,” the covenant idea played a prominent role. The entire history of the covenant was discussed under

¹⁴³ *Dictaak Dogmatiek* I-III, February 1934 to December 1938.

¹⁴⁴ *Compendium Dogmatiek* I-III, 3rd ed. After the first chapter of approximately one hundred pages concerning the *prolegomena* of dogmatics, the rest of his section contains a treatment of the *locus de Deo*. Much of this material was incorporated into his *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*.

¹⁴⁵ *Het verbond in de gereformeerde symbolen* (lecture notes). On p. 3 he indicated just how important the covenant was to him: “Covenant is the body of the church. . . . It is a fundamental relationship for all of life. Seen in this way, it is nonsense to say that there is indeed a Covenant, but also something else. Faith . . . is already a matter that presupposes the Covenant. . . . So the covenant is of greatest importance for, among other things, Reformed preaching. . . .”

¹⁴⁶ A stenographic report of this address can be found in the library of the Theological University, Broederweg, Kampen. Recently this was published in the *Geref. Weekblad Zwolle*, 32 (1979-1980), vols. 24-28.

¹⁴⁷ For example, in *Christus in Zijn lijden* III: 390-392 [ENG?]. In the second edition—in which only volumes I and II were revised—the covenant was discussed more frequently than in the first edition, especially with regard to the relationship between the covenant of grace and the (pretemporal) covenant of peace. Compare, for example, in volume I, pp. 73-74 of the first edition with pp. 86-87 of the second edition, or p. 390 of the first edition with p. 463 of the second edition.

¹⁴⁸ *Wat is de hel?*, 3rd ed., p. 188: “For in contrast to the opinion being fueled here and there that the ‘covenant idea’ in preaching actually contributes to a false quietism, and for that reason should be avoided or at least advocated only under severe restrictions, we would posit the claim that the covenant idea in preaching *addresses every aspect*. This means that one must actually *proceed* from the covenant, in order to be able in a biblical sense ‘faithfully to declare to the godless, that things will not go well for them’.”

the topics of “The Great Lord's Supper” and “Fulfilled Sabbath Peace.”¹⁴⁹ In the beginning (protology), in the middle (Christology), and at the end (eschatology) of world history it is always the same: covenant, covenant, covenant! Aside from the (mostly polemical) writings where Schilder was treating the subject of the covenant directly, the covenant idea surfaced unexpectedly in other contexts. From his lecture notes (*Kompendium der Ethiek* I-VI) we see again the fundamental significance that covenant had for his thinking. His insight into the history and structure of the covenant constituted the unmistakable background of his definition: “Ethics is the science of the constant grounds, the changing dispensations, and the relevant concrete specificity of man’s obligation toward God’s revealed will.”¹⁵⁰

The indices of Schilder's *magnum opus*, the multi-volume *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, easily demonstrate that he delighted in discussing the covenant in connection with virtually every *locus* of dogmatics. This work will be cited extensively later in our own study. For that reason, at this point we will illumine several remarkable subjects for the sake of providing a comprehensive picture.

The covenant is treated explicitly in anthropology. If Schilder were to explain the meaning of the image of God using a single phrase, he would certainly have summarized it this way: Official service in the covenant!¹⁵¹ When discussing hamartiology, he wrote: Apostasy is a covenant matter!¹⁵² And when discussing the doctrine of God, he treated this in the context of the inter-trinitarian covenant (of peace).¹⁵³ Especially in Christology the covenant idea played such a decisive role: Christ is covenant-mediator, and not creation-mediator.¹⁵⁴ Whenever he reflected on the subject of the first and second Adam, he took the opportunity to discuss the relationship

¹⁴⁹ *Wat is de hemel?*, chapters VII (pp. 196ff.) and VIII (pp. 269ff.).

¹⁵⁰ Cited from the summary of Schilder's *Dictaten Kompendium der Ethiek* I-VI, compiled by G. J. Bruijn, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Heid. Cat.* I: 220-312.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 315. Cf. pp. 317-329. With an eye to Schilder's methodology, it is important to see clearly that when in this same context he treated the matter of original sin, he maintained two emphases: on the one hand, that of Adam's juridical position as covenant head, but on the other hand, also that of cooperation (that we really sinned along with Adam). Cf. p. 352.

¹⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 382ff. On p. 23 of this same volume we find this significant comment: “Hereby [with the Catechism's confession of *comfort*, S.A.S.] all of God's works are placed in the context of covenant. . . . Proper and believing reflection on the covenant lays dynamite beneath every chair [katheder] for idle speculation about an abstract God.”

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Heid. Cat.*, 2: 59-103.

between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. At one point he even experimented with the idea of rewriting Question and Answer 12 of the Catechism in terms of the covenant:

Question: Since, according to the ancient rule of the covenant we lie enslaved under covenant wrath, is there any means whereby we, in order to escape covenant wrath ourselves, could be restored unto covenant blessing?

Answer: God maintains the ancient covenant stipulations concerning the original relationship between him and us; therefore in whatever manner possible he must hold firmly to that lest we be destroyed along with the whole world, since the original order has been turned upside down.”¹⁵⁵

In soteriology as well, especially with regard to so-called universal atonement, Schilder delved deeply into the Remonstrant view of the covenant.¹⁵⁶ Anyone who is at all familiar with this commentary on the Catechism also knows that other characteristic motifs of Schilder, like his opposition to the theory of “common grace,” surface almost everywhere. In connection with this particular issue, the doctrine of the covenant was placed in the foreground, especially the matter of the Noahic covenant.¹⁵⁷

The examples could be multiplied. The structure of this four-volume work certainly rested upon other pillars—such as Schilder's peculiar view of God's eternality (Boëthius!). But the foregoing overview (admittedly incomplete) provides sufficient basis for making the claim that in Schilder's theology the covenant idea occupied a central position.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 383-404.

¹⁵⁷ *Heid. Cat.* 4: 127-147.

¹⁵⁸ Others have discerned this phenomenon clearly. Bremmer, “Schilder,” in *Biografisch lexicon*, claimed that one cannot speak of Schilder's unique theological system, but that one can surely point to certain dominant ideas in his work. In addition to his emphasis on the cultural mandate (over against Kuyper's conception of common grace), his characteristic view of the church (over against Kuyper's doctrine of pluriformity) and his influence on preaching (redemptive-historical over against exemplaristic), Bremmer noted: “[Schilder] placed a heavy emphasis on the doctrine of the covenant.” In comparison with Bremmer's earlier article on Schilder in *Chr. Encyclopedie* VI, 2nd ed., it is striking that this aspect of the covenant was added in this later article. This addition is appropriate. In his article entitled “Erfgenaam van het verbond,” in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, pp. 53-55, D. K. Wielenga claimed that this emphasis on the covenant was one of Schilder's greatest achievements. He argued that Schilder could provide fundamental critiques on the basis of his insight into the covenant, both of the “synodical” doctrine defended by, for example, G. Ch. Aalders (*Het Verbond Gods*) and of dialectical theology.

Can this claim be advanced a step further? Can it be shown that the covenant idea occupied *the* central position in Schilder's theology? May it be claimed that the covenant idea structured his work to such an extent that in his case one may speak of him as a “covenant theologian”?¹⁵⁹

The answer to this question surely depends on what is meant by the notion of “covenant theology.” If by this phrase one really intends to claim that an entire theology must be structured according to the doctrine of the covenant, then this phrase definitely does not fit Schilder's theology. Methodologically he explicitly chose to follow the *loci* method in his dogmatics. To his students he once made this confession:

Far more self-consciously than a few years ago, I am now opting for the traditional organization of the material of dogmatics into *loci*. This method of organization is far and away the best and the most honorable. I realize that it all sounds a bit mediocre, dividing the material into *loci*: a section about this and a section about that. It is a difficult enterprise and an exertion for the carnal man, to lecture for one's entire life on section after section without organizing his material in terms of a particular paradigm or a provocative theme. Indeed, here is the ordinariness of Reformed dogmatician, over against the philosopher of the world. Nevertheless, when I have fully acknowledged the ordinariness of the dogmatician *kata sarka*, then I can say: How wealthy I am in the faith, because with my material divided simply into one section after another, I may echo what God has narrated about Himself in His own sermon.¹⁶⁰

Especially with respect to the doctrine of God, Schilder distanced himself from so-called covenant theology.¹⁶¹ So if his theology must be summarized with a term—he himself wanted

¹⁵⁹ J. van Genderen made this claim in his article, “Verbondstheologie – vroeger en nu,” in *Rondom het Woord* 17 (1975): 56. On p. 60 the writer asserted: “Schilder was more of a covenant theologian than Woelderink.” After briefly devoting attention to the views of Kuitert, H. Berkhof, and Flesseman-van Leer, he offered this evaluation (p. 63): “A covenant theology is defensible to the extent that it proceeds from the covenant as the Bible presents it in Old and New Testaments, and if the covenant idea does not become a principle for a covenant system.”

¹⁶⁰ *Kompendium Dogmatiek* I: 106 (3rd ed.). The same defense of the *loci*-method is given in *Heid. Cat.* 3: 12-13.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110: “Cocceius spoke forthrightly about God under the aspect of the doctrine of the covenant. He is chosen at this point, because some folk hang everything on one idea, but may God be viewed—we ask—in terms

simply to be a Reformed theologian—then he should rather be called a “Scripture theologian.” He desired to do justice in his theology to every facet of God's revelation.¹⁶²

There is another dimension, however, to this interesting question. One could ask whether Schilder's avoidance of the consequences of a comprehensive “covenant theology” could not have been due to his inability to arrive at a systematically complete theology? It was a fact that he was not all that systematic. He was more of a preacher than a systematician, also in his theology. He was driven by such prophetic zeal to communicate his message that, just as with a magnifying glass gathering together and focusing the sun's rays, everything converged simultaneously at every point that he was discussing. Especially later in his life, he was so overwhelmed with work that he seldom took the time to develop his ideas systematically.¹⁶³ Everything had to be finished immediately! In addition, from comments of Schilder himself mentioned earlier, it ought to be clear that his choice in this methodological question was of a principial nature. Precisely because he wanted to be nothing else than Reformed, he preferred to link his own idea to the subjects treated in the Confessions.¹⁶⁴

of one point of view? In our opinion we must not go in this direction, I may make no value distinction among God's works. I may not value the covenant above another work of God.” In his *Capita Selecta* I-IV (report of Professor Schilder's comments on the essays submitted to him by his students) he dealt frequently with Cocceius—for example, 1: 10ff., “Afhesis en paresis,” and pp. 13ff., “Fideiussio en expromissio.” In connection with the latter subject, Schilder's comments are reported as follows: “Cocceius, whom we love as one who began with the history of revelation, did not safeguard history, for he confused God's interpreting with the consequences thereof within time. . . . So Cocceius ultimately stumbled in the *locus de Deo*. . . . It is correct to say that revelation grows. But anyone who believes that imputation also grows, accepts mutability in God.”

¹⁶² Cf. how Schilder, in his *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des “Paradoxon”*, pp. 420–421, agreed with J. Bohatec's characterization of Calvin as “Theologian of the ‘Diagonal’.” Over against the emphasis of dialectical theology on God's sovereignty, Schilder comments (*Heid. Cat.* 3: 279, note 44): “It goes without saying that *we* do not wish to reason on the basis of a ‘principle’ and ‘axiom,’ such as God's absolute sovereignty. We believe that one may reason simply from the content of divine revelation.” In *De Kerk* 3: 428–429, a piece written by Schilder was published, in which he recalled that the Synod of Dort warned theologians against discussing theology in terms of its “problems,” but rather “to reproduce the content of Scripture as such, in discrete ‘loci’ for example, and not in a philosophical manual with one or another dominating ‘viewpoint’”

¹⁶³ Comment of D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, “In memoriam K. Schilder,” in *De Ref.* 17 (1952): 150.

¹⁶⁴ In addition to his treatment of the Catechism, where he was able simply to proceed Lord's Day by Lord's Day, Schilder also discussed the Belgic Confession. Concerning his lecture notes on this confession, *Christelijke religie*, J. Kamphuis (“Critische sympathie,” in *Almanak F.Q.I.* 1953, p. 83) commented: “The *greatest* value of these lectures was, in the first place, that as far as we know, this is the only document in which Schilder himself . . . has supplied a brief overview of the whole of his dogmatics. . . . In the second place, these lecture notes provide an account of the lectures he gave to the first-year students. . . . This explains the great clarity . . . of these lectures.” The fact that along with this many-sided approach, Schilder nevertheless became mired in a certain one-sidedness, is shown by the fact that in his lectures in dogmatics, he was unable to get any further than the *locus de Deo*.

The question could also be asked whether this principal choice against a “covenant theology” belonged to the “later” Schilder? Was it not the case that the earlier Schilder thought in a redemptive-historical/covenantal manner, whereas the “later” Schilder thought in a scholastic-predestinarian manner? One encounters this claim repeatedly.¹⁶⁵ It must immediately be admitted that Schilder certainly underwent a development in his thinking.¹⁶⁶ As far as his theological interest was concerned, one could say that Schilder had gone back further and further. Before he became professor, he was quoting a remarkable number of modern, especially dialectical, theologians. Thereafter, especially as a result of the church struggle, he was clearly engaged more intensively with the early Reformed theologians.¹⁶⁷ As he wrote his expansive commentary on the Catechism, he naturally delved deeply into the theology of someone like Ursinus. The Remonstrant views on all relevant points were meticulously explained as well.¹⁶⁸ In his lectures in dogmatics, however, he went back still further, all the way back to the Middle Ages, back to Thomas Aquinas and back to someone like Boëthius, whose definition of the eternity of God attracted Schilder quite strongly.¹⁶⁹ For Schilder, continuity with the (catholic) past was a matter of utmost importance.

¹⁶⁵ In a conversation with Puchinger mentioned in *Is de Gereformeerde wereld veranderd?*, p. 346, H. M. Kuitert claimed: “The immensity of the 1930s, when K. S. was the outspoken proponent of renewal, seems to have reached a dead end in pure rationalistic scholasticism in the four-volume *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*. . . . In any case, I would call the Schilder of the *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* the *inauthentic* Schilder. But as the years passed, the *authentic* Schilder became more and more the *inauthentic* Schilder.” In a conversation with Puchinger (*Hervormd-Gereformeerd, één of gescheiden?*, p. 391), O. Jager similarly spoke of “the increasing influence on Schilder of Aristotle, of scholastic objectivism. . . .”

¹⁶⁶ J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, pp. 185ff., described Schilder's development in terms of three periods, especially in terms of his growing criticism of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Douma indicated that earlier (say, 1932), Schilder wanted to bring every theological issue back to the time before the Fall (*op. cit.*, p. 155), whereas later he wanted to go “still further back” (*op. cit.*, pp. 159-160), namely, back to God's eternal decree. Cf. p. 312 as well. In his article in *Biografisch lexicon*, R. H. Bremmer divided Schilder's active career into three periods: from 1920-1930, from 1933-1944, and from 1944-1952. He added: “In general it can be said that S[childer]'s doctrinal interest shifted during the last period from the newer theology to the struggle waged by Reformational and post-Reformation theology against the Remonstrant and Roman Catholic neo-scholastics.” In his “Epilogue” to Schilder's *Heid. Cat.* IV: 285, W. G. de Vries observed that in Schilder's writing style at the end of his life one notices “that the flowing, playful, poetic character of his language is replaced by longer, more complex sentences, often burdened with many intervening clauses.”

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *De Ref.* 20 (8 December 1939), where in the midst of reviewing the book of G. Ch. Aalders on the covenant, Schilder explained his own position over against the Reformed theologians from the “golden age.” In *Heid. Cat.* 2: 102, where he responded to the criticism of H. H. Kuyper of Schilder's rejection of the phrase “mediator of creation,” Schilder commented: “For that reason we are obligated . . . to continue pleading that we keep adhering terminologically to the early Reformed theology, where possible and salutary.”

¹⁶⁸ One need only compare the significant place that these topics occupy in the “Index of names and subjects” at the end of *Heid. Cat.* IV.

¹⁶⁹ In his article entitled, “Professor Schilder,” in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 49, R. H. Bremmer mentioned this as well: “He purposely expanded his library with the early theologians from the time of the Reformation, from the Middle Ages, and from the Patristics. . . .” indeed, even with Spanish Jesuit publications. In his *Kompendium*

This aforementioned difference between the “earlier” and the “later” Schilder, however, may not be elevated to the level of a contradiction. The young Schilder was also interested in classic theology (even as the old Schilder always remained interested in recent theology). On the basis of the Secession tradition and the influence of Kuyper in Kampen, as a student Schilder must have been thoroughly familiar with Calvin and the theologians who lived when the Reformed Confessions were written. To mention but one detail: already in his early works the traditional Calvinist doctrine of predestination was expressed clearly, something that did not occur for the first time in his post-war publications.¹⁷⁰ The older Schilder was not a different person than the younger Schilder. It is simply not true that in his youth Schilder was not a well-schooled in the Reformed theological world!¹⁷¹ Throughout his entire life, he prophetically warned against what he considered to be deviation from Reformed doctrine. In the 1930s, when Reformed theology was indeed in danger of petrification, he pleaded for the necessity of renewal. But he himself sought this renewal along a Reformational route, in line with Reformed starting points. He never severed, in a revolutionary way, the bond with the past. Later, near the end of his life, when the influence of dialectical theology had begun to infect Reformed circles, he emphasized this bond with the Reformed Confessions even more strongly. How one interprets this last stage in Schilder's theology depends more on the interpreter's own position and on how the interpreter himself values the Reformed Confessions. Someone who no longer values them as highly as did Schilder will naturally attempt to dismiss Schilder as a mere conservative. Or, as happens nowadays among “renewal theologians” of various stripes, one will appeal to the “young” Schilder, while completely rejecting the “old” Schilder.¹⁷²

Dogmatiek II: 129 (3rd ed.), Schilder registered this comment, which was characteristic of his approach: the language of the Roman church is the “language of our church, namely, the church before the Reformation.” From the lecture notes entitled *Capita Selecta*, it appears that Schilder engaged early theology intensively. In connection with the subject of “mystical union,” he is reported, in IV: 38, to have said: “We now proceed to discuss something close to my heart: when I read the view of Ursinus in his larger theological works, then I have the opportunity to read him well only after I have considered the issues present in the time in which he lived.” Schilder sought again and again to fathom the *background* underlying the position of this or that theologian.

¹⁷⁰ In the dissertation of J. Douma (*Algemene Genade*), Schilder's doctrine of predestination was discussed repeatedly. We mention simply the place after p. 203, where Schilder was quoted in order to show that as a student he was already fascinated with the parallelism between election and reprobation. In 1930 as well, in *Christus en zijn lijden*, God's eternal election and reprobation was discussed repeatedly. Already then he wrote glowingly about Calvin's “mysterium tremendum” (III: 320). Admittedly in the second edition of this work (from 1949 onward), Schilder emphasized this doctrine more heavily and developed it more extensively at certain points.

¹⁷¹ This claim was made by H. M. Kuitert, in the conversation with Puchinger (p. 347) cited above.

¹⁷² J. M. van Minnen wrote an article entitled, “Een dichter-schriftgeleerde tussen hemel en hel,” in *Voorlopie* 2 (September 1970), in which he attempted to draw a connection between Schilder's discovery of the covenant the

Was K. Schilder a “covenant theologian”? Once again, for the last time: Everything depends on what is meant by that expression. If the intention is to claim that the covenant functioned in Schilder's thinking in such a way that the covenant forced election into the background and minimized it, then he was absolutely not a “covenant theologian.” He focused all of his intellectual power on providing a place in his theology for both covenant and election. At the same time, he drew a remarkably sharp distinction between covenant and election. He was convinced that the doctrine of the covenant may not be constructed on the basis of the doctrine of election, for then the summons of the covenant would in fact be enervated. In this sense, then, and specifically with reference to the doctrine of the *covenant*, Schilder can indeed be called a “covenant theologian.”

With this, however, we are already in the midst of the complex problematic of the relationship between covenant and election. How Schilder thought about this must await discussion in a subsequent chapter. At this point we must mention that the development of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant during the time of Schilder's participation in theological debate had not yet been finished. The history of Reformed thinking about the covenant betrays in this respect a certain “ambiguity.” On the one hand, a line ran from Calvin through the Reformed Confessions and liturgical formularies, in which covenant and election could be confessed alongside each other without tension. The “old A” position belonged to this line.¹⁷³ On the other hand, a line ran from the Reformation through the 17th-century theology of Voetius and Witsius (under the influence of England), in which covenant and election were related to each other in such a way that it could be said that God had established his covenant with Christ and in Him

the “entire subsequent development of Reformed theology.” On p. 281 he stated: “We can say that now Professor Kuitert, for example—and certainly not the ‘Liberated’—are using the weapons forged by Berkouwer on this front, in the line of Schilder. For Schilder was most seriously misunderstood by his admirers.” This kind of posthumous “restoration of honor” given to Schilder reveals more about the writer's own position than about the intention of Schilder.

¹⁷³ C. Veenhof wrote about this subject in his book, *Prediking en Uitverkiezing*. There we learn, among other things, that the “old A” was hardly a homogenous group! The claim that “old A” reached back to Calvin was widely acknowledged, for example, by S. van der Linde, in his essay, “Calvijn en Nederland,” in *Zicht op Calvijn*, p. 212: “We think it is correct . . . to view the genuine continuation of Reformed life as beginning with the Secession of 1834. That effort embodied legacy of Calvin simply by placing the Church, which the Rêveil had left standing on the perimeter of faith life, once again at the heart of faith life. In connection with that, God's covenant, which in the 18th century had all too often been undermined or emptied, once again came into its own.”

with the elect. The “old B” position belonged to this line.¹⁷⁴ Taking into consideration numerous nuances, it must be emphasized that this “ambiguity” played an extremely important role in the conflict surrounding the Liberation.¹⁷⁵ This uncertainty with respect to the doctrine of the covenant would invigorate someone like Schilder, and would simultaneously provide him an expansive opportunity to make a contribution and to develop a uniquely characteristic position.

¹⁷⁴ G. Vos described this history in *De verbondsleer in de gereformeerde theologie* [ENG??]. G. Schrenk, in his *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus*, pp. 36-82, provided a good overview of this development up until the time of Cocceius. The same matter was discussed, with a narrower scope but clear formulation, by J. van Genderen, in *Herman Witsius*, pp. 213-220; R. H. Bremmer, “Verbond en Kerk: enkele historische notities uit de gereformeerde theologie,” in *Kerk en Theologie*, 24: 39-42; and L. Doekes, “Het genadeverbond Gods als thema der gereformeerde theologie,” in *Lucerna*, 2 (1960): 343ff.

¹⁷⁵ G. van Teylingen provided a particularly lucid overview of this in his *Aard en achtergrond van het geschild in de Gereformeerde Kerken*. C. Veenhof reviewed this document in his *Om de “Unica catholica”*, pp. 175-197. Cf. also the comment of the American theologian W. Heyns, in his *Gereformeerde geloofsleer*, p. 140 (to which Schilder himself referred in *De Ref.* 19 (4 August 1939) 347: “According to the *reformational* perspective of the covenant of grace, as that is set forth in our Confessions, the parties of the covenant were: the Triune God, on the one hand, and Abraham and his seed or believers and their seed, on the other hand. In the seventeenth century, however, a different perspective arose, together with *scholastic* theology, concerning the parties of the covenant, and people began to call them accordingly: the Triune God, on the one hand, and the elect, on the other hand. . .” (italics added)).

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF THE COVENANT

“The covenant of grace is . . . not a second covenant; for God does not duplicate. Duplication is actually incompatible with the covenant; a covenant stands or falls with the ‘everything or nothing,’ and thus also with the ‘ever or never,’ as also with the ‘once and for all.’ ‘Ich liebe Dich auf Zeit und Ewigkeit’ [I love you for time and for eternity].”

K. Schilder, *Wat is de hemel?* (1935)

2.1 Accent on the history and the unity of the covenant

On the basis of the background sketched in chapter 1, it should be patently clear why the systematic exposition of what Schilder wrote about the covenant must begin with the subject of the *history* of the covenant. Schilder himself supplied the subject, since, when we surveyed the polemics of the 1930s, it was suggested that one could describe Schilder’s entire theology in a certain sense under the heading, “Schilder: Between Kuyper and Barth” (cf. § 1.2 above). Our historical overview seemed to suggest that in his conflict on two fronts, Schilder wanted to combat a root error shared by both of his opponents: The misunderstanding of God’s activity *in history*. From a historical vantage point, Schilder’s emphasis on history is to be explained on the basis of this conflict. At the same time this accent on history is one of the *fundamental motifs* in Schilder’s thinking, and therefore it played such an important role in his covenant perspective.

As far as his criticism of dialectical theology was concerned, we have already referred to what Schilder wrote in his earliest publications. This was definitely the chief criticism he leveled against Karl Barth (in 1927 already!): “Even as God of revelation, God is transcendent, but also immanent. He does not simply come down to us from above, but he walks along with us as well. Revelation does not just continually and repeatedly pierce our horizontal plane, but it also patiently accompanies us. Barth has ‘murdered’ a beautiful Reformed discipline, namely, the

discipline of *historia revelationis*, the history of divine (special) revelation.”¹ This criticism was expressed, of course, in the early transcendentalist, culture-critical stage of dialectical theology. Under no circumstances could Schilder reconcile himself to this posture. In 1929 he wrote: “Crisis and judgment are no vertical piercing of the horizontal plane; on the contrary, they are made up in part precisely out of what has developed on that horizontal plane, insofar as *all ‘judgment’ has been given to the Son*. . . . Divine Judgment does not curse history and historical development, for judgment *itself* belongs partially to what has developed in history; it *maintains God as God precisely in history*.”² During these years Schilder incessantly attacked dialectical theology precisely at this point. Because this theology begins with a dualism between eternity and time, its view of history is faulty. For that reason this theology cannot adequately appreciate God’s redeeming work in Christ, and the relationship between God and man (faith!). Schilder wrote heatedly that this “paradox” cannot tolerate the comfort spoken of in the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism (that we belong in life and in death to our faithful Savior): “This answer forms our posture toward history, not a posture of ‘No,’ but of a hearty ‘Yes.’ . . . History? Don’t despise it: it has become the history of our Mediator, and therefore it has become, in Him, our history, without damning us. . . . And this Mediator is not merely King over history . . . but as Mediator He has become engaged with history, just as He continues still to intervene directly in history.”³

When at the centennial of the 1834 Secession Schilder himself explained the continuing relevance and significance of reclaiming the Canons of Dort, he found this relevance and significance to reside in acknowledging both regeneration and the perseverance of the saints. On the one hand, in his grace God intervenes on the vertical axis with us, but on the other hand, he also accompanies us on the horizontal axis. Over against dialectical theology the Scriptural confession must be maintained without falsification: “Only the blind do not see that a totally different view of the essence and value of *history* lies between the others and ourselves, and an entirely different view of the relationship between theology and philosophy, and an absolutely different view of the relationship between eternity and time, between God and man, and, connected to this, also regarding revelation and its terms.” In the same context Schilder said that

¹ The essay “De paradox in de religie” [Paradox in religion] in *Bij dichters en Schriftgeleerden*, p. 106. Cf. chapter 1 above, note 60.

² The essay “In de crisis?” [In the crisis?] in *Tusschen “Ja” en “Nee”* [Between “Yes” and “No”], p. 350.

³ “Hedendagsche afkeer van het ‘veiligheids-gevoel’” [Contemporary antipathy toward the ‘feeling of security’] I en II, in *De Reformatie*, 13 (9 and 16 June 1933), pp. 284f., 292f. The citation is found on p. 293.

the Belgic Confession with its condemnation of Manichaeism already in fact rejected the “view of *history* belonging to dialectical theology.”⁴ Here too we find the motivation behind Schilder’s well-known essay, “Jesus Christ and the cultural life” (1932). Later he developed this more fully. On the basis of history, a connection is indeed possible between *Christ* and *culture*.⁵ The objection against the view of history held by dialectical theology occupied such a central place in Schilder’s theology during that time that he devoted an entire series of articles to it, entitled “Something about history and its value or lack thereof (I – VII).”⁶ These articles constituted his preparatory work for his publication in 1935 of *What is heaven?*, in which his second chapter thoroughly exposed the perspective on history held by Hegel, Kierkegaard, Barth, Althaus, and Tillich. Precisely because dialectical theology had devalued history so thoroughly, Schilder focused massive attention to history, not only the history of earth, but also the history of heaven, and even the history of hell!⁷

It was in this context and against this background that the connection between history and *covenant* came into view. Schilder verbalized a deeply held conviction when he said, “Therefore *covenant* always presupposes history. . . ; anyone who denigrates history . . . severs the root of *covenantal* preaching.”⁸ Later in this chapter we will see that on the basis of his pervasive difference with dialectical theology, Schilder placed especially strong emphasis on the *history* of the covenant.

⁴ *De dogmatische betekenis der ‘Afscheiding’* [The doctrinal significance of the ‘Secession’], pp. 35, 39. Cf. also *Wat is de hemel?* [What is heaven?], p. 87: “In this world there *are* points of contact (but then *embedded!*), and points of contact for grace: ‘new creation’.” The Calvinist may not permit cultural criticism to rob him of the confession of the *praesentia salutis*, the *here-ness* of the Eternal, the *here-ness* of salvation.”

⁵ This is the title of Schilder’s book published in 1948. Twice Schilder responded extensively to criticism of his 1932 essay: first, against K. H. Miskotte, “De Christelijke cultuur en de ‘theologie van de paradox’ I-V” [Christian culture and the ‘theology of paradox’], in *De Reformatie*, 13 (5 May 1933 and following), p. 245 passim; and then against O. Noordmans, “Over ‘de algemene genade’ I-XVII” [Concerning ‘common grace’], in *De Reformatie*, 16 (24 Jan. – 12 June 1936). The latter articles are published in Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie* [A theology in discussion], pp. 84-138.

⁶ *De Reformatie*, 14 (21 Sept. 1934) – 15 (9 Nov. 1934).

⁷ In *Wat is de hel?* [What is hell?] emphasis was placed repeatedly on the connection between heaven and hell, and between both of these and history. Heaven did not more or less “fall from the sky,” but has traversed a history. “It’s the same with hell. Consummated hell, as it will exist after the parousia. Just as with heaven, it doesn’t ‘fall from the sky.’ It also traverses a history, and it is, by virtue of God’s original ordinance, set in the closest possible relation to the history of *this world*” (*op. cit.*, pp. 44-45; cf. also pp. 26, 28, 44, 50, 52, and 55).

⁸ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 249, note 1.

Schilder took a position, however, also against Kuyper, or to state it more correctly, against Reformed scholasticism as this had appeared in various respects in Kuyper's thought. A certain devaluation of history can be identified also with respect to scholastic theology. In his lectures on the theological encyclopedia, when Schilder discussed the object of theology, he leveled a direct attack upon the traditional archetype-paradigm used by Kuyper and Bavinck. With forthrightness he termed this approach "neo-platonic mysticism," and said: "In this way, discursive thought is dismissed. The idea of *the history of revelation*, which has always governed Reformed theology, is thereby practically rendered inert."⁹ Schilder wrote repeatedly against this remnant of scholasticism within Reformed theology, and over against it he repeatedly emphasized history. The clearest expression in this connection is this: "The cancerous cell in this playful quasi-philosophical construction is this: people are performing a juggling act with one or another semi-pagan *above-below paradigm*, but refuse to bow before *the biblical before-after paradigm*, the Christian *first-not-yet-but-later-indeed paradigm*. With a self-serving metaphor people willingly sacrifice Christian *historiography* to pagan *cosmography*."¹⁰

The scholastic method of thinking tends to shift all of theology from [the realm of] time to [the realm of] eternity. Schilder opposed this method especially at three points. The *first* involved so-called justification from eternity. When Schilder dealt with Belgic Confession, Art. 22, he referred to the second of five declarations published against Abraham Kuyper in 1905 by the "old-A Reformed group": "There is no mention in the Confessions of an *eternal justification*, but only of justification *in time*, and through or by faith." Schilder preferred to side at this point with the "old-A Reformed group" and said, "From the five declarations in 1905 there emerges the anxiety leading people once again to sequester everything in eternity. Kuyper even distinguished nine steps in justification!"¹¹ The *second* point at which Schilder similarly opposed this kind of eternalizing is the question whether Christ was appointed Mediator in eternity or within time. Kuyper had chosen for the former possibility, but Schilder maintained that the latter was correct. Kuyper took as his starting point the counsel of peace, the inter-trinitarian covenant

⁹ Diktaat *Encyclopaedie* [Lecture notes on Encyclopedia], 2: 6-7.

¹⁰ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* [Heidelberg Catechism], 2: 316. Cf. also pp. 105-109, and *Ibid.*, 3: 216.

¹¹ *Christelijke religie* [Christian religion] (lecture notes), p. 70. Cf. *Vijf stellingen betreffende leeringen, waarover in die Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland in de laatste jaren verschil gevallen is* [Five declarations relating to teachings concerning which difference has arisen in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands], p. 9. The third declaration (*op. cit.*, p. 14) begins this way: "According to the Confessions, the Holy Spirit works regeneration *within time*, by means of the Word, and then especially the preached Word. . . ."

between the Father and the Son, and he argued that Christ had been appointed Mediator already before his incarnation (thus, in eternity). Schilder did not deny that a covenant of peace existed from eternity, but wanted to distinguish this clearly from the covenant of *grace* which God established with people within time. And Christ is the Mediator of this covenant of *grace*! Schilder feared that covenantal activity would be seen as having actually occurred without the genuine involvement of human beings.¹²

At this point we are already moving in the direction of the covenant. This, then, is the *third* point where Schilder registered his objection against the scholastic tendency to eternalize everything. The question may be put this way: Was the covenant established in eternity or within time? In this connection it was especially Alexander Comrie, whose position Kuyper had adopted, whose view came under scrutiny. Comrie had taught that the covenant of grace was established in eternity with Christ as the second Adam. With respect to this issue, Schilder preferred again to side with the “old-A Reformed group” and insisted with logical arguments that Comrie had this wrong. The covenant was established within time with human beings. Once again, the counsel of peace and the covenant of grace must be clearly distinguished!¹³

What we’ve written thus far should provide adequate testimony to justify our assertion that over against both Kuyper and Barth, Schilder placed heavy emphasis on history. This accent upon history is a characteristic feature of Schilder’s theology. Think only of his contribution to what is typically known as *redemptive-historical preaching*.¹⁴ This approach emerged when Schilder wrote about the covenant. Because his starting point with regard to the covenant lay within human history, his doctrine of the covenant displayed a structure different from what was commonly held in Reformed circles at that time. Other Reformed thinkers at that time preferred to take their starting point in the counsel of peace.¹⁵ Schilder’s emphasis upon history did not

¹² Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: § 44, “De constitutie van den Middelaar” [The constitution of the Mediator], pp. 193ff. The difference with Kuyper is discussed on pp. 195-203.

¹³ *De Reformatie*, 19 (15 and 22 Sept. 1939), pp. 387 and 402, where Schilder discussed this matter in the last two of his series of ten articles, in connection with his review of G. Ch. Aalders, *Het verbond Gods* [God’s covenant], and Comrie’s position regarding this matter. Naturally this subject is related to the issue of whether Christ is Mediator and/or Head of the covenant of grace. That issue will be discussed below. Here we are interested only in showing that Schilder was reasoning—also regarding the covenant—from the starting point of *history*.

¹⁴ Cf. chapter 1 above, especially notes 23-30 and the associated text.

¹⁵ Cf. *De vastigheid des Verbonds* [The certainty of the Covenant], by A. Kuyper, Jr., for example, in which he popularized the doctrine of the covenant taught by his father, A. Kuyper, Sr. In his second chapter he first discusses “Het Verbondsleven van God Drieëinig” [The Covenant Life of the Triune God] (pp. 19ff.), and then “De

mean that he ignored the relationship between the covenant and the counsel of peace. On the contrary, he grounded his view of the history of the covenant precisely in the eternal counsel of God. For that reason, at the end of this chapter we will need to devote attention to this facet of Schilder's doctrine of the covenant. But grounding is something different than starting point! The fact that Schilder indeed took his starting point in the history of the covenant can be illustrated by his emphasis on the reality of the covenant.

In a 1944 address, Schilder systematically set forth the main lines of the doctrine of the covenant.¹⁶ After a brief introduction, the first question he treated was precisely the issue of the reality of the covenant. Many people argue, on the basis of the infinite qualitative difference between God and man, that the covenant cannot exist in reality, but that the language of covenant is merely figurative. Schilder maintained over against this, however, that God created not only human beings, but the bond between himself and human beings. Therefore, the covenant is “a reality and a genuine reality!” And for that reason there is within the covenant full room for (genuine) human responsibility, which otherwise would not be the case. When in another context Schilder supplied his own definition of the covenant, this aspect of the covenant as a historical reality was prominent: “Personally we are convinced that it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the ‘counsel of peace’ and the ‘covenant of grace’; that covenant and election are not to be identified; that the covenant of grace was established *within time*, and then *genuinely* with human beings by way of appropriate word revelation which made possible, introduced, and called into existence a *real, historical* covenant arrangement. . .” [italics added, S.A.S.].¹⁷ Also when Schilder made several more or less systematic comments about the covenant, the issue of the reality of the covenant was presented immediately at the beginning of such an exposition. Admittedly, the parties of the covenant established between God and man are not equal. “But beware, one may not use this inequality as the basis for arguing that the covenant is not *actually* a *genuine* covenant, but rather is no more than a mere *attitude* which God *unilaterally* adopted *with respect* to man, and this, so to speak, ‘over his head.’ To maintain this position is to rob the covenant of its genuine content, and to use the word ‘covenant’ merely in a *figurative* sense; he

Raad des Vredes” [The Counsel of Peace] (pp. 26ff.), before discussing the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

¹⁶ Cf. chapter 1 above, p. **, note 146.

¹⁷ The concluding article in a series of four: “Is er eenstemmigheid over het Genadeverbond?” [Is there consensus about the Covenant of Grace?], *De Reformatie*, vol. 21 (1 Dec. 1945), p. 65. These articles have the same content as the minority report that Schilder and Vollenhoven submitted to the 1939 Synod.

hollows it out, until nothing remains but a dim and dangerous *metaphor*. No, the covenant is a *reality*: its announcement entailed far more than the invention of a symbol, an ideogram.”¹⁸

This, then, is the first matter that must be clearly posited here in the introduction to our chapter about the history of the covenant: Schilder’s *accent* upon history. The second matter that can now be treated is Schilder’s view concerning the *unity* of history. From this we will once again draw implications for his perspective on the covenant.

Schilder’s view of the unity of history is intimately related to what he published about redemptive-historical preaching. The heading over his three articles written in 1931 is typical: “Something about the unity of ‘salvation history’ in connection with preaching.”¹⁹ There he asserted at the very outset:

Reformed people accept the unity of Holy Scripture; and—now this is directly related to that—the unity of history; in a special sense the unity of salvation history as well. They believe that God’s counsel has considered all things according to his will, that he executes that counsel, that he reveals himself in Christ unto the salvation of the world; that therein the unity of history has been provided, and that this unity of history, insofar as it includes the unity of ‘salvation history,’ is able to be recognized (with faith) in Holy Scripture, which narrates this history what we must know in order to learn to recognize its development according to the governing thoughts and factual twists and turns.

From this it follows directly that the Bible actually narrates not multiple *histories*, but one history.

In these sentences we actually possess a concise summary of everything that Schilder taught about the unity of history.²⁰ For here we see first that Schilder would have nothing to do with a duality between salvation history (or church history) and world history. Later he could declare quite simply: “There is but one history, and that is ‘Christian,’ which is to say: governed by Jesus

¹⁸ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 317. Cf. also Schilder’s lecture notes on symbolics: *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, p. 7: “For the covenant is completely real and not figurative.”

¹⁹ *De Reformatie*, 11 (11 Sept. 1931 and following), p. 365.

²⁰ Cf. the discussion of Schilder’s position by S. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, pp. 122.ff.: salvation history is history, is a unity, and signifies forward movement.

Christ.”²¹ Further, from this concise formulation we learn that Schilder grounded the unity of history in the unity of God’s decree. On the basis of that, and on the basis of the unity of God’s revelation in Scripture, all of salvation history is unified.²² this has undergone development from beginning to end, having its midpoint (or center) in Christ.

In order to do justice to this idea of development, Schilder needed to hold firmly to the understanding that the Bible presents history as a linear (in distinction from a cyclical) process: “Scripture portrays for us a history that moves in a straight line, proceeding *from alpha to omega*.”²³ This movement forward in a straight line throughout history Schilder defended vigorously over against various criticisms of it from the history of religions school: “Over against all this speculation, in which very ancient heresies are stuffed inside a not very new package on the basis of the most superficial of grounds, we confess in the Catechism the *unity* and the *uniqueness* of both salvation and condemnation; the unity and the uniqueness of the Mediator, and of the history of revelation and history of salvation, with that Scriptural ‘once for all’ that we encounter repeatedly in Scripture. ‘I am the alpha and the omega’; *the* alpha, not ‘an’ alpha; *the* omega, not ‘an’ omega. Due to the incarnation of the Word, and through this incarnation, the ‘*line*’ of our earth-history has become that of *salvation*-history and *revelation*-history.”²⁴ This formulation appeared in the section where Schilder was discussing Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 6, Question and Answer 19 (that God revealed the gospel first in Paradise, etc.). In the same context he referred to the negative consequence of the cyclical view of history, namely, that such a view eliminates the *covenant*: “It never occurs to these ‘theologians’ that precisely the establishment of the *covenant* lifts the relationship of God toward his people above the sphere of a ‘natural fate’ or of ‘natural necessity,’ in order to place it within the enterprise of a mutually free binding, which from this time forward must operate with the motif of ‘*everything or nothing*.’ An *eternal recurrence of things*—this means that what is called ‘god’ and what is called ‘man’ are both taken up in a ‘*process*’ which neither of them can

²¹ *Schriftoverdenkingen* [Scripture meditations], 3: 347. This is an expression from 1948 in connection with celebrating Ascension Day, under the title “Universele recapitulatie” [Universal recapitulation]. Cf. for similar expressions, *Preken* [Sermons], 2: 174 (a sermon from 1937): “So everything becomes church history, and only then and for that reason, world history,” and *Preken*, 3: 224 (a catechism sermon from 1935 on the church): “Therefore, *all* history is actually *church* history.” Every year is “*anno Domini*”!

²² For now we leave aside the criticism leveled against Schilder in this connection, leaving that discussion until our final chapter.

²³ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 250.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 268ff. The citation is on p. 274.

‘affect.’ But *covenant* entails that they can now ‘move forward.’”²⁵ (This latter expression is a wordplay referring to the covenantal judicial relationship between God and his people, cf. Micah 6.) In connection with this matter of the linear view of history, the moment of “once-for-all-ness” entered the discussion, as might be expected. Schilder wrote frequently about this, since this matter was also related to the redemptive-historical approach to preaching. The history, for example, of Jacob at Peniel, or of Thomas after Easter, was unique, unrepeatable. With this Schilder meant something completely different, however, than Emil Brunner with his notion of “absolute uniqueness.” Whereas Brunner reserved this moment for the unique appearance of Christ in history, Schilder said: “Once the ‘historical’ event is identified as ‘unique,’ then the Son of God has been assigned a very ordinary ‘uniqueness,’ to the ‘uniqueness’ of everyone of us.”²⁶

Schilder saw all of history as one and the same history. Therefore he rejected the common distinction between various categories of history, such as primeval history and ultimate history and supra-history. He preferred to abandon as well the traditional Reformed distinction between “sacred” and “profane” history. “For among the older Reformed folk both so-called ‘sacred’ as well as ‘profane’ history took place in the same arena, on earth, in our world, within time, among people of flesh and blood.”²⁷ In formulating his own position over against that of the dialectical theologians, he said: “Thus we reject the model of history-and-supra-history. We will not permit Christ to be relegated to the sideline, nor the Word, nor any part of ‘God’s world.’ In Christ himself, God was not separated from man—recall Chalcedon—but also not confused with man. Unmixed, yet united. Anyone who believes this will see *precisely here* the law of the Christian view of history fully and firmly maintained.”²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 2: 275. With a pregnant play on words, Schilder concludes this section as follows: “*Eternal recapitulation* = *fate*. *Covenant* = *God*” (p. 276).

²⁶ Ibid., 2: 337. Cf. “Absolute eenmaligheid” [Absolute once-for-all-ness] from 1936, in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2: 201-211, and the essay “‘Naar het vleesch’ en ‘naar den Geest’” [‘According to the flesh’ and ‘according to the Spirit’], in the anthology *‘t Hoogfeest naar de Schriften* [The high feast according to the Scriptures], pp. 31-44. In all three places Schilder entered into discussion with what Emil Brunner had written in his *Der Mittler* (Zürich, 1927) [ET: *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), for example on p. 303: “It is only since Christ came, and through Him, that both uniqueness and absolute decision have been in existence.” (“Erst seit Christus und durch Christus gibt es beide: Einmaligkeit und Entscheidung im absoluten Sinne,” p. 269.)

²⁷ Ibid., 1: 219.

²⁸ *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 67-68.

Schilder held firmly to this unity of one and the same history with a view to both protology and eschatology. Especially in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism he discussed repeatedly the issue of evolutionism. With firm conviction he declared: “The first man in Scripture was not pre-historic, but historical.”²⁹ In this context, such a claim must also have contradicted Barth, because Schilder understood that, in point of fact, neither protology nor eschatology could be worked out on the basis of Barth’s view of Scripture (creation saga!). This is how Schilder formulated his main objection, in characteristic fashion: “The covenant has no place here any longer.”³⁰ He concluded his broad exposition of the doctrine of creation with these highly significant words: “He [God] silences every ‘-ist’ with his closing word from the Book of Revelation: I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end; and I do not transmit ‘A’ subsonically and ‘Z’ supersonically, in order to transmit only from ‘B’ to ‘Y’ sonically. . . .”³¹ God broadcasts all of his news reports, one might say, across the audible frequency: that of the past (“A,” the beginning), of the present (“B – Y,” the middle), and of the future (“Z,” the end)! Therefore it is also unnecessary to listen to the beginning and the end from the middle. Tillich (among others), for example, tried to do this. For him, the “middle of history” (Christology) determined the beginning (protology) as well as the end (eschatology). But Schilder considered such a view to contradict the biblical paradigm which “placed the beginning, middle, and end of history *as the extension of one another*.”³² To speak about the beginning of history merely from the middle of history is to travel an impermissible path where “‘Christ’ is made into a methodological epistemological principle.” The Bible, however, allows us to “begin at the beginning: otherwise we understand neither the middle nor the end.”³³

In this formulation another motif that played an important role in Schilder’s entire theology becomes noticeable. He wanted consistently to begin at the beginning. This maxim comes from his own pen: “Take everything back to ‘in the beginning’!”³⁴ With the word “everything” Schilder meant every theological issue. Take, for example, the question of common grace. During this period, Noordmans spotted in Schilder’s thought this motif of returning to the

²⁹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 237.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3: 370, note 121.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3: 480.

³² *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 51.

³³ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 245.

³⁴ Heading on p. 286 of *Wat is de hemel?* Cf. p. 285: “Every consequence must be explained out of the *beginning*; only then will you see the direction in which movements will flow in the *end*.”

beginning, and Schilder admitted to it. He did indeed want to begin at the beginning, as long as Noordmans recalled that this motif was nothing new, for it had already appeared in Kuyper, and as long as Noordmans understood that this motif did *not* mean that for Schilder, Genesis 1-3 now became the most important chapters in the Bible! Schilder said that for years he had been preaching and writing “that in history there is a tremendous drama that makes the end richer than the beginning.” Therefore Genesis 1-3 itself becomes completely clear only from what follows it.³⁵ By accenting the *beginning*, Schilder was not implying that he was thereby abstracting protology from eschatology. In another place he wrote: “Genesis 2, the beginning of the Bible, governs Revelation 22, the end of Scripture. . . .” Later on the same page: “But there [Rev. 22] it has become far richer, it is consummated.”³⁶

If one inquires where this motif of Schilder came from, then we need to refer to the following. He appealed to the fact that Christ himself held before men “how things were *from the beginning*, which is to say: in the first, original, perpetually binding, and foundationally created relationship between God and man.”³⁷ Schilder had been discussing in this context the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 19, in connection with marriage. Not only in what Christ *says*, however, does Schilder see a reason for emphasizing the beginning. Also in what he comes to *do*. For he was (according to Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15) the second Adam, whose task it was to restore what the first Adam had broken. This paradigm of first and second Adam was so foundational for Schilder, and appears so repeatedly in his writings, that we may suffice here with but a few characteristic statements. When Schilder was reflecting on the relation between Christ and culture, he wrote: “Precisely as the second Adam, Christ as office-bearer reaches back, in the *middle* of history, to the *beginning*, back to the *principles* established then and there.”³⁸ Because Schilder wanted always to begin at the beginning, he had to defend the knowability of the beginning of history over against all those who had declared the Paradise

³⁵ The Noordmans-Schilder debate of 1936 (cf. note 5 above) was published by Puchinger in *Een theologie in discussie*, especially pp. 76f., 89, 91, 127, and 132. Cf. also J. Douma, *Algemene genade* [Common grace], p. 155: “Schilder’s own solution: Back before the Fall.”

³⁶ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 248. Cf. p. 114: “. . . eschatology is not to be separated from protology. . . . Only in this way does *history* obtain its full due.” Cf. also the report of Schilder’s speech of 1948 on “Eschatologische prediking” [Eschatological preaching], collected in *Dictaat Encyclopaedie* [Lecture notes on Encyclopedia], 4: 29-34, where he posited as starting point that we cannot speak of eschatological preaching apart from protological preaching.

³⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 73. On the following page he said, in relation to Christ: “He places the wilderness children under the *Paradise*-claim.”

³⁸ *Christus en cultuur* [Christ and culture], p. 43.

history to be *terra incognita*. This explains his vigorous opposition in his early years against Dr. Geelkerken's position (Assen, 1926), and later (in his commentary on the Catechism) against the theory of evolution. If it had been true that the first man was merely a naïve, primitive person, then Adam could not have been an office-bearer. And then there would be no point in speaking of Christ as the second Adam. And if the fall into sin was not a historical fact that had occurred at a particular moment in history after creation, then there would not have been an original state of righteousness by which the entire subsequent course of history could continue to be normed. For Schilder, evolutionism always constituted the murder of religion. Evolutionist theories ran stuck with the covenant of God with man. “*That* is our greatest objection against the principled doctrine of evolution: we need not wrestle with its heralds about fossils and remains of apes and people and birds, but *about the reality* of a distinct and distinctive Word proceeding from God; that Word, which narrates a complete drama of covenant breaking and covenant restoration, and works this out and preaches this *already* in and to the *first human being*, and this in a world which stood under a divine *calling*, in terms of the capacity of each creature, and not under a mechanistic compulsion of [variation or] oscillation.”³⁹

At this point we have come once again to the idea of the covenant, and this is the proper place, in conclusion, to devote attention to the implications that Schilder drew from his view of the unity of history for his view of the covenant. For the covenant also underwent a history. And because according to Schilder, all of history is one, we may expect that he would have had an eye also for the unity of covenant history. Indeed, in the doctrine of the covenant, Schilder had firmly argued that there was but one covenant, from beginning to end.

Thus on occasion Schilder engaged the views of Cocceius, and said: “Cocceius desired one covenant history and thus held firmly to the historical line of the covenant. We want that as well, for we also believe that it is one history with different stages, whereas the substance of the covenant remains the same through all of these phases. Anyone who alters the substance [as did Cocceius, S.A.S.] . . . and does not limit the changes to a difference of degree in power and administration, is no longer holding firmly to the one line of the covenant. Then what you have

³⁹ *Heidelbergesche Catechismus*, 3: 310. Cf. the entire § 68: “God’s constancy and that of the world,” pp. 258-316.

are not differing stages in one covenant, but continually differing covenants.”⁴⁰ With this criticism of Cocceius, Schilder stood squarely in the Reformed tradition: “By substance is understood the center, the core, the content, the actual fundamental idea. The Reformed teach that in each covenant stage the same substance obtains, namely, the reality of ‘I am your God and you are My people.’ Now wherever the unity of substance is surrendered, the unity of covenant history gets lost.”⁴¹ Whereas Reformed theology had worked for a long time with this fundamental idea of the unity of substance and the diversity of administration in the various stages of the covenant, Schilder used yet another term for emphasizing with still greater clarity the unity of covenant history, namely, the notion of “dating.” He said: “The words and dispensations of God are dated. When God says: ‘I am your God and the God of your descendants,’ which is the substance of the covenant, then that was valid earlier, but it remains valid now as well as in heaven unto all eternity. God speaks concretely and datedly and his speaking thus possesses specificity and modulation in terms of its dating.”⁴² This notion will come up for more extensive discussion in the rest of this chapter. Especially when Schilder wrote, for example, about the law (in Paradise and at Sinai), he appealed to this notion. The obligation of the law is permanent, but the administration of the law is dated, “which is to say: it bears the mark of a particular day when the Lord erected a new mile marker alongside the covenant path.”⁴³

Analogous to his conviction that all history is unified, and that the middle and the end can be understood only in terms of the beginning, Schilder did not ignore the possibility of applying this approach to the doctrine of the covenant. Indeed, here too the slogan “Begin at the beginning!” was applied fruitfully. Schilder tied together not only the various phases of the covenant of grace (Abraham, Sinai, Christ). Even the so-called covenant of works and the so-called covenant of grace, in the final analysis, are not two covenants but two stages of one and the same covenant. “Covenant” is no interim measure, as if other relationships between God and

⁴⁰ *Het verbond in the geref. symbolen*, p. 27.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 29. Cf. in the same lecture notes also p. 5: “Cocceius developed the Covenant in its historical meaning with differing dispensations, so that each dispensation had its own covenant substance, but such was already rejected in this confession [i.e., the *Helvetic Formula Consensus*, 1675, S.A.S.]. All the phases are the fulfilling, administering, bestowing of one substance and the simultaneous disclosure of the same.”

⁴² Ibid., pp. 8-9. Cf. the following page, to p. 11.

⁴³ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 79. On p. 80 we read: “Everywhere we encounter *federal-historical* dating!” Cf. also Schilder’s definition of ethics in chapter 1 above, p. **, note 150.

man outside of the covenant would have been possible. No, this starting point must be valid: “‘Covenant’—constitutional word for ‘all flesh’.”⁴⁴ For that reason Schilder can say: “The covenant of grace is accordingly *not a second covenant*, for *God does not duplicate*. Duplication is actually incompatible with the covenant; a covenant stands or falls with the ‘everything or nothing,’ and thus also with the ‘ever or never,’ as also with the ‘once and for all.’ ‘Ich liebe Dich auf Zeit und Ewigkeit [I love you for time and for eternity].’”⁴⁵ When from his side Adam broke the covenant of works (through sin), God from his side maintained that same covenant (through grace). In so doing, he prevented the already begun covenant history from coming to an end. Through his gracious intervention he saw to it that history moved forward: “a *new* phase, O surely, but then still only a *phase* of the one unbroken covenant history.”⁴⁶ On account of this starting point, the covenant of works was developed rather broadly by Schilder. He did his best to show that all the constitutive elements of every subsequent stage of the covenant could be found back already in the covenant with Adam.

Schilder’s characteristic emphasis on history and the unity of history entailed as well that in his doctrine of the covenant he wanted to do justice to two other aspects: the *history* of the covenant and the *unity* of the covenant. In order to hold firmly to both of these aspects at the same time, he employed this pair of ideas: antiquating and obsolescence. In connection with the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, he said: “There is indeed antiquatio [antiquating], but no abrogatio [abrogating].”⁴⁷ And when he wrote about the relationship between the old and the new covenant, he referred to the connection between the Passover and the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22): “If God does not abrogate (mechanically annul) any covenant, but merely antiquates it (declares it legally obsolete), then the Savior must eventually be able to say about the Passover lamb: Look, Father, it is antiquated,

⁴⁴ The title of a two-part series in *De Reformatie*, 15 (30 Aug. and 6 Sept. 1935), pp. 386f. and 395. On p. 386 Schilder clarifies his intention with that title: “Under the influence of an imbalanced covenant perspective, and of a scholastic impulse for making distinctions, especially in the arena of ‘federal theology,’ there is far too little attention given to the *universality*, the irrevocability, the constitutive significance for every relationship, of God’s covenant with people.” This sentence is repeated word for word in *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 237-238.

⁴⁵ “‘Covenant’—constitutional word for ‘all flesh,’” p. 387. This sentence is also found in *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 252.

⁴⁶ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 402.

⁴⁷ *Americana* (notes), p. 9.

not abrogated. Eating, I have lawfully consumed it.”⁴⁸ Christ did not abrogate, but fulfilled the antiquated covenant. As might be expected, this category of progressive fulfillment is a useful notion for someone, such as Schilder, who wanted to honor both the history and the unity of the covenant. Schilder made repeated use of this idea. But in order to make clear that this may not be confused with an automatic evolutionary process, he also used the notion of catastrophe. With this idea he wanted to emphasize that one phase of the covenant cannot move into another phase without God’s “shock-filled” intervention in history. The newness of each new phase did not come about simply “along the lines of gradual tranquility.”⁴⁹ In this context he could then say: “As a doctrinal maxim, the notion of catastrophe is unique to *every* Christian historical perspective regarding *all* history, the first [protology, S.A.S.], and the last [eschatology, S.A.S.], and also that of the middle (Christ).”⁵⁰

It seems natural that we should use the rest of this chapter to set forth the sequential phases of the one covenant in the course of history, one after the other. This would mean that everything Schilder wrote about each of the phases would be explained in separate sections: first the covenant of works, then the different phases of the covenant of grace, such as the one in Paradise after the Fall, the one with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai, and finally the new covenant in Christ. We have declined to follow this approach, however, for two reasons. First, the *structure* of the covenant must still be discussed separately at a later point, and for that reason all the facets of each covenant phase cannot be discussed now. Second, we could do more justice to Schilder’s own emphasis on the history of covenant as a dynamic process (from the beginning through the mid-point to the end) if in the remainder of this chapter we focused on the *relationship* between the various covenant phases. For that reason, the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is treated, and then the relationship between old and new covenant. Finally, the profound and at the same time exhilarating relationship between the covenant (within time) and the counsel of peace (in eternity) is treated. These facets of the

⁴⁸ *Christus in zijn lijden* [Christ in his suffering], 2nd edition (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1952), 1: 182. This sentence did not appear in the first edition (1930), p. 153.

⁴⁹ *Christus en cultuur*, p. 73. Cf. the edition of this work edited by J. Douma (1978), where on pp. 7 and 85 this notion of “catastrophe” is clarified. Cf. also Schilder’s own clarification in response to Noordmans (in Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie*, p. 131): catastrophe means that a subsequent phase does indeed lie in line with a preceding phase, but it does not emerge from that line. In 1938 Schilder wrote (see *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2: 234) that each new phase of covenant history presupposes a “monopleuric unleashing of power” by God. We will return to this idea in the next section.

⁵⁰ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 67. In this book the idea of catastrophe is discussed repeatedly. Cf. the subject index.

history of the covenant were exactly the points of dispute in the debate within Reformed circles, a debate in which K. Schilder participated so intensely.

2.2 The covenant of works and the covenant of grace

Before the genuinely stimulating facets of the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace can be explained further, a preliminary comment must be made about the phrase “covenant of works.” Schilder repeatedly used this common technical term. He said, “That we speak in what follows about the *covenant of works* will not shock anyone who recalls that this phrase is commonly used to refer to the original relation between God and humanity. The relationship was *covenant*, for the very simple reason that religion (the service of God) is possible only in the form of covenant. And the covenant was called—a posteriori—the *covenant of works*. For it received this name *afterwards*, directly in contrast to the covenant *of grace*.” A bit later on the same page, Schilder added: “Thus, the covenant of works is a relation between God and humanity whereby God, given his free, unilateral determination as creator and lawgiver, couples his works-toward-us with our works-toward-him. Man’s work was thus not the reason *why*, but the path *along which* salvation would come to the human race.”⁵¹ Any thought of merit at this point must be radically eliminated: “But even though this salvation proceeds to man *along the pathway* of obedience, it does not proceed to man on account of his obedience. *Reward* in the sense of *apodosis* (*obligatory* distribution of what is due *by right*, and what would be deserved on the basis of one’s own accomplishments) is not connected to his works at all: *what does he have that he has not received?* (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7). His reward is given to him not out of merit but out of free favor.”⁵²

Naturally, in the course of history, various terms came to be used to describe this covenant with Adam before the Fall. Schilder recognized that the term covenant *of works* was not entirely satisfactory, because of the reason mentioned above. But the phrase covenant *of favor* is confusing as well, for favor is virtually the same as grace. To speak of the covenant *of*

⁵¹ *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 248-249, and 249-250. The heading on p. 249 reads, “‘Covenant of works’—a posthumous appellation.”

⁵² *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 392.

creation or the covenant *of nature* is, however, too restrictive, for according to Schilder (see below), the covenant is then something added to the creation. For that reason he retained the phrase covenant *of works*.⁵³

In order to understand well Schilder's intention with the phrase "covenant of works," each element of the phrase—"works" as well as "covenant"—should be placed within quotation marks. The term "works" may not be associated with merit, and the term "covenant" actually refers to a stage or phase of the one covenant from its beginning to its end. Keeping these comments in mind, we shall use the terms now without quotation marks.

One thing is certain: Schilder studied intensely and deeply about the covenant of works. This concentrated attention related, on the one hand, to his endeavor in every theological investigation to apply the method of "beginning at the beginning" (cf. the preceding section). On the other hand, the theological discussions in the Netherlands during the 1930s compelled him to deepen his understanding of all the stages of the covenant. The questions involved in those discussions dealt primarily with the *structure* of the covenant—for example, the question whether the covenant is unilateral or bilateral. Valentin Hepp argued that Schilder's viewpoint (that the covenant is unilateral or one-sided in its origin, but bilateral or two-sided in its continuation) was in conflict with Reformed theology. In this connection Hepp insisted that even the covenant of works, strictly speaking, was unilateral or one-sided. If it had been bilateral, it would have ceased to exist after the Fall, for at that point humanity from its side could have annulled the covenant. In this context Schilder was required to devote intensive study to the subject of the covenant of works.⁵⁴ In addition to his confrontation with the Kuypersians, his confrontation with dialectical theology also required this intense study of the covenant. For, as

⁵³ *Capita Selecta* I (lecture notes), p. 45f., where Schilder discussed the topic, "Is there room for a covenant of works?" At this point one might ask whether the term "Paradise covenant" deserved consideration. But then Schilder would surely have replied: in Paradise we read more than once about the establishing of a covenant—first before the Fall (thus, covenant of "works"), and then after the Fall (thus, covenant of "grace," cf. Gen. 3:15). Since with the phrase "covenant of works" refers specifically to the (stage of the) covenant before the Fall, for that reason the phrase "Paradise covenant" will not be suitable either.

⁵⁴ Cf. the series of articles Schilder wrote against Hepp's fourth brochure in the series *Dreigende Deformatie* [Threatening Deformation]: "Prof. Hepps ongereformeerde verbondsbeschouwing I-IV [Professor Hepp's unreformed covenant perspective]," in *De Reformatie*, vol. XVIII, p. 90 (12 Nov. 1937) and later. Cf. also the series of article from Schilder, entitled "Is er eenstemmigheid over het Genadeverbond?" (in *De Reformatie*, 21 (10 Nov. 1945): 41 and subsequent issues), in which among other things the viewpoint of Thijs was discussed, namely, that the covenant of works was broken from God's side after the Fall.

Schilder himself wrote, with Barth and Brunner “there is no room left for a covenant of works, no possibility of tying together the beginning with the end and completion of the world, the first with the second and exalted Adam, the initiation with the completion and perfection of history all the way to its heavenly exaltation, the one extending from the other.”⁵⁵

It is clear both that Schilder treated the covenant of works with affection, and why he did so. But how did he provide biblical warrant for the existence of a *covenant* between God and Adam already before the Fall? Schilder refused to be served by a hasty appeal simply to the *locus classicus* (Hos. 6:7), as if that would have solved all the problems.⁵⁶ In agreement with Reformed theology (cf., for example, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck) he preferred to appeal to the Pauline analogy between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12ff. and 1 Corinthians 15:45. For that reason, he spoke repeatedly of the biblical paradigm of First Adam/Second Adam.⁵⁷ In his warrant for the covenant of works, Schilder did not use a biblicistic approach. Even though the Bible does not speak in so many words about a covenant before the Fall, Schilder appealed to the broad theological contexts in which the Bible speaks of Adam. From the point of view of the Bible’s doctrine of sin (harmartiology) it is clear that Adam must have been our covenant head, otherwise the doctrine of original sin remain inexplicable.⁵⁸ Within Christology, the redemptive work of Christ remains obscure until we see that as our covenant mediator Christ has satisfied as our substitute the demand that God originally placed upon Adam, a demand that remains valid even to this very day.⁵⁹ The doctrine of the covenant of works, therefore, has soteriological consequences: this involves matters of life and death (also ours)! Because the covenant is “constitutional for all flesh,” the covenant in all its stages, especially in

⁵⁵ *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶ At the same place mentioned above in note 53, a student reported professor Schilder’s comment in this connection briefly but clearly: “Hosea 6:7 is irrelevant.”

⁵⁷ Cf., for example, the statement in *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 24f., 50, 52. In *Christus en cultuur* this paradigm is, according to Schilder, the “hinge” on which his entire argument swung (pp. 43 and 50). Cf. also the index to *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* (4: 315-316, s.v. “Adam”) to see how frequent and varied was Schilder’s use of this paradigm. In his dissertation, “Om de oeconomie van het welbehagen [On the dispensation of good pleasure],” C. Trimp made a comparison between Schilder and Barth regarding this point. He wrote (p. 56) that according to Barth the First Adam must be understood in terms of the Second Adam, for the First Adam is secondary in relation to the Second Adam. Over against this, Schilder emphasized, according to Trimp, that God “arranged, in the historical order of things, that first the ‘First’ Adam and then the ‘Last’ Adam each started his official career on earth” (pp. 198-199). Trimp supplied the references for both Barth and Schilder on this point in note 23 on p. 199.

⁵⁸ Cf. Schilder’s expansive discussion of the doctrine of original sin in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 313-358.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 7-28.

its first stage, must be correctly construed. If one construes the covenant of works incorrectly, then one faces the danger of going wrong with regard to its subsequent stages.⁶⁰ In order to develop the doctrine of the covenant of works, however, special attention must be devoted to the opening chapters of the Bible. In Schilder's view, this involved a hermeneutical decision, with which the acknowledgement or denial of the covenant of works was closely connected. For him it was a faith presupposition that Genesis 1-3 is accessible (also theologically), since it provides a sufficiently reliable report about the initial beginning of covenant history.⁶¹

In that connection, it is interesting to discuss the question as to when precisely the covenant of works was established. Did the origin of the covenant of works coincide with the time when God created the human race, such that this primordial relationship between God and humanity can be termed "creational"? Schilder held a clear view about this: "But the *covenant* is *itself* a further specification, a providential regulating of the reality of the relationship between God and humanity. When we say *providential*, we mean that the regulating was an act of God's *providence*, not of *creation* itself. Humanity was indeed created *unto* covenant relationship, but was not automatically *in* that relationship; God announced the covenant *after* the creation; it relates to creation not analytically, but synthetically—which is to say, the covenant adds nothing that did not already lay embedded within creation. The covenant is not simply a *concretization*, but also an *enrichment* of the relationship between both, in such a way that they *become* covenant parties. It is, so to speak, not a matter of natural law. . . ."⁶² For Schilder this matter was apparently of such great importance that he returned to it repeatedly. He found here a strong support for his conviction that covenant and election may not be identified. God never overwhelmed humanity with the covenant, such that human responsibility really played no role therein—not even in the first stage of the covenant. When he discussed the "replacement formulation" adopted by the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (1946), he appealed to Wollebius in order to prove that earlier Reformed theology had intentionally placed the covenant in the categories "of *calling*, of audible, official *proclamation* and thus entirely within God's *providence*." The covenant was always subservient to, and a fruit of, God's

⁶⁰ Cf. § 2.1 above, p. ** and note 44. In *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 219-220, Schilder wrote: "To go astray in the doctrine of *creation* is to obstruct, for good, the Scriptural depth of *both* the doctrine of our misery *and* the doctrine of our salvation."

⁶¹ In *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 196, 200, Schilder provides a defense of his "faith presupposition" with regard to Gen. 1-3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1: 318.

governing speaking. “[The covenant] is discernible not from God’s secret thoughts or decrees, but from God’s revealed words which command and allow us to trust and to act.”⁶³ For that reason Schilder objected against someone like Kuyper calling the covenant of works “the most natural thing in the world.”⁶⁴ Schilder wrote, “Covenant is not a datum given automatically with the creation, but it comes under providence, which is to say: what God does after creation, in order to unfold, according to his counsel, what has been created.”⁶⁵

Schilder’s conviction that the covenant (and therefore also the covenant of works) belongs to the order of providence, and not to the order of creation, shows a remarkable parallel to his view of humanity as the image of God. Accordingly we must mention it here in passing. That humanity must display God’s image is not a matter of created qualities, but a matter of official calling. The scholastic idea of *analogia entis* [analogy of being] must be rejected. Schilder asked: “Is being human itself *being* God’s image? How long will people still continue to see the image of God as a question *simply* of *nature* or *qualities* and not of office?”⁶⁶ The Roman Catholic notion of *donum superadditum* (that a separate *grace* must be added to humanity’s original *nature*) must likewise be rejected.⁶⁷ Schilder saw only one possibility for avoiding this mistaken construct: the *imago Dei* must be tied to the *covenant*. He reasoned as follows: “After all, a covenant established between two parties always does two things: [1.] since it appears after creation and within God’s providence, it *connects* to that which *already exists*, to that which is already present; [2.] it brings that which already exists and is already present unto greater richness, unto more glorious unfolding.”⁶⁸ Applied to humanity as image of God, this means that God created humanity with precisely that creaturely quality which would be suited to the office

⁶³ “Het vierde formulier van eenigheid II” [The fourth Form of Unity], in *De Reformatie*, vol. 22 (16 Nov. 1946), p. 50. Cf. in the same series, part V on p. 73 (7 Dec. 1946): “The covenant belongs under *divine providence*. . . Therefore the covenant *must* join up with the creational (‘maintenance’), developing it according to its nature and at the same time enriching it (it brings out, synthetically, enriching elements), and in this way bringing the creation to fulfillment (that is: ‘governing’).”

⁶⁴ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 340f.

⁶⁵ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 90. In the same context he also wrote, “This covenant-establishing Word comes *after* creation, and comes *over* creation, and comes *alongside* creation.”

⁶⁶ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 294. Cf. pages 253, 258, 262, and 306 for similar assertions.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 278 and 284.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

unto which he thereafter, within the covenant, called humanity, namely, to represent him (cf. Gen. 1:28).⁶⁹

Schilder must have been well aware of the fact that with his view he was going against an opinion widely held in the Reformed circles of his day. In 1932 Rev. N. Diemer published a doctrinal-historical study of the covenant of works.⁷⁰ In this study the view that the covenant is something added to creation was discarded as an unreformed mechanistic idea.⁷¹ The covenant of works (which was here preferably termed “creation covenant” without objection) lay fixed organically in creation, just like the covenant of grace is organically grounded within the recreation through regeneration.⁷²

From his side, however, Schilder could also appeal to sound authorities. An expert in Reformed covenant theology like Dr. Geerhardus Vos wrote: “According to the Reformed view the covenant of works is something more than the natural bond which exists between God and man. . . . To be sure, if the relationship in which Adam came to stand with God is entirely natural and if there was nothing positive in it, then the covenant theory as an expression of that purely natural relationship must indeed appear rather artificial. The truth of the matter is that in the covenant of works the natural relationship was made to serve a positive purpose.”⁷³ Here the temptation is great to expand on the relation between creation and covenant in general, especially in terms of Barth’s famous contribution in this regard (the creation as external ground of the covenant, and the covenant as the internal ground of creation)! But we must forego that discussion in this context, since we are interested here in the *history* of the covenant.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 286: “And thus God *made* a man for that *office*, and *gave* him the qualities needed for that office *immediately* interwoven with nature.” And on p. 287: “. . . God’s image is not an *addition* [*toevoegsel*], but determines the *grout* [*voegsel*; “connective glue” {trans.}] of human nature. . . .”

⁷⁰ *Het scheppingsverbond met Adam* [The creation covenant with Adam]. In the preface, Dr. F. W. Grosheide mentions that with the study the author had won a contest prize, on the recommendation of, among others, Professor Dr. A. G. Honig, J. Thijs, and G. C. Berkouwer.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 75, for example: “Every mechanistic addition to God’s creation is a weakening of the pure Reformed standpoint, since it is not grounded in creation itself.”

⁷² Ibid., p. 77.

⁷³ *De Verbondsleer in de Gereformeerde Theologie* (Grand Rapids: “Democrat” Drukkers, 1891), pp. 22-23 [ET: “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 244]. Schilder employed this very quote in his debate with V. Hepp; cf. his article, “Professor Hepp’s unreformed covenant perspective IV,” in *De Reformatie* 18 (3 December 1937), p. 115.

Precisely in connection with the treatment of the history of covenant we need to pause for a moment to grasp Schilder's view of the ground of the covenant of works. By virtue of his grounding the covenant in God's *providence*, he made room for the *history* of the covenant, also in its first stage as covenant of works. After all, providence as defined by the Heidelberg Catechism in terms of upholding and governing, implies an historical process moving from a beginning to an end. Schilder describes providence as follows: " 'Upholding' means that in every second of time, God 'draws' everything forth from Genesis 1, the alpha of history, and 'governing' means that in every second, he 'leads' everything to Revelation 22, the omega of history."⁷⁴ With regard to the covenant of works this means that in his providence God intended that through obedience to the probationary command (Gen. 2:16f.), if the Fall had not occurred, Adam was supposed to have moved from the state of *posse non peccare* [able not to sin] to a state of *non posse peccare* [not able to sin]. Schilder developed rather extensively this traditional Reformed understanding.⁷⁵

Whenever Schilder dissected modern views of history, he attempted to explain the grounding of his own view in the *beginning* of history. Before the Fall into sin all the constitutive factors which determined the subsequent course of history can be found. Thus, he asserted as his conviction that already in Paradise "fruit" must have grown, which must have ripen gradually through an *evolution on the basis of the creation*, in order then later to be harvested in a state of a "no longer growing but eternally established salvation."⁷⁶ Schilder was aware that his line of reasoning risks the danger of becoming a fantasy, but he also believed that Scripture permits us to make legitimate deductions, which may be considered in all their consequences.⁷⁷ He therefore reasoned from eschatology back to protology. On the analogy that the *end* of (the currently sinful) history cannot be attained any other way than by a "catastrophe," then a kind of "catastrophe" must also be presupposed at the *beginning* of (the at that time sinless) history. One need only keep in mind that this latter "catastrophe" at the beginning is not understood to imply the associated notion of a purifying judgment (upon sin), but rather strictly as perfecting and

⁷⁴ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 4: 205.

⁷⁵ In his *Handboek van de Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Manual of Reformed Dogmatics], Honig indicated that the Reformed had maintained this understanding of the covenant of works over against the views of the Lutherans and the Remonstrants.

⁷⁶ *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 50-51; cf. p. 54. Also in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* 3: 288, he spoke repeatedly of "an evolution on the basis of the creation."

⁷⁷ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 64.

fulfilling. For Adam was perfect, but not yet complete. On the basis of Christ's assertion in Luke 20:35f. and Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 6:13, Schilder argued that it had been God's intention that at a specific point in time Adam would move from a sexual-vegetative existence to a non-sexual-vegetative existence.⁷⁸ But Adam could not have achieved this transition in his own strength, apart from the intervention of God. Schilder employed various terms in describing this matter. He said that already in the covenant of works God had intended ultimately to do something "useful": "This 'chedasjah' comes only by way of the *leap*, the *shock*, an acute alteration, a *miracle* at a point in time."⁷⁹ Even sinless Adam would not, so to speak, have been able to ascend from earth to heaven unless God had drawn him there.⁸⁰ Adam's transition from the mode of existence in *time* to the mode of existence in *eternity* therefore may not be called "death," since in the Bible death is always seen as repayment for sin.⁸¹ "Neither death nor life are 'original,' neither is 'from the beginning.' Not 'life' either? No, for *life is more than existence*: it is existence-in-peace. And peace came as a positive peace through the *covenant* given to humanity *after creation*. Death is not the twin sibling of life, but rather an 'enemy who has crept in from the outside'."⁸²

This line of thought is surely among the most difficult that Schilder ever penned. One cannot claim that it abounds in clarity or transparency. For that reason it is understandable that his views came under criticism.⁸³ Indeed, the danger of speculation is virtually inescapable when

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 65-67. Cf. p. 128: "not eating, no longer marrying." On p. 123 he said that the word "shock" is preferable to "catastrophe," because the latter notion always includes more or less the basic meaning of "destruction." Already in 1930 he wrote extensively about this idea; cf. chapter 6 of *Christ in His Suffering*, vol. 3: "Christ Under the Catastrophic Curse." In the same work (2: 492 [ET: 2: 514]), he stated: "God's ideal, then, is a bloodless human being." In *Heidelberg Catechism*, 1: 390ff., the matter of "vegetation and sexuality" is discussed once again, as is the "catastrophe" notion. Cf. also 3: 447-448: "For he *must, even if the Fall into sin never happened*, transition into this higher form of existence, wherein—*without* marriage and the sexual urge (which are needed only as long as God had not created that number of people, fixed in his decree, who would complete the drama, the epic, of history), and *without* material alteration (which material is needed only as long as people must function in the realm of temporal and moveable things)—wherein resting, that is to say, having been brought to rest, and having been translated beyond every 'probation' (from God's side) and beyond all 'trying' (from humanity's side), he, *man-God*, could receive the reward for his (originally troublefree and painless) 'kopos' [labor, work], and could serve God in a better mode of existence." (A wonderful example of an intricately constructed Schilderian sentence, S.A.S.!)

⁷⁹ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 129. There is a kind of "drawing" power (of God) in the covenant of works (p. 133).

⁸¹ *Wat is de hel?*, 3rd edition, p. 229, note 130.

⁸² *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 437f. Cf. the entire paragraph 70: "Is death the counterpart of life?" (pp. 383-453).

⁸³ In his work, *Het eeuwige leven* [Eternal life], (pp. 400-404), O. Jager discussed this line of Schilder's thinking in the context of Schilder's view of the relationship between time and eternity. On p. 403 he flatly

one writes so extensively in a pro-lapsarian (if not supra-lapsarian!) manner. But we have dared to bring this train of thought into our discussion because it clearly relates to our subject, which is the *history* of the covenant. Even though in his development of protology, Schilder occasionally went beyond the boundaries of the explicit data of Scripture, nevertheless, with his emphasis on these matters he succeeded in showing beyond doubt that the covenant of works traverses a history. And that history belonged from the very beginning to the fundamental structure of the covenant. Thereby Schilder also paved the way for coupling the covenant of grace to the covenant of works. Not merely the covenant of works, but the covenant of works together with the covenant of grace traverses a history. In the most literal sense of the word one may speak, then, of *continuity* between covenant of works and covenant of grace. Here one may speak of a decisive “before” and “after” on one line: “For this belongs to the faith-content and the thought-content of ancient Christendom, that there was *first* a creation, and *thereafter* a covenant establishment, with the accompanying specification of sanctions, which did not yet need to be activated, but were included in the covenant statute, and *subsequently* there was a *breaking of faith* from the side of humanity, and *thereafter* the activating of the sanctions, and *thereafter* the appearance of the *christological* promise, with the simultaneous activating thereof, and *thereafter* (many centuries later) the incarnation of the Word, and the appearance of Jesus Christ here upon earth, and thereafter his (still awaited) return.”⁸⁴

In the very same context where Schilder wrote about the above-mentioned catastrophe, he clarified why he placed so much emphasis on this: “because we want to continue seeing the *second* Adam as the second *Adam*.”⁸⁵ Immediately thereafter he penned this important assertion:

Reformed dogmatics must expend every effort to remain constantly faithful to the idea that Christ did not come in order to do something brand new within a ‘second’ history,

dismissed the approach of “imagine once the possibility that the Fall into sin never happened” as vain speculation. Jager referred especially to the article of K. J. Popma, “De eeuwigheid Gods volgens Boëthius [God’s eternity according to Boëthius],” in *Philosophia Reformata* 22 (1957): 21-51. J. Stellingwerf also discussed this train of thought in his article, “Kritiek op K. Schilder als filosoferend dogmaticus [Criticism of K. Schilder as a philosophizing dogmatician],” in *Philosophia Reformata* 27 (1962): 106-125. This criticism was directed against Schilder’s view of the relationship between time and eternity, to which we ourselves must return below. Stellingwerf expressed criticism also of Schilder’s Scripture proof for the opinion that in heaven there would no longer be any vegetation and sexuality.

⁸⁴ From Schilder’s debate with O. Noordmans (1936), as published in Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie*, p. 117.

⁸⁵ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 129.

but in order to save *what from the very beginning* God had established as his goal.

Therefore one may not separate what Christ did from what the first Adam was called to do, to think, and to hope. Christ demonstrated obedience to God in a twofold way. He has borne the *punishment*, and that did not need to be discussed with the first Adam. But further, through his *active* obedience he complied with the *demands* of the covenant of works, he picked up the thread of history at the point where it had slipped from Adam's hands. Therefore, in everything that Christ does, alongside the factor of eliminating sin and destroying the curse, also this *ancient* factor must be recognized, namely, accomplishing what had been given in the *original blueprint*.⁸⁶

Surely we may be allowed this extensive quotation. For here, in a virtually unsurpassable way, Schilder put into words the inner connection, the continuity, between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace: Christ picked up the thread of history exactly at the point where Adam had dropped it! This connection must be grasped firmly, else deformities will result. Without it, the redemptive work of Christ cannot be understood in all its depth and surety. That God has shown grace to us in Christ means that from his side he maintains the existing covenant and restores its original intention. "Grace" can then be defined as "restoration," as long as it is clearly understood to be the restoration not only of that which (before sin) once upon a time *was* good, but also to be the restoration of that which (in spite of sin) meanwhile *had been intended to have been good*. Here indeed very significant matters are at stake, as appears from Schilder's indignation when Hepp hesitated to acknowledge readily that the covenant of grace is indeed *the extension of [in die verlengde van]* the covenant of works. With emphasis he wrote, "That which restores must, in fact, be the extension of [in het verlengde van] that which is to be restored, otherwise it cannot restore."⁸⁷ To this the question was added: "If that which restores is not the extension of [niet in het verlengde van] that which requires or needs restoration, then how will the Reformed, Kuyprian relation between nature and grace be rescued?"⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 129-130. Cf. also p. 144: because the Mediator appeared immediately after the Fall, *history* was not broken off after the Fall, but implemented in and for the second Adam.

⁸⁷ In his series of articles, "Prof. Hepps ongereformeerde verbondsbes[ch]ouwing," (cf. note 54 above), p. 115, with reference to Hepp's *Dreigende [D]eformatie*, IV: 81.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

Now this is certainly not the place to provide a comprehensive overview of Schilder's perspective on the relation between nature and grace. Along with every other Reformed theologian, Schilder pointed continually, in various contexts, to the maxim that the way we construe the relation between nature and grace is of fundamental significance for every theological system.⁸⁹ We mention this here only incidentally, in order to emphasize that, for Schilder's understanding, the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace was inextricably related to the deepest of all theological problematics and starting points.

One of those problematics involves the permanence of the covenant of grace. Schilder pointed out that this surfaced clearly in the confrontation between the Reformed and the Remonstrants, so much so that everything descends into confusion when this connection between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is lost. The Reformed were convinced that Christ had come to establish through his death the *existing* covenant between God and humanity, which is to say, to enforce it so that he might impart its benefits to believers. But the Remonstrants argued that with his death Christ merely obtained the right for God to establish once again another covenant with humanity. A person can share in the covenant then only if he satisfies its "conditions."⁹⁰ Similarly the Socinians, with their so-called "acceptilation theory," placed the covenant of grace over against the covenant of works, when they argued that God can demand no satisfaction if he truly desires to forgive our guilt. Over against this teaching, Schilder posited that the law-of-satisfaction is *constitutional* for the covenant.⁹¹ Christ's atoning death can be understood only in the light of the "vengeance" of the "covenant of works" which was never abolished but must be enforced.⁹² At the conclusion of a discussion of this matter,

⁸⁹ Cf., for example, *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 60 and 85, where he says that the Bible teaches a contrast not between nature and grace, but between nature and sin. Cf. also how he deals repeatedly with this problem in his sermons, *Preken*, 3: 154, 239, 261, 402, and 418. In his *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 3: 335ff., he discusses the difference between Luther and Calvin on this point, and in *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 1: 210ff., he accuses Barth and others with their "theology of the cross" of a dualism between nature and grace.

⁹⁰ *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 2: 244f. Cf. *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, pp. 25-29. In the next chapter we will return to Schilder's view that one can speak in a good sense, without being Remonstrant, about covenant conditions.

⁹¹ *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 2: 16.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 13. Cf. p. 37: "For the covenant was never 'abolished'." This is what he says in this context: "With every subject in dogmatics, we should go back to what existed before the Fall, without, of course, denigrating what occurred thereafter" (p. 15).

Schilder expressed his conviction this way: “The covenant of *grace* does not destroy the *covenant*.”⁹³

In terms of the relationship between nature and grace, we must pause a moment to consider Schilder’s interesting view regarding the Noahic covenant (the so-called covenant with nature). This is related to his offensive against Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace, in which the relation between nature and grace also surfaced.⁹⁴ For this doctrine Kuyper began with the Noahic covenant, which he termed a covenant of common grace. Schilder viewed this covenant, however, as a stage or phase of the covenant of grace.⁹⁵ He writes: “The so-called Noahic covenant continues history up until Christ.”⁹⁶ Insofar as the covenant was established with nature, the word “covenant” should actually be placed within quotation marks. For one can hardly speak here of two real and mutually responsible *parties*; “covenant” here has the sense of “arrangement.”⁹⁷

The fact that we can (and must) speak of connection and continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace further implies that one can show clear lines of similarity between the two administrations of the one covenant. For the covenant of works is called the “primeval form” of the covenant.⁹⁸ This is no temporary stage, but “the unique, first, original covenant, and thus in terms of its fundamental structure, a covenant never to be annulled or abolished.”⁹⁹ If this is true, then one should be able to find all the “articles” of the “constitution” of the covenant in the covenant of works. Schilder was convinced that this is indeed possible. He once said, in a lecture: “God declared the substance of the matter already in Paradise.”¹⁰⁰ Before the Fall, God already revealed to Adam the essential content of the covenant: “I am your God.” After the Fall, in the administration of the covenant of grace, no further extra content was added

⁹³ Ibid., p. 39.

⁹⁴ Cf. the publication of the report prepared by Schilder and Vollenhoven for the 1939 synod, in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 227-245, esp. 242.

⁹⁵ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 259.

⁹⁶ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, IV: 132. On pp. 127-148 this subject is discussed extensively under the heading, “A ‘covenant of forbearance?’” Cf. also J. Douma, *Algemene Genade*, pp. 137-140, 309f., who agrees with Schilder for the most part on this point.

⁹⁷ Cf. further “Natuurverbond en genadeverbond, de paradoxale garantie [Covenant of nature and covenant of grace, the paradoxical guarantee]” (1947), in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2: 217-220.

⁹⁸ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 366, note 103.

⁹⁹ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁰ *Christelijke religie* (lecture notes), p. 25.

to this. In the changing circumstances of history the existing relationship between God and humanity was merely updated when God revealed that the way in which he would continue to be God to Adam would now change. From now on, that would happen only in and through Christ (according to the mother promise, Genesis 3:15).¹⁰¹

Schilder's view of the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace can be paraphrased as follows: the distinction between the two stages of the one covenant exists not on an ontological level, but on a methodological level; this involves the path along which God realized his covenant. Naturally this distinction makes a world of difference for us (fallen sinners). If God had not in his grace paved the new pathway, there could no longer have been any covenant between him and us. There is no difference of opinion about this *methodological distinction*. Schilder subscribed wholeheartedly to this distinction. But regarding the *ontological convergence* (between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace) difference of opinion did and does exist. For that very reason Schilder placed so much emphasis precisely upon this point.

There is also structural similarity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. From its very beginning, the covenant was bilateral or two-sided. Even though God and humanity could never be (and even then were not) *equal* parties, nevertheless humanity is always (and even then was) treated as a *genuine* party: humanity can keep the covenant, but can also break the covenant.¹⁰² On the basis of this, it must be clearly seen as well that from its very beginning the covenant was two-dimensional, that is to say, the covenant existed as promise and demand. The forbidden tree in Paradise appeared to be included in a *legal relationship*, "in a context of obedience and trust, or of disobedience and unbelief."¹⁰³ Already in Paradise God spoke prophetically-threateningly of covenant blessing as well as covenant wrath, when he says:

¹⁰¹ *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, p. 9: "After the Fall God had to date the substance of the covenant in terms of the date of the Fall, and a new way was opened, namely, the way of Christ." Cf. in the same lecture notes: "The first covenant is never abolished, but it is maintained through Christ Jesus; and the fact that in the covenant of grace the way of salvation has come to be opened is nothing other than the implementation of the ancient covenant. For as soon as Someone comes who keeps the ancient covenant, He may live, and thus impart life to those belonging to Him."

¹⁰² *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 321.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

“The day in which you, *living*, shall eat of it, you will die the *death*.”¹⁰⁴ On the basis of this view, it is also then logical to speak of faith as a Paradise command. Already before the Fall, Adam was obligated to show his love to God through his obedience, by saying “Amen” to the Word of God. Indeed, at that point he did not yet need to turn back to God, but he was required to turn unto God. In the dispensation of the covenant of grace, our faith is thus essentially the same as the faith of Adam, except that now it is dated and qualified as “Christian” faith, and therefore also includes the forgiveness of sins.¹⁰⁵ In this context Schilder did not shy away from speaking even of “sanctification” (with quotation marks, of course) before the Fall. By this he meant that even though Adam was holy (that is, sinless), he was still required continually to *show* his holiness through his obedience to God. And even Adam could not fulfill this condition apart from the continually strengthening power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁶

At this point we can conclude our summary of the similarities between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. In the next chapter we must come back to discuss all the structural elements of the covenant. We mention the similarities here in order to show how Schilder used his starting point with respect to the *history* of the covenant (the fact that at their foundation the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are one) for grounding his view of the *structure* of the covenant as well. In order to be able to make a structural analysis of the covenant, according to Schilder, one must thus reason *forward* (from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace) and *backward* (from the covenant of grace to the covenant of works). Only if it is established without doubt that a particular facet belongs both to the administration of the covenant of works as well as to the administration of the covenant of grace, can this serve as a constitutive structural element of the covenant.

¹⁰⁴ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 242. Cf. Schilder’s 1935 meditation: “Ik geloof aan de universele ‘wederherstelling’” (included in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2: 79ff.), where the following section appears: “Precisely here again the idea of covenant surfaces in all its power. The covenant is no tranquilizer that teaches the eyes to close for death, allowing them to open now and then for life. On the contrary, the covenant opens the eyes immediately for life and death both. As soon as it is proclaimed—in Paradise, where there was no death yet—the covenant immediately put life and death at stake in *all* Paradise concourse with God as Covenant God. In the covenant, humanity is obligated to take account of death as God’s maintaining of justice, even before he had fallen into sin. These were the original relationships: *that everything would proceed according to God’s justice*” (p. 83).

¹⁰⁵ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 403-405.

¹⁰⁶ *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, p. 40. Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 323, and 2: 434.

2.3 The old covenant and the new covenant

It will be difficult to demarcate the preceding section (on the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace) precisely from the present section (the relationship between old and new covenant). The two subjects overlap already on account of the fact that within Reformed theology for a long time it was customary to speak of the covenant of works as the “old covenant” and the covenant of grace as the “new covenant.” The terminological question will not be discussed here. Our intention in this section is to investigate, under the heading “The old covenant and the new covenant,” how Schilder set forth the relationship between the two great phases of the covenant of grace—the one before Christ, and the other after Christ. This involves more, however, than an overlap in terminology. These two subjects also overlap substantively. Anyone who considers the relationship between old and new covenant (in the sense that we intend) inescapably faces the problem of the relationship between law and gospel. Early Reformed theology repeatedly related law (in this latter connection) to the law which God revealed to Adam already before the Fall. In doing so, a twofold uncertainty dominated Reformed covenant theology for a long time—on the one hand, involving the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and on the other hand, involving the relationship between old and new covenant.¹⁰⁷

We hear these echoes of such uncertainty throughout the ecclesiastical conflict to which we referred in our first chapter. Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr., for example, wrote during this time that with their stress on the conditional character of the covenant the Remonstrants had in fact again introduced into the dispensation of the covenant of grace “a truncated covenant of works.”¹⁰⁸ Schilder linked that statement to the relationship between old and new covenant, because his synodical Reformed opponents also argued that the old covenant was especially external (and

¹⁰⁷ Schilder discussed this dogma-historical question in his lecture notes reported in *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, pp. 12-15. On p. 12 his comments are reported as follows, where he discussed the theology of Olevianus and Ursinus: “And now a person does not know precisely where to draw the boundaries between the covenant of Law and the covenant of Grace, where the one stops and the other begins. On the one hand, we see the law in Paradise, but on the other hand, it surfaces again with Moses. . . . On the one hand, thus, the Mosaic law is a continuation of the covenant of Law. . . on the other hand, Moses stands already in the covenant of Grace. . . . Here we have a confusion that embodies a twofold tendency. People find the law good, but at the same time an annoyance.”

¹⁰⁸ *Christelijke Encyclopaedie* [Christian Encyclopedia], vol. 2 (1st edition), s.v. *Genadeverbond* [Covenant of Grace].

thus could include conditions which had to be satisfied by “works”), but that the new covenant is essentially internal (without conditions, and without “works”). In this context then, Schilder noted that the accusation of a “truncated covenant of works” is actually not a persuasive argument. “In his original state as well, Adam was also *created*; his righteousness and holiness were also *bestowed*; he also *needed the Holy Spirit* for maintaining the holiness bestowed upon him, thus for keeping him holy. He also *did not merit*, strictly speaking. He was indeed saved *along the path of obedience*, but never *because of or on the basis of obedience*.”¹⁰⁹ Whoever posits any opposition between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace thereby demonstrates that he understands neither. This was Schilder’s accusation against the Reformed synod of 1942: “The synod fantasizes a completely different person in the ‘covenant of *works*’ than the one we in fact behold, theirs in the shape of a Remonstrant. And similarly the synod fantasizes in the ‘covenant of *grace*’ a person appearing in the style of an antinomian.”¹¹⁰ From this formulation it is evident that for Schilder, the subject of *law and gospel* has everything to do with the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. But then with these two pair of subjects, no contradiction may be introduced between the components of either of them. One may not posit that in the covenant of works there was no “gospel,” and in the covenant of grace there is no “law.” On the contrary!¹¹¹

Schilder’s treatment of the Heidelberg Catechism provided him the opportunity to develop an extensive description of the problems involving the function of the law in the different phases of covenant history. When he discussed Lord’s Day 2, Question and Answer 3 (“From where do you know your misery? From the law of God.”), he sided with Olevianus and Ursinus, who had viewed the Decalogue as a repetition of the law given to humanity in Paradise as the rule for covenant concurrence.¹¹² To this, however, Schilder added that the law of Moses was not simply a bare repetition of the Paradise law. It bore, so to speak, the marks of a

¹⁰⁹ Looze Kalk [Whitewash {from Ezek. 13:10-15; 22:28, “untempered mortar,” ASV}], p. 62. Cf. pp. 60-61.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

¹¹¹ Cf. the chapter “Law and gospel” in *Capita Selecta I* (lecture notes), pp. 29-30. Between law and gospel, says Schilder, we can distinguish merely in abstraction; logically, but not chronologically. In *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* (1: 390) we find the following formulation: “To speak of ‘gospel’ in Paradise is, at bottom, not strange. There are ‘glad tidings’ there too. It is gospel-without-*Christ*, to be sure, but *gospel* nevertheless. A gladsome message, which assures us that all dipleuric covenant *relation* finds its origin and its explanation and its *guarantee* in God’s monopleuric covenant *administration*; that He is the first, and the pioneer, and the sufficiency, and establishes the guarantee; that it is His free *favor* which binds reward to obedience.”

¹¹² *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 72-77.

particular date in covenant history, as we see clearly in the introduction to the Mosaic law: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. . .” [Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6]. The obligation of the law is indeed permanent, but the administration of the law is dated.¹¹³ From this Schilder immediately drew the practical implication that the thunder and smoke of Sinai were not the law’s “permanent accompanists.” Fundamentalist preachers who with oratorical flourish try to recreate the “rumbling” of the law forget that the Ten Commandments (in the Old Testament) are dated!¹¹⁴ “That is all past now. The legal document is *now* not put in the hands of a mediator like Moses by angels along with trumpet blasts and rumbling thunder, but now it is opened, taught, understood, proclaimed in the ordinary church. . . . For God’s work-energy is more powerful in an inscribed law-word than in a clap of thunder: a *sermon* in the New Covenant declares God’s majesty more piercingly, and for the children more intelligibly, than a shaft of lightning from the Old Testament. The means of administration used today—pen and ink, in contrast to stone tablets, a service of the Word instead of terrifying rolling thunder—are so much more *excellent* than those of former times, also when it comes to declaring the majesty of the Lawgiver. . . .”¹¹⁵

When Schilder discussed Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 4 (that in his law God requires of us what Christ had summarized in the two great commandments), he returned to the thought that the Ten Commandments were a repetition of the Paradise law. Here he was distancing himself from scholastic theology which had drawn the inference from this that the content of the Ten Commandments can be equated with the content of so-called natural law.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Schilder firmly maintained that the law of Sinai, although it was dated in terms of a particular phase of the covenant of grace, did indeed lead us back to the covenant of works.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 79. Cf. p. 80: “Everywhere we find *federal-historical* dating!” On p. 16 already we read: “And in the Ten Commandments we are dealing not with a bleached, bloodless, formal-abstract presentation of an outline-of-the-moral-law-for-humanity, nor with ‘General Directives for Moral Conduct,’ but with covenant legislation, given by our Covenant God, on a particular date, to his covenant people whom he is addressing directly, whom he had just made to see his faithfulness in very concrete redemptive works. . . .”

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 81. Near the end of this citation, yet another aspect of the relationship between old and new covenant was already touched on, namely, the superiority of the latter over against the inferiority of the former. We presented this full citation, however, because it offers a fine example of what Schilder meant by “redemptive-historical” preaching.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 131. Cf. pp. 85-124 for Schilder’s discussion of the *theologia naturalis*, and his exegesis of Rom. 2:14-15.: God did not inscribe his *law* in the heart of the pagan; he has imprinted particular *works* of the law (p. 105). In his study, *Natuurrecht—een betrouwbare gids?* [Natural law—a reliable guide?], J. Douma provides more citations from Schilder regarding the *lex naturalis* (p. 66f.). On pp. 75-76., he discusses Schilder’s exegesis of Rom. 2:14-15, mentioning as well the criticism of that exegesis by G. C. Berkouwer and H. Ridderbos.

Nowhere in Scripture is Christ called the “second Moses,” but he is certainly called the “second Adam.” In that capacity, Christ’s office was to lead us back to God’s original intention as it must have been from the beginning, namely: that we must love him with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.¹¹⁷ God never abrogated the “primordial law” or “constitution” of the covenant. Along this path of “maintaining the law” God remained faithful to himself. Therefore the church confesses that God does no injustice to human beings when he continues to require of them what they (now as a consequence of sin) cannot do (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 4, Question and Answer 9).¹¹⁸

In this way, Schilder honored the element of truth in the position of earlier theologians, that the Decalogue is a repetition of the Paradise law. He could not, however, subscribe to the notion of a mere bare repetition, something we learn from his comment (in another context) that contemporary Reformed theology should pay attention to the following development in the history of dogma with respect to the doctrine of the covenant: “Whereas the earlier doctrine of the covenant presented the distinct covenant dispensations as circles with overlapping segments, such that one stage furnished a repetition of the revealed facts of its predecessor, now, the moment we let go of that image of circles, suddenly the notion of the repetition of revelation

¹¹⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 132-133. By emphasizing the connection between the Sinai law and the Paradise law, Schilder was attempting to prevent the denigration of Moses. In referring to the thunder and lightning at Sinai, he said rather wistfully: “Just as the passenger in the modern airplane luxuriates in the glorious sunlight as soon as he climbs above the ‘storm,’ so too the Paradise clouds swirled around Moses’s head. . .” (p. 132).

¹¹⁸ Cf. Schilder’s discussion of this Lord’s Day in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 377ff. The statements within quotation marks appear on pp. 381, 387, and 398, respectively. Cf. also the rich image on pp. 397-398: “The train in which the member of the covenant of works was sitting, and which Adam as the lead engineer had to guide to the destination, has careened into the ravine. . . . But immediately after the train appeared to be damaged, it *also* appeared that God, so to speak, left the ‘tracks’ lying. The rails of the first and second tables. Laid with evangelical purpose, from the very beginning.” The extent to which this theological relationship lived in Schilder’s thinking is illustrated by the article he wrote for the issue of *De Reformatie* (vol. 15, 12 Oct. 1934) commemorating the Secession, in connection with Micah 6:8 (“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”), entitled ‘De Vocativus van de Reformatie, ook in 1834’ [The Vocative of the Reformation, also in 1834] (published in *De Kerk* [The Church] 1: 375-378). Concerning the prophet Micah, Schilder wrote: “Standing in the covenant of *grace* he says: you must not complain that the covenant of *grace* exhausts you, that it so burdens you with its ‘strange-nesses,’ its ‘unique-nesses.’ For this covenant of *grace* ultimately addresses you for that very reason with the name that makes you so special among all people (‘covenant partner’ of *Yahweh*), because it is leading you back to the covenant of *works*, in which the service of God means ‘covenant’ with God, with *Elohim*, the *Creator* of heaven and earth. From ‘Yahweh’ back to ‘Elohim,’ from the ‘Re-creator’ back to the ‘Creator,’ from the ‘covenant of *grace*’ back to the ‘covenant of *works*,’ from the ‘second’ to the ‘first’ Adam.” On the day before (11 Oct. 1934), Schilder had presented the commemorative address “Beginsel, recht en betekenis der Afscheiding” [Principle, warrant, and significance of the Secession], in which he advanced the same motif. Cf. *De Kerk*, 2: 85: “The covenant of *grace* does not, after all, require anything new, but reaches back to the covenant of *works*. That is its glory: it restores and rescues the things which ‘from the beginning’ were the *primeval* relationships.”

content gives way to the notion of a *forward moving patefactie [being revealed]* after the principal *addition* to what the first Adam already knew, in the *proto-evangelium* (the ‘first’ gospel, the mother promise, Gen. 3:15), of the *christological* chapter.”¹¹⁹

Forward moving unfolding of revelation content—such a formulation fit perfectly with Schilder’s emphasis on the *history* of the covenant. While this starting point can be employed in terms of the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace (taking into account the principal addition of the christological chapter!), it is to be understood that he preferred also to apply this to the relationship between old and new covenant, as two stages within the covenant of grace. He wrote a section in one of his books about the “intensifying revelation light.”¹²⁰ In another publication he wrote explicitly that Old and New Testament do not stand antithetically against each other: “the one *emerges* out of the other.”¹²¹ Old and new covenant lie, therefore, along the same line. As long as “law” and “gospel” refer to salvation historical categories, therefore, the relationship between old and new covenant can be expressed in terms of law and gospel. This is what Paul does when he says that the law was our “tutor unto Christ” (Gal. 4:23). Schilder discussed this text in a section where he was actually treating the two parts of the covenant: promise and demand. He emphasized then that “law” and “gospel” here serve to indicate two “dispensations” of the covenant of grace. With a wordplay we might summarize Schilder’s position this way: the two *dispensations* of the covenant (history) may not be confused with the two *parts* of the covenant (structure). Both *parts* of the covenant appear in both *dispensations* of the (same) covenant: “the ‘law’ (of the OT) was not without promise, and the ‘gospel’ (of the NT) is not without demand.”¹²² Apart from this qualified sense, the (historically loaded) phrase “law and gospel” may *not* be employed to describe the relationship between old and new covenant. It simply will not work to call the Old Testament “law,” for this was already chock full of “gospel”! Schilder insisted that we are obliged to understand Christ’s

¹¹⁹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 4: 131, where over against Kuyper, Schilder argued that the so-called Noahic covenant was a subsequent stage of the covenant of *grace* rather than the covenant of *works*.

¹²⁰ Cf. the section under this heading in *Wat is de hel?*, pp. 69ff. On pp. 69-70 we read: “The light, kindled in the Old Testament, became brighter and brighter, until in the New Testament it reached its brightest intensity.”

¹²¹ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 132. On p. 229 he said that the new covenant “developed along God’s supremely juridical reformation-route *out of* the old (under the restrictions of the already discussed ‘catastrophe’ idea. . .).”

¹²² *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 395. Cf. also *Ibid.*, 2: 345, where Schilder discusses Gal. 2:15-18, the conflict between Paul and Peter. Peter’s mistake was that he had not interpreted the Mosaic laws “as laws-of-and-unto-the-gospel, as *Christ-laws*.” In the lengthy hyphenated section here, the word “of” means that there is not contradiction between law and gospel (the laws are laws-*of*-the gospel), and the word “unto” means that law and gospel are salvation-historical categories (the laws are laws-*unto*-the-gospel).

saying in John 5:46 (“Moses wrote of me”) this way: “*I was the real subject of Moses’s books. You people write above Moses’s books: Concerning law, duty, merit.* This is the title I see written above them: *Concerning the gospel* (of free grace, of the comfort of Israel). Compare Deut. 30:11-14 with Rom. 10:6-8.”¹²³

Herewith we have reproduced the principal elements of what Schilder wrote about the theme of “law and gospel,” and simultaneously we have shed light on the connection between our previous section (covenant of works and covenant of grace) and the current section (old and new covenant). In the same way other themes connected with the relationship between old and new covenant could certainly also be discussed logically one after another. This relationship, however, is of such central significance in Reformed theology that everything connected with it cannot be completely surveyed. Beside the fact that all of this is related to the doctrine of the covenant (involving both its history and its structure), this all involves large parts of the doctrine and use of Scripture, as well as the doctrine of the church and its sacraments. So that we can in a sense organize these matters properly, and at the same time restrict ourselves to our subject (K. Schilder on the covenant!), we would like at this point, by way of a diversion, to follow carefully an important episode from Schilder’s polemic in the 1930s.

In the spring of 1938, when Dr. J. Thijs (a Reformed minister) published a series of articles on the covenant in *De Heraut* [The Herald], Schilder responded to them extensively in *De Reformatie*.¹²⁴ In his first article, Schilder recalled Dr. Abraham Kuyper’s repeated reference to Deuteronomy 29:29, and declared as his conviction that covenant and election must be clearly distinguished: the former belongs to the “revealed things” and the latter to the “hidden things.”¹²⁵

¹²³ *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 2: 309. Cf. p. 311: “. . . you must write above the *law*-book, boldly and freely: *BOOK OF THE GOSPEL*. . .” Schilder found a contradiction between law and gospel also in Luther. Cf. his extensive discussion of Luther’s view of God’s “right hand” and “left hand,” in *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 3: 317-382, especially p. 325, which has the heading: “Law (sour, ‘alien’) and gospel (sweet, ‘proper’).” J. T. Bakker, in *Coram Deo* [Before the Face of God], p. 72f., said that Schilder had posited an unwarranted contradiction between Luther and Calvin regarding the function of the law. Cf. also Schilder’s comment about Luther and Barth concerning law and gospel, *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 3: 434, note 61: Luther’s concept of revelation (over against that of Barth) was still “good-orthodox”; “he still believed the unity of the Bible, even though he did view the covenant stages (Sinai as repetition of Paradise law, and thus both as ‘law’ *over against* ‘gospel,’ Old *over against* New Testament) as standing too sharply against one another (which the Reformed did as well in the beginning).”

¹²⁴ Cf. chapter 1 above, notes 70 and 71. This subject was at the time extremely relevant, for the doctrine of the covenant was one of the points of difference which had to be investigated by mandate of the synod of 1936.

¹²⁵ *De Reformatie*, 18 (17 June 1938), p. 342f.

The relationship between covenant and election is, of course, a difficult question, but to argue that the covenant was made only with the elect is to weaken the covenant.¹²⁶ Schilder referred in this context to the 17th century Reformed theologian Herman Witsius, who followed Cocceius in making a sharp distinction between the “testamentary” covenant of grace and a covenant which rested on a “treaty” or “agreement.” But in this manner the character of the covenant of grace is assailed, Schilder insisted.¹²⁷ In the next article the view of Cocceius was explained further. Schilder wrote: “Cocceius’s covenant theology has dug deep furrows; it has occasioned vigorous polemics; and despite much that is worthwhile, it has nevertheless generated legitimate reasons for great concern at more than one point.”¹²⁸ One of these points was precisely the relationship between Old and New Testament. Although Cocceius also mentioned the agreement between Old and New Testament, he emphasized especially the distinction between the two. Over against the “external character” of the benefits of the old covenant, he posited the “internalizing” of the covenant in the new dispensation. Schilder believed that on this point a remarkable similarity could be demonstrated between Cocceius and the articles of Thijs, which he proceeded to do with chapter and verse. Schilder, however, wanted to distance himself from this kind of contrast between old and new covenant. In doing so, he appealed to formulations of well-known Reformed theologians (such as A. Kuyper, H. H. Kuyper, and J. Ridderbos).¹²⁹ Early Reformed theologians from the “golden age” (such as Ursinus, Paréus, Junius, and Heidegger) had already clearly differed from Cocceius as well. They continually maintained that the “substance” of the covenant was the same in Old and New Testament, and that only the “administration” (of the “substance”) differed in the various dispensations. But this difference cannot be formulated in terms of “external” and “internal.” Under the old covenant there were, after all, “internal” blessings as well (for example, the forgiveness of sins), and under the new covenant there are always “external” blessings also (for example, worship or sacraments). Schilder cited the well-known *Leiden Synopsis* to prove that the difference between the dispensations “is not to be formulated this way: externalizing in the Old, internalizing in the New Testament; but rather this

¹²⁶ Ibid., (24 June 1938), p. 351f.

¹²⁷ Ibid., (1 July 1938), p. 358f. For an extensive discussion of Witsius’s doctrine of the covenant, cf. J. van Genderen, *Herman Witsius*, pp. 135-166, 213-220. On the relationship between Witsius and Cocceius, Van Genderen wrote (p. 136) that Witsius used the format [skema] of covenant theology in order to attempt to reconcile followers of Voetius and followers of Witsius, but that he had definitely rejected Cocceius’s view at particular points.

¹²⁸ *De Reformatie*, 18 (8 July 1938), p. 366.

¹²⁹ Ibid., (15 July 1938), p. 374f.

way: less and more richness, both in the internal as well as in the external administration, both in the Old and in the New Covenant.”¹³⁰

A few months later Schilder resumed his series of articles. He began with Scripture proof. On the basis of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Heb. 8:7-13), Dr. Thijs had written in his series of articles, among other things, that the old covenant *could indeed* be broken, but the new covenant *could not* be broken. Schilder found this to be a “radical claim, to suggest that the covenant possesses this feature, namely, that *God can break it*.”¹³¹ With reference to what Junius had written about Hebrews 8, Schilder advised caution. No hasty inferences should be drawn from this passage of Scripture about the difference between old and new covenant. Furthermore, Schilder offered his own view, in agreement with that of Junius: “We believe that Hebrews 8 does not seek to place the two dispensations of the covenant over against each other, the one being an outward covenant, the other being an inward covenant; but we believe rather that this chapter is dealing with the ‘circumstances,’ the further *arrangement*, or *disposition*, which appeared successively in each phase, or dispensation, of the covenant of grace.”¹³² On the basis of what Behm had written (in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*) and what F. Grosheide had written (in *Korte Verklaring* [Short Exposition], Schilder argued that *diathēkē* in Hebrews 8:7 should preferably be understood as “unilateral disposition” rather than “bilateral covenant.” In the next article Grosheide was cited once again, especially the reasons he thought that *diathēkē* should rather be translated with “testament,” precisely to express the element of unilateral disposition.¹³³ Schilder argued that in certain instances the word “covenant” is used in Scripture (which must be distinguished from the way it is used in scientific theological language) to mean nothing other than “covenant arrangement.” And this is an important consideration to keep in mind. The bilateral covenant relationship between God and his people has a unilateral

¹³⁰ Ibid., (22 July 1938), p. 384. Cf. the entire article, pp. 382-384. In *Looze kalk* [Untempered Mortar], pp. 26 and 50, Schilder cited from this and the preceding article. What he writes in this volume about “external” and “internal” touches more on the *structure* of the covenant (external and internal “sides” of the covenant) rather than the *history* of the covenant (OT = external, NT = internal). For this reason we will discuss this aspect once again in our next chapter. In his lecture notes on *De kerk* [The church], p. 77, Schilder discussed the view of Appellius which argued that the old covenant was external, but that this external covenant was invalidated in the NT. The covenant has now supposedly become entirely “spiritual.” Schilder says that this is “a false distinction,” because “spiritual” may never be posited over against “physical.”

¹³¹ *De Reformatie*, 18 (9 September 1938), p. 438.

¹³² Ibid., (16 September 1938), p. 446. Schilder referred incidentally to the Westminster Confession, which cites Jeremiah 31 to prove that in the New Testament there is “more spiritual power.” Thus, concluded Schilder, there is in this text “no contrast between outward-inward, but between less or more, less clear or more clear. . . .”

¹³³ Ibid., (23 September 1938), pp. 454-455.

origin, through the intervention of God. But there is more: every decisive alteration in the history of the covenant takes place in no other way than through this sort of unilateral disposition. “At each new *transition moment*, at *every* mile-marker along the route of covenant history, the sovereign, ‘shock’-filled divine act of intervention occurs from above, in order by the power of this unilateral disposition to guide the subsequent bilateral covenant concourse further in the course of the succeeding centuries.”¹³⁴ And this is what is at stake here: Jeremiah 31 placed such a new intervention of God prophetically on the horizon, whereas Hebrews 8 announced that this prophetic prediction had now entered into fulfillment. Already in Jeremiah 31 as well, *berith* means *covenant disposition*. From this Schilder drew the following conclusion: “The old ‘diathēkē’ also called for faith and obedience, but it was less powerful in terms of the instruments through which God awakened and effectuated faith and obedience. Now comes the new diathēkē, with stronger instruments, with more powerful working. But this *distinction* may not be twisted into an *opposition* between external and internal. If in the New Testament all covenant children are office-bearers (the office of believer) and if the hierarchy has become obsolete, does that then mean that the external has made way for the internal? No. It means that the ‘administration’ of the covenant benefits has become more rich, more efficacious, more broad. But the covenant substance which is ‘administered’ remains the same. Hebrews 8 seeks to provide a sharp delineation not of two *periods*, but of two *diathēkē’s*.”¹³⁵

In the same article Schilder called attention to yet another important aspect of the exegesis of Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8. With an appeal to what Ridderbos and Grosheide had written in their respective commentaries in the *Korte Verklaring* series, he stressed that the new covenant not only related to the period between Christ’s first and second comings, but had in view also eternal redemption after his return. Jeremiah 31 must be interpreted in agreement with the foreshortened character of Old Testament prophecy. On the basis of this, Schilder believed that Dr. Thijs was working with “a knee-jerk exegesis which was the fruit of dogmatic prejudice,” when he without argument deduced from the Scripture passages mentioned that in the period between Pentecost and Parousia one can be no longer speak of covenant wrath. Schilder’s remaining articles written in opposition to Dr. Thijs focused on the subject of covenant wrath.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 455. For this formulation, Schilder referred to his work *Wat is de hemel?*, where he had treated this notion of “shock” more broadly.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 455.

For Thijs had written that covenant breaking (from man's side), and subsequent covenant wrath (from God's side), appeared only under the old covenant; the new covenant is unbreakable in principle. Over against this Schilder asserted that Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 30, speaks in connection with the Lord's Supper of "eating and drinking judgment to oneself" (Question 81; cf. 1 Cor. 11:29) and of "profaning the covenant of God" (Question 82).¹³⁶ In the next volume of *De Reformatie* Schilder followed this up directly by writing a new series of articles setting forth the reasons why he was convinced that also under the new covenant one could and should definitely still speak of covenant wrath. From these articles we wish to cite several portions relevant to Schilder's view of the history of the covenant.

In the first article (of the new series)¹³⁷ he criticized the opinion of Thijs that the old covenant could be broken by man "essentially," but the new covenant could be broken by man only "apparently." Such a position implies that one could identify a period in "the history of hell" (cf. *Wat is de hel?*) during which *real* covenant breakers entered hell as the place of extreme divine punishment (namely, the dispensation of the old covenant), but in addition there was supposedly another period during which only *apparent* covenant breakers entered into darkness (namely, the dispensation of the new covenant). Schilder insisted that his belief in the unity of God's work prevented him from ever accepting such a construction. "The motif of the continually forward moving, observable revelation-*history* and salvation-*history* and judgment-*history*, all of which extends into every crevice of the cosmos that is always in movement, has . . . grabbed hold of us far too forcefully for that. We see the reverberation of God's saving and judging work in Christ everywhere in the cosmos-in-history that has not yet been brought to rest; so too in hell, even as it too has its own history before the return of Christ. Its own history determined by revelation and by covenant."¹³⁸ In a subsequent article,¹³⁹ he returned to Jeremiah 31 in order to stress that the prophecy of a new covenant had already enjoyed its preliminary fulfillment in the return from captivity. For this he appealed to J. Ridderbos's just published book, *Het Godswoord der profeten* [God's Word through the prophets].¹³⁹ Schilder appealed to

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 462.

¹³⁷ *De Reformatie*, 19 (17 October 1938), p. 2f.

¹³⁸ Ibid., (14 October 1938), p. 10f.

¹³⁹ Ten years later, in 1948, Schilder once again focused extensively on Jeremiah 31. These articles are published in *Schriftoverdenkingen* [Scripture meditations], 3: 296-321, 332-334. On p. 299 he observed that this prophecy had enjoyed a threefold fulfillment, namely, in "the church liberated from Babylon, after the captivity. The church liberated from Jewish constraints, after Pentecost. The church liberated from all sin and sorrow after the

other passages from the New Testament to serve as proof for his conviction that covenant wrath was remained a constitutive element of the covenant now as well.¹⁴⁰ His discussion of Romans 9-11 was followed by attention to Hebrews 6:4-8. He observed that this latter passage was dealing with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and that the punishment for that was indeed “covenant wrath in its extreme form.” Dr. Thijs was correct in saying that the “external” of the Old Testament (for example, stoning) was in many respects replaced in the New Testament by somewhat more “spiritual” things (a formula of excommunication, for example). “But alteration of the *instruments* of punishment (‘wrath’) does not mean *removal* for the wrath, the punishment, *itself*. The *means* of discipline have moved from being ‘outward’ under the Old Testament to being spiritual now. *But the discipline has continued* . . . although the *means* have changed, the *wrath* has continued. The means of the New Testament serves precisely to *sharpen* divine wrath.” To be consistent, one may not take a scissors and cut apart the promise and threat of the covenant – as though under the new dispensation the promise has become more abundant, while the threat has disappeared! After all, the Canons of Dort (V.14) also explicitly maintain the threat as an inherent part of gospel preaching to the New Testament church.¹⁴¹ In his concluding article, Schilder noted that in this entire series he had been proceeding from this fundamental notion: “The substance of the covenant has always been the same, even though of course it was administered, set forth, and preached in very distinct ways. By virtue of this unity of all distinct covenant phases, as far as the substance was concerned, in every age, despite the distinct phases,

parousia.” On the same page he noted that “new” here does not mean something totally or radically new, but something that is re-new-ed. “In the new, the old returns, but in renewed form, and with fortified majesty, and intensified power” (p. 303). The distinction between old and new covenant may not be expressed with the following *contrasts*: law-gospel, group-individual, gross-net, husk-kernel, appearance-essence, rough-polished, blemished-unblemished (p. 304f.). Concerning the “blemished quality” of the old covenant, Schilder penned a wonderful article: “God says ‘memphomai’” (pp. 308-314), in which this paragraph appears (p. 313): “The Lord indicates his *dissatisfaction* with what had been. It had not gone well. The circumstances were extremely unsatisfying. And complaining about what had been attained up to this point, the Lord says now: We will *work things more strongly*. We will bestow upon them *more* Spirit-powers. But concerning his *covenant institutions* and his *covenant substance* he says *nothing bad*. *On the contrary*: they transgressed them. The covenant *rule* was good, and the *substance* *remains* the same. But the supplemental powers and the added Spirit-working, *these* can still *grow*.” On the basis of the fact that Scripture itself (Heb. 8) explains the prophecy of Jeremiah 31, Schilder searched for the main subject running through the entire epistle of Hebrews (p. 321): “Is it perhaps this: in the Old Testament everything was merely superficial, raw, gross, but among us in the New Testament everything is deep, polished, refined? O no. The contrast is enduring: in the Old Testament we stood, simply, unlettered, ‘laity’ not belonging to the priestly class, always *at a distance*, but today we may *come near*. . . .” The better promise of the new covenant means (p. 334): “The ‘spiritual *class*’ must vanish, that *center* must be abolished; we must see a *people* [volk] of kings, priests, and prophets be born.”

¹⁴⁰ *De Reformatie*, 19 (21 October 1938), pp. 18-20.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, (28 October 1938), p. 26.

God continually brought to fruition his hidden counsel through revelation.”¹⁴² In terms of this starting point, the threat (together with the wrath) belonged to the essence of the covenant from the very beginning. Only in this way can one maintain that “Covenant preaching constitutes the most pointed appeal to responsibility. Which is why it is so extraordinarily serious. And discriminatory. Amputatory. Abasing. Removing all innocence. Comforting, but at the same time tearing to shreds every devilish religious feather pillow. Prohibiting the pretense of an imaginary hell while en route to heaven. And preventing the pretense of an imaginary heaven while going to hell.”¹⁴³

Looking back on this discussion, one may be convinced of one thing at least: it will not be very easy to put into words with a simple formula Schilder’s view of the relationship between old and new covenant. But if one were to attempt to come up with a systematic summary of his view, at least the following aspects must be taken into account. First, without question Schilder strongly emphasized the unity of old and new covenant. In so doing, it is beyond doubt that he was standing within the tradition of Reformed theology.¹⁴⁴ In addition to the unity in substance, however, this tradition also speaks of the distinction in administration in the successive phases of the covenant. This feature also figured prominently in Schilder’s thinking. For him, the new covenant is by definition a new phase in the history of one and the same covenant. One could say that this lies *on the same line* as the phase of the old covenant, but that this did not emerge

¹⁴² Ibid., (18 November 1938), p. 51.

¹⁴³ Schilder wrote about covenant wrath in the New Testament in many other places. Cf., for example, his farewell and installation sermons from 1922 on Hebrews 12, printed in *Om Woord en Kerk* [On Word and Church], 1: 80-95 and 1: 96-104. Already then this subject occupied Schilder. In this same period his essay appeared on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (ibid., pp. 205-230). He wrote about this latter subject also in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 461-472. Here he observed that before Pentecost the Pharisees and scribes (Matt. 12) belonged to the sphere of the covenant. “But after this Acts 2 feast of Pentecost which was so decisive for the transition from Old to New Testament, the line of the covenant went coursing through the church of the New Testament. This then became the covenant sphere, the true Israel” (p. 466). But: “Wherever the covenant appears, there too danger arises; the zone of the covenant is the zone of danger (for the flesh). It is tense there” (p. 467). Hebrews 6:4-8 refers to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the “new” covenant sphere, and covenant breakers are then also punished with “exclusion from the church, on which God sets his seal” (p. 469). This punishment is “more serious” than the physical capital punishment under the Old Testament. In his lecture notes *Christelijke religie* as well Schilder expressed himself on these issues. Cf. p. 18: “Use of gallows and sword has indeed been abolished; today the church no longer punishes anyone with a physical punishment. But punishment is still surely present, and covenant wrath is still present more strongly than in the OT; when the fire of grace is stoked more, it burns up its surroundings more aggressively. How much more shall we not escape, says Hebrews, we who have seen more? Therefore we must have done with every attempt to place the OT over against the NT.”

¹⁴⁴ Ridderbos, “Oud en nieuw verbond [Old and new covenant],” *De apostolische kerk* [The apostolic church], p. 18, notes that on this point Calvin was the pioneer. In the *Institutes* 2.10.2, Calvin wrote: “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation.”

(automatically) *from this line*. By means of a unilateral act of divine intervention (the incarnation of the Word and the outpouring of the Spirit), God permitted the new covenant to unfold from the old covenant. In this way, as far as the relationship between old and new covenant was concerned, Schilder remained faithful to his starting point which we formulated in the first section of this chapter as follows: emphasis on history and its unity. It was his intention to hold fast to two things in the doctrine of the covenant: the *unity* of the covenant and the forward movement of the covenant in the course of *history*. Although nowhere in this context did he explicitly employ the concept, in our opinion, it would appear most appropriate to describe his intention in terms of the concept of “continuity.” Schilder’s view of the relationship between old and new covenant can then be characterized as a relationship of continuity; that is to say, this relationship is not one of simple *identity* (for then the aspect of forward moving *history* would be shortchanged), nor is it one of *opposition* (for then the aspect of *unity* would be shortchanged).

Schilder wanted especially to make clear that one may not posit a contradiction between old and new covenant. For that reason he disapproved of the *law-gospel* paradigm (except as this is used in a redemptive-historical sense) as being an unuseful characterization of the relationship between old and new covenant. At the same time, he wanted nothing to do with the *external-internal* paradigm used to describe this relationship, as we saw earlier.¹⁴⁵ He did not deny the difference between old and new covenant, but this difference is a difference only of degree:¹⁴⁶ a

¹⁴⁵ Schilder discussed this paradigm repeatedly in connection with the distinction between the church in the old covenant and the church in the new covenant. In his lecture notes *De Kerk*, p. 48, he opined that it is not true to say that the church under the old covenant was visible, whereas under the new covenant it has become invisible: “In the Old Covenant the church was visible and now it becomes still more visible in the New.” Also in the lecture notes *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, pp. 40-45, Jeremiah 31 came up for discussion, and Schilder stated that he “did not accept the paradigm of visible and invisible church” (p. 42). Of course, a distinction between the church of the old covenant and that of the new covenant *does exist*. Schilder wrote about that extensively in “*Ons aller moeder*,” *Anno Domini 1935* (published in *De Kerk*, 2: 153ff.): The hierarchical-centralized ecclesiastical authority (pp. 186-187) and the national church [volkskerk] notion (p. 218) are typically Old Testament. Simply applying these circumstances to the New Testament church is “exegetically-hermeneutically forbidden” (p. 172). Cf. in this connection Schilder’s youthful essay from 1923: *Vrijmetselarij* [Lodge membership] (published in *Om Woord en Kerk*, 4: 5ff.), where it is claimed that just like the Roman Catholics with their hierarchy, lodge members are reaching back to the (now obsolete) old dispensation (p. 53). Cf. also the provocative comment in *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 154, concerning “the Old Testament distinction between a nature-preserve and a grace-preserve.” Once again, even in this respect there is no contradiction between old and new covenant. Cf. *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2: 198f.: Although in the OT the special offices stand in the foreground, the general office was not absent even then. “Otherwise the Old Testament would really have contradicted the New Testament. It did not contradict the New Testament, however, but rather functioned as its source, its path preparer.” Between OT and NT (“propadeutic” and “actual lesson”) no antithesis exists.

¹⁴⁶ *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen* (lecture notes), p. 43.

difference “not of antithesis, but from less to more, from beginning to continuation.”¹⁴⁷

Moreover, the *obscure-lucid* paradigm preferred by early Reformed theologians must be understood correctly, Schilder stressed: “Here ‘obscure’ does not mean ‘in contradiction with light,’ but the word results from a *comparison*: thus, *comparatively speaking, relatively speaking*, there is less light [in the old covenant, S.A.S.], so to speak, it is obscure. But there was always *light*, revelation light.”¹⁴⁸ Other traditional paradigms used throughout history to characterize the relationship between old and new covenant must, where necessary, be reinterpreted in a redemptive-historical manner. Thus Schilder pleaded, for example, that the *shadow-substance* paradigm (derived from Col. 2:17) must be purged of any Platonic associations.¹⁴⁹ And when the sacrificial ministry of the old covenant is called a “copy and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5), Schilder was convinced that this formulation has nothing to do with a semi-pagan “*above-below* paradigm.” On the contrary, this had everything to do with the biblical “*before-after* paradigm.”¹⁵⁰ To mention one last example: in the *figure-truth* paradigm (Belgic Confession, Art. 25), “truth” does not stand over against falsehood or duplicity. Here “truth” refers to the “coming reality,” the “promised realities,” toward which the vague figures of the old covenant were pointing, and which are fulfilled in the dispensation of the new covenant.¹⁵¹ At the end of his long discussion of Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 19 (that God first revealed the gospel in Paradise, etc.), Schilder let this formulation slip out: “The *fulfillment* of the gospel, that is a far-reaching dogma.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 273; cf. p. 275.

¹⁴⁸ *Heidelbergsche Catechism*, 2: 260. Cf. *Christelijke religie* (lecture notes), p. 67: “We may not, however, translate ‘obscure’ to mean dark or bad, but: less light. The distinction is relative, it is not the distinction between night in comparison to day, but between less light in comparison to more light. Therefore any denigrating description of the Old Testament, or any aggressively antithetical contrast between Old and New Testament, is wrong. . . . There is no difference of essence, but only a difference of degree.” Cf. pp. 82-83, where the same expressions are used.

¹⁴⁹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 302-305, 312-315.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316. Cf. what we cited above in connection with note 10, in regard to the scholastic archetype-paradigm. On p. 317 Schilder stated: “Consequently, worked into that notion of ‘the heavenly things’ [Heb. 9:23, S.A.S.] is a chunk of *salvation history* and *revelation history*. Christ’s heavenly tabernacle ministry does indeed administer the ‘truth’ (*reality, substance*); but the notion has *nothing* to do with Plato; Plato saw the so-called ‘heavenly’ things as supra-historical, supra-temporal; the Bible views the essential heaven involved within a historical process; for the Bible, the reality or genuineness, the substance, that massiveness, that realness, that solidness, which is *now* applied above for the benefit of the church, *did not function that way from the beginning*. It could find a place above only because of and after Golgotha.” Cf. p. 109, note 1: in Hebrews 9:23 this is “*the dominant* indication that heavenly worship is not static, immobile worship, but rather *salvation-historically* and *revelation-historically* determined worship: the Priest carries in his own blood (after Golgotha).”

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 321, 323. Cf. also *Christelijke religie* (lecture notes), p. 82: “*alètheia* is the *reality*, the thing in view. Those things which formerly had been portrayed figuratively are now received in reality.”

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

This, then, was how the category of (what we will call) continuity between old and new covenant functioned for Schilder. By holding to it firmly he could show that every trace of contradiction must be avoided. As two phases of one and the same covenant, at bottom old and new covenant constitute a unity.

2.4 The covenant and the counsel of peace

Strictly speaking, the topic of the counsel of peace does not fit at this point in the logical development of this chapter. For up to this point we have been treating the (successive stages of the) *history* of the covenant. The counsel of peace cannot be viewed, however, as a subsequent historical stage of the covenant, appearing after the new covenant! This must be seen rather as the (pre- or supra-historical) background of the (historical) covenant. That we are bringing it up for discussion precisely at this juncture is due to Schilder himself. Wherever he wrote about the covenant more or less systematically, he would add a paragraph about the counsel of peace at the *end* of his discussion.¹⁵³ This methodological choice betrays something of Schilder's intention. For his doctrine of the covenant he would take as his *starting point* the history of the covenant, especially that point at which history began: the covenant of works. In addition, however, he sought the *grounding* of the covenant in the eternal counsel of God.¹⁵⁴ Whether the grounding appears at the beginning or the end of someone's treatment of the doctrine of the covenant does not make all that much difference. That Schilder, however, expressly placed it at *the end* is due to another consideration. By this means he wished to make explicit that "Everything that is *from* God returns *to* God; thus also everything in the covenant and every covenantal aspect."¹⁵⁵ "If, then," he wrote, "God's covenant with man is fundamentally a unilateral arrangement in its *origin* [*her-komst*], then it must also display a unilateral arrangement in its *future* [*toe-komst*] . . .

¹⁵³ In *Wat is de hemel?*, pp. 237-268, the following topics are discussed in sequence: Par. 8 "The Great Supper and the covenant" (pp. 237ff.); Par. 9 ". . . and the 'covenant of works'" (pp. 246ff.); Par. 10 ". . . and the covenant of grace" (pp. 252ff.); Par. 11 ". . . and the 'covenant of nature'" (pp. 257ff.); Par. 12 ". . . and the 'covenant of peace'" (pp. 262ff.). See the two articles: "Covenant—constitutional word for 'all flesh'" in *De Reformatie*, 15 (30 Aug and 6 Sept. 1935), where exactly the same sequence appears.

¹⁵⁴ See what we wrote in the first section of this chapter: "grounding is something different than starting point!"

¹⁵⁵ *Wat is de hemel?*, p. 262.

The notion of ‘monopleuric’ is a constitutive element within protology in the doctrine of the covenant; for that reason it must also be the same in its eschatology. The entire covenant arrangement must *in the end* [italics added, S.A.S.] be recognized as the bestowal of a covenant of *God with God*. . . .”¹⁵⁶ Reformed theology has expressed this motif—“climbing with everything up to God”—with the phrase “counsel of peace.”¹⁵⁷ In this doctrine, Reformed theology has identified the deepest basis for “God’s being-turned-toward the cosmos, toward angels and toward mankind. But not only this. In this dogma it has simultaneously exposed the fundamental plan of heaven as the highest covenant guarantee and covenant manifestation.”¹⁵⁸

Schilder meant that the “dogma” of the counsel of peace prevents taking the “dogma” of the dipleuric character of the covenant as the final word. Not in such a way that the element of bilateralness is pushed aside, but rather in a way that it is subordinated to the element of unilateralness.¹⁵⁹ “For the highest covenant joy tasted therein, that *God and man* look each other in the eyes ‘dipleurically’ in peace, is *never the ultimate act*. It is always the *penultimate*. The *ultimate* and most intense covenant yearning is that, as at the first, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit look *each other* in the eyes, satisfied with one another’s *reality*, before they became satisfied with the *image* of them all, humanity. *Before* they became satisfied with that. And also *afterward*.”¹⁶⁰ Later on the same page he wrote yet again: “It was that counsel of peace which, unto the unfolding of God’s majesty . . . established history and summoned all the world into existence. And now that history has entered into its rest, now Father, Son, and Holy Spirit turn toward one another, rejoicing eternally with one another in the fulfillment of the faithfulness which each of them from eternity promised to the others.” Our analysis of the concept of salvation can proceed no further than this. For here is where, as a human being, you become conscious of your limitation and smallness and inability for understanding. “But the fact *that*

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 263. On the same page Schilder says that by “pactum salutis” or “the counsel of peace of God with God” is understood “a pre-temporal covenant relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, wherein each of the three divine Persons bound himself to the others in eternal attraction; so that each of these three would do what was necessary for the redemption of the world. . . .” But even “apart from sin,” Father, Son, and Spirit would have taken such a “union-counsel” together “in order to maintain the entire creature in the creation plan itself, as stationed in covenant relationship with God.” Cf. p. 264: “thus it is not only on account of sin that there is a ‘pactum salutis’—‘salus’ understood then not in the ‘narrow’ sense, but in the ‘broader’ sense.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 264-265. Cf. p. 267: “The *bi*-lateral covenant (the *dia*-thēkē) is not superseded in the *uni*-lateral covenant (the *sun*-thēkē), the covenant of peace of God with God, but it is saturated, and explicated, and radiates in this extreme glory.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 265.

Scripture desires to bring us *up to* this last, and at the same time first, deepest point of thinking, that is certain.”¹⁶¹ For Schilder, the covenant of peace was discussed as a “supra” temporal grounding of the covenant, and thus not only in terms of reflecting on the *pre*-temporal dimension of the covenant, but also reflecting on the (so to speak) *post*-temporal dimension of the covenant.¹⁶² Therefore it is fitting to discuss his opinion regarding the counsel of peace at the end of our discussion of his view of the history of the covenant.

It is not our intention to provide here a summary of everything that Schilder wrote about the counsel of peace. By analogy to the other sections of this chapter, we must investigate especially how he understood the *relationship* between the covenant and the counsel of peace. In this connection obviously we will touch incidentally on his understanding of the relationship between time and eternity, for the covenant is an historical reality, something in *time*, whereas the counsel of peace, as an inter-trinitarian covenant, belongs to *eternity*. In this way, the doctrine of God enters our field of view. A focused discussion of the relationship between covenant and election, however, which could fit here, is reserved for the next chapter, where the relationship between the two P/parties of the covenant, and man’s responsibility toward God, will be explicated further.

Already in the first section of this chapter, attention was drawn to the fact that in his theology, Schilder placed strong emphasis upon history. Especially in connection with the doctrine of the covenant, he repeatedly took as his starting point the truth that the covenant is an historical reality, a genuine relationship between God and man, just as genuine as history itself. But this reality is not the only reality revealed in Scripture. Behind the covenant in time, said Schilder, lay an eternal decision of God which itself took on the character of a covenant: “A covenant, that is, of God the Lord with himself. A covenant that people often press into service as the *pactum salutis*, as the so-called ‘counsel of peace,’ but whose broad basis does not

¹⁶¹ Ibid. We have related these thoughts of Schilder rather fully because precisely on this point sharp criticism was later directed against him. Cf. J. Stellingwerf’s article, “Kritiek op K. Schilder als filosoferend dogmaticus” [Criticism of K. Schilder as philosophizing dogmatician] in *Philosophia Reformata* 27 (1962), pp. 106-125; we shall return to this in our final chapter.

¹⁶² Cf. the following statement in the meditation “E pacto salutis” (1948), published in *Schriftoverdeningen* 3: 37: “God sees everything He has decided. . . . He sees it before and after. . . . Before that which has been decided in fact happens. And after it has happened.”

coincide with that of the ‘counsel of peace.’”¹⁶³ With the last phrase, Schilder meant that all of God’s decisions are actually “pacts, covenant acts between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁴ Thus God’s counsel embraced more than just the (specific) counsel of peace. There is “a pactum salutis, but also a pactum damni, a counsel of peace and also a counsel of judgment, a pactum creationis, a counsel of creation, but also a pactum restaurationis, a counsel of salvation-restoration. We could continue this way indefinitely.”¹⁶⁵

Schilder felt compelled to state the matter this way to avoid the danger of scholasticism (“far from imaginary, also in these matters”). The irony of the matter is that it was precisely on this very point that he would be accused by others of being scholastic! Although Schilder included more in his description than just “counsel of peace” and “counsel of judgment,” it was this parallel placement of salvation and condemnation in the eternal counsel of God that gave occasion for accusing him of a speculative search for symmetry, which can be identified at various points in his theology.¹⁶⁶ No matter, in the same section to which we referred, Schilder also rejected supralapsarianism, which presents the decrees of God “as moments in succession.”¹⁶⁷ When he later (in connection with the doctrine of creation) discussed this entire question extensively, he explicitly rejected the age-old dilemma of supra- and infra-lapsarianism.¹⁶⁸ He distanced himself from Beza’s “impolite” theological “overconfidence,” for in the latter’s position, “supra-lapsarianism” becomes “supra-destinationism.”¹⁶⁹ Schilder preferred to follow Herman Bavinck at this point, “whose discussion of this question, especially in his criticism of *both* positions, we for our part . . . consider to be the most elegant part of his Dogmatics,” because Bavinck correctly pointed out that neither the supra- nor the infra-lapsarian can succeed in carrying through his position “with rigid consequence.”¹⁷⁰ Since in the decrees of the eternal God one cannot speak of a “sequence” (whether logical or chronological), Schilder

¹⁶³ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 382. In the above-mentioned article in *Schriftverdenking* (3: 271-272), he defined the counsel of peace or pactum salutis as “a mutual self-binding of Father, Son, and Spirit to do all those works in history which would lead the world back to God after and out of its deep fall.”

¹⁶⁴ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 383. Not only between Father and Son, as the older theologians argued (cf. Schilder’s note 3 on this page).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* In *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* 2: 195, he says as well: “As long as one identifies *all* decisions of God as ‘pacts’ of the three Persons together, we have no substantive objection whatsoever against calling the decision to save . . . a ‘covenant of peace,’ a salvation covenant, or pactum salutis.”

¹⁶⁶ Especially J. Douma, in his dissertation *Algemene genade* [Common grace], has carefully and extensively documented and analyzed this particular criticism leveled against Schilder. We shall return to this in our final chapter.

¹⁶⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 384.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 455-480.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 465-466.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

considered the terms “pactum” and “decretum” as, strictly speaking, inadequate: the participle of “*completed* present time” cannot adequately express the fact that God’s eternal decrees are nonetheless actually “*decrees*,” “*always-and-again-decrees*.” For this reason he preferred the stammering expression of the older theologians: God’s decree is the decreeing God himself.¹⁷¹

Evaluating adequately all these ideas of Schilder regarding God’s eternal counsel would require a broader treatment of his theology than we would consider relevant in this context (within the scope of our study). Within such a broader treatment one would definitely need to consider how he worked out the doctrine of God, to which we shall refer very briefly at this point. Precisely to avoid speculation regarding the order of God’s decrees, Schilder placed heavy emphasis on God’s *eternity*, wherein his uniqueness as God comes to expression.¹⁷² In this emphasis, Schilder was adopting with the well-known definition of God’s eternity given by Boethius (4th century after Christ): “aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio [Eternity is a simultaneously full and perfect possession of interminable life].”¹⁷³ Schilder appreciated especially the fact that in his definition, Boethius had expressly chosen as his starting point the more Scriptural “life” of God rather than the philosophical “being” of God.¹⁷⁴ On this point as well, criticism arose, as could be expected.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Schilder focused so strongly on this definition that his doctrine of God exhibited a strongly tautological tendency. Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that precisely *because* he sought to avoid the scholastic analogy-of-being, Schilder attached so much value to this ancient definition.¹⁷⁶ This put him in a position, for example, to distinguish clearly God’s eternity (aeternitas) from man’s eternity (aeviternitas). He repeatedly employed this distinction, which he himself described as

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 1: 385. In *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 133ff., he discussed the counsel of God quite extensively. There he stated that God “*still decrees* each moment in his eternal decree” (p. 134); “the counsel of God is here a matter-of-each-moment: a time and again *determining*. That is not to deny that behind this present time lies a ‘planning,’ a permanent plan or decree; but it is to argue that in addition, this decree *happens each moment again*” (p. 135). In connection with what S. Greijdanus remarked concerning the Logos in John 1, Schilder said: “the generation of the Son remains an eternal and supra-temporal reality. But *supra-temporal* is not *extra-temporal*” (p. 162).

¹⁷² In his article “Critische sympathie” [Critical sympathy] in *Almanak F.Q.I. 1953* (pp. 89-91), J. Kamphuis mentioned that here is where one must look for the background of Schilder’s emphasis on God’s eternity.

¹⁷³ In his *Kompendium Dogmatiek* [Compendium of Dogmatics] 3rd edition (lecture notes), pp. 85ff., this definition was treated extensively, also in terms of the biblical proof for it.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 109-132, esp. 116.

¹⁷⁵ O. Jager, *Het eeuwig leven*, pp. 47-51, offered a summary of Schilder’s position and criticism of it (especially from K. J. Popma). The article by Stellingwerf cited above also discussed this.

¹⁷⁶ J. Kamphuis emphasized this intention of Schilder in a series of articles in which he voices criticism of K. J. Popma’s criticism of Schilder, *De Reformatie*, 38 (1962-1963), 311f. 319f. 358f., and 366f.

follows: “By ‘eternity’ we understand *God’s* eternity (which includes something else than simply ‘being without beginning and without end’ [but does include this as well, S.A.S.]), and by ‘eviternity’ we ordinarily understand the manner of existence of angels and people (who do have a beginning but reach no end).”¹⁷⁷

In this context we are still interested in the question regarding to what extent Schilder’s view of the relationship between eternity-time influenced his perspective on history. In the first section of this chapter, it became clear to us that Schilder placed great emphasis on history. This accent was so remarkable that he was early on accused of over-valuing history.¹⁷⁸ Later, however, he was accused from various quarters of exactly the opposite, namely, that he under-valued history.¹⁷⁹ This criticism was so widespread that it surely cannot be ignored, and for that reason we will return to it in our final evaluation.¹⁸⁰ What must be stated already at this point, however, is that this criticism (of particular concrete points) cannot serve as a concluding characterization of Schilder’s entire theology (in general). Anyone who listens carefully to the entire Schilder will hear him speak most frequently of two things: the *decree* of God (in eternity) and the *deed* of God (in time).¹⁸¹ These two may not be identified, but neither may they be separated. The second is the realization of the first. Schilder chose to speak, as he occasionally put it, in a “*trinitarian-historical*” manner—precisely so he could avoid any imbalance.¹⁸² Even though he at times used such strong language about the *decree* of God, in itself this supplies no

¹⁷⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 391. Also in, among others, *Ibid.* 2: 56, 3: 113-116, 4: 129.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. the debate between Schilder and J. Overduin, for example, regarding the history of salvation in preaching, in *De Reformatie*, 18 (1938), pp. 311f. 225f., and 351.

¹⁷⁹ G. C. Berkouwer began with this in *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952 [Dutch 1950]), pp. 70-82. In connection with common grace he accuses Schilder of pressing “a logical consistency [here] It is a logic which deduces from the decree and final purpose of God, rather than from the word of God to man in his historical matrix” (p. 72). Schilder responded to this accusation in his *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 4: 68-71 and 172f. J. Douma discussed this debate in *Algemene genade*, pp. 129-131. Sidney Greidanus also referred to this in his *Sola Scriptura*, p. 175. On p. 184 (note 65), Greidanus concurred with O. Jager, who wrote (*Het eeuwige leven*, p. 403): “Although Schilder took up the cudgels against many theologians on behalf of the value of history, nevertheless a logicistic and systematizing and speculative thinking repeatedly dominated his approach, which led him to, among other things, a devaluation of time and of God’s speaking in time.” Notice that Jager speaks of “repeatedly,” which is to say: not always; and “among other things,” which is to say: not in every instance!

¹⁸⁰ In a review of Sidney Greidanus’s *Sola Scriptura*, C. Trimp admits that Schilder can indeed be criticized at those points where he reasons from God’s decree to history. *De Reformatie*, 45 (22 Aug. 1970), p. 345.

¹⁸¹ Cf. the heading, for example, at the top of his *Christ in His Suffering*, vol. 1 (1930): “‘Giving’ in the decree and ‘giving’ in the deed.”

¹⁸² Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3: 7: “The church has once for all organized its creed in terms of the *trinitarian-historical* perspective.” Precisely in this context (p. 12f.) Schilder pleaded for the loci-method in dogmatics: “It may appear to be a sign of poverty, but in fact it is nonetheless one of strength.”

basis for calling him a supralapsarian. Just as little, in fact, as his strong formulations about the *deed* of God make him a historicist!

Schilder certainly did not in every instance neutralize the deed of God in history by the decree of God in eternity, something evident precisely from what he wrote specifically concerning the relationship between the covenant and the counsel of peace (the topic under consideration here). We have already mentioned that in this context Schilder had with straightforward language signaled his objection against the scholastic tendency toward theological “eternalizing.” The covenant (within time) may not be identified with the counsel of peace (within eternity), but must be clearly distinguished from it. The covenant of grace was not established in eternity, but in time.¹⁸³ In reflecting on this topic, a central question involves the role ascribed to Christ. Does he appear as Mediator in the counsel of peace or in the covenant of grace? Concerning this, too, Schilder adopted a clear position. Over against Abraham Kuypers, Schilder maintained that Christ was appointed to be Mediator of the covenant of grace not in eternity, but in time.¹⁸⁴

Naturally, there are more aspects to this subject. One involves the question whether Christ must be called “Mediator” or “Head” of the covenant of grace. To answer this question, another determination must be made first. It has been a centuries-long debate within Reformed theology whether in the doctrine of the covenant, two or three covenants must be distinguished. On one side were those who insisted that there are only two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. This position identifies the covenant of grace with the so-called covenant of peace, in the sense that the former constitutes the outworking in time of the latter,

¹⁸³ Cf. § 2.1. above, especially pp. ??, and note 13. In the article cited there, p. 388, Schilder wrote: “In fact, construing a covenant of grace established in eternity is just as ridiculous a mental fantasy as that of a creation made in eternity. Let Comrie be our lighthouse on the sea.”

¹⁸⁴ Cf. our § 2.1., p. ??, and note 12. In *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 2: 217, Schilder wrote: Christ is “. . . covenant *partner* in the covenant of peace, with Father and Spirit, and covenant *mediator* between the two parties in the covenant of grace.” Recently M. J. Arntzen has expressed criticism of this position of Schilder. He refers to the Canons of Dort, I.7 (that God appointed Christ from eternity to be the Mediator and Head of the elect), something that Schilder supposedly ignored (!); Arntzen claimed: “Due to his understandable fear of eternalizing God’s salvation acts, and with all the emphasis that was laid on what God does in history (here we can see a certain remarkable similarity to Berkouwer), particular passages in Holy Scripture and also some confessional formulations were inadequately respected. . . . That God’s decrees are eternal, Schilder maintained to the fullest. In this respect Berkouwer goes much further” (*De vredeaad III in De Reformatie*, 56 [5 Sept. 1981], p. 723).

which was made in eternity.¹⁸⁵ On the basis of this starting point, the parallel between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12ff. was summarized this way: just like Adam appeared as representative covenant head in the covenant of *works*, so Christ appeared as representative covenant head in the covenant of *grace* (covenant of *peace*). On the basis of this position, then, it was said without any objection that the covenant of grace was established in *eternity* with Christ, and in him with the elect. On the other side, however, were those who maintained that three covenants must be distinguished: the covenant of peace (or counsel of peace), the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.¹⁸⁶

Schilder adopted this last-mentioned position, which at the beginning of the twentieth century enjoyed strong support among the “old-A Reformed.” On the basis of this position, he stressed that it is undesirable to speak of Christ as the “Head” of the covenant of grace. To call Christ the “Head” of the covenant of grace was to risk having the covenant swallowed up by the counsel of peace, for then it would be set forth in such a way that “in eternity God, without any consideration of mankind, established a pact with Christ as Head of the elect to pay for their guilt. . . . This, however, is an incorrect opinion. It is the case that Jesus Christ is Mediator of the covenant. Christ reconciles God and people. . . .”¹⁸⁷ In another place he says that Christ may well be called the Head of the covenant members and even of the covenant sphere (i.e., the church), but not the Head of the covenant as such. A covenant *qua talis* [as such], said Schilder, cannot

¹⁸⁵ A typical advocate of this position in our modern day is Rev. G. H. Kersten. In his *De gereformeerde dogmatiek voor de gemeenten toegelicht* [Reformed dogmatics explained for the churches], vol. 1 (1950), p. 308, ENG?? he wrote: “The Covenant of Grace is the execution of the Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity with the elect in Christ, their representative Covenant Head. In essence both are one and the same covenant. . . .” With an appeal to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, he asserted on the same page: “Regarding the redemption of the elect there is only one covenant, even as our Confessions and liturgical Forms also continually treat only two covenants *in relation to man’s eternal state*, namely, the Covenant of Works, broken by all men in Adam unto condemnation, and the Covenant of Grace, made in Christ with the elect unto eternal life.” On p. 310 he continued: “Herewith we take a position against those, like South African Professor J. Heyns, many Christian Reformed [Christelijke Gereformeerden], Rev. Woelderink, Professor Schilder, and others, who distinguish the Covenant of Grace *essentially* from the Covenant of Redemption, following Arminius in this distinction.” Regarding Bavinck, Bremmer writes (*Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* [Herman Bavinck as dogmatician], pp. 351-352): “In considering the doctrine of the covenant, it is remarkable how close a connection Bavinck asserted to exist between the covenant of redemption (counsel of peace) and the covenant of grace. His interest in doing so involved the grounding of the certainty of salvation.” Bremmer refers in this context to Karl Barth’s criticism, and Berkouwer’s defense, of the connection between the doctrine of the covenant and the doctrine of the trinity and the doctrine of Christ, respectively.

¹⁸⁶ A modern representative of this position, Professor J. J. van der Schuit, in 1952 described the Christian Reformed Churches [Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk] (to which he himself belonged) as “the church of the three covenants. . . ., to wit, the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace” (in *Het verbond der verlossing* [The covenant of redemption], p. 5).

¹⁸⁷ *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, p. 84.

have a head: “A covenant exists between two parties. Over it stands no third party, who is a head. . . . Covenant *spheres* can have heads, a covenant *party* can have a head, but not a *covenant*.”¹⁸⁸ Schilder focused the problem on the meaning of the word “mediator.” Whenever he treated this matter, he stressed that the mediator’s primary function is to effect reconciliation between two hostile parties.¹⁸⁹ As an aside it should be mentioned (in view of the fact that this is tangentially related to our subject) that precisely on account of this opinion regarding the work of a mediator, Schilder had serious objection against the Kuyprian notion that Christ should be called not only Mediator of Redemption, but also Mediator of Creation.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, if Schilder wanted to maintain consistently that Christ is not the Head of the covenant of grace, naturally he needed to make clear how the incontrovertible parallel between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:21ff. was to be explained. Does not this parallel mean, quite clearly and simply, that just as we sinned “in Adam,” so also we are saved “in Christ” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22)? The “in Adam” implies, does it not, that he is our covenant head, who functioned in Paradise in our stead and whose trespass is imputed to us? And in the same way, must not the “in Christ” imply that he is our Covenant Head, who functioned at Golgotha in our stead and whose righteousness is imputed to us?

Schilder discussed this traditional perspective in great detail.¹⁹¹ Chiefly on the basis of a study by S. Greijdanus (*Toerekeningsgrond van het peccatum originans* [The ground of imputing original sin], 1906) he reached the conclusion that the parallel between Adam and Christ does *not* entail that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us in the same way as Adam’s transgression is imputed to us. With original sin one must maintain, alongside the covenant line, also the realistic line. Adam was our “father” and he sinned while we were “in his loins.” But Christ became our “brother.” “In Christ” does not function on the same level as “in Adam.” As Mediator of the covenant Christ has effected reconciliation between God and us, the two parties of the covenant. This means that he made the covenant legally valid; he has provided the judicial basis upon which God can communicate his benefits to us. Therefore the phrase “in Christ” must in the first place be seen as a *forensic* concept: “So it can be said that Christ is *forensically* the Head of the

¹⁸⁸ *Capita Selecta I* (lecture notes), p. 45, where he discussed the topic “Is Christ Head or Mediator of the covenant of grace?” (pp. 42-45).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 59-75, § 37: “The meaning of the word ‘mediator’.”

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 83-103, § 39: “Covenant-Mediator, not Creation-Mediator.” Schilder saw here the danger of a Gnostic dualism lurking around the corner, as if from the very beginning there existed enmity between God and his creation, an enmity that needed to be reconciled.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, pp. 51-69, and *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 329-358.

covenant sphere, but that does not mean that he is mystically-genetically the Head of the regenerate.”¹⁹²

With this (typically Schilderian) mention of the forensic, we have now encountered an aspect which touches more on the structure of the covenant. We must discuss this in the following chapter. Even though critical remarks about Schilder’s position were made here and there in the preceding paragraphs, it has become generally clear that the history and the structure of the covenant are so intertwined in his thought that a final evaluation of his perspective on the history of the covenant (including the relationship between the covenant and the counsel of peace) can be provided only at the end of our study. Therefore we will suffice at this point with our presentation of his perspective on the history of the covenant.

¹⁹² *Capita Selecta I* (lecture notes), p. 45.

CHAPTER 3

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COVENANT

“For the covenant—different than the contract—does not live out of the principle of ‘do ut des’ (the principle of exchange, where one gives and the other gives in return, each helping the other), but from the principle of a God who gives everything, but then also, once that which is given is accepted, takes everything, and does so as soon as man rejects Him as Giver, and thus breaks the covenant, after it has been bilaterally offered and accepted. This breach is from man’s side a rejecting of everything. The contract seeks to salvage what there is to salvage from a bankrupt estate—and regulates this salvaging business in advance; it then proceeds from the assumption that ‘everything or nothing’ is a burdensome phrase. But the covenant always begins its conversations on that one note: everything—or nothing. The contract says: ‘Whoever has something must lose it, and whoever has nothing, that which he has must increase.’ By contrast the covenant begins its book of proverbs with a saying that has been incorrectly described as paradoxical: Whoever has, to him shall be given, and he will have abundantly (heaven), and whoever does not have, from him shall be taken even what he has (hell).”

K. Schilder, *Wat is de hel?* (1932)

3.1 A bilateral relationship

When the structure of the covenant now comes under discussion as something pertinent at this point, in a certain sense we have reached the heart of our investigation. In the preceding chapters we have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the discussion in which K. Schilder participated at that time was primarily centered on questions touching the structure of the

covenant.¹ This discussion involved especially questions of an entirely doctrinal nature—questions like: What actually is the covenant? And: What is the nature or the character of the covenant between God and man? And: What constant elements or constitutive components make up the covenant in all its historical phases? Also: How must we describe, in the light of Scripture, the relation between covenant and election, between covenant and baptism, and between covenant and church? The answers to these questions which K. Schilder offered, and a comparison of his answers with those of his theological conversation partners, provides the material for the substance of this chapter. Because Schilder formulated his view also (and especially) in connection with these matters largely in the heat of the ecclesiastical struggle, however, the significance of our first chapter (about the historical background) will become evident once again. We are therefore assuming familiarity with that *Sitz im Leben* at this point. In the second chapter, various facets of the problematic regarding the structure of the covenant were discussed. Here we can build further upon this (necessary) background by entering into the problems more deeply and systematically. Whereas chapter 2 supplied a longitudinal cross-section of the covenant, chapter 3 offers a latitudinal cross-section.

One of the first problems confronting a structural analysis of the covenant is the question: What actually is the covenant? Traditionally Reformed dogmatics has replied: The covenant is fundamentally nothing else but the relationship between God and humanity. This relationship originated, according to Scripture, unilaterally (from God's side alone), but it is manifest bilaterally (between both God and humanity). Schilder aligned himself with this definition when, for example, he wrote in 1932: "For the *service of God* was given at the beginning through God's

¹ After the Liberation Schilder himself provided a summary of these questions in his articles entitled, "Is er eenstemmigheid over het genadeverbond? I-IV [Is there consensus about the covenant of grace?]," in *De Reformatie* 21 (10 November 1945 and following). These articles are mainly a reproduction of the minority report which he, together with D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, produced for the synod of 1939. With citations from recognized Reformed theologians he proved that no consensus has existed concerning the following questions: (a) "Who is included in the covenant of grace? Does it include only the elect or other as well?" (p. 49); (b) "Does the covenant contain conditions or not?" (p. 49); (c) "Is the covenant monopleuric or dipleuric?" (p. 49); (d) "Can the covenant of grace (even though it may be in a phase that has passed away) be broken from God's side?" (p. 50); (e) "Can the 'new covenant' (possibly taken 'according to its essence') be broken from man's side?" (p. 57); (f) "Is there also under the new covenant also 'covenant wrath' or did this apply only to the 'old covenant'?" (p. 57); (g) "Must we distinguish in terms of the covenant between 'essence' and 'appearance,' thusly, that between those two or between our relation to both of them a discrepancy, yes, a certain contradiction can exist?" (p. 57); (h) "With what or with whom was the covenant made, with Christ or with God's people?" (p. 57).

unilateral decision, and revealed, and announced, in a *bilateral covenant*.”² Already in 1935—thus, before there was talk of any ecclesiastical conflict—Schilder expressed himself in similar (traditional) formulations: “In its manifestation this covenant is *dipleuric*, it has *two* parties. . . . But in its origination, this covenant is *monopleuric*, that is to say: it *comes* through a *uni*-lateral determination of God.”³

Because several years later a heated polemic would break loose precisely on this point, it is necessary to investigate Schilder’s view with respect to this matter. In the same year as the statement mentioned earlier (1935), Schilder developed this theme more broadly in lectures he offered to beginning students on the concept of religion. In those lectures he asserted that the question concerning the essence of religion is primarily a question concerning the relationship between God and humanity. This relationship is characterized in Scripture from the very beginning as “covenant.”⁴ That the covenant is a dipleuric (bilateral) relation in no way shortchanges the monopleuric (unilateral) determination of God. Dialectical theology wanted to protect God’s sovereignty by emphasizing the *diastase* (difference, distance) between God and humanity. Reformed theology emphasized God’s sovereignty just as much, but, Schilder said, added to it the claim “that precisely through His speaking God already immediately subordinates the diastase to the conjunction, and thereby relativizes it.”⁵ On the basis of the Reformed view, the bilateral character of the relation between God and humanity may and must be fully honored. “For man, religion cannot be reduced simply to being taken up merely passively and receptively into a state of peace. For the covenant includes the activity, as condition sine qua non for covenant concourse.”⁶ Formulated still more sharply, Schilder expressed himself this way: “For the covenant makes reciprocity into a constitutive factor in religion. God comes to us and gives

² *Wat is de hel?*, 193, with citations from Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* 1.318 and 2.611-613.ENG?? On page 178 of the same work Schilder writes: “. . . the notion of that which is incommensurable between God and humanity, between infinite Maker and finite creature, is indeed acknowledged in Reformed theology, insofar namely as the *establishment* of the covenant, and the stipulation of the *terms* of the covenant, occurred *uni*-laterally by God and proceeded from Him. The covenant is set up in a *mono*-pleuric way, Reformed theologians have said. But no sooner had the covenant become *bi*-lateral (*di*-pleuric) through the *announcing* and constituting thereof, than the existing incommensurability was severed forever within subsequent *covenant* conversations. . . .”

³ *Wat is de hemel?*, 243. Cf. also 249 and 262-264, where we see clearly that Schilder emphasizes both the unilateral origination and the bilateral manifestation of the covenant.

⁴ *Christelijke religie* (lecture notes from 1935), 28. Although these lecture notes bear the same title as the later ones on the Belgic Confession, these lectures deal with entirely different material.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

to us, we come to Him and give back to Him.”⁷ In the remainder of these lecture notes, Schilder further develops the notion that man is God’s fellow-worker—a notion to which a bilateral covenant logically leads.⁸

In the subsequent course of the debate concerning the covenant as a bilateral relationship between God and man, this concept of man as God’s co-worker played a rather significant role. Initially Schilder appealed to this notion over against dialectical theology. Later he had to defend this position also over against the Kuyperians. During the first phase of this debate, his polemic directed against Dr. O. Noordmans (regarding common grace) was characteristic.⁹ Schilder wanted to ground Christian culture in the mandate of Genesis 1:26-28. About this, he wrote: “The Paradise command . . . was given to man as *God’s co-worker*. As God’s co-worker in the historically developing course of providence. In and through this providence God desired to bring the world which he had created from the alpha to the omega. . . .”¹⁰ Through his substitutionary work Jesus Christ has returned the one who had fallen into sin back to obedience to this continually valid original mandate. In response to Noordmans’ criticism of his 1932 essay (“Jesus Christ and cultural life”), Schilder himself provided a summary of the ideas which lay at the foundation of his essay. He indicated that his starting point for this essay was the covenant between God and man.¹¹ This covenant is always dipleuric: “God binds himself to man, man binds himself to God; both do this in freedom. . . .”¹² But that this covenant could come into existence, and indeed has come into existence, depended entirely on God’s monopleuric dispositon. “The infinite qualitative difference between God and man has been acknowledged in Reformed theology for centuries already, *and put at the front*, precisely here,” Schilder said.¹³ But this difference between God and man was proclaimed to man for the first time after the fact, in and through a covenant conversation. “Just as it still continues to this day, only the believing person (who came to faith thereby) can speak obediently about election (in other words, *within*

⁷ Ibid., 31-32.

⁸ Ibid., 38ff. Cf. *Wat is de hemel?*, 253, note 1: “. . . to be ‘God’s co-worker’ [is] the highest benefit of the covenant of grace. A proof as to how seriously the denial of this being God’s co-worker (in dialectical theology) corrupts the covenant idea.”

⁹ Cf. our first chapter, ?? (also notes 44 and 45), and our second chapter, ??, note 5.

¹⁰ G. Puchinger, *Een theologie in discussie* [A Theology in Discussion], 94. Because Puchinger’s publication of this polemic is more easily accessible than the original articles in *De Reformatie*, we are quoting from that.

¹¹ Ibid., 105.

¹² Ibid., 108.

¹³ Ibid.

the *di*-pleuric covenant concourse with God *after the fact* can a person act in terms of the mono-pleuric moment of divine election), so too it was in the earliest days of the covenant, before the fall into sin: Adam lived first *di*-pleurically, *in* concourse with God (this determines his being-a-man-of-God), and *thereafter* he received knowledge of the *mono*-pleuric aspect of the divine disposition of this covenant.”¹⁴ Because such important doctrinal decisions depend on this point, according to Schilder’s conviction, and because he expressed himself so compactly, one more extensive citation may be permitted. He wrote: “To the degree that God *alone* is viewed as the almighty, sovereign Arranger (and people abstract from the covenant idea the infinite qualitative difference between God and man as mere ‘objectifying’ theoretical knowledge-content, which is the great transgression of dialectical theology), to that degree the prefix ‘co-’ in the phrase ‘co-worker’ has merely a figurative meaning; one must then take it ‘cum grano salis’ (‘with a grain of salt’). For in that case, the co-worker is in fact merely an *under*- worker, someone who works under God. But look, now comes the *covenant* once again to created man. And it is due to this covenant, and only to this covenant, that the prefix ‘co-’ in the phrase ‘co-worker’ does *not* need to be taken ‘cum grano salis.’ This prefix ‘co-’ now obtains its fully strict meaning; God ‘is not ashamed’ to be called co-worker of those who are his handiwork. The *almighty power* of God created, *established*, the *covenant* relationship; the former can never be abstracted from the latter, nor the latter from the former.”¹⁵

Several aspects of Schilder’s exposition still require our attention. He said that man is God’s co-worker, “not in creation (or recreation), not in *birth* (or in *rebirth*), but *certainly* in providence (maintaining and ruling of that life, or life-benefit, or life-domain which comes into

¹⁴ Ibid., 107.

¹⁵ Ibid., 107-108. Schilder argued this point especially over against the view (expressed by Ph. Kohnstamm, in his *De Heilige* third volume of his *Schepper en schepping*, 1931), which maintained that “in a world which is the Creation of an almighty Creator, no one can have any task.” It is interesting, moreover, to observe that this is the only place, as far as I know, where Schilder calls God man’s co-worker! Such a formulation can hardly be defended by a Reformed person (and thus also not by Schilder) without further explanation. Later Schilder himself wrote (to which we shall return below) in *De Reformatie*, vol. 13 (14 January 1938), 163: Anyone who emphasizes the covenant so prominently will “not speak of God as man’s co-worker, but rather of *man* as *God’s co-worker*.” In his volume on *The Providence of God*, (p. 154), G. C. Berkouwer pointed out that precisely for this reason—namely, to avoid the notion that God co-operated with man—Reformed theology has rejected the idea of “concursum.” Berkouwer refers at this point to Hepp, but not to Schilder, who himself has also rejected “concursum” as a third dimension of divine providence, alongside God’s maintenance and rule (cf. *Heidelbergische Catechismus*, 4:251-256).

existence through creation or recreation, birth or rebirth).”¹⁶ Therefore it can be said that as God's co-worker man is called to a dipleuric service of maintaining and governing. Schilder finds such a formulation theologically legitimate, under the condition that one always keeps in mind that “all *di*-pleuric concourse of man with God (also within *this* co-laboring) is derived from and continues toward the *mono*-pleuric decree of God, and is seen as dependent upon that decree. . . .”¹⁷

Whenever this formulation is considered separately from the foundational idea of the monopleuric activity of God, however, it leads to an absurd and unbiblical anthropology, insisted Schilder. A final aspect connected with the idea of “man as God’s co-worker” to which attention was paid in the 1936 series of article was the Scriptural evidence. Schilder was aware that F. W. Grosheide interpreted 1 Corinthians 3:9 in such a way that “God’s co-workers” does not mean, “people who work alongside God,” but “people who work together in God’s service.”¹⁸ For Schilder, however, this was not a decisive argument against his view. Other Reformed exegetes have interpreted the verse in the former sense. Moreover, the notion of “God’s co-worker” is in agreement with the substantive content of Scripture, taken as a whole, and this is also a recognized technical term in Reformed dogmatics.¹⁹

The second stage of the debate about the covenant as a bilateral relationship was opened with the publication of Professor V. Hepp’s fourth pamphlet in the series *Dreigende Deformatie* in 1937.²⁰ In that pamphlet Hepp was actually discussing the objections of Schilder (and others) against the Kuyperian doctrine of common grace. Since Schilder’s objections against that doctrine were largely governed by his view of the covenant, Hepp focused his criticism on the doctrine of the covenant. He argued as his conviction, “Reformed dogmatics acknowledges a covenant of works that was simply *unilateral* from the beginning to the end.” Anyone who makes the covenant, whether in its origination or its administration, *bilateral*, said Hepp, “is

¹⁶ Puchinger, *op cit.*, 108-109. In connection with the history of the covenant it has already become clear that Schilder was convinced that the covenant belongs to the order of providence. Cf. chapter 2 above, pp.??

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, 109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111. Schilder referred here to the dogmatic-theological *Locus de foedere* in the *Dictaten Dogmatiek* of A. Kuyper.

²⁰ For the historical background, see our first chapter, pp. ??, especially note 58.

inhaling foul air.”²¹ Against this undisguised accusation that he was allegedly departing from Reformed doctrine, Schilder registered fierce objection. He wrote an entire series of articles in order to refute these accusations, and at the same time to demonstrate “Professor Hepp’s unreformed covenant perspective”! In the first article under this title²² he showed with extensive citations that in defending his own view Hepp could not appeal to Kuyper or Bavinck, or to earlier theologians (such as à Marck, de Moor, Turretin, Heidegger, Gomarus, van Mastricht, Cocceius, Burmanus, Leydekker, and Junius). All of these unambiguously confessed that the covenant is unilateral in its origination, but bilateral in its administration. Schilder suggested that perhaps Hepp was following Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr., who had written: “At its deepest level the covenant of works is unilateral, because it was placed upon man, and the covenant of grace is unilateral, because it was a covenant given to man.”²³ This claim A. Kuyper, Jr. made against Pelagianism. But against antinomianism the same author wrote (in the same context): “God’s Covenant is in its essence unilateral, but in its conditional form and in the form of its manifestation it is bilateral.” Schilder’s view was that here a clear distinction must be made between the sides and the parties of the covenant. He wrote: “Among Reformed writers one encounters this claim throughout: (a) there are two *sides* or *parties*: God and man; (b) there are also (for each of the parties) two parts within the covenant; for God both of these parts are *promise* and *demand*, for *man* they run parallel: ‘*reciprocal demand*’ (a requiring of what God has promised) and ‘*consent*’ (an accepting of the obligation).”²⁴ At the end of the first article in his series, Schilder argued that the practical significance of the entire matter (regarding the one- or two-sidedness of the covenant) lies in the fact that this discussion can result in being able to defend honorably the idea of man as God’s co-worker. Hepp accused Schilder of over-stressing and over-estimating the idea. Schilder in turn wanted to show that Hepp was under-emphasizing and under-estimating the idea.

²¹ *Dreigende deformatie*, 4: 73-74.

²² *De Reformatie* 18 (21 November 1937): 90-92.

²³ *Christelijke encyclopaedie*, 1st edition, vol. 5, s. v. *verbond*.

²⁴ At this point Schilder referred to à March, who used the terminology *promissio*, *stipulatio*, *restipulatio*, and *adstipulatio*. Later in the same volume of *De Reformatie* (21 January and 4 February 1938), 175-176, and 191), Schilder wrote again about “unilateral or bilateral.” To these articles he referred still later in *Looze kalk*, 16, where he wrote that the expression used in the Form for Baptism, “in all covenants there are contained two parts,” refers to promise and command. Cf. in this context also the lecture notes entitled *Americana*, 7, where Schilder was reported as follows: “We must sharply separate [surely he meant ‘distinguish,’ S.A.S.] between parts of the covenant and parties to the covenant. The parts are promise and demand. . . . Love can never proceed from only one side, and does not wish to proceed from only one side. In order, then, to prevent love from proceeding only from one side, God brings his love to mankind by means of an almighty sovereign deed of a unilateral action within bilateral concurrence. The sides or the *latera* are generally the parties.”

In the next article Schilder quoted even more early theologians (like Vitranga, Trelcatius, Regius, and Rivetus), to show that Hepp was not moving within the tradition of Reformed theology when Hepp argued that the covenant of works could not have been bilateral else it would have ceased to exist when one party (man) had withdrawn from the covenant by falling into sin.²⁵ Subsequently, Schilder pointed out that this question is of great importance, “since the idea of man as God’s co-worker not only stands or falls with the covenant idea, but also in its further development is determined by the answer to the question, whether the covenant is a unilateral arrangement of God, or a bilateral arrangement of free parties, each according to his nature.”²⁶ In passing Schilder commented that Hepp should not lose sight of the fact “that all of the Reformed have maintained that one can teach the dipleuric, and at the same time the infinite qualitative difference between God and man.” Before returning to the issue of man as God’s co-worker, Schilder delved with great detail into Hepp’s view of the covenant of works. He showed very incisively in tabular form the inner contradiction in Hepp’s assertions about the covenant of works.²⁷ Against Hepp, Schilder maintained with absoluteness that the covenant of grace lay in the trajectory of the covenant of works.²⁸ For that reason, he spotted a dangerous tendency toward “cultural antinomianism” in Hepp’s assertion that now we are no longer under law but under grace. Christ leads us back, after all, to obedience to God’s law—also to the original cultural mandate!²⁹

In the next issue of his magazine Schilder began a new series of articles under the title, “Bad consequences of Professor Hepp’s covenant perspective.” The first of these “bad

²⁵ *De Reformatie* 18 (19 November 1937): 97-99. In the same article Schilder pointed out that a term being used at that time in the field of jurisprudence, namely, “mutuus,” was used frequently by early theologians as a translation for “dipleuric” or “bilateral.” We will return to this aspect in our next section.

²⁶ Ibid., (26 November 1937): 106.

²⁷ Ibid., (3 December 1937): 114-116.

²⁸ Cf. our second chapter, § 2.2, especially pp. ?? (and notes 87 and 88).

²⁹ Again near the end of his life (in 1951) Schilder returned to this subject. In his *Compendium Ethiek* VI (lecture notes), 5, he referred to Hepp’s view, and over against it asserted that the substance of the covenant always remained the same: “After all, for the *foedus operum*, the covenant of works as well, the heart of the matter was ‘I am your God and the God of your seed.’ In a side comment Schilder (characteristically!) added: “The phrase ‘your God’ refers not merely to the loving, friendly God who gives presents, but also to the judging, punishing, righteous God, a God of favor and of fury. . . .” He resumed his argument with: “The ‘I am your God’ also means: obey the obligations that continue. . . . These obligations are essentially the same as those of the present time; Christ leads us back to the original obedience. Behind Hepp’s theory lies a particular Remonstrant notion, namely, that the covenant [here: the covenant of works, S.A.S.] is a pathway for coming to God. The covenant is no pathway, however, but the rule—by means of spoken words—for traveling the pathway.”

consequences” Schilder found to be “that Professor Hepp is not in a position either to properly evaluate or to endorse the Reformed development of the concept of ‘God’s co-worker’ (as referring to covenant man); more, that by virtue of his severing the nerve of the covenant idea (by denying the bilateral covenant), he is now compelled to fight against it.”³⁰ Over against Hepp’s view, Schilder firmly maintained (once again with numerous proofs from early Reformed theology), that *cooperatores Dei* had for centuries been a commonly accepted term within dogmatic theology. In the next article he asserted: “The preposition ‘co-’ receives its Scriptural content, and its legitimacy, from the doctrine of the *bilateral covenant*.”³¹ The notion of “God’s co-worker,” however, may not be set in contrast to the notion of “God’s *subordinate* worker” (as Hepp tried to do); the former does not *exclude* the latter (God and man are *unequal* parties in the covenant), but the former *includes* the latter (both God and man are *parties* in the covenant)! After the turn of the year, Schilder resumed his series. He pointed out first that an early Reformed theologian like De Moor had clearly fenced off his (Reformed) doctrine of cooperation against the Remonstrant talk about man working together with God.³² Schilder went on to identify Hepp’s fundamental mistake to be this: because he had separated the “co-working” from the doctrine of the covenant and had relocated it within the doctrine of providence, he had simultaneously expanded this notion to apply to all creatures in general, and consequently, as part of the doctrine of concursus (first and second causes), Hepp had rejected it. Schilder likewise rejected this dubious doctrine, but whenever he was dealing with the notion of “co-worker” (properly understood to be that of man with God, and not the other way around) in the context of the doctrine of the covenant, and thus having reference only to man, he held firmly to the legitimacy of this notion.³³

On this point Schilder wished to echo, among others, Professor W. Geesink, whose *Gereformeerde Ethiek* was published during this time (by none other than Hepp!) who had grounded man’s status of God’s co-worker in the covenant of works, and had talked about it as a continuing *Aufgabe* [mandate] also for us in our life of gratitude.³⁴

³⁰ *De Reformatie* 18 (10 December 1937): 122-123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, (17 December 1937): 130.

³² *Ibid.*, (7 January 1938): 154-155.

³³ *Ibid.*, (14 January 1938): 162-163.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, (21 January 1938): 171. What Schilder wrote in the rest of the series under the title “Various objections I-IV” (28 January 1938 and following) and in his concluding review (4 March 1938) provides no additional substantive contribution to the topic under consideration.

After Schilder had concluded this series of articles, by way of an epilogue, as it were, he returned to what for our investigation is an important aspect of the ongoing discussion. Under the title, “De in-stand-houder in stand gehouden” [“The Maintainer Maintained”], he wrote in part: “God maintains the covenant member; but that is not to say that God himself would now become the subject of the human action which we term ‘keeping the covenant’.” From this he drew the following conclusion: “Things go awry, then, if we deny that God maintains the human party; but they go awry also if we deny that the human party is genuinely a party to the covenant, genuinely keeps the covenant, and whose covenant keeping is of decisive significance for the history of the covenant.”³⁵

It was necessary to recount the two stages of this debate chronologically and with relative fulsomeness, for this provides us, at least implicitly, with Schilder’s answer to the question: What actually *is* the covenant? Especially from his penetrating and reasoned emphasis on the reality that the covenant member is God’s co-worker, it becomes evident that the covenant is a bilateral relationship between God and man, as the heading of this section suggests. Schilder could formulate this starting point in different ways, when he argued, for example, that the covenant (in its *proper* sense) is a *mutual conventio*, a reciprocal concourse of God and man.³⁶ Schilder insisted that one must take his starting point precisely *here*—in the bilateral covenant concourse. Then there will always be room to give adequate attention to what lies “behind” it—the unilateral establishment of the covenant.³⁷ When at one point he himself wrote systematically

³⁵ Ibid., (21 January 1938): 171. What Schilder wrote in the rest of the series, under the title “Remaining objections I-IV” (28 January 1938 and following), and in his concluding summary (4 March 1938), supplies nothing essentially new in terms of the topic that interests us here.

³⁶ *De Kerk* (lecture notes), 54. In the same section (cf. 85 and 87) he also stated: Defining the covenant in an *improper* sense reduces it to a bare arrangement or appointment. In another lecture (*Het verbond in de gereformeerde symbolen*, 22-23), Schilder pointed out that Ursinus and Olevianus maintained, in addition to the *adventio* (of God in Christ), also the *conventio* (the reciprocal element) in the covenant. This was also the foundational premise of the appeal to the synod submitted in June 1943 by ministers S. O. Los, J. H. Rietberg, R. Schipppers, M. B. van ‘t Veer, and F. de Vries: “It seems foreign that the explanation [of the synodical decision, S.A.S.] in its further definition of the covenant of grace has departed from the description that one finds in Calvin, Ursinus, and various Reformed theologians from the period of the Synod of Dort, namely, that the covenant is a reciprocal concourse (*mutua conventio*)” (*Verklaring van gevoelen met enkele bijlagen*, 54. Cf. also C. Veenhof, *Om de “Unica catholica”*, p. 173).

³⁷ In an important paragraph on page 311 of *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, vol. 1, Schilder wrote of our knowledge of God within the covenant: “It is a knowing that reflects upon what God has thought beforehand. It therefore returns from the end of all history that has been unfolded up to a particular moment, back to its beginning, to what lies behind it, to the eternal decree of God. It returns *from* bilateral covenant *concourse* to unilateral covenant *establishment*.”

about the covenant, his foundational premise was evident. For then he *began* his explanation this way: “1. According to the unanimous testimony of almost the entire corpus of classic Reformed theology, the covenant is a bilateral covenant. That is to say: in the covenant the ‘*mutual coming together*’ of God and man as two *parties*, a relationship governed by God, is within that regulation accepted by both; it is a *reciprocal* agreement. 2. That these parties are *unequal*, and then with an inequality as great as the qualitative difference between God and man, speaks for itself. This difference is *immeasurable*.”³⁸ Notice the order: first point 1 (starting point), then point 2 (background). Consequently, Schilder never neglected for that very reason to mention that every relationship in the covenant between God and man is defined by the inequality of the parties.³⁹ But he did not see any way to make this his starting point, for then one would be all too easily tempted to think: “man is *actually* not a ‘*genuine*’ party; and *actually* there is no reciprocity. . . .” Schilder wanted to avoid at all cost the view that the covenant would in this way once more be rendered powerless and robbed of its content. Therefore he held firmly “in full seriousness” to the *bilateral character* of the covenant.⁴⁰

Were we now to inquire concerning the motivation that lay behind Schilder’s clear emphasis, he left us with no uncertainty about this. He had to emphasize the bilateral character so that people could believe without doubt that God addresses man and deals with man in the

³⁸ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 317. The numbering appears in the first edition of the work (1939), p. 250.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 319-320. On pages 85-86 of his lecture notes, *De Kerk*, Schilder discussed the issue of the parties of the covenant. Suppose that we use a capital “P” to represent the divine party and a small “p” for the created party; we could then distinguish five possibilities: 1. *PP*: this refers to the counsel of peace. 2. *P+p*: this refers to the covenant of God with nature. “Since God provides merely an arrangement governing the creation, both God and creation are actually not parties.” So this should actually be *P+p*! 3. *Pp*: this represents the covenant between God and man. Concerning this, Schilder wrote: “It is created reciprocity, so there is a capital P, but then nonetheless there is genuine reciprocity. Here we must posit either one of two possibilities: either we pay attention only to the unilateral character, whereby man comes to stand on the same level with the other creatures, or it is the case that man is above the rest of the other creatures, and exists in a state of relating with God, albeit by virtue of God’s arrangement.” 4. *pp*: a covenant between people. 5. *p+p*: this applies to an expression like “I have made a covenant with my eyes.” At the end of his analysis, Schilder argued: “The covenant is denigrated when, in taking our words strictly, someone argues that the covenant is and remains unilateral.”

In connection with the issue of the parties in the covenant, we must also take note of the following claim argued by Schilder (in *De Reformatie* 20 [9 February 1940]: 150). Dr. A de Bondt had written somewhere, “The covenant of grace is absolutely monopoleuric,” and therefore all boasting is excluded. Over against this, Schilder argued, “The covenant of grace is absolutely dipoleuric (classic theology). It became so by means of God’s monopoleuric arrangement. There are two parties. The one Party is so great that he can make the other party—which in himself is too unequipped and incompetent for being a party within this fellowship—into a genuine ‘party,’ and therein the first Party is so sovereign that he indeed does this. That the other party accepts the promise and fulfills the demand is due exclusively to God. That he does this as a party to the covenant, and does not act like a stone or a lump, is similarly due to God. All (false) boasting is excluded. But boasting in the Lord has now become all the greater.”

⁴⁰ *Heidelberg Catechismus*, 1: 321.

covenant as a *genuine* and a *responsible* party.⁴¹ This motif of assigning responsibility echoes like a refrain throughout Schilder's writings. Scripture teaches us, he wrote, "that the covenant that God established with man, showed man from the very beginning already the sharp edge of this *two*-edged sword. In its *continuation* [as distinct from its *origination*] that covenant is *dipleuric*, it has *two* parties, and thus *before everything* it fixes man's responsibility, it loves man's responsibility, and it refuses to let that responsibility be forgotten."⁴² Before everything . . . man's responsibility! We are thus permitted to say that here we see one of Schilder's most fundamental ideas, yes, a ground motive (also of his covenant perspective). He himself verbalized this ground motive in the aphoristic expression, "Everything or nothing."⁴³ But then in this context, the phrase "everything or nothing" does *not* mean, "God, everything; man, nothing." On the contrary, here in particular it means that man (as God's co-worker in the covenant) finds himself within a zone of tension where he must make an unavoidable choice: either "everything" or "nothing." One who chooses for "everything" acts responsively and responsibly. He understands the bilateral covenant to involve reciprocal activity: God, "everything," and man, "everything"! But to argue that here (in the covenant) man needs to do "nothing," is to attempt in an illegitimate way to avoid responsibility, and is to end up with unresponsive and irresponsible passivity.

This emphasis on human responsibility is closely connected to Schilder's heartfelt conviction that the covenant always employs what exists at hand, in order to bring it to fuller

⁴¹ Ibid.; in the covenant, man is "not a zero, but he genuinely counts."

⁴² *Wat is de hemel?*, 243. Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2:365: "We can only conclude that this *constituting man as a responsible being belongs to the constitution* that God established for man's existence." And *ibid.*, 393: "But if someone at any point were to deny to the '*covenant*' this feature that on Scripture's authority we ascribe to the covenant the ultimate power of the constitutive element of individual responsibility under sanction of an absolute threat of eternal death, then we are left with a '*covenant*' that can no longer shoot the arrows of an *almighty* promise and an *almighty* threat from the bow of God's absolute freedom. . . ." Cf. also *Looze kalk*, 52: In and through the covenant, God stimulates, enlarges, and refines our responsibility, and this appeal to our responsibility "belongs to the constitutive, the essence-defining elements of the covenant."

Finally, we may refer in this context to a typical Schilderian formulation which appeared in the final chapter, in all three editions, of *De openbaring van Johannes en het sociale leven* (1st edition, 1924, 243; 2nd edition, 1925, 263; 3rd edition, 1951, 349): "History is from God; each day has enough of its own evil, but also enough of God's grace, which provides its recipient no *tranquility* in the howling storm without at the same time supplying a *motive* along with it" (*italics added*).

⁴³ Cf. the lecture notes, *Americana*, 11, where he wrote (with a deliberate reference to this "everything or nothing"): "People watch bears dance on a heated floor. You could view the covenant in the same way. It stokes the fires hot. Nothing makes for greater responsibility. In the covenant, responsibility is infinitely intensified." Schilder explained that this was the reason why he wanted to emphasize covenant wrath, namely, to show "that the covenant does indeed incite responsibility" (10).

development.⁴⁴ Thus, the covenant of works employs man's created freedom, without in any way compromising the security of the covenant, grounded in God's freedom (also something existing "at hand"). "Human freedom rests as created freedom within divine freedom. The forward deck anchor is God's own freedom and God's own arrangement. Through faith man sees the second freedom, takes refuge within the covenant of works in God himself, and in this way reaches the self-unfolding and development of his own freedom."⁴⁵ In exactly the same way, the covenant of grace never shortchanges "human freedom in the sense of human responsibility." "In this way, through faith, which is a covenant demand, my responsibility is addressed, my freedom is acknowledged, and I arrive with Christ to the security that he obtained for me. When I believe in Christ and increase in that faith, the two parties are seen more and more in their freedom. For me, God becomes ever more rich, I start doing things out of gratitude, for the Lord's sake."⁴⁶

With his unequivocal emphasis on human responsibility (and freedom), Schilder sought in every way possible to honor God's sovereignty (and freedom). Put another way: with his view of the covenant, he did not intend to neutralize election. Therefore he emphasized incessantly alongside the dipleuric continuation also the monopleuric origination of the covenant.⁴⁷ In this monopleuric moment, the confession of election was maintained. But the reverse is equally true: Schilder refused to understand election in such a way that election would render the covenant impotent. We may "never dare to speak any word about election apart from man's own responsibility."⁴⁸ With various formulations Schilder tried to maintain the balance between covenant (a bilateral relationship) and election (a unilateral arrangement). Repeatedly he focused attention in this context of Isaiah 54:5, concerning which he said once in a sermon: "It is written, 'Your Maker is your husband.'" This proverb is the 'a-b-c' of the covenant. God created man and recreated him through regeneration. He is the Maker and the Father. That Maker now becomes,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cf. in addition to what has already been mentioned, his discussion of Genesis 15 in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 2:97-103. This was part of a planned collection, to have been entitled "Alles of niets." Concerning the fact that while Abraham slept, God walked the "avenue of blood" all by himself, Schilder wrote (102): "... that is the *revelation* of that *entirely unique character* of the covenant of grace, which on this day begins a new stage with Abraham. In this stage, God the Lord says to us that he wants the covenant in its *continuation* to have *two* parties, but that in its *origination*, in its *possibility*, in its *foundation*, God was setting up the covenant in dependence upon his own purely *uni-lateral* arrangement."

⁴⁸ *Wat is de hel?*, 147. On the same page, he spoke also of "the complete compatibility of [divine] election and [human] responsibility."

in Christ Jesus, the church's *Husband*.”⁴⁹ Precisely how the relationship between covenant and election must be viewed was not developed any further by Schilder at this point. At its deepest level this relationship is a wonderful mystery.⁵⁰ What becomes evident here, in any case, is that we must strictly *distinguish* covenant from election without *separating* them. Covenant and election (dipleuric and monopleuric) may not be identified. But neither may they be abstracted from one another: monopleuric origination and dipleuric continuation remain, after all is said and done, two aspects of one reality.

In the ecclesiastical conflict surrounding the Liberation, the relationship between covenant and election was frequently part of that dispute.⁵¹ Supporters of the synodical decision pointed out that whereas the synod proceeded from two lines (covenant and election), the objectors acknowledged only one line (covenant). Schilder did not recognize himself in these polarized classifications. When he defended himself against such an accusation, he provided a definition of the covenant that can serve quite suitably as the conclusion to this section: “*Covenant* is the reciprocal *agreement* between God and his people, originating through himself, and maintained (by virtue of his gracious work) by God himself and his people as two ‘parties.’ In terms of the respective elements pertaining to each party, it is defined by *his speaking*, by his *Word* (promise and demand). And through this speaking he executes his counsel of election, as well as his counsel of reprobation (insofar as this latter is a prior arrangement unto punishment specifically regarding despising the covenant of grace administration).”⁵² On the one hand, this “definition” offers a summary of those themes we have already discussed, while on the other hand, it also sets forth our task for the rest of this chapter, by referring to aspects of the structure of the covenant that we must now unfold.

⁴⁹ *Preken*, 2:414ff., in a sermon on Matthew 12:39, preached on 12 April 1942. Cf. for an outworking of the same thought, the lecture notes on *De Kerk*, pp. 84-85, where he wrote: “Being our Maker refers to God as Creator in his transcendence and as Father upon whom everything depends. Being our Husband refers to the immanence, the fellowship, the bilateral relationship, his voluntary binding. . . . Both elements are included in this wonderful ground rule for our covenant understanding: *origination* and *continuation*.”

⁵⁰ Also in connection with Genesis 15 (see note 47 above), *op cit.*, p. 100, Schilder wrote: Abraham knew “that in all covenants there are included two parties, and that with *this* covenant also, in view of the choice of the ancient ceremony, nothing could be taken away from it on that score, but rather that *here of all places* a miracle occurs that had never before been observed with any other human covenant. For here already the idea begins to take on a fixed form, that in *this* covenant a mystery should be displayed, which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined.”

⁵¹ Cf. C. Trimp, *Tot een levendige troost Zijns volk*, passim.

⁵² *Looze kalk*, 66. Cf. the heading of that section (64): “The ‘lines’ game.”

3.2 The forensic character of the covenant

It has become clear from the first section of this chapter how Schilder responded to the question: What is the covenant? According to him, it must be stated in the first place that the covenant is a (bilateral) *relationship* between God and man. This formulation expresses the most essential feature of the structure of the covenant. The next question to be answered is this: What is the unique nature of that (covenant) relationship? Stated another way: How must we further describe the character of this covenant?

Anyone who investigates Schilder's theology with a view to answering this question is struck by the remarkable fact that he frequently characterized the relationship between God and man as a *forensic* relationship [*regs-verhouding*]. His description employs particular forensic or juridical terminology, such as "stipulations" and "sanctions," among others. Although these expressions appear especially in his later publications, even his early writings show a certain interest in the forensic aspects of the gospel. For that reason, it is important to investigate something of his course of development in this connection. If in this way we take note of how Schilder gradually came under the conviction that the forensic character of the covenant had to be emphasized prominently, we can simultaneously obtain clarity about his reasons and goal for doing so.

As early as 1926, Schilder wrote the following in a meditation on Luke 16:17: "There are those who find it irreverent, or too cold, or too rationalistic, to wrestle hard with the *justice* of God. They don't care to know that there are people who do not *dare* to separate the question of their being accepted by God from the other question, whether God's *justice* has been satisfied. They are horrified by a '*blood theology*' which speaks of Christ's *substitution as surety* in order to let justice run its course. Such people *protest against Christ*. . . . For heaven will sooner disappear than I will be saved *apart from justice*."⁵³ A few years later, in 1930, he developed this theme further in various places in his extensive trilogy on the suffering of Christ. For example, he wrote that Jesus' life perpetually involved the great "*lawsuit*" (between God and man): "For

⁵³ *Schrifoverdenkingen* [Scripture meditations], 1: 157 (reprinted from the daily devotional *Goud, wierook en myrrhe* [Gold, frankincense and myrrh]).

Christ did not come merely to work powerfully. He came also, even in the *first* place, to restore *justice*. The salvation he desires to accomplish is *first forensic* Through his pure *sacrificing* and complete *atonement* toward God he desires first of all to lay the forensic foundation beneath the threshold of the living temple, which is the church.”⁵⁴ Such a formulation already implies something of a connection between *covenant* (of which Christ is the Mediator) and *justice* (here: God’s justice). This connection was discussed more explicitly when he wrote concerning Christ that “as covenant breaker” he was forsaken by God on the cross. To this he added that we cannot understand anything more “about the ‘*how*’ concerning the things in this justice-dispensation involving justice-withholding” than that “obtaining the peace of the covenant through suffering the wrath of the covenant” must have been infinitely painful for Christ.⁵⁵ Also in Schilder’s book dealing with hell, written in 1932, there lie traces, perhaps implicit, of a connection between covenant and justice. For in that treatise he proceeded from the premise that no meaningful word can be written about hell apart from the idea of the covenant. Therefore he emphasized that the punishment of hell (what he termed a “*covenant statute*”) must be proclaimed as such in the *covenant arena* to *covenant breakers*.⁵⁶

It was around 1935 for the first time, however, that Schilder published formulations in which the covenant was expressly described as God’s decisive “act of justice” in Christ Jesus. When he reflected on the cosmic significance of Christ, Schilder repeatedly described the eschatological peace of the consummated covenant of nature (the fulfilled sabbath) as something forensic. He concluded that line of thought then by saying, “God—the sovereign God, the only

⁵⁴ *Christ in His Suffering*, vol 1, pp. 116-117ENG??. Cf. also pp. 118-119ENG??.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 391. Cf. also vol. 2, pp. 81ff., where Jesus’ silence before the high priest is discussed in terms of a forensic courtroom scene. In the second edition of this second volume (1951) this chapter was expanded and consciously placed with the context of the covenant. In a section not appearing in the first edition (vol. 2, p. 117) reference is made to Isa. 50, with this comment: “A trusted figure: one brings his complaints before the court . . . before the forum of the covenant.” Christ is called “Synegor” (DefendantENG??) and the Sanhedrin “qategors” (accusersENG??). In the same context (p. 123) we read: “The Passion becomes . . . the great administration of *justice* to Christ himself and to the world.” This provides a small indication of this persistent theme in the trilogy: through his atoning death Christ made the new covenant legally effectual. Cf. *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 84, where he writes about Christ as Surety and Mediator of the new covenant: “Here the doctrinal notion of establishing the covenant, ratifying the covenant, surfaces,” and p. 228, where Christ’s work is with the help of the “goel” figure in the Old Testament: “From this series of ideas, light is wonderfully shed on the familiar and so frequently misunderstood phrase: *Mediator of the covenant of grace*; that is to say, The One who had been promised within the covenant sphere, for the covenant people, in the covenant *promises* and other covenant *statutes*, now comes to *establish* (sancire, ratificare) . . . [all of these] in the *facts* of his *actions* as redeemer or savior.”

⁵⁶ *What Is Hell?*, 3rd edition, p. 194-195. In *What Is Heaven?*, this idea is verbalized still more clearly in the expression, “*All punishment is covenant wrath, for all sin is covenant breaking*” (pp. 238, 241-243).

law-giver, judge, court appointer; God, forensically speaking, first to himself (pactum salutis, sabbath God) and speaking forensically for that *reason*, by that *standard*, and after that *moment*, to man (covenant of grace, our sabbath). It is a deep delight to be *Reformed*.⁵⁷ During that same year his well-known pamphlet appeared dealing with the ecclesiastical debate, containing a heading that made clear that Schilder in no way saw a contradiction between covenant and justice: “Forensic registration, but before the covenant court.”⁵⁸ In that pamphlet Schilder accused brothers in the national Dutch Reformed Church [Hervormde Kerk] of holding to a mistaken view of the covenant. That the prophets of the old covenant had proclaimed to the ancient people, in specific concrete circumstances, that God would not reject them even though they had forsaken him, provided no modern person any warrant for appealing to God’s covenant faithfulness in order to argue the continuing validity of a particular church group. On the contrary, it is precisely the idea of covenant that has done away with all forms of “quietism” and summons people to deeds of covenant obedience—also with regard to the church!⁵⁹ In order to defend this truth, Schilder had appealed the year before (1934), in connection with the right to ecclesiastical secession, to Micah 6 (the lawsuit between God and his people) as follows: “For Micah, the *prophet*, knew indeed that the phrase ‘*covenant of grace*’ is no pillow for lazy reclining. . . . On the contrary, Micah knows, and teaches, that conscience has no sharper stimulus in all the world, no more forceful incitement against false security in Zion, than precisely the covenant of grace. . . . The establishing of the covenant itself is already . . . an entering into a *forensic* covenant, back and forth, a *forensic* relationship between two parties, a *forensic* relationship desired through love. If the people are placed within the same *forensic* context with their God, then they must also undergo a *lawsuit* that the Lord initiates against his people. That is not a *disruption* of the covenant, but rather its maintenance.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *What Is Heaven?*, pp. 312-319. Cf. in the same volume the paragraphs on pp. 237-246, which in fact are verbally similar to the two articles in *De Reformatie*, 15 (30 August 1935 and following): “‘Covenant’—constitutional word for ‘all flesh’.” Notice the expression “constitutional”!

⁵⁸ “*Ons aller moeder*” [“*Mother of Us All*”], p. 38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61ff.

⁶⁰ “Beginsel, recht and betekenis der Afscheiding,” [“The Principle, Validity, and Significance of the Secession”], published in *De Kerk*, 2: 84. Cf. p. 106: “the *forensic character* of the covenant is again placed in full light . . . the covenant posits the strongest of all forensic norms and therefore maintains the sharpest of all forensic stimuli. . . . covenant is the most extreme forensic act. . . .” How important a role that Micah 6 played for Schilder as Scripture proof of the forensic character of the covenant is shown by the fact that he repeatedly returned to this subject (especially in this time period). For example, see his 1934 meditation (published in *Schriftoverdenkingen* 2: 17-18) where he mentions “the forensic connectedness of God’s covenant of grace.” In 1936 he wrote three meditations on this same Scripture passage for the anticipated volume of essays entitled *Alles of niets*, which were entitled “The covenant, the possibility (the certainty, and the settling) of the Lord’s lawsuit” (*ibid.*, pp. 112-119). Cf.

To return to 1935, at the very end of that year Schilder wrote an important article in light of Acts 3:20-21: “I believe in the universal ‘restoration’.” Here he argued, on the basis of what ??INITIAL?? Oepke had written in an article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, that this passage involves the restoration of forensic relationships. After discussing the covenant of works (in which man was already obligated to view death as the maintaining of God’s justice), he concluded his article this way: “Whoever scans the horizon (in terms of the new year about to dawn, S.A.S.), let him seek the *justice of the Lord*. . . . On Old Year’s evening, the pietist seeks the apokatastasis of himself. The pagan can do that as well. The servant of the living God seeks the apokatastasis of everything according to the claims of justice. Wonderful, wonderful, already in seeking that fulfillment of the claims of justice he shares in it; he again occupies his place. Justice has taken him and brought him along in grace.”⁶¹

After the synod of 1936, the debate concerning the covenant problematic had obtained significant momentum. Once again Schilder's avid opponent, Professor V. Hepp, pointed out objections against the former’s “all too forensic” formulations regarding the covenant. He objected especially to Schilder’s use of the term “sanctions,” for, he wrote, this led “to thinking more in terms of a national treaty agreement than of the covenant of works.”⁶² In responding to this accusation, Schilder appealed to Herman Witsius, among others, who had also used this term. This was related to the conviction of early Reformed theologians that the bilateral character of the covenant implied a mutual obligation (*mutua obligatio*) between the two parties (God and man). “Everyone who encounters the word ‘mutuus’ (which often served as a rendering of the term *dipleuric*) in the theological formulations during this fertile period, in this same period in which the theological faculty made use of this word, one also encounters the forensic idea of ‘mutuum’ (reciprocal) as that was developed in the science of jurisprudence. . . . One cannot separate the theological terms of that early period from the juridical usage of those days.”⁶³ Alongside the Scriptural basis (Micah 6) Schilder thus found here the dogma-historical basis for

also the editorial in *De Reformatie*, 16 (31 January 1936), pp. 137-138, “Our position regarding the ‘adiaphora’,” where he again stated in so many words that Micah (as well as Christ himself in Rev. 2 in the letter to Thyatira) was discussing the “forensic character of the covenant of the Lord with his people.

⁶¹ *De Reformatie*, 16 (27 December 1935), 98, reprinted in *Schriftoverdenkingen* 2: 79-84.

⁶² *Dreigende deformatie*, 4: 79. At this point Hepp provided a citation from Schilder from 1936, which we have used in our second chapter (p. ??, note 84).

⁶³ *De Reformatie*, 18 (19 November 1937), 98. Schilder did not deny that on the basis of this, later theologians treated the covenant “more like a contract,” but this was not their original intention. In the same article (p. 90), he referred also to Gomar, who in his inaugural address in Leiden gave prominent place to the mutual obligation between God and man in the covenant.

his emphasis on the forensic character of the covenant. The importance of this matter for him appears also from his lectures in 1939. When discussing “the famous question whether the covenant is unilateral or bilateral,” he stated: “Concerning this theologians have spoken clearly. The fact that one takes notice of the forensic element shows that one often comprehends covenant theology in juridical terms. By virtue of the forensic stipulation the forensic context comes back. Terms like *mutuum*, or bilateral, came to be used. This word was investigated during the period of Leiden theology also among the faculty of jurisprudence.”⁶⁴

Schilder returned to this matter again when he investigated the historical background of the confessional formulations dealing with the covenant. At that point he drew attention to the so-called stipulation theory found already in the *Erlautherer Bekenntnis* of 1562.⁶⁵ According to Schilder, the well-known C. F. K. Müller, in his discussion of this confession, had observed that already here one finds the first traces of a scholastic treatment of the doctrine of the covenant are encountered, according to which the covenant is viewed so mechanistically and juridically that it comes to resemble a formal notary document, such that the promise character of the covenant is pressed into the background. In his response to this criticism, Schilder wrote: “We admit that the covenant was indeed viewed too juridically, but this is not to be blamed on the use of the term ‘stipulations,’ etc., but on the fact *that people had forgotten the inequality of the parties*. As a consequence of that, the contract idea became prominent. This presupposes, however, *equality* of the parties, and we can call this the primeval premise of all heresy. In all covenant two parts are included: promise and demand. Now, the covenant (also) involves two parties, and for that reason there is bi-directional traffic. Then there must also be mutual stipulations. God promises something and for that reason we demand, and vice-versa. Thus promise and demand possess covenantal forensically binding significance.”⁶⁶ Although Schilder nowhere fully developed this historical basis, this fragment nevertheless shows clearly that he did *not* consider a reference to the forensic character of the covenant to be a phenomenon accompanying the (later) corrosion of Reformed theology.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Americana* lecture, p. 8. With reference to the terms *stipulatio* and *ad-* or *re-stipulatio* Schilder pointed to the connection between (contemporary) church polity and (earlier) covenant theology.

⁶⁵ *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen* (lectures), pp. 4, 69ff.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁷ Cf. his discussion of the synodical “replacement formula” in *De Reformatie*, 22 (14 January 1947), 105, where he wrote (with reference to the Preface of the Statenvertaling and the Westminster Confession) that reciprocal stipulations can function only where one party puts conditions to the other party.

This overview of the route along which Schilder came to the conviction that the covenant possessed a forensic character was necessary. For it provides some sense of the sphere in which this theological insight came to be developed. It also clarifies the intention with which Schilder moved into the foreground precisely this forensic character of the covenant. This emphasis was related to the fundamental starting point of his doctrine of the covenant. What we observed in the preceding paragraphs appears to be true here as well: for him this involved primarily making man responsible as a genuine and serious party to the covenant. In the covenant as a bilateral forensic relationship man is placed by God under the burden of the “absolute seriousness” with which Christ spoke his “absolute saying”: “everything or nothing.” In this saying, on the one hand, the sounds of certainty and comfort (“assurance”) became audible (the *faithfulness* of God!), while on the other hand and at the same time also sounds of the intensifying or our responsibility (the *justice* of God!).⁶⁸

That this formed the heartbeat of Schilder’s theology was observed by others as well. After his death, one of his colleagues wrote, “Our brother reflected much on the justice of God. He pondered deeply over, and assimilated what he found in the Word concerning this justice. For him that justice was no abstraction, no imaginary entity above and beyond his own life, but it was a concrete reality. He himself trembled before that justice of God, he himself was broken under that justice, he learned to lay hold of Christ as his righteousness before God, and finally came to love that justice from his heart. He became a contender for the justice of the Lord. At that point, as he searched the Scriptures, he found that the lawsuits of God are conducted in the context, in the forensic context, of the covenant, and he identified and explained, more clearly than those who came before him, the justice and the forensic speech of God in his covenant.”⁶⁹ Although these words are mixed with a kind of biographical amazement, nevertheless his dogmatics are altogether “right-ly” characterized!

By analyzing his thought in this way, we believe that we can penetrate to the firm center of Schilder’s view of the covenant. Precisely at this point we see that a joint in his thinking is exposed where the various parts of his covenant perspective fit together with each other. The covenant is a *bilateral relationship*. This displays a *forensic character*. Therefore this covenant

⁶⁸ Cf. the meditation on Matt. 13:11 in *De Reformatie*, 15 (15 March 1935), reprinted in *Schriftoverdendingen*, 2: 58-60. The title was, “The Preacher of the ‘everything or nothing’.”

⁶⁹ Deddens, P., “Professor Dr. K. Schilder, vindicating the justice of God,” in *Gedenkt uw voorgangeren*, p. 31.

contains reciprocal *stipulations* of promise and demand, along with *sanctions* of imparting reward and threatening punishment! We will return in the following section to this last-mentioned structural element of the covenant. Since his conviction regarding the forensic character of the covenant performed such an important role within the entirety of Schilder's covenant perspective, however, we must continue discussing this conviction further at this point. We want to pay close attention to the theological connection in which he discussed this forensic character of the covenant in his post-war publications.

If you work through Schilder's expansive commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, you will discover repeatedly, at one point more briefly, at another more extensively, references to the covenant.⁷⁰ What is remarkable is that in most of these instances, Schilder used suggestive expressions relating to the forensic character of the covenant. In many of these instances one gets the impression that he is proceeding on the basis of an axiom that he need not defend. Furthermore, it cannot be said that he pulled this presupposition out of thin air. Behind this starting point lay rather strong theological arguments which in turn rested on an entire series of Scriptural givens. Especially in soteriology Schilder made it clear that those biblical givens dealing with the heart of the gospel, such as sin and grace, must be viewed as "*forensic matters*."⁷¹ Concerning the Fall into sin, he wrote, "Apostasy is . . . *a covenant issue*: and covenant issues are not trivial: They lie clasped within the tightest possible forensic grip."⁷² This is related to the anthropological conviction that man, created in God's image, was from the very beginning embraced with all his qualities in the covenant. Repeatedly this original covenant was described as a "forensic relationship." ORIG: rechtsverband, but I WONDER IF IT MUST BE?? rechtsverbond⁷³ It was only man, and not the rest of the creatures, who came to stand with God in a covenant relationship. "But human beings were created in such a way that they were never 'justice-indifferent creatures'; they received an *office*, they stand amid *forensic* involvement and are placed in a forensic grip that always presupposed their *responsibility*. . . ."⁷⁴ Through his Word God first called man out, and then called him forth as a party in "a covenant with promise and demand, with statutes, conditions, stipulations, legal norms, which are binding and are

⁷⁰ Cf. chapter 1, pp. ???

⁷¹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 206.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 258, 262.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 89.

accepted as binding.”⁷⁵ In the doctrinal section dealing with original sin, one must note that Adam, as “legal person” or “legal figure,”⁷⁶ occupied the office of a “‘public person’ in a federal world-embracing forensic act.”⁷⁷ We are all included with Adam in a “legal relationship.”⁷⁸ Mere genetic is not decisive here: “the bond of *blood* is placed under the right of covenant relationship.”⁷⁹ Here we find the forensic basis for the imputation of Adam’s guilt to his posterity, though this does not exclude the idea that we all indeed sinned along with him.⁸⁰

In view of the fact that the covenant between God and man is a created legal relationship, God’s punishment for human sin must be seen as “legal retribution for covenant justice violated.”⁸¹ This punishing “*legal administration* of almighty God”⁸² occurred on the basis of the fact that as Lawgiver, God never dispenses with the original law (as the rule for covenant concourse).⁸³ In addition to the doctrines of creation, humanity, and sin, the forensic character of the covenant was also grounded in the doctrine of God as such. Concerning this doctrine Schilder had firm convictions. Not only God’s love, but also his hatred existed from eternity: “For God’s hatred is actually a form of love; namely, of that eternal love which God shows to himself. . . . This eternal self-love of God is also eternal hatred; that is to say, from eternity to eternity this hatred rejects everything that is not directed unto him as unto the first and the last. Hatred is the ‘other side’ of this self-love, as we express it haltingly in our defective linguistic usage.”⁸⁴ Because Schilder’s doctrine of God has in large measure already been analyzed (and criticized) by others before us, we consider it unnecessary to enter deeply into this subject.⁸⁵ What interests

⁷⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3: 95.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 392. Cf. also p. 422: public “*legal person*” instead of “*fateful person*” (Max Scheler).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1: 329.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 346.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 347. Cf. p. 352 concerning the “two lines” that Schilder wanted to trace in connection with original sin (in the footsteps of Greijdanus): “The *one* was the line of cooperation, which is to say: having sinned ourselves in Adam and along with him. The *other* was the line of God’s judicial determination, whereby room was made for Adam’s judicial position in the covenant.” Cf. also vol. 4, p. 86-87, where Schilder wrote that Rom. 5:19 (“many were made sinners”) points to “a *judicial decision* of God.”

⁸¹ Ibid., 1: 435.

⁸² Ibid., 414.

⁸³ Ibid., 400-401. Cf. also pp. 72-76 for the relationship between covenant and law, in Paradise and at Sinai.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 488.

⁸⁵ Cf. J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, especially pp. 159-166, 276-279, 289ff. In his study Douma also drew on others before him who criticized Schilder on this point. Douma himself appreciated the fact that Schilder had called attention to the wrath and judgment of God, but he nonetheless saw the need to criticize Schilder’s theological outworking of this matter. He criticized especially Schilder’s thoroughgoing parallelism between God’s love and God’s hatred on the basis of (what one could call) an eternal equilibrium construction (cf. pp. 330-331).

us here is the indisputable connection between this approach in the doctrine of God and the accentuation of the forensic character of the covenant. This appears, for example, when Schilder wrote: “Nevertheless since the creature *as such* can never be the object of divine hatred, because the Maker can only love his handiwork (. . .) therefore God brings the creature partially unto himself in such a relationship, that they *come to stand in a forensic relationship*: angel and man; at the same time, they can decide in freedom for or against the legal ordinances that the Lord established. Then immediately the already-present love emerges, and thus also the already-present hatred, which the Lord God in the prior concourse and conversation with this creature had already declared not only in terms of the reward or blessing, but also in terms of the wrath of his punishing righteousness.”⁸⁶ At all cost Schilder wanted to prevent God’s righteousness from being swallowed up by his mercy. Therefore in his extensive confrontation with Luther (in which he also included Barth incidentally) he opposed the view that the “works of God’s right hand” would be seen as more valuable than “the works of his left hand.”⁸⁷ From this emphatic maintaining of the righteousness of God a line runs directly to the forensic character of the covenant. For Schilder, God is never just “love”; he is also “Hater”⁸⁸ and “Zealot”⁸⁹—and this from eternity! For this reason, thus goes the reasoning, God, who is both the electing and the reprobating God, needed to create a forensic context within which he could execute his purpose and right to judge and to punish justly. This forensic context is the covenant.⁹⁰

From the doctrine of the atonement a particular line is visible as well, one whereby covenant and justice are brought into relation. We referred to this in passing already.⁹¹ Zion will be *saved* through *justice* (cf. Isa. 1:27)! For that reason Schilder could write about Christ’s work of atonement this way: “the struggle against Satan is then not (in Gnostic fashion) a wrestling of

⁸⁶ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 488-489.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3: 317ff. and 428ff. On pp. 345-346, Schilder opposed the expression of Voltaire, for example (which he himself described as): “God’s love as the main thing; his wrath as merely incidental” (heading at top of p. 346). On p. 429 he addressed a question to Barth’s position: “Who gives you the right to ascribe a ‘pre’ to *mercy*; if there is a ‘pre,’ why then is that not attached to *wrath* as well?” J. T. Bakker discussed Schilder’s interpretation of Luther critically in his dissertation, *Coram Deo*, especially pp. 67ff. and 197ff., *passim*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:489. Cf. pp. 503ff., where Schilder proceeded from the “faith presupposition” regarding the “simplicity” of God and refused to acknowledge any “chief attribute” in God, whether his mercy or his righteousness. Speaking of “God’s philanthropy” Schilder found to be “the banal thought-product, or rather fantasy-product, of Remonstrants, and humanists”!

⁸⁹ In the sense of “filled with zeal”: *ibid.*, 486; the same in vol. 4, pp. 143-144.

⁹⁰ Cf. vol. 4, p. 116: “the electing and reprobating God sees in each individual the material through which he will at some point manifest himself: merciful but also strict, and always *primevally* covenantally forensically.”

⁹¹ Cf. note 55 above.

force with *counter-force*, but of *covenant* breaking with covenant restoration: by virtue of Christ's right [recht]."⁹² This right to restore the covenant Christ obtained on the cross, about which one can also say that the cross includes first of all a "justice element": satisfying God's justice in a "lawsuit."⁹³ The salvation that Christ obtained in this manner is offered in the preaching of the gospel. But against this background of "lawfully regulated covenant concourse," there can be no talk of a "'friendly offer' (*of choosing*, according to a person's taste or mood or personal whim)." This offer occurs "in terms of fixed legal stipulations, and in terms of the grip of the law of covenant concourse and of the highest federal authority." The offer of the gospel is not "*well-meant*" ("in cafeteria style," like a hostess offers some pastries which a person can pass up). No, this is "*well-meant*," "intended." "'To offer' is to perform a juridical act in conformity with agreed-upon stipulations made known beforehand within the covenant sphere formed by the summons proceeding from the gospel. A 'proposing' with authority, a putting forth without apology, that is to say: appealing to responsibility and bringing to decision in such a way as to remove all innocence."⁹⁴ This presentation is related to Schilder's convictions that Christ cannot be called Savior without further qualification. For he appeared in history "as Savior-Redeemer and as Savior-Destroyer. The constitutive element lies in both functions: his evangelical salvation work, that refuses ever to be a negligible quantity."⁹⁵

From these facts it should be clear that this forensic character of the covenant is no Fremdkörper [alien element] in the totality of Schilder's theology, but that this was embedded in the entire complex of doctrinal loci. So criticism of that feature will have to take into account all these lines of connection that have been mentioned. When we consider further the criticism of Schilder's views expressed in this connection, it is obvious that no one (operating from a Reformed position) can deny that the covenant displays a forensic character. But for Schilder the

⁹² *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, 1: 463.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2: 191. Cf. vol. 1, p. 44: "restoration of justice *precedes* moral restoration," even as justification precedes sanctification.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 250-251. Cf. the entire section (pp. 237-260), where mention is made repeatedly of a "forensic offer." This theme was (partially) the subject of the dissertation of A. C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*. Unfortunately De Jong referred only incidentally in a footnote on p. 149 to the forensic character of the covenant: "In so far as Schilder defines this *oer-verbond* [primeval covenant] exclusively in terms of forensic relationships a question about Schilder's covenant views presents itself. In a more detailed study of his covenant views particular attention should be directed to this question: In how far does Schilder reduce the covenant of grace to a forensic relationship to the exclusion of the covenant as a communion of life?" It remains on our agenda to provide an answer to this question within the scope of this study, but then only when we have come to the end.

⁹⁵ *Christus en cultuur* [Christ and Culture], p. 65. Cf. the 1948 meditation on Acts 17:31, "The judgment by the Man," in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 3: 326.

forensic character of the covenant is not simply and merely one among many features affecting one or another stage of this history of the covenant (e.g., the covenant of works), or affecting one or another dimension of the structure of the covenant (e.g., the external side). Rather, for him the entire structure of the entire covenant is decisively determined and qualified by this forensic character. Schilder alludes to this when he returns to the critical comment of Hepp (that his view recalls more a “covenant treaty” than the covenant itself),⁹⁶ when he writes: “The *subjectivism in the doctrine of the covenant* must necessarily incline one toward diminishing the *sanctions*, and the assuming of *stipulations*, and the *establishing of covenant statutes*, with that ugly term: ‘*juridical*,’ although in Reformed theology the word ‘*forensic*,’ a far better term, has come to be preferred; that ugly term seeks to have the ‘*juridical*’ apparatus identified with those features belonging to the (*merely*) ‘*external*’ side of the covenant, fails to understand that one who assigns a ‘*Word of God*’ to the (*merely*) *external* is really taking an Anabaptist rather than a Reformed approach.”⁹⁷ In those days those belonging to the Liberated Reformed Churches were being accused of permitting the covenant to be identified with what at that time was termed the “external side” of the covenant.⁹⁸ In defending himself against this charge, Schilder appealed again to the forensic character of the covenant. The so-called “covenant in its external side” was, for him, not something belonging to a subsequent order, but an indispensable “spiritual” benefit: “It is the Word-entry gate, through which the Lord brings *all* of them, elect and non-elect, into what the ancients call: the sheepfold. It is the forensic arrangement that can ignore none of them. Put another way, it is the judicial status ordained by the *speaking* God, the God of *the Word*, ordained for *all* of them, for those who would subsequently say ‘Yes,’ and for those who would subsequently say ‘No’—who together passed by the church’s baptismal font when they were but infants. In view of the fact that the proclamation of their judicial status included a warning as well, the Lord is taking into account both the subsequent ‘No’ just as much as the later ‘Yes.’”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Cf. note 62 above.

⁹⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2:381, note 1. Cf. 1:267, where in connection with man as body and soul, Schilder says: “Where there is something ‘external,’ there is also something ‘internal,’ and vice versa.” In a related footnote, he comments: “For that reason it is very dangerous, with Dr. J. Ridderbos, to apply the ‘geographical-spatial’ terminology of internal-external to forensic relationships and connections, such as the *covenant*.”

⁹⁸ By J. Ridderbos, for example, in his *Kerkscheuring* [*Church Split*], p. 3: “So the covenant is not simply an inner, unbreakable fellowship between God and His own, not an eternal covenant with God; but it is identified as a certain kind of position in which man is brought unto God, one that is referred to especially as a forensic position. In short, it comes to be identified with something that all covenant children have in common, something therefore that does not include salvation.”

⁹⁹ *Looze kalk*, 12-13.

From this citation we see that for Schilder, the forensic character of the covenant was related to the doctrine of the sacraments as well, especially that of baptism—an issue to which we will devote attention in a subsequent section. But this kind of formulation gives rise to the question whether such an approach can do justice to the reality that since the Fall, the covenant is nonetheless a covenant of *grace*. Schilder entertained this question only briefly. In defense of his position, he appealed to the early Reformed theologians “who formulated the doctrine of the covenant in the *forensic* form which came later to be treated in theology far too much as a ‘juridical’ forensic form. This latter feature may be considered objectionable in view of the fact that ‘jus’ and ‘fac,’ human justice and divine justice, must be kept distinct; nevertheless, among these early theologians one thing was perfectly clear: God’s covenant established a (unique) *forensic* position, a forensic status. Naturally, for each of us it is firmly established that this forensic position was created by the divine administration of *grace*. It is thus a *grace-administered-justice* that we are talking about. But it is still *justice*. Justice received. Justice created. Justice proclaimed. Justice established. Justice ordained by God. Covenant justice. To which He bound *Himself* voluntarily, and to which He now binds us.”¹⁰⁰

From this evidence it is clear that Schilder consistently and with increasing conviction maintained that in the covenant minimally there can and does exist no contradiction between grace and justice. That this viewpoint does not yet provide adequate answers to every possible question regarding the structure of the covenant is, however, also clear. For example, how must the forensic character of the covenant be related to the fellowship between God and his people, the so-called substance of the covenant? Did Schilder maintain at this point a kind of form-content paradigm? Or is it the case that with this accent, Schilder in fact tended toward a formalistic and legalistic externalizing of the covenant? Further discussion of this problem is reserved for our final chapter, where all the aspects of his doctrine of the covenant can be considered together.

3.3 The constitutive components of the covenant

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 49, with reference to the “covenant lawsuit” in Micah 6.

In order to continue following the thread of our investigation more easily, perhaps it may be useful to begin this section with one of Schilder's most complete explanations of what he meant by "covenant":

"Personally we are convinced that a sharp distinction needs to be made between the 'counsel of peace' and the 'covenant of grace'; that covenant and election are not to be identified; that the covenant of grace was established within time, and done so really with man by means of appropriate word revelation, which made possible, and introduced, and called into existence a genuine, historical covenant establishment; that not only promise and demand, but also promise of reward and of warning are constitutive and indispensable elements in connection with all forms of maintaining and implementing the covenant; that this perspective, and not the opposing view, connects reasonably with that of the earlier Reformed and with the text both of the Confessions and of the liturgical forms."¹⁰¹

What are here called the "constitutive and indispensable elements" of the covenant form the topic of this section.

The first thing that must be mentioned in this connection is the consistent manner in which Schilder formulated these constitutive elements. Obviously he was repeatedly recalling the familiar two parts of the covenant, namely, promise and demand. But his further inquiry into the history of covenant theology led him (especially in later years) to add a third element, namely, sanctions.¹⁰² Those sanctions he subdivided further as "announcement of threat (the first sanction) and of reward (the second sanction)."¹⁰³ With minor variation in his terminology one finds this triad everywhere in Schilder's writings. Thus he can say, for example, that the position of the member of the covenant can be delimited in terms of the *promise* and the *demand* (which are intertwined), and "in terms of the divine *sanctions* of the promise of reward and the threat of

¹⁰¹ *De Reformatie*, 21 (1 December 1945): 65 (the final article in the series mentioned in note 1 of this chapter).

¹⁰² About Witsius, Schilder wrote: "He adopted a unique position to the extent that he saw the covenant as containing not two parts . . . but three; the third, then, is the '*sanction*'. . ." (*De Reformatie*, 28 (19 November 1937): 98-99.

¹⁰³ *De Kerk* (lecture notes), 140.

punishment.”¹⁰⁴ Certain formulations prompt the question whether Schilder nonetheless distinguished only two elements, namely, promise and demand. But another element appears repeatedly, such that we must conclude that he did indeed work with a triad. In one address, he described the covenant this way: “Promise and demand are both parts [of the covenant]; with the promise comes an extra, and with the demand as well. With the promise comes the additional pledge of reward and with the demand comes the additional threat of punishment; do this and you shall live, fail to do this and the wrath of the LORD will be terrible.”¹⁰⁵ In another place mention is made of the LORD’s “spoken promises and demands, His promise of the blessing together with His declaration of the wrath of His covenant, His enticement no less than His threat.”¹⁰⁶ And to mention but one more occurrence: “the unity of *promise-demand*, with the appendix of reward-pledge and punishment-threat.”¹⁰⁷

Before proceeding to explain these three basic structural components of the covenant further—what each one consists of individually, and how they are mutually related—we must first (again) seek to determine the theological background underlying Schilder’s distinction of these three. Obviously his fundamental convictions regarding the *structure* of the covenant (see the preceding two sections) played a significant role. If the covenant is a bilateral relationship, and it possesses a forensic character, then these would quite obviously entail that alongside the promise he would emphasize also the demand, and together with these, also the sanctions, of the covenant. But for a still clearer insight into Schilder’s motivation with regard to this phenomenon, we must reach back to what we presented in an earlier chapter concerning the *history* of the covenant.

Schilder wrote a remarkable amount dealing with the covenant of works. When we provided a summary of his broad and penetrating perspective in this connection, we identified the structural correspondences that, according to Schilder, exist between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. All the constant and constitutive components of the covenant in all its historical stages—promise and demand, as well as blessing and wrath—can be distinguished

¹⁰⁴ Looze kalk, 12. Cf. p. 37: “covenant-*promise* . . . covenant-*demand* . . . covenant-*sanctions*.”

¹⁰⁵ *Hoofdzaken van de verbondsleer* [Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant] (a report), 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Acte van Vrijmaking* [Act of Liberation], point IIA.

¹⁰⁷ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2:402.

already in the first stage of the covenant (before the Fall).¹⁰⁸ To the data already furnished, numerous citations can be added. Schilder constantly returned to this theme: “He (i.e., God) addresses us in covenant conversation, He promises and threatens, while He commands and demands. In *both* instances He speaks in the form of an oath; and since there is no one higher than He by whom to swear, He swears by Himself. . . ., and then comes a pledge of reward or of curse, given in view of potential obedience or unfaithfulness toward Him, the Lawgiver.”¹⁰⁹ No one can deny that already in the covenant of works God made promises and established demands, but then this also must be seen clearly, namely, that then already He made known His “covenant wrath” when He spoke in advance of death and the wages of sin (Gen. 1:27).¹¹⁰ Therefore we may speak of a *created* connection, “first of all between covenant faithfulness and covenant blessing, and further, between covenant breaking and covenant wrath. The elements in each pair remain indissolubly connected; they can hardly be separated into ‘promise’ and ‘threat,’ since from the very beginning they appeared alongside each other in the covenant statute, proclaimed by God in one revelatory conversation, God speaking as the ‘I’ with man, who is addressed as ‘Thou.’ They are intimately bound to each other. . . with this same divine rationality, such that a *twofold sanction* appears in the one law: the sanction of reward for obedience, but also the sanction assigning punishment to disobedience.”¹¹¹ The riddle of the origin of sin can never be solved, acknowledged Schilder, but it can certainly be made clear why God forsook man after he had forsaken God: “Just as little as *covenant wrath* conflicts with the *covenant statutes* within which it had *previously* been included and established, also in the so-called ‘covenant of works,’ so little does the ‘spiritual abandonment,’ the withdrawing of the Spirit of God who equips and further enables the ‘growth and increase,’ conflict with the covenant stipulations established by the Lord at the ‘inauguration’ of a covenant with man.”¹¹² Also in connection with the problematic of common grace Schilder brought up this aspect of the covenant of works: “If already in paradise God threatened punishment for transgression, and thus conscripted man, according to his nature supplied at creation, for covenant service, in a manner

¹⁰⁸ Cf. § 2.2 above, pp. ??.

¹⁰⁹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1:155.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 193. Cf. also p. 389: “For in Paradise itself the *threats* already appeared, as well as the *pledge of reward*. In advance God ‘foresaw’ every event, whether the law would be transgressed, or whether they would obey. Such ‘sanctions’ of the law, as the fathers termed them, are in fact a direct expression concerning the permanent validity of the fundamental obligation.”

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 324. Cf. p. 325: the punishment (“covenant wrath”) was “announced *in advance*,” and “the possibility of a *temptation* was held before man in advance by God himself.”

of simultaneously declaring covenant wrath in the event of transgression and covenant blessing for continued obedience, then it is absolutely necessary, both for the punishment and for the reward, as much for hell as for heaven, both for catastrophe and for happiness, that human nature as such *remain preserved*.” Therefore “the first and best covenant word” (Gen. 2:17) presupposes human “eternity,” “the no-end-in-sight, that man would be preserved as man.” But the fact that after the Fall God did preserve man is then “not properly called *grace*,” and also “not *judgment*, strictly speaking,” but the condition for both: “the presupposition, the foundation, the substratum, of curse and of blessing. . . .”¹¹³

In view of the fact that with so much conviction Schilder had identified these three constitutive components of the covenant already in the covenant of works, one may rightly expect him to argue the same with a view to the covenant of grace. For there exists no structural difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace!¹¹⁴ Moreover, to be able to demonstrate that in the Sinai stage of the covenant of grace, that is to say, in the old covenant, the same constitutive components can be distinguished, requires no special dexterity. One has only to consider Scripture passages like Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 32, where we read explicitly of covenant promises and covenant demands, as well as the “extra” features of covenant blessing and covenant wrath. Since this is so obvious, Schilder virtually passed them by in silence. But—and this is the point at issue—these Scripture passages may not be contrasted with each other as “law” (in the sense of belonging to the passing phase of the old covenant) against “gospel” (in the sense of the new covenant after the coming of Christ). According to Schilder, no structural difference exists between old and new covenant. “Law” and “gospel” are two *parts* of the covenant that appear in both *dispensations* of the same covenant of grace!¹¹⁵ As far as the new covenant is concerned, no one can deny that this contains promises as well as demands. One needs simply to recall the familiar Pauline indicative and imperative. To this also Schilder gave only passing attention. But whenever the actual problem surfaced, namely, the question whether the new covenant also includes covenant wrath as a constitutive element, Schilder communicated his position clearly. To this question his answer was affirmative,

¹¹³ Ibid., 116-117. Cf. J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, 135-136, and 157-158, for more places where Schilder said the same thing. Here we are focusing on the clearest formulations.

¹¹⁴ Cf. again § 2.2 above.

¹¹⁵ Cf. § 2.3 above, ??.

consistently in line with his view concerning the history of the covenant. We have already treated that answer.¹¹⁶

The background of Schilder's presentation of the constitutive components of the covenant is to be found not only in his perspective on the *history* of the covenant, but also in his view of the *structure* of the covenant. That the covenant between God and man is a bilateral relationship implies that genuine bi-directional traffic exists between the two parties. In the covenant a kind of back-and-forth can be "stipulated": what God promises us we may demand from Him, and what He demands from us we must promise to Him. But the covenant has a forensic character as well. Therefore this stipulation is not a matter of indifference, but a (mutual) obligation. This is a question not merely of *ability*, but of *responsibility*! Precisely for this reason God adds to the promise and the demand of the covenant also the sanction of a pledged reward and a threatened wrath. Thereby man's responsibility in the covenant is intensified all the more sharply: one who keeps the covenant will be blessed, but one who breaks the covenant will be punished.¹¹⁷ Also in connection with the establishing of the constitutive components of the covenant—promise and demand, along with sanctions—Schilder's motive, by now already familiar to us, of fixing responsibility ("everything or nothing"!) plays a decisive role.

In this context we must reflect further on the specific content that Schilder ascribed to the various elements that make up the covenant. The unique nature of each of these components becomes evident especially when attention is paid to the mutual relation existing between them. Already as early as 1932 Schilder struggled to formulate clearly the relation between God's promise and his threat. Already then he was convinced that these two moments can be traced back to a single unity, namely, to the covenant idea.¹¹⁸ From that point forward, this subject of the place and function of God's threatening in the covenant would not leave him alone. The covenant as the primordial relationship between God and man, from the very beginning,

¹¹⁶ ee above, pp. ??-??.

¹¹⁷ This is how the related notions discussed in our preceding two section can be summarized.

¹¹⁸ *Wat is de hel?*, 193. On p. 196 he writes: "For if God thinks of man as eternally existing, who is thus *with* the givenness of this eternal existence is placed in the covenant, in the covenant with its "sanctions" or threats, then *everything* is here made subservient to God's single plan for the world . . . heaven as well as hell." And on p. 197 he concludes this section with the idea that the biblical message "death and life" connected "not in merging, but in tracing these two to the double datum of: God's purpose, and: — the original covenant statute."

established God's covenant *wrath* in response to man's covenant *breaking* as "a constitutive term in the mutual binding of the two 'parties'."¹¹⁹ Already in paradise God used the "persistent duality of covenant *blessing* and covenant *wrath*" in order to stimulate man and to drive him to serve God, and in so doing, bound these two "into one covenant work."¹²⁰ In another context Schilder raised the question whether Adam, seeing that he had received not only a promise but also a threat, could ever possess certainty. The answer is, "Yes." "But *what kind of certainty*? Answer: "*none other than faith-certainty*, clinging to God's *promise*, and without any means-of-prediction. Love does not live from *predictions*, nor does it allow itself to live this way. Adam received no prediction, but received a *promise*, and a *threat*. He was t-h-r-e-a-t-e-n-e-d."¹²¹ When this element of threat is kept firmly in view, one obtains a clearer view of the nature of the promise: "The character of a promise surrounded with threats is simultaneously thereby automatically defined."¹²² Promises are not predictions. God *leads* man by means of promises, rather than coaching him by means of predictions.¹²³

What is true of the covenant of works must apply to the covenant of grace as well: "the *Promising One* of the first phase of covenant history refuses to appear now as the *Predicting One* in its second phase."¹²⁴ "If the *not-predicting-but-promising* has *nothing less than constitutional* significance. . . ., then from God's side the possibility is *excluded* that the covenant of grace, proclaimed immediately after the Fall in the . . . 'mother promise' (. . .), would be a *covenant of prediction*. In other words, it leaves open the possibility of a covenant break from man's side."¹²⁵ On the basis of this consideration Schilder decisively rejected the idea of a "universal covenant of grace" (as proposed by the German Pietists and the Remonstrants).¹²⁶ It is true that Cain had also belonged to the covenant of grace. "Where the calling comes through the gospel, there the Word constitutes a covenant fellowship, and there the Word applies constitutionally, namely, '*To you and your children*.' " ??The CHECK ORIG Here the decisive question is: "Cannot a member

¹¹⁹ *Wat is de hemel?*, 242.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹²¹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 363.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 364.

¹²³ *Ibid.* On p. 365 we read that from "this governing, parenetic unity of *promise-with-demand*" we may conclude "that God's *making man responsible belongs to the constitution*, which God established for man's existence." Cf. also p. 387: "the covenant *did not predict* . . . Adam and Eve; the covenant *did not desire* to provide guarantees of predictions, but to arouse only a faith-guarantee."

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 377ff. On pages 397ff. Barth's "universal election" was also rejected in this context.

of the covenant fall away?”¹²⁷ On the basis of the fact that Genesis 3:15 clearly establishes an antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (in the sense of two communions), Schilder concluded that Cain had withdrawn with his children from the covenant sphere, and therefore was excluded by God until they should repent. Anyone who denies this impolitely ignores the fact that the covenant formula (“you and your descendents”) “in its ‘official’ stipulations includes the element of *threat*.”¹²⁸

We must mention one more aspect related to the threat of the covenant (also called covenant wrath, as the realized threat in the case of persistent disobedience). This involves the question whether this emphasis on covenant wrath does not remove the comfort and the stability of the covenant. When Schilder discussed this question in a lecture,¹²⁹ he mentioned first that in the covenant God always comes to us with firm promises, promises on which we can depend. “The covenant gives me judicial guarantees. It removes God’s favors from the realm of the accidental and places them within the judicial framework of Christ. From that point forward I may plead: I believe the perseverance of the saints. When I look at myself I see only a bundle of misery; nevertheless I believe that confession because God perseveres. . . . The covenant promise means this, that we come more and more to see God as Party Number 1, which continually strengthens us as party number 2. We believe in the perseverance of God and therefore also in the perseverance of the saints.” Furthermore, we must also hold fast to the truth that the covenant is the great summons to faith: “Demand and promise are absolutely correlative in the covenant.” Therefore no one may say now already that he is a reprobate, “for he possesses the demand: believe in the Lord Christ and you will be saved!” Even the threats do not rob us of comfort. “Suppose that I were abandoned after my sin, pedagogically, for the purpose of chastisement. Now that is covenant wrath, this chastisement, and in terms of God’s continuing abandonment, this wrath becomes more and more intense, until it finally becomes the absolute exclusion. Now God still says to the sinner: the chastisement is pedagogical. Until the day of my death I have no proof that my chastisement is God’s eternal judgment.” Schilder made the same distinction elsewhere. For one who is in Christ, suffering and death do not possess the character of curse,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 384.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 400.

¹²⁹ *Americana* lectures, 18.

but of chastisement, “not the character of definitive and condemning covenant wrath, but of temporary and purifying covenant wrath.”¹³⁰

The element of the covenant *promise* has been mentioned above repeatedly. The unique nature of this promise will be able to be discussed fully only in our next section, in connection with baptism. Here we wish (by way of conclusion) to observe that according to Schilder, the most intimate connection imaginable exists between the promises and the demand of the covenant. We cited above already the formulation which speaks of an absolute “correlation” between promise and demand. One encounters this formulation repeatedly in Schilder’s writings. Promise and demand, he writes, are always concretely “mutually indissoluble correlates,” for the covenant comes into existence through God’s (addressed) Word. “And in that *Word* promise is connected to demand. . . . I am not a God who promises a heaven abstracted from the covenant demands of faith and trust and sanctification.”¹³¹ The covenant involves the kind of demand “that is correlative to the covenant promise, that accompanies it, and is stitched within the very same covenant embroidery.”¹³² Schilder wrote especially clearly about the unity between promise and demand in connection with “the single original promise of God,” “the single covenant-substance (*I am your God*),” back to which every revelation-historically dated promise reached: “God himself is included together with all the benefits of the covenant; if God is not included, they cease to be covenant benefits. But for that reason as well the genuine correlation of promise and demand in the covenant can be maintained only in terms of the unity of both promise and demand. In every *promise*, even where it pledges *apparent* ‘incidentals,’ the Covenant God appears before me, as through sovereign and unilateral determination, my electing *cause* of the covenant relationship. And it proceeds the same way in every *demand*, even where he desires *apparent* incidentals, the Covenant God appears before me, as the One in sovereign the unilateral determination electing me, and through me also now having been elect, first and last *goal* of the Covenant relationship.. That is so simple, and the unity of the two parts of the covenant (promise and demand) is so blindingly evident, that one wonders with amazement how Reformed theologians who are always talking about ‘common grace’ can dare to speak against a ‘common mandate’ as its counterweight, or can deny the unity of ‘Gabe’ and ‘Aufgabe.’ What God has

¹³⁰ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 192.

¹³¹ *De Reformatie*, 22 (30 November 1946): 65-66.

¹³² *Looze kalk*, 34.

joined together let no man put asunder.”¹³³ That Schilder intends the idea of “correlation” in its most literal sense becomes clear when we focus on the following formulation: “In the covenant we never possess a *promise* that can be thought of apart from the *demand* (for then the promise would degenerate into a mere *prediction*, while the covenant *predicts* nothing, but *promises* all the more). On the other hand, in the covenant we also never receive a demand without *promise* (for then it would be a new law, a nova lex, even though it were then legalistic).”¹³⁴ Promise and demand form an indissoluble unity: “I can place two silver dollars on the table, take one of them away, and keep the other; I have then nevertheless one nice genuine silver dollar, half of what I had placed on the table. But I cannot say, ‘There are two entities lying on the table, a promise and a demand: were I to remove one and leave the other, at that point I would have but half of what lay on the table pledged to me. Similarly with respect to God’s transcendence and immanence, I can hardly confess the one and not the other. So too, when I see a married man together with his wife, were I to remove one of the marriage partners and keep the other, I could hardly say that I have half the marriage covenant left.”¹³⁵

At this point we may conclude provisionally that Schilder rejected any priority (any “pre”) of the promise over the demand in the covenant. He writes emphatically that the demand must be allowed to stand as an “equal partner” alongside the promise; otherwise it can happen all too easily that the covenant is reduced to the *promise*.¹³⁶ Why this ought not to happen is already evident (at least on the basis of Schilder starting point). The question whether this position adequately avoids other extremes, namely, that the covenant ought not to be reduced to the *demand*, remains an open question for the moment. Before we can discuss that question, several other aspects of Schilder’s view of the structure of the covenant must be explained. These aspects come to the surface when he writes specifically about the significance of baptism.

3.4 Illustrated in connection with baptism

¹³³ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1: 134.

¹³⁴ *Looze kalk*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹³⁶ *Looze kalk*, 17.

It is not our intention to provide in this section a complete explanation of everything that Schilder published concerning baptism. Such an excursion would draw our attention too far from the doctrine of the covenant toward the doctrine of the sacraments, and thus fall outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the most intimate connection exists between covenant and baptism, especially in Reformed theology. How a theologian thinks about baptism is largely determined by how he thinks about the covenant. But the reverse is also true: a theologian's covenant perspective is illustrated by his perspective on baptism. And precisely this occupies our attention in this section, namely, to investigate how Schilder's view of (especially the structure of) the covenant is illustrated in his view of baptism. By concentrating on this, we believe, we may obtain a more clearly defined insight into his conception of the structure of the covenant.

What we have explained above as Schilder's basic starting point with respect to the structure of the covenant—man's responsibility!—is discussed by Schilder also in connection with baptism. In a sermon on Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 27 (in 1941), he expressed the following (for him characteristic) understanding: "To every covenant, past and present, belongs the threat. . . . The threats hover over the baptismal font as well! Be careful! Fear and tremble! . . . Every covenant signifies an appeal to *responsibility*. And I know of no other way to recognize my responsibility than along the route of the *covenant*. For therein God is going to deal with me. Not as dead capital exchanged in eternity between the Father and the Son. For, although I was dealt with *in eternity* in the Counsel of Peace, when I was given by the Father to the Son, nevertheless precisely for that reason God made the covenant of works *in time*, thereafter the covenant of grace, and included me therein. The capital, exchanged in eternity, appeared in time to seize upon human responsibility for Adam and thereafter with Christ in the covenant of grace."¹³⁷ From this citation we see again how Schilder distinguished between covenant and counsel of peace, without separating them. For along the route of the covenant God realizes the counsel of his decree, also that relating to election. Although in this decree of election He treats

¹³⁷ *Preken*, 3: 261. A sermon of Schilder on Lord's Day 28 (in the same year, op cit. pp. 265ff.) had as its title: "The assurance and warning of the Lord's Supper." The conclusion of this sermon went this way (again, typically): "Anyone who knows the authority of Christ Jesus, who is God and man in one person, and who trembles before the Lord's Supper, just as he trembles before the Word, and understands the command to eat and drink to be nothing less and nothing different than the Ten Commandments, that person can come to the Lord's Supper and say: Lord, I *tremble* before the *authority* of Your commanding, for the entire law, which speaks with thunder and lightning, although it comes with peaceful intentions, comes also with the Lord's Supper."

us “as dead capital,” precisely in the covenant He does deal this way with us! In the covenant—a genuine bilateral relationship—He treats us as fully responsible people. And this appeal to our responsibility applies without exception for everyone who is baptized.¹³⁸

In line with this basic starting point, other fundamental convictions of Schilder with regard to the structure of the covenant are illustrated in connection with baptism. One of them is the forensic character of the covenant, to which he repeatedly referred whenever he discussed the basis for infant baptism. The doctrinal conflict that (together with other things) occasioned the church split of 1944 was focused chiefly on this point. This conflict involved the interpretation of the expression found in the first question of the liturgical formulary for infant baptism, namely, whether the believing parents confess that their children are “sanctified in Christ,” and therefore ought to be baptized. In order to understand Schilder’s position in this respect, it is necessary to provide a bit more background. In the Netherlands debate concerning the precise meaning of this phrase has continued literally for centuries.¹³⁹ The original 16th century baptism form initially meant by this expression nothing more than that children of believers, by virtue of God’s promise in Genesis 17:7, Acts. 2:39, and 1 Corinthians 7:14, were together with their parents included in God’s covenant. Soon thereafter, however, theologians like Gomarus felt compelled, especially as a consequence of a national church situation, to distinguish between an external and an internal covenant. To the external covenant belong all those infants who are baptized, who share in external holiness. But to the internal covenant, with its internal holiness, belong only the elect or the regenerate. In order to prevent the church from being divided in this way into two spheres (a core of true believers encircled by a group of unconverted), theologians like Voetius

¹³⁸ Here we pass by the entire question of whether the boundary of the covenant coincides with that of the (lawful) church. Schilder was of the opinion that the fact that the “Reformed Churches” recognized the baptism administered by other churches did not include the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of these other churches. Cf. his two-article series in 1936, “Against the leading of the Holy Spirit?”, and “‘De Heraut’ concerning baptism and ‘the pluriformity of the church’,” republished in *De Kerk*, 2: 276-322. Any study of Schilder’s concept of the church will need to take account of this aspect of the relationship between covenant and church.

¹³⁹ R. H. Bremmer provides a good overview of this debate in his article, “De controverse over de eerste doopvraag in historisch perspectief” [“The controversy about the first baptism question in historical perspective”], in *Kerk en Theologie*, 14 (1963): 195-218. Bremmer refers to, among others, the specialized studies concerning this subject by G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte* [*The relationship of baptism and regeneration*] (1897), and L. Doekes, *Der Heilige Quadoš und Hagios in der Reformierten Theologie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* [*The Holy Ones, Quadoš and Hagios in the Reformed Theology of the 17th and 18th Centuries*] (1960). J. G. Woelderink also provides a valuable explanation in his *Het Doopsformulier* [*The Form for Baptism*] (1938). Cf. for a shorter overview (“drawn with a few rough lines of differentiation”) the article of J. Veenhof, “De theologie van J. G. Woelderink,” [“The Theology of J. G. Woelderink”] in *Gereformeerde Theologische Tijdschrift*, 75 (1975): 220ff.

and Witsius came out at that time with the theory of presupposed regeneration. In preaching and in administering baptism, office-bearers must proceed from the judgment of charity that they were dealing with believers, or at least with potential believers. The more “objective” interpretation of “sanctified in Christ” was exchanged from a more “subjective” interpretation. Leaving aside all the refined nuances of the subsequent two centuries, it can be shown that Dr. Abraham Kuyper, especially in the later stages of his life, agreed with this line of thinking. After the church union of 1892, people from the “old-A” line of thinking fiercely opposed Kuyper’s doctrine of the covenant, because they had from the very beginning (in the circle of the Secession of 1834) been nurtured in another view, one that fit better with the original Reformational intention. In 1905 the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands decided, in reference to the point that interests us here, that “the seed of the covenant is to be considered, by virtue of God’s promise, to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ, until when they grow up the contrary appears in their doctrine or life.”¹⁴⁰ According to this wording, Kuyper’s position had in fact achieved supremacy: the holiness of the covenant was identified with regeneration. Because the conclusion of this declaration included other elements, however, namely, that God fulfills his promise for or under or after baptism), everyone could subscribe to the intention of the declaration. In this way this decision succeeded in calming the waters. But in 1942 the ecclesiastical peace was finally broken when the synod, in a tense situation, literally reconfirmed this formulation and thereby also declared it to be binding.¹⁴⁰

Schilder participated in this centuries-old debate in his own way. Characteristic of his position regarding the first baptism question in the 1920s was his polemic with the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands). In an important series of articles, he showed, for example, that there was no *principal* contradiction between the position of the Secession and that of the Doleantie—in this sense that this would make living together ecclesiastically to be impossible. On the one hand, those belonging to the Secession did not officially teach that baptism imparted “internal holiness,” but on the other hand, neither did they

¹⁴⁰ Cf. chapter 1, § 3, above. In footnote 76 of that chapter, the complete text of the doctrinal pronouncement of 1942 is cited.

allow the “relative covenant holiness” (in the first baptism question) to be reduced to a mere offer of grace.¹⁴¹

A decade later (in 1939) Schilder engaged this problematic once again, when he evaluated all the prevailing distinctions introduced in the course of the centuries regarding the covenant. Regarding the idea of two covenant spheres, an external and an internal, he wrote at that time: “Every attempt leading to this contrast result from a mistaken anthropology, namely, that a person’s internal dimension is the most important. The fact that something is visible is no reason to call it non-spiritual. One can also be spiritually occupied while performing something physical. Spiritual means governed by the *pneuma tou theou*, that which conforms to God’s Spirit in the visible and the invisible.”¹⁴² Schilder objected as well to the distinction between absolute and conditional covenant (held, for example, by Koelman): “One is in the covenant or one is not in the covenant.” This distinction rested on the view that in a “forensic relationship” one should not inquire about “inclination.” But Schilder argued: “that is precisely the point. . . . The gifts of love come within forensic relationships and forensic guarantees. I may tug on the hem of God’s garment. Justice and love go together.”¹⁴³

In the same year Schilder discussed extensively the (at the time recently published) book of Professor G. Ch. Aalders, *Het verbond Gods* [*The covenant of God*].¹⁴⁴ Although this review did not deal primarily with the baptism question, Schilder nonetheless entered into aspects of the doctrine of the covenant related to the first baptism question. In his book Aalders had proceeded from the conviction that the participants in the covenant of grace are without doubt the elect, and to that extent covenant and election are quantitatively identical. His chief argument for this position was that the covenant of grace was established with Christ as the Head of the covenant, and in Him with all who are included in Him. In response Schilder provided page upon page of

¹⁴¹ *De Bazuin*, 77 (22 March – 17 May 1929). In the last-mentioned article, he wrote: “. . . by reducing the covenant of grace to an *offer* of grace, people in the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands have in principle accepted the idea of a national church.” Cf. also his discussion of the brochure of Professor H. Visscher (Gereformeerde Bond [Reformed Association?]), *Het verbond der genade in ons kerkelijk leven* [*The covenant of grace in our ecclesiastical life*] (vol. 81 [16 June 1933]), where he wrote, among other things: “The professor has rescued himself there out of his difficulties with the use of the *fatal distinction* between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ covenant, whereby he even arrives at a construction of an ‘external covenant with an entire nation’.”

¹⁴² *Americana* lectures, 16.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *De Reformatie*, 19 (7 July 1939 and following).

quotations from recognized Reformed theologians who did not agree with this argument. He objected especially to Aalders' claim that his was the only Reformed position. He wrote: "It is not a question of old-A or old-B, but that question undoubtedly lies in the background."¹⁴⁵ At the end of his book, Aalders wrestled with the problem that the covenant on the one hand (in his view) was established with the elect, but that on the other hand there are covenant members (in the sense of those having been baptized) who are lost. This problem he then attempted to "solve" by taking refuge in "a certain contradiction between the essence of the covenant of grace and the outward manifestation with which it appears."¹⁴⁶ But Schilder mounted a strong protest against this "flight into spotting contradictions" as well. God never reveals contradictions! Where will we end up, Schilder asked, if we must accept a contradiction between the essence and the manifestation of the *promise* and of the *demand* as well? "A word that is addressed [including promise and demand, S.A.S.] is precisely '*manifestation*,' *revelation*; not the essence of the word, but of the *Speaker* reveals itself in concretely spoken or written words. I see no possibility of preaching in line with the mode of Professor Aalders' theory. . . ."¹⁴⁷ In order to prove that Aalders could not insist that his position alone had the right of being called Reformed, Schilder referred to, among other things, the pamphlet of the preachers belonging to the Secession, Pieters and Kreulen, *De kinderdoop* [*Infant baptism*] (1861). In that essay, the authors argued that the phrase "sanctified in Christ" (as basis for infant baptism) cannot refer to eternal election or to a "subjective" grace, but refer to "a holiness by virtue of the covenant." To this Schilder added: "I agree; *not* in order therein to seek a *contrast* to the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, for . . . that would conflict already with Hendrik de Cock himself, who also talked of covenant holiness, not excluding but include the Spirit's work in the heart (according to the judgment of charity, naturally); otherwise one would 'externalize' the covenant. . . . But I mean it in this sense: we move ultimately from the covenant to holiness, not from holiness to the covenant."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. (21 July 1939): 330. Schilder appealed especially to what the American professor William Heyns had written in his book, *Gereformeerde geloofsleer* [*The Reformed Doctrine of Faith*] (1916), concerning the mistaken identification of covenant of grace and counsel of peace, and the similarly mistaken distinction between internal and external covenant (ibid., 4 August 1939: 347ff.).

¹⁴⁶ Aalders, *Het verbond Gods*, 211.

¹⁴⁷ *De Reformatie*, 19 (11 August 1939), 356. Schilder ended this article as follows: "'Manifestation,' says Professor Aalders. But given *his position*, he should rather say: *apparition*."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. (18 August 1939): 364. Also in the lectures on *Het verbond in de geref. symbolen*, 63, Schilder expressed his appreciation for the fact that with the Secession, no contrast was made between "the federative being-in and the mystical being-in," with respect to the expression "sanctified in Christ": "De Cock combined both of these views, and thus saw it as covenant holiness with the inclusion of being mystically sanctified."

In 1942, just before the synodical doctrinal decision was made, Schilder delivered a series of addresses regarding the church, on the occasion of articles which appeared in *De Heraut* [The Herald] which had accused him of holding a deviant view. In these addresses, he discussed the phrase “sanctified in Christ,” and expressed the view “that what is meant here is a covenant-holiness, which with an eye to the community included genuine holiness. The church will always remain a church in which the fear of God exists. This is not to say, however, that each child is regenerated, nor that a child who comes to faith later had been already regenerated at baptism, but that the children *grosso modo* belong to God’s people and are included within the holiness category.”¹⁴⁹ Later in the same lecture he referred again to Hendrik de Cock, who would summarize the phrase “sanctified in Christ” to mean “a covenant-holiness with the inclusion of internal holiness,” to which Schilder added: “We believe that this was correct, for covenant-holiness is never an external matter abstracted from the internal. . . . That internal character, however, is supplied in covenant form and covenant categories, which is to say: with the demand of faith and conversion. Otherwise the promise is frail.”¹⁵⁰

That covenant holiness (1 Cor. 7:14) “indeed refers to the yet to be received benefits, but these come only in the combination of promise and demand, permission and obligation, threat (the first sanction) and announcement of reward (the second sanction).”¹⁵¹

From these data it appears that it is rather difficult to identify precisely Schilder’s position regarding the synodical declaration of 1905 (repeated in 1942). In any case, however, this much is clear: at least before the Liberation he would not permit himself to be driven into a polarized position wherein the expression “sanctified in Christ” was taken to refer simply to an external meaning. That a kind of connection existed between baptism and regeneration he never denied. He did object, however, to the binding decision (1942) which decreed that regeneration had to be presumed for every child being baptized, for such a view left no room for the view that the covenant—with its promises and demands, with its blessings and curse—can function to its fullest. For that reason the decision of 1942 was roundly rejected in the *Act of Liberation*.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Lecture on *De Kerk* [The Church], 91.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁵² Cf. chapter 1, ?? above, and paragraph II.A. of the *Acte van Vrijmaking*, reprinted in *Looze kalk*, 89.

After the Liberation, Schilder was continually preoccupied with this problematic. In his lectures in dogmatics (October 1945 to March 1946) he examined very extensively the pamphlet entitled *Preadvice of Committee I to the General Synod of Utrecht 1943*. We provide here a few formulations from those lectures, which are related to the question regarding what Schilder meant by the forensic character of the covenant. He said, for example: “‘In Christ’ has been in recent times understood as referring to the mystical union, ‘being united by the Spirit to Christ.’” But the phrase ‘in Christ’ can also refer to standing in a forensic relation with Christ. Then the phrase ‘sanctified in Christ’ is not yet speaking of ‘being engrafted into Christ through the Spirit.’”¹⁵³ Schilder referred to the conversation of Petrus Dathenus with the Anabaptists (*Protocol*, 1571), in order to prove that the actual point with which the Reformed were engaged was the question whether the children of believers also belong to the church “by right”: “For Dathenus, ‘sanctified in Christ’ means . . . matters of justification. It touches on the question of guilt, the imputation, Christ’s blood. But not yet Christ’s Spirit.”¹⁵⁴ The children of the covenant live through the blood of Christ in “forensic relationship” with the Father and the Holy Spirit. “This fellowship has nothing to do with a mystical union. Involved here are questions relating to promise and relating to rights. So here what is being confessed is not regeneration as a fact, but justification as a promised benefit.”¹⁵⁵ In order to formulate this clearly once more: “If the phrase ‘sanctified in Christ’ can mean sharing by promise in justification, then the ‘therefore’ (of the first baptismal question) intends to say that one is engrafted into the church according to a forensic relationship, so that “‘therefore’ one ought to be baptized.”¹⁵⁶ At the very end of the lecture, Schilder said: “G. de Brès pointed very clearly to the forensic context of the covenant and to the forensic action of God. The being placed in the forensic context of the covenant must be appropriated by faith. That is what regeneration accomplishes.”¹⁵⁷

One encounters similar ideas in Schilder’s volume *Looze kalk* [Untempered Mortar] from this same time period (1946) as well, wherein he responds vigorously to the pamphlet written by

¹⁵³ *Dogmahistorie Praeadvies* [History of Dogma Preadvice] (lecture), 9.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. also 17: “Nobody among the objectors has ever said that all children are in the covenant in the same sense, but some have said that all children are in the covenant with equal rights, equal in forensic address, in a forensic class. The one child responds, however, with ‘Yes,’ while another with ‘No,’ the one receives blessing, the other curse.”

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

Dr. J. Ridderbos, entitled *Kerkscheuring* [Church Split]. He directed his primary criticism against Ridderbos' position that the covenant comes into existence through the renewal of the heart.

Through this deep-rooted "subjectivism," wrote Schilder, is "the Word stolen from its place of honor, in order to locate the focus and to seek the starting point in the subject, and from there (apparently in the Spirit, and in reality as well) within the human spirit (e.g., by placing in the foreground at baptism not the promises and demands, which is to say: the speaking of God, but the regeneration that has occurred). . . ." ¹⁵⁸

In this context Schilder set forth the logic of his position on baptism point by point: ¹⁵⁹ "Sanctified in Christ' means: by virtue of participation in the covenant, to have the right to the promises of justification through Christ's blood."

Justification occurs not from eternity (Kuyper), but in time, through faith. "If faith arrives at the point of accepting the promise of cleansing through Christ's blood, and if thereby the baptized person indeed shares in justification, then from this flows forth the cleansing through Christ's Spirit, being sanctified not 'IN Christ,' but 'THROUGH the Spirit.'" Therefore at baptism one's starting point must be that one shares in the promise. "And that which we *have* 'in Christ'

(according to covenant right, in promise) is then also the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives (that which the ancients termed regeneration. . .)" So also after the Liberation Schilder could still continue to acknowledge a connection between baptism and regeneration.

But then, according to his view, it must be stated this way: baptism seals to us the (*promise* of the) covenant. This promise entails that the Holy Spirit *will* impart to us that which Christ has already obtained for us (our justification and our sanctification). This which we already possess "in Christ" must still "become ours in faith." In the covenant God has "*legally*" accepted us as his children and heirs. But this formulation implies no "mystical union" in the sense of "*regeneration individually worked through the Holy Spirit*," for in Scripture and in the earlier theologians, "'mystical union' is often a being-bound-*legally*-to-Christ, without thereby claiming that no single, individual branch which is 'in Christ' (the vine) will be burned. In short: the prayer of thanksgiving after the sacrament of baptism *praises and exalts* God for the *renewing* and the *promising* of that which has been obtained by Christ, to us and our children, together with the already far advanced *appropriation* to the congregation collectively. And this

¹⁵⁸ Looze kalk, 27. Cf. 40: "the anabaptistic-mystical subjectivistic *contrast* between 'external' and 'internal'"; and 41: "Therefore the entire elevation of the internal at the cost of the external, and the entire degradation of the external in favor of the internal is so thoroughly unscriptural and unreformed."

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 44.

prayer seeks now the *appropriation* of that which has been promised to this child.”¹⁶⁰ When Ridderbos maintained that baptism is more like an “offer” or more like the sign of a “legal position,” Schilder replied, “As far as we are concerned, he can receive our ‘so be it’ to that claim. For we also are saying, along with earlier theologians, that the sacraments (*when used in faith*) are not only *obsignatory*, but also *exhibitory*; that they not only seal, but they also do something, they bestow something.”¹⁶¹

During this same period Schilder responded also in a long series of articles about the so-called Replacement Formula of the synod of 1946.¹⁶² From the multitude of data that he incorporated into that series, we mention here only two aspects that relate to the forensic character of the covenant. From the synodical side frequent reference was made to Galatians 3:16 (the promise to Abraham and to his seed, which is Christ), in order to prove that the covenant was established only with the elect. Schilder wrote: “In the context of this reasoning, Christ is seed as ‘Head of the covenant of grace.’ He incorporates all the elect within Himself through a ‘mystical union’; LEGAL contexts and fellowship in *legalities* are never noticed in this line of reasoning; the ‘in Christ’ is stubbornly understood in a ‘mystical’ sense, not in a forensic-federal sense. ‘In Christ’ preferably means ‘by the Spirit.’ . . . Conclusion: the boundaries of covenant and election are identical.”¹⁶³ In connection with the synodical conviction that the children of believers must be viewed and treated at their baptism as regenerated (already or potentially), Schilder wrote that he too “viewed and treated” the baptized infant, but then in this

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 73. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: the citation from Schilder uses two words with a similar prefix: *toe-zeggen* means “to promise,” and *toe-eigen* means “to appropriate,” “to make one’s own.” At baptism, the benefits obtained by Christ are promised (which is a *toe-zegging*) and must still be appropriated (which is a *toe-eigening*) by faith.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 74. Schilder nowhere denies that the “renewal of the heart” occurs in the covenant, but the point is this: the covenant does not *come into existence* thereby. On 60 Schilder asserts that starting point once more. But notice what he adds: Every intelligent Reformed person, he said, readily admits “that through the heart renewal and the display of obedience and of love which arise from that, between God that the regenerated person an ‘intimate’ faith-concourse comes into existence, which itself in the form of grace again goes far above the particular position in which we have been place toward God in terms of rights, even as this position is bestowed upon us at the outset of our lives, when our affirmation toward God must still come.” This legal position *is* thus (already) the covenant, but (still) not the *whole* covenant—this is how Schilder’s position can be summarized.

¹⁶² Cf. chapter 1 above, p. ?? and footnotes 88 and 89.

¹⁶³ “The fourth form of unity,” in *De Reformatie*, 22 (1 March 1947): 161. Regrettably enough in his exegesis of this text Schilder did not develop the notion of the legal character of the covenant any further. He did mention that here Paul is not discussing the question “For whom were the promised benefits (including eternal life) forethought?” but “To whom were the promises themselves imparted?” To the elect God *said* nothing, although *about* the elect He *thought* and even *said* something, something which does not apply to *all* members of the covenant. But *to all* the members of the covenant He *says* the very same thing! In this text there is mention of a promise “given to Abraham and his seed, and *having relation to Christ*.”

sense that they share in the promises of the covenant. “*Sharing* in a promise—that is a *right*. Anyone who bases his view on that . . . has a *legal* foundation for his ‘viewing and treating.’ But *sharing* in an *effectual* grace, an already *working* grace, that is a *fact*. Anyone who bases his view on that has a *factual* foundation for his ‘viewing and treating.’” The synodical folk “jump from the *fixed* [*stellige*] formulation that *creates* a *legal* foundation to the *presupposed* [*onderstellende*] *fiction* that fantasizes a *factual* foundation.”¹⁶⁴

The forensic character of the covenant (as illustrated in connection with baptism) was discussed by Schilder in another context as well: the question of “self-examination.” Already the Synod of 1905 had declared that the conviction that the seed of the covenant must be held to be regenerated, “which is in no way to say that therefore each child is truly regenerated. . . ., so that in the preaching the need for serious self-examination must continually be stressed. . . .”¹⁶⁵ The Synod of 1942 also reasserted the necessity of the summons to self-examination.¹⁶⁶ The fact that this issue was placed on the agenda of the synod as one of the differences of opinion since 1936, provided occasion for a lively discussion in which Schilder also participate.¹⁶⁷ Later Schilder himself summarized his position on this matter systematically, when he discussed the nature of true faith (Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 21) and the familiar illustration of the “practical syllogism.”¹⁶⁸ At that point he declared his conviction that there was every reason to view this self-examination in connection with the doctrine of the covenant. “For earlier as well, difference of opinion about the doctrine of the covenant led to a difference *not* so much in relation to the *necessity*, but rather concerning the *place* and *starting point* of self-examination.”¹⁶⁹ Schilder clarified his intention by linking the following interpretation to the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18 (22 March 1947): 185.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. for the text of this decision R. J. Dam, et al., *Rondom 1905*, 141.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. for the text of this decision “concerning the covenant of grace and self-examination,” G. Janssen, *De feitelijke toedracht* [*The factual mandate??*], 268-269.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *De Reformatie*, 16 (10 July 1936): 343-344, where Schilder reviewed the brochure of Dr. C. N. Impeta, *Zelfonderzoek noodzakelijk* [*Self-examination necessary*], and his three articles, “‘Verzekerd uit de vruchten’ (Antwoord aan ds. Th. Delleman),” [“‘Assured from the fruits’ (Response to Rev. Th. Delleman)”] *De Reformatie* 16 (14-28 August 1936). In vol. 17 another four articles appeared: “Naar aanleiding der artikelen van ds. Delleman” [“In response to the articles by Rev. Delleman”] (27 November – 18 December 1936).

¹⁶⁸ *Heidelbergsche Catechism*, 2:499-520; this piece consisted in fact of a literal reproduction of his articles entitled “Insinuaties inzake het zelfonderzoek” [“Insinuations with relation to self-examination”] I-VI, in *De Reformatie*, 21 (13 and 20 October, 10, 17, and 24 November, and 1 December 1945). In these articles Schilder published for the first time (with a few comments added) the minority report that he and Vollenhoven had composed for the synod of 1939 on the matter of self-examination.

¹⁶⁹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 501. For Schilder it was clear “that a close connection existed between a person’s view of the covenant, on the one hand, and his ‘locating’ self-examination.”

conventional distinction between “state” and “condition.” He claimed that “state” refers “in the first place to our *legal position*.”¹⁷⁰ But then we can hardly initiate any self-examination for the purpose of determining whether in ourselves we possess any “right” to appropriate the promises of God for ourselves! Such a subjectivistic fantasy of self-sufficiency is cut off at its very root when preaching is once again viewed in its Reformed senses as the well-meant summons of God, as “promise with command to repentance and faith” (Canons of Dort II/5).¹⁷¹ In distinction from our “state”—which touches on the “*legal issue*,” our “*legal position before the Lord*”—the term “condition” refers to our sanctification. “Condition” [Dutch: stand] has to do with the question concerning man’s “*situation* [Dutch: toe-stand] in its religious dimension, his way of living, careless or careful, his training, lazy and unsystematic or diligent and systematic, his prayer, his secret concourse with God, his joy of salvation or the absence of joy, his pain regarding sins committed and regarding his own depravity, and the avoiding and fleeing from them in daily covenant obedience.”¹⁷² According to Schilder, these questions must also be raised in connection with a Reformed self-examination, but then never in a way that leads one to draw his conclusion—positive or negative—about his “status” on the basis of his “condition.” The direction must be the reverse, where the “status” of all baptized covenant members is taken as the basis for conducting an examination *in faith* of the “condition.” “Self analysis without faith,” said Schilder with emphasis, is “unfruitful.”¹⁷³ It is precisely those who, on the one hand, reject (Kuyperian) “lethargic regeneration” and, on the other hand, see covenant wrath as an essential element in all the phases of the covenant’s history, who can never easily refrain from telling covenant children: “You are in the covenant, so your life stands good before God.”¹⁷⁴

Not only that the covenant is a bilateral relationship possessing a forensic character, but also the constitutive components of the covenant are illustrated in connection with baptism. Because baptism (according to the Reformed understanding of the sacraments) was instituted precisely to seal the *promises* to us and our children, it is fitting here to inquire further as to how

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 506. Cf. *Looze kalk*, p. 79: “‘State’ has in view . . . the *legal* status established by God’s speaking.”

¹⁷¹ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 507.

¹⁷² Ibid., 509.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 516-517. Cf. *Looze kalk*, 68: “anyone who allows self-examination to begin without *proceeding* from God’s speaking also in the promise itself removes the bottom underneath that self-examination, and robs it of the possibility of being *believing* self-examination; for faith accepts the promises—on authority.”

¹⁷⁴ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 517-518. If some belonging to the Liberated churches were exposed to the accusation of “covenant automatism,” such a complaint cannot be verified at this point from Schilder.

Schilder described the nature of these promises. When in the previous section we discussed the constitutive components of the covenant, we touched upon certain aspects of this description: between promise and demand there exists an indissoluble correlation, and: a promise is in principle something other than a prediction. In our present section as well, it has already become clear that with a view to the promises of the covenant Schilder explicitly distinguished between *pledge* [Dutch: *toezegging*] and *appropriation* [Dutch: *toeeigening*]. The Holy Spirit must yet cause us (through faith) to appropriate what we already possess in Christ (*in promise*).¹⁷⁵ Without faith the promise of the covenant is not fulfilled.¹⁷⁶

During and after the Liberation, Schilder crystallized his position on the nature of the covenant promise, in his plea for recognizing that this promise possesses a “conditional” character. Already in his lectures he made use of every possible datum from the history of dogma in order to provide warrant for his position.¹⁷⁷ Most of these arguments reappeared later in *Looze kalk*. There he began his exposition of the matter with a reference to Ursinus’s distinction between categorical (unconditional) and non-categorical (conditional) promises. To the latter group Ursinus assigned the sacramental promises. When the Liberated folk took up this terminological usage, they wanted to maintain that the appeal to human responsibility belongs to the constitutive elements of the covenant. Dismissing this accent on human responsibility as nothing more than “Remonstrant” (J. Ridderbos) misses the target completely.¹⁷⁸ After all, in its preface to the New Testament, the States General Bible translation also declared that God promises us eternal life “on the condition” that we believe in Christ.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Schilder

¹⁷⁵ Schilder wrote clearly about this in 1945 (published in *Schriftoverdenkingen*, 3: 24ff.) in connection with Genesis 15:7 and 16 (the LORD’s promise to give Abraham the land when the fourth generation returned to it): “Pledge and appropriation are two distinct matters. But *faith* is the bond, to be created by God, and nonetheless demanded from us, the bond that forges these two into one.” Cf. *ibid.*, p. 144 (a meditation from 1946), where it is said that Christ through his resurrection has obtained the life-giving Spirit: “The Son has from his side fulfilled what was necessary to accomplish salvation. And the covenant between Father, Son, and Spirit has now beforehand thus determined that thereafter the Spirit would come, in order, in combination with the work of the Son, the great work of beginning to *appropriate* that which the Son had accomplished.”

¹⁷⁶ *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 357, with reference to Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews 4:2 (“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it”).

¹⁷⁷ *Dogmahistorie Praeadvies* [*Doctrinal-historical Pre-advice*] (lecture notes), especially pp. 33-36 (dealing with the Conference in The Hague between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants, 1611), p. 38 (dealing with Ursinus), and pp. 76-79 (dealing with the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619).

¹⁷⁸ *Looze kalk*, 52.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53. In the publication *Praeadvies van Commissie I* (1943) it is said that “this anonymous author [of the Preface] had not penetrated all that deeply into the doctrine of the covenant”! (p. 57).

continues, this appears from the fact that both the Remonstrants and the Reformed spoke about “conditions” in comments at the Synod of Dort. “In other words: the issue is not ‘conditions or no conditions.’ Rather it is: conditions according to the Remonstrant understanding, or according to the Reformed understanding.”¹⁸⁰ The Remonstrants made human faith a *meritorious* condition, something that God *assists*. They made it a “condition upon which God ultimately *depended* in his intentions, in his desire to come from the possible to the real covenant.” According to Schilder the characteristic background of the Remonstrant understanding of condition must be found there. But, he said, “*this* theory is to be absolutely rejected. For to speak of conditions in this way is to injure God; it is to make him follow man as a dependent God who would not know what to do with his treasures and gifts if man were uncooperative.” In this way the heart of the Reformation is attacked, with Luther and Calvin being exchanged in principle for the Roman Catholic doctrine of human merit.¹⁸¹ In contrast to that view, Schilder thought, one can indeed speak of “a Reformed doctrine of condition.” He summarized the views of the Leiden professors (in their “Censure”) as follows: “The Remonstrants emphasize the need for an *appropriating of what has been obtained* (taking unto oneself what Christ has obtained). The Reformed never thought to deny that. Just this: they teach not only the appropriation of what has been obtained, but also *obtaining the appropriation*. That is to say: they teach that the appropriation itself was merited and obtained by Christ. Even in our act of appropriating we enjoy a fruit of Christ’s death.”¹⁸² In spite of the Remonstrant accusation that on the basis of their viewpoint, the Reformed are still unable to speak of “conditions,” a number of the delegates to the Synod of Dort nevertheless confidently continued to maintain the term.¹⁸³ For that reason so do the Liberated Reformed! In that essay, amid all the polemic Schilder made the following comment in order to clarify the conditional character of the covenant promise, as illustrated in connection with baptism. He wrote, “The early Reformed knew that in the baptism of children of believers God *promises everything but predicts nothing*. . . . God does not say to the one: ‘Little one, you are elect and at some point you will be regenerated by my Spirit’; and even less does he say to another: ‘Little one, you are reprobate, and you will never receive the Spirit of regeneration penetrating to your innermost heart. Were he to speak in this way, then he would

¹⁸⁰ Looze kalk, 58.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸² Ibid., 58. On the same page Schilder argues that, strictly speaking, it is not *God* who fulfills the conditions of the covenant in us. “For it is still *man* who acts; the subject is not eliminated by the activity of God in the person.” Cf. page 61: “We fulfill the conditions, even when we do so with the strength granted by God’s grace.”

¹⁸³ Ibid., 58-59. Schilder cited comments from the delegates from Britain, Geneva, and Emden.

indeed *predict*. . . . But he suffices with a *promise*. A promise that *is always accompanied with the demand*.¹⁸⁴ Further: “Faith is *indeed* a gift of the Covenant God, but it is *at the same time a condition*, that he establishes. *A condition he places upon us* in order to arouse our sense of responsibility, to stimulate that sense, and even to proclaim it. A condition that is not Remonstrant, but Reformed.”¹⁸⁵

In addition, in his series dealing with the so-called Replacement Formula of the synod (1946), to which we referred earlier, Schilder dealt further with the nature of the covenant promise. From these articles we mention several noteworthy items. For example, he writes that the issue of conditional or unconditional promises has everything to do with the use in early Reformed theology of the term “stipulations,” in the sense of mutually binding provisions. If in the covenant genuine stipulations exist mutually between the parties, this can occur only in a context “in which one places *conditions* upon the other.”¹⁸⁶ When Schilder continued by discussing the distinction between “children of the flesh” and “children of the promise” (Rom. 9:8), he referred to the (synodical) view that the latter category supposedly included only the elect covenant children. In agreement with S. Greijdanus (*The revelation of God in the New Testament concerning his covenant of grace, 1946*), Schilder came to the conclusion that “children of the promise” means nothing else than “Abraham’s seed,” which is to say, the entire New Testament church. To all of them God promises “eternal life conditionally,” and to all of them he promises “unconditionally the privileges of Word, law, worship, and the indestructibility of the church, the constancy of the Spirit, and whatever else there may be.”¹⁸⁷ In the concluding article of the series, Schilder returned to the indissoluble unity of promise and command within the covenant. “These two parts belong together; which then explains why the promise does not become effectual unto salvation if the *demand* is rejected (something than never happens except

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 61.

¹⁸⁶ “The fourth form of unity (8),” in *De Reformatie* 22 (11 January 1947), 105. Of course by this Schilder did not mean that the contribution of God and that of man in the covenant were equal. In his lecture notes on *Covenant in the Reformed Confessions*, he referred to Regius (p. 16) and Trelcatius (p. 23), who acknowledged the mutual binding but called the promise God gives *libera*, and the demand that man must fulfill *necessaria*. “God is not obligated to the giving of promises, but we are obligated to fulfill our duty,” Schilder said (p. 23).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 14 (22 February 1947): 154.

in and through rejecting God's *promise*). . . . Apart from faith, it [the promise] yields no *benefit*.”¹⁸⁸

Although in this context Schilder himself never used the expression “everything or nothing,” the phrase does provide in this context one more example of what he meant precisely. With respect to the promise and the demand of the covenant, the rule applied: “Everything or nothing!” In the covenant anyone who refuses to receive *everything* receives literally *nothing*. For anyone who wants to have the promise apart from obeying the demand, cannot expect that he will share the benefits of the covenant. Naturally, the reverse is also true!

In one of Schilder's very last publications written before his death, he reflected again about the conditionality of the covenant promise.¹⁸⁹ In response to the “Brief Explanation”?? of the Protestant Reformed Churches, which explicitly rejected any notion that the promise of the covenant would be conditional, Schilder maintained that this entire issue depended on what was meant by the word “condition.” He summarized his conviction with subtlety this way: “A. By ‘condition’ do you mean something that would bind God? Then we declare unconditionally: ‘Let the term “unconditional” be our motto!’ B. By ‘condition’ do you mean something for which God must wait before he can proceed? Then we declare unconditionally, ‘Let the term “unconditional” be our motto!’ C. By ‘condition’ do you mean something that we must fulfill in order thereby to merit? Then we declare unconditionally, ‘Let the term “unconditional” be our motto!’ D. By ‘condition’ do you mean something that God has coupled to something else in order to make clear to us that the one thing cannot exist apart from the other thing, and that we cannot be assured of the one thing unless at the same time we are assured of the other thing? Then we declare unconditionally, ‘Let conditional be our motto!’”¹⁹⁰ When Schilder analyzed

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 25 (31 May 1947): 265. On the same page Schilder wrote that his view does *not* mean that for him the covenant promise gets swallowed up by a “conditional declaration TOEZEGGING.”

¹⁸⁹ Cf. chapter 1, especially note 91.

¹⁹⁰ Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger, 14.ENG TRANS?? Elsewhere Schilder made the same comments more vigorously, for example, in his lectures *Christelijke religie*, 77: “Conditions vary in nature and character. One can have (1) a *conditio antecedens* (preceding condition), and (2) a *conditio adiuncte seu connexa* (connected condition).” The latter appears with our justification by faith: “Faith is a means . . . an accompanying phenomenon that possesses no merit. . . . If God himself has proclaimed: the one does not happen without the other, then it is not Remonstrant to say that there are conditions.” Cf. also *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 344: “No, this is not a ‘condition’ which enhances this faith of theirs as an act-of-*meriting*; a covenant of grace is not a covenant of grace-except-at-the-decisive-moment. But a condition-of-*concomitance*, of accompanying-the-one-with-the-other, such that it is indicated how the one would never be able to occur apart from the other.” This he wrote in connection

the Declaration in more detail, he wrote that the real issue at stake is this: What happens at baptism? “Do I receive in baptism a doctrinal pronouncement: God saves all of the elect? Or am I addressed with a forensic declaration in which I am personally and individually involved?”¹⁹¹ After Schilder had discussed various related issues, like common grace and the general offer of grace, he returned to the question of the conditional covenant promise. At the Synod of Dort, he wrote, mention was made of “a Reformed doctrine of condition,” not in the sense that faith was viewed as the ground or cause of salvation, but in the sense “that God does not give the one apart from the other, while he is the fountain of both the one and the other, the gracious Grantor and Bestower. This is again related to the fact that he addresses me, without making predictions about my future, but to bind me all the more to his promises, which never come to me without a demand.”¹⁹² For the promise of the covenant is still the same as the promise of the Gospel, and therefore involves a communication and a message. “So it involves not God’s secret thoughts, but rather what he has to *say* to us.”¹⁹³ For this reason the promise involves not a doctrinal *pronouncement about the elect*, but a kerygmatic *announcement to those addressed*. This occurs with the promise that God addresses to each of us personally at baptism.¹⁹⁴ This is what God says to each and every baptized child: “Little one, under condition, which is to say, under explicit assurance, and stipulation, that your faith will be and must be the only route along which all of this will occur, unto which you are being warned and obligated . . . the Father *shall* assure you of every good gift. . . .”¹⁹⁵ By calling the covenant promise “conditional,” and thereby continuing to maintain the responsibility of the (baptized) person, Schilder was not trying to make the covenant an unstable relationship. On the contrary, for him at bottom this issue involved the veracity of God—the God who keeps his promises, and also his threats. A person can “hold fast”

with the covenant of works. And as far as the covenant of grace is concerned: *ibid.*, 349: “Apart from faith . . . it will be impossible later to get the last page of your passport stamped by the gatekeeper of the heavenly city. . . . [Christ] enforces the original *condition-of-concomitance*—for he is no revolutionary: salvation does not exist apart from faith, hope, and love. Or did you perhaps think that he had invented a different salvation, a faith-less one, or a God-less one?”

¹⁹¹ *Bovenschriftuurlijke binding*, 24.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-73. Cf. also how Schilder developed this view (already in 1936) in a sermon on the familiar text of Matthew 11:28 (“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”): “This is strictly *personal*, reprobation on the one hand and election on the other hand. But *I* don’t ever need to bother with that when the invitation comes. . . . And for that reason, God bind me not to the *doctrine of election*, which indeed *exists* and wherein he meets us in grace, but which afterward can only strengthen us in the faith; rather, he binds us to the *revealed* Word. *Everyone* come to me. And when the invitation comes, no one may say: Yes, but what about *election*? That is his secret, but what has been revealed is for you. . . .” (*Preken* 2:143-144).

¹⁹⁵ *Bovenschriftuurlijke binding*, 75.

to God's "audible" speech, but not to a so-called "unconditional promise that was never spoken in audible language to any particular child."¹⁹⁶

At this point we have provided an extensive and (we trust) complete discussion of Schilder's view of the structure of the covenant as that was illustrated in connection with baptism. Various aspects that have been touched upon, such as the conditional character of the covenant promise, about which others have expressed rather sharp criticism, will be raised again in our final evaluative chapter. At this point, then, we conclude our thetical explanation of Schilder's covenant perspective.

¹⁹⁶

Ibid., 81.

CHAPTER 4

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHILDER'S CONTRIBUTION REGARDING THE COVENANT

“Personally we are convinced that it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the ‘counsel of peace’ and the ‘covenant of grace’; that covenant and election are not to be identified; that the covenant of grace was erected within time, and done so really with humanity through accompanying Word revelation which made possible, introduced, and called into existence a real, historical covenant union; that not only promise and command, but also the pledge of reward and threat in connection with the covenant union and with every form of maintaining and implementing the covenant, are constitutive and indispensable elements; that this perspective, and not its opposite, fits reasonably with that of the early reformed and the text of the confessions and the liturgical formularies.”

K. Schilder, *De Reformatie*, 21 (1 December 1945), p. 65

4.1 Schilder's unique contribution

Now that Schilder's perspective on the covenant has been extensively analyzed, one task remains, namely, that of evaluating this perspective. That this is no small task, however, should be clearly obvious! Therefore we believe it is necessary to restrict our attention at this point to the *main elements* of Schilder's understanding of the *covenant* in particular, without evaluating every detail of what we provided in the preceding chapters from his writings. To achieve this goal it is unnecessary to begin this final chapter with a brief summary of the fundamental ideas of his covenant perspective. From the section headings of the previous chapters it should be evident that we have already been working systematically. An assessment of our evaluation in this last chapter will depend in large measure on whether we have succeeded, especially in the second and third chapters, in correctly reproducing Schilder's basic starting point with respect to the doctrine of the covenant.

This final chapter is therefore not intended to be merely a summary of the main issues discussed in the preceding chapters. Nevertheless we will need, in the first place, to reach back to what had already been discussed there. We intend to refer now and then to points of criticism of Schilder that have already been offered, which provided us an occasion to ask several critical questions. This criticism must at this point be summarized concisely and evaluated. When we pay attention to this criticism, we are led to discover that Schilder's position, at least in the first two decades after his death, remained quite relevant and attracted continued attention.

With this evaluation the task we've undertaken in this last chapter is not yet finished, however. We must also pose (and try to answer) the question whether and to what extent Schilder's contribution regarding the covenant is still relevant today. To be able to do so requires that in addition we must take a cursory look at the current doctrinal discussion of the covenant in the Netherlands and in South Africa. Naturally one should not expect to encounter the name of Schilder frequently in contemporary debates. Several reasons account for this. First, it is true that due to its polemical character, his theology is somewhat "time conditioned." In order to discern his meaning with precision—as we have already established—every one of his formulations must always be read in terms of the background of the ecclesiastical-historical context in which he lived. Therefore it is rather difficult to "translate" his position for today. Second, the church struggle in which he participated so intensely resulted in the fact that in many circles in the Netherlands he became *persona non grata*, and in South Africa he came simply to be ignored. Third, we encounter the (fortunate!) reality that he had no epigone of significance who has introduced his characteristic position into contemporary scientific theological conversations. Finally, since his death an immense change has taken place in the theological world. Only a few years after his death, serious attention began to be devoted in Reformed circles in both the Netherlands and South Africa to the possibility of positive appreciation of the theology of Karl Barth. Today Barth is virtually passé! Figures like J. Moltmann, W. Pannenberg, and E. Jüngel excite people today. Standpoints within Reformed theology have been altered by this development in such a way that it is understandable why a Reformed theologian such as Klaas Schilder would no longer enjoy much attention.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the issues relating to the doctrine of the covenant are and will remain enduringly relevant. For these involve one of the most fundamental themes

of the Christian faith: the relationship between God and humanity. In his Word God himself has revealed this relationship between him and us to be a *covenant* relationship. For that reason no theologian reflecting meaningfully about the covenant may simply be ignored. Wherever it has been graciously granted to a few theologians that they should offer an independent contribution to this reflection, this is precisely what continues to warrant our attention. Such is undoubtedly the case with K. Schilder. Even though his theology cannot be stamped in its entirety as something original—precisely because he was a Reformed theologian—nevertheless it can hardly be denied that at several points he did provide an independent contribution. This is true especially of his contribution with respect to the doctrine of the covenant. And we wish to concentrate in this final chapter on his *characteristic contribution*. For organizing our comments we will continue to use the same two overarching topics of the preceding two chapters: the *history* of the covenant, and the *structure* of the covenant. The first of these two topics confronts us with the central question of the relationship between the decree of God (in eternity) and his action (in history). In connection with this we must look further at the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and between old and new covenant. Schilder's heavy accent on the moment of *continuity* provides us here with the opening for a critical-evaluative reflection on his view of the history of the covenant. In the second topic, concerning the structure of the covenant, we encounter the central question of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Closely connected with this is a discussion of the question whether Schilder brought together in an acceptable way the two structural elements of the covenant, justice and fellowship. Finally, his own characteristic view of the nature of the covenant promise (and demand) requires our attention, before we conclude this chapter with a final section dealing with the continuing significance of Schilder's contribution on the covenant.

4.2 The decree and the activity of God

With the perhaps somewhat strange (but otherwise rather typical) expression of the heading of this section, the essence of Schilder's view of history can be summarized. From our analysis¹ we have seen that one may speak of a remarkable emphasis in Schilder's theology, especially in its day, on history. In opposition to both the initial transcendentalist phase of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, in this section we are referring to § 2.1 and § 2.4, without further specification.

dialectical theology and the tendency in scholastic theology toward eternalizing, he maintained that history—as the *activity* of God—may not be devalued. For *God* is at work *in all of history*. For that reason history may not be denigrated in any way. What Schilder wrote back then in this context can still today be highly appreciated as a genuinely biblical position.²

Schilder applied his characteristic emphasis on history to the covenant as well. Because to took history as his starting point, we concluded, his conception of the doctrine of the covenant evidences a structure different from what prevailed at the time in (Kuyperian) Reformed circles. But this did not yet mean that he was an “historicist.” He had distanced himself too emphatically from Cocceius to merit that criticism. By his own historicizing of salvation, Cocceius was led to the denial of the unity of the history of the covenant.³ Schilder was concerned precisely with this *unity* of (covenant) history. For that reason Schilder did not emphasize history as such, but especially the unity of history. In his reflection regarding this matter, it is clear that for him, behind his *starting point in history* there lay a *foundation of history*, namely, God’s (eternal) *decree*. It is precisely at this point that Schilder’s shoe pinches the contemporary theological foot. With a starting point in, and an emphasis on, history as such no one today seems to have any difficulty, but the unity of that history and especially the grounding of history in the unity of God’s decree generates various questions. Since Schilder’s conviction regarding the unity of history forms the backbone of his covenant perspective—think only of his emphasis on the *continuity* between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and between old and new covenant—it is necessary to inquire further into the criticisms people have made about Schilder in this regard.

In one of our previous chapters we already referred to the repeated accusation against Schilder that, perhaps contrary to his intention, he ultimately at cardinal points supposedly devalued God’s concrete speaking in history.⁴ This accusation is part of an entire complex of criticisms directed against aspects of especially his outworking of the doctrine of God and the

² Even someone like H. Berkhof referred several times to Schilder’s book, *Wat is de hemel?*. In his own work, *The Christian Faith* (p. 188ENG), Berkhof says that Schilder’s book contained an eschatology “in which heavy emphasis is placed on the salvation-historical function of heaven.” Cf. what we wrote above, in chapter 2, note 7.

³ Cf. what G. C. Berkouwer wrote about Cocceius in his important chapter, “Promise and Fulfillment,” in *The Person of Christ*, especially p. 121. ENG

⁴ Cf. especially chapter 2 above, note 179.

doctrine of predestination, but were focused primarily on the manner in which he connected the *activity* of God (in history) with the *decree* of God (in eternity). In order to obtain a comprehensive overview of this criticism, it would serve us well to take up the extensive analysis of Schilder's theology provided by J. Douma in his dissertation, *Algemene genade* (1966). By way of supplement, we can then point out aspects of the entire problematic to which Douma gave inadequate attention.

In setting forth Schilder's views on common grace, Douma arranged Schilder's motifs with the following headings: "Back before the Fall," "The covenant relationship," "Still further back," and "Christ and culture."⁵ Under the third of these four headings, Douma describes Schilder's presentation the attributes of God as (what one might call) "eternal balance." Not only God's love but also his hatred existed from eternity. The forbearance of God displays the same kind of duality: it serves as the "substratum" for God's grace and wrath. Douma concludes: "In this way history obtains a completely different profile. God is present in history as electing and reprobating, with love and hatred."⁶ In the last of the four sections mentioned above Douma discerns the same "the 'both-and' emphasis that has become so familiar to us," but now in "Christological dress"⁷: Christ is Savior-Redeemer and Savior-Avenger, both of which serve eternal life and eternal death. Further, Douma shows that double predestination, though it was present in Schilder from the beginning, nevertheless later in his life played an increasingly dominant role. In this respect, despite all the differences, we can observe a certain similarity between Schilder and the American, Rev. Herman Hoeksema.⁸ After discussing with clarity the similarities and differences between Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin with respect to common grace, Douma comes to his evaluation. From his evaluation we wish to provide the following relevant points in connection with Schilder. On the basis of good Scriptural and confessional grounds Douma argues that one must indeed hold firmly to the Reformed doctrine of double predestination,⁹ but then not in the sense that eternal reprobation "can be emphasized in such independent parallelism with election as Schilder does."¹⁰ Douma rejected Schilder's unwillingness to recognize any "pre" of God's mercy in relation to his wrath, and any "pre" of

⁵ *Algemene genade*, 155-183.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 185-203.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 289-295.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

election in relation to reprobation. “Precisely by his portrayal of the balance between God’s eternal hatred alongside his eternal love, Schilder frequently spoke in a way that was more strongly supralapsarian that had occurred up to that time in Reformed theology.”¹¹

Specifically in connection with the covenant, Douma believes that two lines can be distinguished in Schilder’s thought. Especially in his book, *Wat is de hel?* (1932), Schilder wrote heart-warming things about the significance of the covenant with respect to the punishment and judgment of unbelievers. Later, however, especially in his contending against common grace, there came to dominate “a further constructed parallelism between heaven and hell, to such an extent that, in our opinion, the properly drawn connection between covenant and hell . . . could no longer adequately come into its own.”¹² When he returned to the topic of God’s wrath and judgment, Douma expressed appreciation for the fact that especially in his preaching, Schilder paid attention to these matters. “We wish to hold firmly to what Schilder had in view. We may not lose sight of God’s decrees. On the other hand, however, eternity may not obscure our view of time, filled with God’s considered and determined acting and with his windings and turnings. History is more than eternity’s grand billboard. We must continually speak with *two* words, the first of which (concerning eternity) may never swallow the second (concerning time) as something naïve, anthropomorphic, and as part of our language of observation.”¹³ In this context we must mention one more element in Douma’s critique of Schilder. Douma warned that one must not reason too directly from God’s decree to events in history, and thought that with both Kuyper and Schilder “more than once *speculation* about God’s decree” can be demonstrated, “which falls outside the boundaries of the concrete speaking of Holy Scripture and then leads among other things to positing the continuation of history as something *necessary*.”¹⁴ Douma did not deny the existence of God’s decree, but it was not his decree of election and reprobation that

¹¹ Ibid., 298.

¹² Ibid., 312. On p. 319 as well, Douma states that a distinction must be made between Schilder’s publications on the *covenant* and his confrontation with the idea of *common grace*. Schilder’s parallelism between election

¹³ *Algemene genade*, 335. With these expressions Douma concurred with the criticism of Schilder’s view of revelation expressed by, among others, H. M. Kuitert in his dissertation, *De mensvormigheid Gods* (especially pp. 108ff.). Naturally this does not mean that Douma accepted Kuitert’s thetical position (the identity between the essence and the revelation of God).

¹⁴ *Algemene genade*, 342. In the second claim that Douma made in his speech, “Cultuur en vreemdelingschap” (published as an appendix to the second edition of his *Algemene genade*, pp. 369ff.), he stated that Schilder and Kuyper both maintain the unity of world history (before and after the fall into sin), as this is anchored in God’s eternal decree. But between these two authors this difference nonetheless existed: when they wrote about the cultural mandate, Kuyper proceeded more from God’s eternal decree, whereas Schilder preferred to begin with creation.

“necessitated” that God permit history to continue. That continuation is due to God’s faithfulness: “a faithfulness that is never automatic and necessary, but continually surprising as grace manifests itself.”¹⁵

Anyone who reviews in its entirety the treatment Schilder’s theology received from Douma will confess nothing but appreciation for his analysis. For here we have a significant attempt to penetrate Schilder’s motifs/motives and where possible to appreciate them. In this way the other points concerning which criticism must of course be expressed can be seen in their proper proportion. Necessary accusations about an excessive parallelism in the doctrine of God and the doctrine of predestination then need not lead us constantly to a pin Schilder down on this point. For this is not the whole Schilder! From some of his other critics Schilder did not always enjoy the same fair treatment. When someone like J. T. Bakker, for example, chose as the subject of his own study the relationship between God’s wrath and his love (especially in Luther’s theology), the only Reformed theologian whose views he persistently discussed was K. Schilder.¹⁶ Now, Schilder’s interpretation of Luther, which occupies merely a few chapters in his *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, may certainly be in need of correction, as far as we are concerned. But the point at issue is this: whereas Bakker persistently accounts for Luther’s historical circumstances, he is absolutely silent about Schilder’s life struggle against the weakening by other Reformed thinkers of the seriousness of the covenant threat (arising precisely from a particular view of the relationship between election and covenant). Bakker nowhere discussed the question whether Schilder’s forced symmetry necessarily vitiated the tension of the “everything or nothing” (redemptive for believers, but non-redemptive for unbelievers!). On the contrary, he concluded his confrontation with Schilder with the rhetorical question: “Did not Schilder seek *time and again* to reach beyond history and then to explain all of history and revelation on the basis of his election-reprobation paradigm?”¹⁷ Although the way in which Schilder grounded the seriousness of gospel preaching in God’s decree was mistaken at points, nevertheless one needs to be careful that criticism of those points does not become the occasion for that grounding as such to fall into discredit.

¹⁵ Ibid., 343.

¹⁶ *Coram Deo* (1956), 67ff., 197ff.

¹⁷ Ibid., 213-214 (emphasis added).

Douma's critique of Schilder showed a partial agreement with that of G. C. Berkouwer. Whereas with Berkouwer on the one hand one can find points of appreciation for Schilder in numerous passages in his *Studies in Dogmatics*, on the other hand he nevertheless always had difficulty with the parallel between God's *eternal* love and his *eternal* hatred. He briefly accounted for this in one of his last publications.¹⁸ With reference to Schilder's position regarding the general offer of grace, he stated that in the discussion concerning this matter what was at issue was "especially the significance of *history*, of the reality and seriousness of gospel proclamation."¹⁹ Although he realized that in this discussion Schilder distanced himself from Hoeksema, he remained convinced that the analysis of the notion of "offer" with Schilder "stood under the same heavy pressure of double predestination (love and hatred), from which the pathway to proclaiming the *gospel* to everyone was difficult to discover."²⁰ This criticism of Berkouwer must surely be taken to heart, but at the same time one must remember that Berkouwer's own position regarding double predestination (other than that of Douma) is itself not without questions. Gradually the conviction grew for Berkouwer that the Reformed doctrine of predestination must be revised at more than one point. His later position surfaced along with his sympathy for criticisms of the Canons of Dort, as formulated in a gravamen adopted by the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (synodical) in 1970.²¹

One aspect of the issue at hand, namely, the *decree* and the *activity* of God in Schilder's theology, Douma did not discuss in his study. We are referring to the (philosophical) critique that had previously been given concerning Schilder's view of the relationship between eternity and time, to which we referred in our analysis.²² Entering fully into that critique would lead us too far away from the limits of our study. But one point requires our attention because this touches

¹⁸ *A Half-Century of Theology* (1974ENG?), 130ff.ENG

¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰ Ibid., 138-139. Berkouwer is referring here to the dissertation of his student A. C. de Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer. The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (1954).

²¹ For an overview, see the unpublished dissertation of J. F. Botha, *Die problematiek rondom die leer van die verwerping van ewigheid in die Dordtse leerreëls, met besondere toespitsing op die Skrifbewys, en die gravamen Brouwer, op die Sinode van Sneek* (Stellenbosch, 1972). For criticism of Berkouwer's position, see also the discussion of M. J. Arntzen, of the unpublished dissertation of the American A. L. Baker, *A critical evaluation of G. C. Berkouwer's doctrine of election* (Dallas, 1976), in *De Reformatie* 54 (26 May 1979) and following. In that review it is shown, among other things, that Berkouwer had difficulty acknowledging a divine decree that encompassed everything (including sin). Although over against Karl Barth, Berkouwer acknowledged the counsel of peace as a biblical idea, nevertheless it can be said that for him there is ultimately only one divine will: that all people be saved.

²² See chapter 2, notes 83, 161, and 179.

directly upon the relationship between covenant and the counsel of peace. Stellingwerf accused Schilder, with reference to passages dealing with the counsel of peace in the latter's book, *Wat is de hemel?*, of allowing the covenant ultimately to be swallowed up by the counsel of peace.²³ For Schilder history would have been merely an interim that at the end of time is taken up into the timeless eternity of God. Stellingwerf connected this "the return of God to God" with what Schilder wrote in his dissertation about God's transcendence, and divine accommodation in revelation, concerning which Stellingwerf commented: "We know no transcendent God who can be conceived of apart from his creation. . . . There is no way back to his transcendence. The meaning of history is not that God returns unto himself. The meaning of history is that for eternity God comes unto man. There among mankind God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). Man is continuously and seriously God's covenant partner. And God's name is forever the God of Israel, the God of people. . . . Perhaps we must let go of the entire problematic of transcendence and immanence as an unbiblical problematic."²⁴ In this connection we wish to make two comments. First, it is a truly unfair charge that according to Schilder there will no longer be any place for man alongside God. He expressly argued that the dipleuric covenant between God and man is not eliminated by the monopleuric "covenant" between God and God, but saturated, explained, and resplendent with extreme glory.²⁵ From these expressions, full of doxological amazement, one must not draw too many inferences. Second, it is a fact that in his exegesis of "no vegetation, no sexuality" passages, Schilder tended toward a dualism between time and eternity. In our opinion, Stellingwerf has shown convincingly that Luke 20:33=36 and 1 Corinthians 6:13, to which Schilder appealed for his view, can be interpreted differently.²⁶ But the last word has not been spoken concerning the danger of a "dualism" between time and eternity. O. Jager, for example, dealt extensively with this issue. After his detailed explanation of how others have thought about this issue, he registered this conclusion: "We can conclude that in the end time man will as real man be focused upon God, fellow man, and cosmos, and that this position of man excludes all deification and eternalizing. . . . Only by confessing the continuity of time is one armed against pantheism."²⁷ Exactly how that "continuity of time" must be understood, however, remains unclear. Someone else has written: "Scripture does not talk about

²³ "Kritiek op K. Schilder als filosoferend dogmaticus," in *Philosophia Reformata*, 27 (1962): 115ff.

²⁴ Ibid., 121-122.

²⁵ Cf. chapter 2, note 159.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 110-111.

²⁷ *Het eeuwige leven*, 577.

the end of time. . . [but says that] time will continue, though that time will differ from the present time, of course, in many respects. Whether that time belonging to the consummation must be called eternal temporality or creaturely eternity, one thing is sure: the boundary between God and man, the eternal God and temporal man, will never be erased.”²⁸ It is to Schilder’s credit that he never violated this boundary, something that has happened many times before.²⁹

Several years after the appearance of Douma’s study, S. Greidanus intensively studied Schilder’s perspective on history in his dissertation, *Sola Scriptura* (1970). In that work he acknowledged deep appreciation for the redemptive-historical approach brought by Schilder and others to preaching, especially in comparison to the much weaker exemplarist method. He correctly observed that the theological foundation of the redemptive-historical preaching for Schilder rested in the fact that all of history forms a *unity* because it is grounded in the *unity* of God’s decree, as revealed in the *unity* of Holy Scripture.³⁰ When Greidanus registers his own criticism of redemptive-historical preaching, he does not criticize this starting point as such, but charges Schilder with schematism, speculation, and objectivism.³¹ Greidanus based his criticism mainly on a detailed assessment of Schilder’s trilogy dealing with the suffering of Christ. Something of a speculative schematism can indeed be shown from that work, especially when Schilder tried to indicate the exact chronology of the successive events in the passion history. But the design of the trilogy was more devotional than doctrinal in nature. For this reason we regret that here again Schilder’s theology in an all too facile manner (accompanied with references to the criticisms already known from Berkouwer, Kuitert, Jager, Douma, and Stellingwerf) is simply summarized with the claim that “he reasons from God’s decree to history, while Scripture proceeds in the opposite direction.”³² On the one hand, it remains a valid question whether Scripture moves simply from history to God’s decree, and whether occasionally Scripture presents the course of history precisely as the consequence of God’s

²⁸ J. A. Heyns, *Dogmatiek*, 63.

²⁹ With someone like J. van Andel a trace of pantheism lies under the surface when in his commentary on Luke 20:34-36 (*Lukas*, 2nd edition, 1932), he notes: “from him [God] everything has come, and in him everything will disappear. Earthly relationships, including marriage and parenthood, are merely shadows cast by eternal relationships, destined to disappear for good as soon as these have appeared.”

³⁰ *Sola Scriptura*, 123-124. In addition to the formulations we have already cited in our analysis, Greidanus culled the following comments of Schilder from his *Bij dichters en Schriftgeleerden* (1927), p. 401, where he stated that the Reformed refuse to read the Bible “as a collection of disparate pieces and books . . . but as a *unity*, as a single book of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 174ff.

³² *Ibid.*, 175.

decree.³³ On the other hand, a balanced evaluation of Schilder's theology must guard against maintaining simple paradigms ourselves and falling into "schematism." That which another (by no means uncritical) Schilder researcher wrote is absolutely true: "... Schilder was such a fertile thinker that he constantly modified his statements, and these modifications are of such a significant nature that any evaluator of Schilder must in turn modify his judgments. Schilder's reflection resists any and all easy, simple characterization. Since he was more of a suggestive theologian than a systematician we find him opening up new perspectives rather than consistently working out all the implications of his reflections. To this we must add that Schilder was highly polemical in his writings and thus he frequently set up theological danger signals. It is regrettable that he failed to see and mitigate the dangers implicit in his own speculative construction about God's self-love procreating elect and reprobate individuals."³⁴

This puts us in a position at this stage to make several comments occasioned by the criticism of Schilder that has been (very briefly) recounted here. We need not register anything beyond "several comments" here, since it is not our intention with this study to review the *entire* theology of Schilder.

The preceding critique has brought to light at least one issue: Schilder's theology is not a complete system in which all of its aspects can be harmonized neatly. There are two lines that undoubtedly run throughout his thinking. On the one side he occasionally reasons so strongly from God's "decree" (in eternity) that this can hardly avoid doing injury to the decisive character of his "activity" (in history). This line comes under enormous pressure. On the other side, however, there is in Schilder that line according to which the historical activity of God admittedly remains grounded in his eternal decree, but then in such a way that this grounding does not rob history of its character as the arena of genuine encounter between God and man. In our analysis we have traced especially this second line of Schilder, for two reasons: first, because it cannot be denied that this line appears prominently in the foreground with Schilder when he

³³ Cf. the review by C. Trimp of Greidanus's dissertation in *De Reformatie* 45 (1970): 337ff. What Trimp writes on p. 338 is important: the connection between earlier (Scripture) and today (the church) is to be found in the *unity* of God's redemption: "It is one history, in which the same God was busy earlier and is busy now working out the redemption of his people. The unity of salvation history forms the continuous connection between the ancient covenant people and us, and it is on the wavelength of this one salvation history that the sound of God's revelation comes to us. It was especially Dr. K. Schilder who already around 1930 defended this proposition."

³⁴ A. C. de Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, 154.

explicitly treats the covenant, because this line of thinking in our opinion lies closer to a biblical vision of the relationship between God's "decree" and his "activity."

With regard to Schilder's development of the doctrine of God, we can agree in large part with the critique of J. Douma. In order to accentuate God's wrath upon sin—a legitimate biblical motif—it is really unnecessary to posit the hypothesis of an "eternal hatred" on God's part alongside his eternal love. Therefore it seems to us safer to say—as Schilder himself occasionally did—that divine hatred is the "mirror image" of his love.³⁵ Clearly Schilder was led to his characteristic parallelism of the divine attributes by his intention to ground the seriousness of the covenant threat also in the doctrine of God. One should not fault him either for that seriousness nor even for that grounding as such, but Schilder should have appealed to God's *righteousness* rather than to his hatred or wrath. To say it in Schilderian terms, we would wish to formulate our position this way: When already before the Fall God threatened man with eternal death "in advance" (Gen. 2:17), this is not his "already present hatred" that had existed eternally alongside his love, that necessitated him to make this threat, but this threat agrees with his (eternal) righteousness. Therein God "did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just" (Belgic Confession, art. 16).

Indeed, there *is* something attractive in Schilder's view that in the doctrine of God, one may not proceed from one or another "chief attribute" of God, to which all of his other attributes must then be subordinated. Surely it is dangerous to desire to balance in a rationalistic manner the attributes of the wholly gracious God in a "parallelism" or "symmetry." But we will never be able to avoid one or another "double" manner of speaking, even though we know that God is "simple." Well known are—to mention only a few representatives--Bavinck's distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God, and Barth's distinction between the perfections of God's freedom and his love, and H. Berkhof's distinction between the capacities of God's transcendence and his condescension.³⁶ We can certainly agree that the relationship between God's love and his wrath (or judgment or hatred) can be formulated as an

³⁵ Cf. chapter 3, ????. Our evaluation concurs with that of J. J. F. Durand, who, in his *Die lewende God*, 90, writes: "When we turn to Scripture, we see immediately, however, that God is not in the same sense the God of wrath as he is the God of love. . . . Therefore God's wrath is not a divine capacity alongside his other capacity, but rather the other side of his *love*. . . the reaction of his love."

³⁶ Cf. Durand, *op. cit.*, 89.

opus proprium and an *opus accidentale*.³⁷ But when this distinction is applied also to the relationship between God's mercy and his justice, in our judgment too little is said. God *is* merciful (in a just manner), *and* he *is* just (in a merciful manner). Less than this we should not confess at this point. To try to argue, for example, that God is "simply" love is dealing with a dangerous image of God that is in fact humanistic and must inevitably lead to an unscriptural redemptive universalism.³⁸

Something similar can be said concerning Schilder's development of the doctrine of predestination and the criticisms others have registered about that. Here as well a "parallel" or "symmetrical" arrangement of election and reprobation could better be avoided, but without surrendering a "double" predestination. We remain convinced that one can speak in a biblical manner of reprobation "from eternity" as part of "double" predestination. But then two things must be kept in mind in that connection. The first is that this decree of God (in eternity) did not occur outside of the disobedience of man (in time).³⁹ And the second is that this decree of God need not be deduced from his so-called "eternal hatred." But it is closely related to God's (eternal) righteousness. For God genuinely demonstrates (within time) this righteousness not only by declaring some of the godless to be justified (Rom. 4:5), but also by justly "surrendering" others who are godless to their godlessness (Rom. 1:18ff.). Why God makes that distinction remains for us (believers) a (reverent) mystery. But that he does this, and also how he does this—namely, according to his "decree of election and reprobation" (Canon of Dort, I.6)—is a revealed fact. Seeing that according to this decree "according to his good pleasure" he sends the gospel "to whom he will and when he wills" (Canons of Dort, I.3 and II.5), it is not clear to us what Berkouwer means with his comment that Schilder's analysis of the "general offer of grace" allegedly labors too much under the pressure of "double" predestination. It can hardly be denied that those who never had the privilege of hearing the gospel have in reality also never received God's saving grace. To say without qualification that God loves everybody, is simply

³⁷ Douma, *Algemene genade*, 245-246, in the line of Calvin.

³⁸ J. C. Lombard, in his *Die leer van die heiligmaking volgens Karl Barth* (203), indicates that Barth, from his accent on the sovereignty of God's revelation of love in Christ, can finally do nothing but view God's holiness, righteousness, wrath, and judgment, "everything" as "the predicate of his love." Without hiding anything, A. König wrote (though failing to criticize Barth adequately), in his *Ek is wat Ek is* (64): "It is eternally dangerous to live with the misunderstanding that God is a nice grandfather who is 'too nice' to oppose his grandchildren and thus ignores everything they do wrong!"

³⁹ Cf. what Schilder himself said about the eternal decree (mentioned above in chapter 2, p. ???): it is "time-and-again-decreed."???

untrue. What is true is that to those whom God gives the privilege of hearing the gospel God also really offers his grace in full seriousness. Therefore the church has received the mandate to proclaim the gospel of grace, “together with the command to repent and believe,” to all people “without any distinction” (Canons of Dort, II.5). “Double” predestination, understood in the sense used above, need not in any way obscure the vision for this mandate of the church. Where such obscuring is happening or has happened, the blame should not all upon the confession of “double” predestination as such, but squarely upon the church’s disobedience to its divine mandate.

By now it should have become clear that this entire complex theological problematic lies more at the periphery of our actual topic, which is K. Schilder and the covenant. The above-mentioned criticisms of Schilder and our own comments occasioned by them must therefore function without the framework of our study as a warning to be aware that in his concrete development of the doctrine of the covenant, Schilder perhaps reasoned too strongly from the *decree* to the *activity* of God. We will need to keep this warning in mind in the next section as well. When Schilder wrote about the relationship between covenant and the counsel of peace—as this has appeared from our analysis—he can neatly distinguish the *decree* and the *activity* of God without separating them entirely from each other. This seems to us to be precisely the proper starting point. But then we must maintain two aspects simultaneously: we must distinguish between covenant and counsel of peace without separating them. By doing the first—distinguishing—Schilder could succeed in clarifying that man’s responsibility (in the covenant) is in no way neutralized by God’s sovereign decree (in election and in reprobation). On the other hand, by not separating covenant and counsel of peace, however, Schilder avoided falling to the other extreme. And this too is an important point. In modern theological developments there is a tendency either to disallow God’s decree to function in any manner whatsoever, or to consign God’s decree to the rubble heap of myths.⁴⁰ This tendency is, in our opinion, definitely not due, as is often argued, to a better understanding of Scripture, but rather due to the modern attempt to ban every form of “metaphysics” from theology. In opposition to that tendency, one who wishes, on good Scriptural and confessional grounds, to continue speaking of God’s eternal counsel—

⁴⁰ Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 68-70ENG??, where he calls the counsel of peace “mythology.” According to him there is only one covenant possible—the covenant of grace. God can establish a “covenant” only with people, not with himself. It is remarkable as well that H. Berkhof’s *Christian Faith* nowhere mentions God’s counsel of peace.

though this is carefully nuanced—does not dare to deny the theological connection between the *decree* and the *activity* of God.⁴¹

4.3 Continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace

What Schilder wrote about the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in general differs little from the Calvinist tradition, especially as this was developed by Kuyper and Bavinck.⁴² Once again we may speak here of a characteristic contribution in connection with this theme. This is related in the first place to his emphasis that from beginning to end, all history is one and the same history. Therefore, for Schilder the *proton* and the *eschaton* lay on the same continuous line as extensions of one another. Applied to the covenant this means that the entire history of the covenant is the history of (to be sure, distinct phases of) the one covenant between God and man. The original covenant is also the abiding covenant. It is indeed antiquated by sin, but it is renewed by grace. That antiquating and renewing, however, signifies no invalidating or replacing, but rather a progressive fulfilling of the original intention. Schilder's position with respect to the history of the covenant thus stands or falls with the slogan "always or never," whose converse is the other slogan, with respect to the structure of the covenant: "everything or nothing."

In this regard Schilder's view of the covenant displays some (remarkable!) similarity with that of Karl Barth, at least at one point. Barth, too, was alert for the dualism he thought he detected in the traditional distinction between the covenant of works, on the one hand, and the covenant of grace, on the other hand. For that reason, he preferred to replace that "dualistic" doctrine of the covenant for a "monistic" doctrine of the covenant.⁴³ But here the similarity between Barth and Schilder stops. Precisely in contradiction of Schilder's starting point, Barth rejected the notion of the covenant of works entirely, and posited the claim that from the

⁴¹ A fine example of this is provided by J. A. Heyns, *Dogmatiek*, 72-77, 105-106.

⁴² Cf. § 2.2 above. In his *Jesus Christus die Eschatos* [Jesus Christ the Eschatos], A. König provides a clear overview of what he terms Bavinck's "relative parity [gelijkstelling] of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace" (pp. 221-224).

⁴³ C. Graafland, "Belijdenis, verkiezing en verbond [Confession, election, and covenant]," *Theologia Reformata*, 15: 180-208, esp. 204ff., with reference to Barth's excursus on the "Föederaltheologie [Federal theology]" in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* [Church Dogmatics], 4.1: 57-70.^{ENG??}

beginning there was only one covenant: the covenant *of grace*.⁴⁴ Theologically this position of Barth is connected with his doctrine of God and doctrine of revelation. He wants nothing to do with the notion that God reveals Himself before or outside of Christ. But hermeneutically this position is related to his interpretation of the biblical creation story as “saga.”

By contrast, however, Schilder adopts an altogether different theological and hermeneutical starting point. Regarding the latter, he proceeds from the “faith presupposition” that Genesis 1-3 is historically reliable. Therefore, in his doctrine of the covenant he employs his principle “begin at the beginning,” with the result that his exegesis of this part of Scripture functions with remarkable breadth in his doctrine of the covenant. In this context, however, it is important to note that with Schilder there is no dilemma between protology (Gen. 2) and eschatology (Rev. 22) of the covenant.⁴⁵ One could say that precisely on the basis of his interest in eschatology—his reflection on hell and on heaven!—Schilder arrived at the need to develop protology. Because the ending of the covenant must be understood as being in line with the beginning of the covenant as restoration and fulfillment of the original intention with the covenant, for that reason eschatology can never be fully understood apart from protology.

A clear demonstration of the fact that Schilder reasoned not only “from earlier to later” (from protology to eschatology), but also “from later to earlier” (from eschatology to protology), is to be found in the fact that he introduced into protology the notion of “catastrophe,” distinct from the Fall into sin. We have already discussed this.⁴⁶ Here we need to add that the modern exclusively eschatological approach (of Pannenberg and Moltmann, for example) is definitely one-sided.⁴⁷ Because a protological and an eschatological approach cannot be separated from one another, Schilder and others who address theological questions (also) protologically should not for that reason be characterized as “conservative,” in contrast to a “progressive” (merely) eschatological approach.

⁴⁴ In his doctrine of creation (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 3.1: 103ff.^{ENG??}), Barth has an extensive discussion of his central formulation that the creation must be understood as the “äusserer Grund des Bundes [external ground of the covenant]” and the covenant as the “innerer Grund der Schöpfung [internal Ground of creation].”

⁴⁵ Cf. the second half of § 2.1 above.

⁴⁶ See § 2.2 above.

⁴⁷ Cf. for Moltmann, the recent study of H. G. Geertsema, *Van boven naar voren* [From above to ahead] (1980), which concludes: “The theology of hope presents a new concept of history. . . . The starting point for understanding history is the future as that which is totally new, not that which has already always existed” (p. 53).

Schilder did not ground the existence of the covenant of works, nor the continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, exclusively in the first chapters of Genesis. The biblical-theological connection between the first and the last Adam played a role for Schilder that was too great to allow him to do that. Once more, you can never obtain a proper view of the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace (nature and grace, respectively) if you deny the historical reliability of these chapters. Involved here is more than just a particular view of Scripture! An example of a modern evolutionistic reinterpretation of Genesis 1-3, with all the dangerous consequences of that, is encountered in the thinking of H. M. Kuitert. Serious objections must (and can) be raised against his position that in the New Testament the figure of Adam functions merely as a “teaching model.”⁴⁸ What Schilder emphasized so strongly in this context must be maintained: creation (and together with it, the establishing of covenant), the Fall into sin (as disobedient covenant breaking by man from his side), and redemption (as gracious covenant restoration by God from his side) are clearly distinguishable historical moments of the one history of the covenant. Therefore, the relationship between creation and sin is one of “sequence” [ná mekaar], and not “simultaneity” [náás mekaar].⁴⁹ In his later publications, the results of Kuitert’s understanding of (what we are here calling) the “continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace” came into view more fully. Because creation and sin are so tightly interwoven, creation and redemption (or nature and grace) are all too easily placed on one level. The Christian faith then gets defined in terms of an “historical quest,” one of the (many possible) developments of a basic primeval faith (“an anthropological ground floor”), in which everybody shares.⁵⁰ Schilder’s accent on the continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace must not be confused with this kind of “continuity.” For Schilder spoke of a decisive gracious intervention from God in Christ immediately after the Fall into sin, without which the further unfolding of covenant

⁴⁸ Cf. the essay of J. P. Versteeg, “Is Adam in het Nieuwe Testament een leermodel? [Is Adam a teaching model in the New Testament]” *Woord en kerk* [Word and church] (1971), pp. 29-70, where the author shows from especially an exegetical basis how untenable Kuitert’s position is (which the latter set forth in his *Verstaat gij wat gij leest?* [Do you understand what you are reading?]).

⁴⁹ This formulation from J. T. Bakker, cited by Versteeg, p. 66.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Wat heet geloven?* [What is believing?] (1977). R. H. Bremmer, “De hermeneutische theologie van H.M. Kuitert [The hermeneutical theology of H. M. Kuitert],” *In die Skriflig* [In the light of Scripture], 15 (1981): 3-20, provides a clear overview of the most recent developments with Kuitert. Cf. for a critical discussion of this also the last part of the article of J. Hoek, “Natuur en genade bij enkele twintigste-eeuwse theologen [Nature and grace in several twentieth-century theologians],” *Theologia Reformata*, 22 (1979): 191-204.

history simply would have been impossible. And still, this very same history of the very same (renewed) covenant was advanced in the dispensation of the covenant of grace. Nature and grace may not be placed in contradiction to one another, just as in this sense they may not be identified with each other.

That Schilder would have nothing to do with a contradiction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is nicely illustrated by his emphasis on the structural continuity between the two phases of the one covenant. With his talk of “gospel,” “faith,” and “sanctification” already before the Fall into sin (with quotation marks, of course!), he was moving along the good track that Calvin already had laid. Although Calvin nowhere used the phrase “covenant of works,” he was indeed certainly aware of a covenant relationship between God and Adam already before the Fall into sin. But this relationship was not a legalistic relationship in which man was cast upon his own effort. Then too already God had shown his “grace” in the “Mediator” (the Logos of John 1:4).⁵¹ Later so-called covenant scholasticism did indeed place the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in contradiction with one another. You could say that Schilder avoided this scholasticism and clearly exposed it with his perceptive remark that a mistaken view would fantasize someone with a Remonstrant figure in the covenant of “works,” and someone with an antinomian style in the covenant of “grace.”⁵² Thereby Schilder showed that it is possible to reject any false contradiction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace without surrendering the existence of the covenant of works as such. But then we must not posit a flat uniformity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Between these two phases of the covenant there does exist a distinction, in the

⁵¹ J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, p. 221, and C. Graafland, *Het vaste verbond*, pp. 24-29. With reference to H. H. Wolf *Die Einheit des Bundes. Das Verhältnis von Altem und Neuem Testament bei Calvin* [The Unity of the Covenant. The Relationship between Old and New Testament in Calvin] (1958), Graafland said that Calvin’s position must not be read through Barthian spectacles, as though a straight line ran from Calvin to Barth on this point. Calvin accented the break between God and man (at the Fall) more strongly than Wolf suggests.

⁵² Cf. § 2.3 above. Without referring to Schilder, Berkouwer writes in *De zonde* [Sin], 1:200f.^{ENG77}, about the false opposition between a covenant of “works” and a covenant of “grace,” something that can indeed be found in someone like V. Hepp. On this point a remarkable similarity can be observed between Hepp and his followers and the new (Barthian) dogmatics of Beker and Hasselaar. In their *Wegen en kruispunten in de dogmatiek* [Paths and intersections in dogmatics], (1979) 2:22f., they assert that serious objections can be raised against the “hypothesis” of the covenant of works. They go on to ask *correctly* how, in such a construction, freedom would be possible without grace. (Cf. Schilder: no person with a “Remonstrant” shape in Paradise!). But they add *incorrectly* that in such a construction, there can be no obedience directed toward a “probationary command,” because this “necessarily leads to legalism.” Here the existence of the covenant of works is denied (recall Schilder’s concern) from an “antinomian” view of the covenant of grace!

sense of a revelation-historical continuity: the same structural elements of the original covenant are, in this new phase of that covenant, brought up-to-date and further unfolded.

Accepting this continuity appears to be the *sine qua non* required for doing justice to the central biblical data regarding the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of reconciliation. Because the covenant of works, together with its requirement of obedience and its threat of punishment for disobedience, was never abolished, all people always stand guilty before God. Admittedly, the debate relating to the confession of original sin is not resolved with a choice between “realism” or “federalism.”⁵³ But aside from that, it must once again be maintained that on the basis of the continuing and universal nature of the covenant of works, no person is excused. Because God maintains his original covenant law, He does no one an injustice by continuing to require that which we can not do (any longer).⁵⁴ Only along this route can it be made clear that reprobation is no gruesome deed of a grotesque deity, but the warranted retribution of a righteous and faithful God of the covenant, administered against unrighteous and unfaithful covenant breakers. As Schilder liked to put it: hell is covenant wrath resulting from covenant breach! If you acknowledge the permanent validity of the covenant of works, you will find in that acknowledgement, among other things, the legal basis for the condemnation of a portion of humanity, and you will not need to take refuge in a doctrine of universal reconciliation.

At the same time, accepting the idea that the covenant of grace conjoins with the covenant of works on the basis of the biblical link between the last Adam and the first Adam,

⁵³ In his volume on *Sin*, ENG??, Berkouwer analyzes a strong “realistic” tendency in Schilder, a tendency followed by S. Greijdanus also. When in his work (p. ??) Berkouwer rejects the *dilemma* between “realism” and “federalism,” it must be said that in the end Schilder also did so. Cf. the “two lines” which Schilder wanted to maintain in relation to original sin (chapter 1, note 152 above).

⁵⁴ Cf. what we wrote above in § 2.3, regarding Schilder’s position in this connection. The righteousness of God, together with His mercy, comes into view here as well (cf. our comments in the preceding section regarding the doctrine of God). Cf. Schilder’s exposition of Q. / A. 11 of the Heidelberg Catechism (“God is indeed merciful, but He is also just; His justice therefore requires that sin, which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be punished with extreme that is, with everlasting punishment both of body and soul.”) in *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 1:503-515. Exactly identical reasoning appears in the Canons of Dort, II.1: “God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And His justice requires (as He has revealed Himself in His Word) that our sins committed against His infinite majesty should be punished, not only with temporal but with eternal punishments, both in body and soul; which we cannot escape, unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God.”

will provide the framework within which Christ is seen to accomplish his work of reconciliation—such that it would be “abundantly sufficient” for “the sins of the whole world” (Canons of Dort, II.3). As Mediator of the covenant of grace He has performed the demand of the covenant of works, and undergone the realized threatened punishment of that covenant—eternal death! By so doing, He could, and He did, acquire the right to have the original and continuing promise of the covenant—eternal life!—proclaimed to the whole world. All who believingly accept this promise receive also the blessing of the realized promise. You could go a step further here to ask whether the general offer of reconciliation—something different than the offer of universal reconciliation!—can be grounded in the continuing validity of the original covenant. Schilder nowhere developed this idea. But in line with his starting point you could reason as follows: The original demand and threat belonging to the original covenant (of works) remain perpetually valid for all people, also in the dispensation of the covenant of grace. Cannot the same be said, then, concerning the original covenant promise? We accept Schilder’s position that the covenant of works was broken from man’s side, without God from His side ever nullifying it. Therefore the realized threat belonging to the covenant of works—eternal death—continues in force for every person, unless a person by faith in Christ shares in the realized promise—eternal life. But the still-unrealized promise as such—does it not also retain its continuing validity for all people? And on the basis of this, then, are not all people—at least in principle—”susceptible” to the gospel of Jesus Christ [vir die evangelie van Jesus Christus vatbaar]?

Where, however, this continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is not accepted, lapses occur precisely in connection with the central doctrinal issues mentioned above. Someone like H. Berkhof, for example, explicitly rejects the *status integritatis* as having existed prior to the *status corruptionis*.⁵⁵ Although he takes a brilliant stab at harmonizing the modern evolutionist worldview with the biblical creation narrative, this attempt yields disastrous consequences for his doctrine of sin. Sin existed from the very beginning as a structural element within creation: “Sin is a possibility created with freedom.”⁵⁶ Regardless of how he then develops dialectically the “guilt” and the “fate” character of sin, his

⁵⁵ *Christelijk geloof* [Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith, rev. ed.], p. 199^{ENG??}.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 219^{ENG??}.

view inevitably weakens the seriousness of human guilt.⁵⁷ But this position also recasts the doctrine of redemption in evolutionist terms. In Christology it goes then like this: “. . . Jesus relies upon a new creational act of God. And this newness at the same time includes the truth that he is not restoring an imaginary perfect covenant relationship originating in primeval time. History is not turned back, but makes its decisive spring ahead. The ‘last Adam’ is infinitely more than the first . . . an entirely new beginning. . . .”⁵⁸ And within eschatology as well, this conviction fosters great sympathy for an unrestrained acceptance of universal salvation. Even though the covenant is not explicitly mentioned, within this covenant view there is no more room for God’s final righteous judgment of culpable covenant breakers: “We know that the covenant means that the Faithfulness of God arises again and again against the unfaithfulness of people. Which one will in the end give way: Faithfulness or unfaithfulness? . . . In God’s name we hope that hell will be a path of purification.”⁵⁹

With this line of reasoning we see clearly the full consequences of neglecting Schilder’s warning. Misunderstanding the covenant’s protology is the source of misunderstanding the covenant’s eschatology! When the existence of the covenant of works is denied, the grace character of the covenant of grace must necessarily be stretched to such an extent that God’s grace ultimately cancels his judgment. In so doing, however, it is precisely human responsibility, something that plays such a dominant role in Berkhof’s thought, which in the end is again not taken completely seriously. Compared to such a view, Schilder’s covenant perspective with its responsibility-emphasizing “everything or nothing”—at both the beginning and the end of history—stands far more sturdily.

4.4 Continuity between the old covenant and the new covenant

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 198-223^{ENG??}. From the wide discussion of Berkhof’s book, see the following three articles of C. Graafland, all of which repeatedly identify this aspect: “Nieuwe bezinning op het Christelijk geloof [New reflection on the Christian faith],” *Theologia Reformata*, 17 (1974): 86-105; “Berkhofs theologie in het licht van de gereformeerde traditie [Berkhof’s theology in the light of the Reformed tradition],” *Weerwoord* 91974); “Enkele aspecten van de Christelijke geloofsleer bij H. Berkhof [Several aspects of the doctrine of the Christian faith in H. Berkhof],” *Theologia Reformata*, 19 (1976): 37-55.

⁵⁸ *Christelijk geloof*, p. 302^{ENG??}.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 554^{ENG??}.

In the doctrine of the covenant, Schilder wanted justice to be done to two issues simultaneously: the *unity* of the covenant (as grounded in the *decree* of God) and the forward movement of the covenant during the course of *history* (as the *deed* of God). Therefore—and this was our line of reasoning—his view of the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant can most fittingly be described with the notion of “continuity.” Because old and new covenant at bottom constitute a unity, under no circumstances can the relationship between these two be described as contradictory or opposing. But at the same time, because the one covenant followed a course of history, this relationship can also not be described as one of mere identity.⁶⁰

In principle this conviction is shared by many other theologians. It is striking, however, that the relationship between old and new covenant is usually described dialectically as one of continuity and discontinuity. John Bright, for example, writes (with reference to Th. C. Vriezen): “The relationship of the Testaments is inevitably a dual one: it is a relationship of continuity *and* of discontinuity.”⁶¹ The question is appropriate, however, whether this relationship is best described this way. For within the idea of “continuity,” the moment of “discontinuity” is already implicitly present, since “continuity” is not the same as “identity.” The danger exists that this kind of distinct emphasis on “discontinuity” already presupposes too strongly the element of “contradiction.” In the same context, Bright wrote: “The continuity lies in the obvious fact that Christianity is historically a development out of Judaism; the discontinuity in the equally obvious fact that Christianity is not a continuation [*sic*, S.A.S.], or even a radical reform of Judaism, but an entirely separate religion.” This last sentence cannot receive our agreement, at least if “Judaism” here refers to “the old covenant.” From the contemporary discussion regarding this matter, it seems that allowing the moment of continuity between Old and New Testament to function properly always proves challenging. The popularity of the Old Testament today appears to give the impression that the ancient (energetic!) heresy of Marcion has now finally been eradicated. The fact that the value of the Old Testament is once again being recognized can be appreciated only positively. But upon further examination it appears nevertheless that this modern opinion still proceeds too much from a duality between old and new covenant, rather than from the principal unity and the consequent redemptive-historical continuity between these two phases of the one covenant. From this quarter the accent gets placed on the “breakpoint” and the “discontinuity” alongside the evident “continuity.” So it is stated explicitly, for example, that in

⁶⁰ Cf. § 2.3 above, especially p. 7.

⁶¹ John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 201.

the New Testament genuinely new and genuinely other things appear than we find in the Old Testament. This kind of a formulation must apparently be maintained, since with both the Old as well as the New Testament people talk of a special “uniqueness” of each. Not only must the New Testament supplement the Old Testament (in the sense of “fulfill”), but the Old Testament must also supplement the New Testament: “Precisely in our day with its macro-ethical and structural question we need the breadth and depth of the Old Testament more than ever.” Because the principal unity of the covenant and of the entire Scripture, however, is surrendered with this position, it could even be said that we may draw from the Old Testament without explicitly relating it to the New Testament or to Jesus Christ.⁶²

Schilder’s traditional Reformed position is directly opposite to this contemporary view. But his position with respect to this matter is not unqualifiedly “traditional.” Because he wanted to make especially clear that absolutely no contradiction existed between old and new covenant, he consistently held firmly, in connection with every question relating to this problem, to the indissoluble connection between Old and New Testament. Therefore he fiercely opposed the then-common use of “traditional” paradigms designed to express the relationship between old and new covenant. According to him, paradigms like “law-gospel” and “external-internal” must be interpreted in a strictly redemptive-historical manner. The biblical “figure (or shadow)-truth” paradigm must be purified of any Platonic “appearance-reality” or “above-below” paradigm, and should rather be replaced with a redemptive-historical “before-after” paradigm.⁶³ Because Schilder did not develop this subject to any significant degree, it is understandable that in several respects his formulations can be criticized.⁶⁴ But our opinion is that with this characteristic contribution Schilder furnished an important dogmatic impetus which can be fruitfully applied

⁶² Cf. the report “The relationship of Old and New Testament,” produced by Berkhof and others for “Faith and Order” and published in *Kerk en Theologie*, 25 (1974), pp. 318-327.

⁶³ Cf. the conclusion of § 2.3.

⁶⁴ C. van der Waal has devoted intense study to this subject in various publications. Cf. for a broad scientific treatment, his *Het pascha van onze verlossing* [The Passover of our salvation] (concerning the biblical interpretation found in the Easter sermon of Melito of Sardis, second century A.D.). More practically oriented is his *Het Nieuwe Testament: boek van het verbond* [The New Testament: book of the covenant]. In the latter work, p. 12, he defends the thesis that “truth” (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 25) means “realization of a blueprint, of a building design.” In this context, p. 18, he corrects Schilder’s formulation: “If we might make a comment, it would be this, that Schilder called the ‘truth’ a ‘coming reality,’ or ‘promised realities,’ and thereby continued to operate with the very terminology he seeks to oppose. To speak about *realization* of outlines, shadows, patterns, and scale models, would have been better. He did, however, in fact put the dynamite under the platonic paradigm.” Replacing “reality” with “realization” deserves serious consideration, for in this way, the element of the redemptive-historical forward movement from the old to the new covenant come into view better—as long as we remember that “realization” does not mean that the “figure” in the old covenant was “unreal.”

within a Reformed hermeneutic and within exegesis. The possibilities for applying this redemptive-historical exegesis can be illustrated by pointing to two contemporary phenomena: liberation theology and the charismatic movement. In both of these movements, Scripture is used in a way that strongly resembles the typical “moralistic” [exemplaristic; exemplar = example] method over against which more than fifty years ago Schilder and others parenthetically posited their “redemptive-historical” method. According to the “exemplaristic” method, the basic starting point requires that what happened then and there (in Scripture) must be repeated here and now (in our situation). Both of these modern movements, despite their differences, agree that they should try to find, in a selective manner, examples in the history of revelation that should be imitated—whether “revolutionary” figures like Moses, the prophets, and even Jesus (as in liberation theology), or the Pentecost church in Acts and 1 Corinthians (as in the charismatic movement). One who, in response to these movements, on the basis of a Reformed position maintains the significance of “liberation” or “extraordinary gifts” as not being necessarily repeatable, as being dated benefits of the covenant within a particular redemptive-historical phase of that covenant, can make it clear in a meaningful way that the basic mistake of these movements is theological in nature. This kind of critique is more fundamental than merely pointing out the imbalances within these movements, which often employs false dilemmas like vertical-horizontal or official-charismatic.⁶⁵

It cannot be denied that Reformed theology has been trapped for centuries, as it were, in the “external-internal” paradigm used to characterize the relationship between old and new covenant. Usually a kind of denigration of the external and the temporal (or the old covenant in comparison with the new covenant) can be observed. J. Veenhof takes note of the fact that even Herman Bavinck’s balanced and attractive description of the relationship between Old and New Testament was not entirely free of this weakness. Despite all his esteem for Bavinck’s appreciation of the Old Testament, the critical comment is nevertheless added: “Meanwhile we may not suppress the fact that Bavinck occasionally connected the biblical notion of fulfillment with categories which aroused instinctive associations with an idealist or spiritualist pattern of

⁶⁵ Cf. for a redemptive-historical critique of liberation theology, the article of H. J. Schilder, “Modern exemplarisme [Modern exemplarism],” published by Joh. Francke in *De jongste theologie* [The newest theology], pp. 145-151. Among us, J. M. Myers recently applied the same method of criticism to the theology of Allan Boesak. Cf. his unpublished paper, “An evaluation of hermeneutic principles in the treatise of A. A. Boesak, ‘Farewell to innocence,’ especially pp. 72-75. For a redemptive-historical critique of the charismatic movement, see C. van der Waal, *Het Nieuwe Testament: boek van het verbond*, especially pp. 146-163.

thinking. This is all the more remarkable, since . . . in the key elements of his theology Bavinck opposed with focused sharpness the principles of idealism and spiritualism.”⁶⁶ It must surely be regarded as an advance on the part of Schilder that with his radical rejection of any trace of opposition between “external” and “internal,” he took Reformed theology further in this respect. His exegesis of those Scripture passages which are so important for this question, Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, is being validated posthumously. From the final result of an erudite and penetrating scientific investigation of the relationship between old and new covenant, there appears to be a remarkable agreement with Schilder’s comment in this context: “According to the epistle to the Hebrews, the surpassing quality of the new covenant beyond the old covenant consists at its core in this, namely, that the new covenant functions more powerfully than the old covenant, so that the goal envisioned by the Lord from of old is now being achieved.”⁶⁷

Seen against the background of the absolute continuity between old and new covenant, one is not surprised that Schilder’s doctrine of the covenant appears to the eye to have a strong Old Testament tint. Especially his perspective of the structure of the covenant truly rests more on Scripture passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 32 than on explicit New Testament texts. Schilder’s conviction, however, was that the Old Testament and the New Testament are essentially one, and that therefore the New Testament must always be read in connection with and in agreement with the Old Testament. On the basis of this hermeneutical starting point Schilder did not find his chief (though not exclusive) Old Testament biblical evidence for the doctrine of the covenant to be problematic. In our opinion, this need not have been problematic. If someone proceeds from the Old Testament revelation concerning the covenant, one can surely demonstrate the same structure of the covenant from various New Testament passages: promise and demand, accompanied by sanctions of reward and of threatened wrath.⁶⁸ If, by contrast, one were to take one’s starting point exclusively in the New Testament understanding of the

⁶⁶ “De verhouding van het Oude en het Nieuwe Testament volgens Herman Bavinck [The relationship of Old and New Testament],” in the anthology *In rapport met de tijd* [In step with the time], p. 225.

⁶⁷ This is the third thesis of J. de Vuyst, in connection with his dissertation “*Oud en nieuw verbond*” in *de Brieven aan de Hebreërs* [“Old and new covenant” in the Epistle to the Hebrews] (1964). If you compare this thesis with what we cited from Schilder in the text of § 2.3, accompanying note 135, then you will see literal agreement, down to the very words.

⁶⁸ Van der Waal, *Het Nieuwe Testament: Boek van het verbond* provides an example of what we mean, especially in the second and third chapters of his book. When in that book he repeatedly describes the covenant with the formula, “C = P + C + T, or Covenant = Promise + Command + Threat” (e.g., on p. 54), such a formula shows something of an imbalanced emphasis on the wrath of the covenant because the concept of reward is thereby eliminated.

covenant, however, one would hardly discover this structure of the covenant—not because the New Testament speaks differently than the Old Testament about the covenant, but simply because the New Testament is able to presuppose implicitly much of what has been explicitly revealed earlier in the Old Testament. Schilder’s characteristic approach moving from the Old Testament, but always in connection with the New Testament, is less strange, however, than may appear at first glance. In fact, Reformed dogmatics has traditionally followed the same hermeneutical method in terms of other areas of doctrines. For example, how can atonement through Christ ever be understood only from the New Testament without the broad background of the Old Testament understanding of sacrifice?⁶⁹ If the structure of the covenant would be essentially different in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, then characteristic Reformed worship would lack any rationale, with its infant baptism, reading of the Decalogue, and singing of psalms. In fact, it is precisely this acceptance of the unity of the covenant, along with the continuity between old and new covenant, that forms the backbone of the Reformed conviction that all of Holy Scripture, in its whole and in all its parts, must be taken with utmost seriousness in the church and in theology. Modern critics may well view this “assimilation” or “harmonization” between Old and New Testament as an old-fashioned approach,⁷⁰ but for Reformed confessors what is at stake here is nothing less than the connection with the catholic faith! Irenaeus (against Marcion and the Gnostics) and Calvin (against the Anabaptists) had earlier attached great value to the continuity between old and new covenant.⁷¹ A dogmatics that is constructed only on the basis of the New Testament, or in which an isolated New Testament must serve as a “filter” used to determine which Old Testament data may be “let through,” is at the least incomplete and even imbalanced, but certainly not Reformed! Concerning Schilder’s polemic regarding the covenant, then, we must observe that this hermeneutical conviction played a very significant role. The relationship between old and new covenant is so central a theme for understanding Scripture that it definitely deserves more attention in dogmatics. The issues that come up for discussion in that context possess continuing relevance.

⁶⁹ Cf. the fine essay by A. B. Du Toit, “Die boodskap van die versoening,” in *Rondom die prediking* (1972), pp. 152-182, where the author lays strong emphasis on this Old Testament understanding of sacrifice over against the essential atonement doctrine of H. Wiersinga.

⁷⁰ Cf. J. Barr, “Some Old Testament aspects of [H.] Berkhof’s ‘Christian Faith’,” in *Weerword*, who writes on p. 17, among other things: “Covenant, I think, is the thing that gives something of an Old Testament air to Reformed theology.”

⁷¹ Cf. H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, p. 236-237,??CHECK, and especially C. Graafland on Calvin, in *Het vaste verbond*, pp. 29ff. ENG??

One of these relevant issues is the relationship between Israel and the church. When the Old Testament is taken with utmost seriousness in the discipline of dogmatics, this topic arises as it were automatically within the field of vision. Extra-biblical factors also play a role in that. After World War II, and thus after Schilder's death, a widespread philo-semitism rose to prominence in place of an earlier anti-semitism. Nonetheless, theologically the relationship between Israel and the church had before then been understood generally as an exclusive relationship: the Christian church is the new Israel which has replaced the old Israel after the coming of Christ as God's covenant people. Over against that today many are proposing a relationship of complementarity: in God's redemption plan Israel continues to occupy a place alongside the church. This, for example, is the position of H. Berkhof, who speaks of "two forms" of the people of God: "We do not expect that Israel will be swallowed up and erased?? by the church, that that it will fulfill its central role therein. In the stage of redemption we are now living, Israel continues to possess, as the special recipient of the faithfulness and promises of God, its own form as a distinct people with a distinct land and a distinct pathway of judgment and grace, thus also with distinct promises for the future. . . ." ⁷² Here we find the theological background of the modern view that the church and Israel must continue to engage in dialogue together. Each has something important to say to the other. But for us, it is questionable whether this position takes sufficient account of the reality of God's covenant wrath which has ultimately resulted in God rejecting Israel as a people with a special position of privilege. Of that rejection the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was the convincing proof. Nevertheless, this judgment does not, of course, exclude the fact that even today God desires to renew his covenant also with every Jew who is converted to Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant. When the notion of the final covenant wrath, something that Schilder emphasized so strongly, is excluded in advance—even though mention is still made of "judgment"—this must necessarily lead to a perspective of the covenant in which has no room any longer for the terrible reaction of the God of the covenant to the hardened disobedience of the people of the covenant. Only where this covenant reality is honored can it be seen that the covenant is indeed normed by the principle: "everything or nothing." In this covenant everything is due to God's grace. But anyone who

⁷² *Christian Faith*, p. 277. ENG?? In his *Dogmatiek*, J. A. Heyns finds this position unacceptable (p. 358).

refuses to receive this “everything” with hearty faith will ultimately end up with nothing more than “nothing”!

C. Graafland brings to light a somewhat different facet of the continuing discussion about Israel.⁷³ According to him, the Old Testament has a twofold significance: on the one hand, this discussion includes the preparatory promises in the Old Testament that have been fulfilled in the New Testament, but on the other hand, one also encounters in this discussion “earthly” promises that, according to him, must lead to the conclusion that empirical Israel even today occupies a distinct place in God’s redemption plan. He identifies especially those objections against a “spiritualizing” of the latter promises pertaining to land and people when attempt is made to apply them to the church. We sympathize with Graafland when he pleads for the continuing earthly aspect of the salvation promise of the Old Testament also for the New Testament dispensation. Any spiritualizing is always dangerous! But when this starting point compels him to acknowledge a continuing place for Israel in salvation history, we would still wish to ask why this earthly aspect of salvation cannot simply be applied to the New Testament church as covenant people.⁷⁴ Proceeding from the principal continuity between old and new covenant must cling firmly to the truth that the particular character of God’s grace in the old dispensation has undergone a universal expansion in the new dispensation, to include all peoples and all lands. But then it is simply logical that this expansion may not be restricted again to the so-called spiritual aspects of salvation—also not for us who belong to the new covenant people. Just as in the old dispensation the Lord included his covenant blessings that he connected to the obedient observance of his covenant demands, so too for us the covenant blessings include various earthly realities: health, prosperity, fruitfulness, etc. Is this not what Paul literally meant when in Romans 8:32—written to the Christian church—he asks: “How will he not also with him graciously give us *all* things?” The fact that today, just as in the old dispensation (see Job, and Psalm 73!), exceptions to this rule occur, serves only to establish this rule. If fact, the curse of the covenant includes in the New Testament, just as in the Old Testament, at least this earthly aspect as well. The apostle’s comment in 1 Corinthians 11:30 continues to sound quite remarkable:

⁷³ *Het vaste verbond*, 169-176.ENG??

⁷⁴ Graafland agrees with this in part (174-175)ENG??, but immediately proceeds again on the basis of this to argue for a continuing place for Israel (175ff.).

“That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” In this respect, as well, one may not posit any structural contradiction between old and new covenant.

In connection with the preceding, we must make one final comment. Although Schilder was heartily convinced of the absolute continuity between old and new covenant, he nonetheless did not use this conviction as a straightjacket to force an absolute identity between these two stages of the covenant. This evidences a balanced insight on his part. Especially in his perspective on the church his view that there exists more than an absolute distinction between old and new covenant comes into play. In comparison with the Old Testament church, the New Testament church must be organized—so we hear Schilder argue—in an anti-centralized, anti-hierarchical, and anti-clerical manner. That form of organization severs the kinship bond between the church and the coming of Christ, such that today there may be no national church.⁷⁵ With a view to this distinction, however, it remains valid that the principle of a revelation-historical continuity thereby does not come under pressure. For already *in* the Old Testament it is clearly indicated that a time would come when the blessings of the covenant would spread to all nations (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:14), and that the entire covenant people will be a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). When the principle of continuity between old and new covenant is thus applied with discretion, this opens up the possibility, as is proper, for reading the New Testament with a covenant perspective.

4.5 God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility

In our unfolding of Schilder’s view of the structure of the covenant, we established that for him one of the most elementary foundational principles of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant is that the covenant between God and man is a dipleuric relationship.⁷⁶ Schilder could wholeheartedly agree with the traditional understanding that in its origin the covenant is monopleuric and in its existence it is dipleuric. Although he persistently gave the monopleuric origin its due attention, it is striking how he devoted particular attention to the further development of this conviction that the covenant exists dipleurically. From his point of view,

⁷⁵ Cf. chapter 2, notes 139 and 145.

⁷⁶ Cf. § 3.1.

this manner of the covenant's existence entails specific consequences that may never be obscured OMSEIL?? in any way. One of them is that the covenant must be viewed literally as a *mutual conventio*, a mutual agreement between God and man. This in turn implies that both parties in this covenant, although absolutely unequal, nevertheless are genuine parties. Therefore Schilder expended so much effort in developing the idea that in the covenant man is God's partner. The motivation for this characteristic emphasis of Schilder—thus we concluded earlier—must be located in the following: *historically* his viewpoint must be explained on the basis of his struggle against both Kuyperianism and Barthianism, both of which (mirabile dictu) placed the difference between God and man in the foreground in such a way that little room was left for the essential dileptic nature of the covenant; and *principally* Schilder was influenced by the motif that man had been made responsible, a reality that cannot be neutralized.

Anyone who reflects on this characteristic contribution of Schilder cannot escape the question whether his emphasis did justice to the relationship between God (with his sovereignty) and man (with his responsibility). In fact, this question can certainly be seen as the most fundamental doctrinal problem in all of theology. This issue has surfaced time and again in various ways throughout the history of dogma. Think only of the early church's struggle against Judaism, or of Augustine against Pelagius, or of the Reformation against Rome, or of the Synod of Dort against the Remonstrants. At all of these decisive moments in church history, at issue was this burning question: How must the relationship between God and man—in other words, the covenant!—be described so that both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are accounted for in a Scripturally responsible manner? Even today *this* fundamental problem remains relevant, though in new forms. Think, for example, of contemporary discussions about Holy Scripture, which as the word of man is at the same time the Word of God.

By formulating the issue of the relationship between God and man in this way—and this must be stated explicitly here—it is not our intention to fall prey to a superficial competition mentality. For that reason, what is involved for us is not simply whether by his emphasis on “man's part” in the covenant, Schilder gave short shrift to “God's part” in the covenant. Rather,

involved here for us is this question, whether Schilder's covenant perspective indeed gives any indication that it can be placed on the same line as contemporary covenant theology.⁷⁷

The shift that has occurred during the last two decades in the Netherlands can be attributed largely to the fact that all of theology has become covenant theology. H. M. Kuitert verbalized this new view when in 1962 he wrote: "Already in the *locus de Deo*, which is to say: from its very beginning, theology will have to be covenant theology. . . ."⁷⁸ This starting point implies a different view of God and of man, as well as of the relationship between them both: ". . . the being of God as Covenant Being presupposes in Holy Scripture the being of man, which similarly is characterized as covenant being. And the concourse between God and man is therefore portrayed . . . as a concourse between Covenant Partner and covenant partner."⁷⁹ This covenant-partner concourse must clearly be understood in such a way that apart from it, God cannot any longer be God.⁸⁰ Understandably (and for our investigation, quite relevantly) criticism of Kuitert would focus precisely on this issue. W. H. Velema, for example, terms this "the core" of his objection that Kuitert replaced the biblical relationship between God and man with a paradigm "in which God's being is determined by man's being."⁸¹ He was of the opinion that Kuitert thereby shortchanged "the sovereignty and independence of God,"⁸² and that he made use of the category of covenant partnership "in order to build into it the modern notion of co-humanity in the doctrine of God."⁸³

In the theology of H. Berkhof as well, "covenant" is a key concept, as is evident from several of his central declarations. In connection with providence he refers to the age-old insoluble problem of the concurrence paradigm, and writes: "The Bible"⁸⁴ In the important chapter in his dogmatics concerning Israel, he states the following: "The covenant is one-sided in origin, but two-sided in its design."⁸⁵ And this: "The covenant ..." ENG??⁸⁶

⁷⁷ In our first chapter (??-??), we already raised the question when we referred to specific statements (and AANSPRAKE!) from people like Kuitert and Van Minnen.

⁷⁸ *De mensvormigheid Gods*, 233.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 265. "The relationship to man belongs essentially to the God's essential being as God."

⁸¹ *Aangepaste theologie*, 176.

⁸² Ibid., 138.

⁸³ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁴ *Christian Faith*, 230.ENG??

⁸⁵ Ibid., 245. ENG??

Proceeding from the inter-subjectivity of the covenant encounter, Berkhof posits in connection with justification, “that we” ENG??.⁸⁷ The same starting point is applied to perseverance as follows: “. . . God and man limit each other. . . .” ENG??⁸⁸ It is precisely in connection with human responsibility that Berkhof discusses God’s election in order to emphasize that the covenant between God and man is something different from a human covenant between two equal “partners.” Even so, according to him, this may not lead us to lose sight of the truth that the man who in election is only the object, in the covenant is made to be subject.⁸⁹ Therefore election may never be isolated from the covenant: “By the secret of election....” ENG??⁹⁰

At first glance most of these statements may appear to lie on the same line as Schilder’s vigorous claims made in his own day about the two-sidedness of the covenant. Since various contemporary Reformed theologians have stated their serious objections against Berkhof’s position, however, we should be careful not to draw conclusions too hastily. Someone like C. Graafland objects, not about the fact that Berkhof brings the idea of the covenant to the foreground in his theology, but that he introduces the covenant as an encounter event via the doctrine of revelation into the doctrine of God in such a way “that it injures the sovereignty and even the deity of God.”⁹¹ According to Graafland, on the basis of his perspective of the covenant as an intersubjective relationship between God and man, Berkhof assigns a synergistic feature to man in this relationship. Thereby man obtains too much of an independent place, with the result that in the final analysis Berkhof cannot overcome the competition mentality that he wanted so vigorously to avoid.⁹² Once we come to Christology, the consequences of Berkhof’s portrait become crystal clear, for there he can no longer subscribe to the doctrine of the unity of the two

⁸⁶ Ibid., 262. ENG?? Here something is definitely shining through of an overemphasis on the two-sidedness of the covenant, for in our opinion it is impossible to call God’s grace a “reaction” (to one or another “action” of man). God’s grace precedes every action (or reaction) of man! It is of course true that the “blessings” of the Lord are presented in the Bible as a “reaction” of God to the obedience of man to the demands of the covenant. To cite but one text: “Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord” (Ps. 128:4).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 463-464. ENG??

⁸⁸ Ibid., 499. ENG??

⁸⁹ Ibid., 501. ENG??

⁹⁰ Ibid., 502. ENG??

⁹¹ “Nieuwe bezinning op het Christelijk geloof,” in *Theologia Reformata*, 17 (1974): 86-105 (citation, 95). In the same article Graafland identifies the same connecting line between Berkhof’s view of the covenant as the relationship of essence between God and man, and the view of K. Barth (*Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*, 1956) and J. Moltmann (*Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 1972). Over against this, Graafland said, Reformed theology places God’s sovereignty in the foreground precisely to maintain “that God is God and he can exist *apart from* man” (96-97).

⁹² Ibid., 101-102.

natures of Christ. Jesus is ultimately nothing more than a (unique) man.⁹³ Naturally, Berkhof himself is aware of these objections whereby his position has been attacked. In his own defense he mentions that others (e.g., E. Flesseman-van Leer) in turn have accused him of not developing the two-sidedness of the covenant consistently and radically enough! But he maintains his conviction that “the Christian church in this period of her pilgrim journey must have imprinted upon her precisely these ideas of intersubjectivity, partnership, historicity, and mutability.”⁹⁴

Does this excursus prove now that Schilder’s covenant perspective can be placed on the same line, for example, with that of Berkhof? This question cannot be answered only on the basis of an apparent similarity in their respective formulations. When note is taken of the motivation for and the application of their shared conviction that the covenant is dipleuric, then significant differences appear between Schilder and contemporary covenant theologians. Whereas Schilder was motivated by his struggle against weakening human responsibility in particular Reformed circles, Berkhof formulated his position self-consciously with an eye toward a positive coupling with certain modern views about the coming-of-age of modern man. And whereas Schilder’s covenant perspective is not determinative for the rest of his theological positions, for example, the doctrine of God,⁹⁵ Berkhof employs the dipleuric character of the covenant in order to recast, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity and of christology. Not the modality of the two-sidedness of the covenant as such, but the context within which this functions yields the conclusion that Schilder’s view must be evaluated differently than that of Berkhof. What has become clear in any case, furthermore, is that Schilder’s view of especially this two-sidedness of the covenant remains relevant still today.

The doctrinal problem of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility can arise in many ways. In the twentieth century history of various Dutch church groups belonging to the Reformed family, this arises as the issue of the relationship between election and covenant. The entire problematic acquires a soteriological focus, since in the discussion concerning this relationship this involves especially the issue of the assurance of salvation. The background of

⁹³ Cf. the comments of Graafland in his article, “Enkele aspecten van de Christelijke geloofsleer bij dr. H. Berkhof,” in *Theologia Reformata* 19 (1976): 37-55.

⁹⁴ From the foreword to the third edition of his *Christian Faith* (1975). ENG??

⁹⁵ Cf. § 1.5, especially pp. ???-???

this discussion naturally lies in the far distant historical past.⁹⁶ On the one hand there was that group of Reformed people who, connecting with the Reformation, took their starting point in the covenant. According to this view, the promises of the covenant must be proclaimed to the entire congregation as being applicable to all of its members. Faith is then saying “yes” to these promises, and the assurance of faith rests only on the trustworthiness of the gospel. On the other hand, there were those who, in following the Second Reformation, took their starting point in election. Covenant members and the elect are quantitatively identical. Among some extremists, full consistency with this starting point means that you can come to assurance of your salvation only by making sure that you are elect. Only when you evidence the “marks” of a regenerated person can you with certainty know that the promises of the covenant are intended also for you.

This entire problematic is nicely illustrated in the life work of Dr. J. G. Woelderink (1886-1956).⁹⁷ As a minister who earlier had belonged to the Reformed Alliance in the Dutch Reformed Church, he came into contact with this group, the “heavy” right wing among the “Reformed minded,” [reformed gezindte], a group he liked to call “the Anabaptist spiritual wing.”⁹⁸ Over against their subjectivist starting point, Woelderink emphatically proclaimed the faithfulness of the covenant promises for everyone who by virtue of baptism belongs to the church. It is understandable that his work was read with attention and agreement in the circle that would later go along with the Liberation.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Graafland provides a good orientation to this history in his dissertation, *De zekerheid van het geloof. Een onderzoek naar de geloofsbeschouwing van enige vertegenwoordigers van Reformatie and Nader Reformatie*.

⁹⁷ Cf. the collection of his essays, *Verbond en bevinding*, published posthumously in 1974. In his introduction to this volume, Rev. C. van der Wal provides a brief biography as well as an overview of the most important publications of Woelderink. In 1974 as well, devoted a theme issue of *De Civitate*, monthly periodical of the student body of Utrecht, to Woelderink (vol. 24, no. 5). B. Plaisier wrote a master’s thesis at this Utrecht university dealing with *Het verbond bij J. G. Woelderink*. Important is also the article by J. Veenhof, “De theologie van J. G. Woelderink,” in *Gereformeerde Theologische Tijdschrift*, 75(1975): 220-228.

⁹⁸ G. H. Abma published an article in the edition of *De Civitate* cited above concerning “Woelderink en de ‘doperse geestesstroming’,” in which he says (p. 17) of this wing that its position wreaks havoc with the relationship between election and covenant: “In contrast to the theology of the Reformation, these people have allowed the one doctrine to dominate the other. God’s election became an all-dominating abstract election-idea. . . . Although Scripture never states it this way, the Anabaptist wing considers the covenant to have been established only with the elect.”

⁹⁹ In an appendix published in the above-mentioned edition of *De Civitate* (86-90), Professor C. Veenhof wrote that Woelderink’s book, *Het Doopsformulier* (1938), at the time made an enormous impression on the “objectors” in the “Reformed Churches.”

What is interesting at this point is that near the end of his life, this same Woelderink came into conflict with the doctrine of election as this is confessed in the Canons of Dort.¹⁰⁰ J. Veenhof mentions somewhere that had read the copy of Woelderink's study on election which Schilder had read before his own death. From this one may clearly infer that on this point Schilder certainly did not have much appreciation for Woelderink!¹⁰¹ So one can say that with regard to the problem of the relationship between election and covenant in Dutch Reformed circles, there occurred a kind of chiliastic exchange of theological positions. Whereas someone like Berkouwer warned in the 1930s against Woelderink's position—regarding the covenant—Schilder and his supporters at the same time chose for Woelderink. In the 1950s, however, Berkouwer had more sympathy with Woelderink—regarding the point of election—whereas Schilder at that time chose against Woelderink!¹⁰²

The relationship between election and covenant remains a delicate problem. If the two components of this relationship are placed too closely together, the danger exists that it can run aground in one of two ways. If you take election (as God's eternal decree *about* man) as your starting point, this leads easily to an impermissible "eternalizing" of the covenant. However, if you take the covenant (as God's relation in history *with* man) as your starting point, this leads again to a similarly impermissible "historicizing" of election. In the course of our investigation, we have encountered and rejected both of these imbalances. We choose to travel a safer path of preferring to confess that election and covenant exist alongside one another, even though we know that these two may never be abstracted from each other, and even though we know also that along this preferred path "protrusions" will always appear and generate questions. This safer path is not an easy path. For in the final analysis God has revealed to us in his Word both his *decree* and his *activity*. Therefore we wish to continue to echo him in this way "with two words," also concerning election and covenant. In so doing, we have learned to appreciate Schilder to the extent that he did not attempt to reduce these two revealed entities to either one of the two.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. his *De Uitverkiezing* (1951).

¹⁰¹ Cf. J. Veenhof, "Verbond en verkiezing," in *Gereformeerde Weekblad*, 35 (1979-1980): 50: "I saw in those days the copy he [Schilder] had studied: full of underlining, markings, and question marks, which gave expression to his dissatisfaction with Woelderink."

¹⁰² Cf. J. Veenhof's statement in the article cited in note 97: "In his book on election [1955, S.A.S.], Berkouwer admittedly criticized Woelderink's interpretation of the Canons of Dort, one that was too hostile for Berkouwer, but at the heart of the matter Berkouwer agreed with Woelderink."

In our own South African church history, this theologically fundamental problematic of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility has played a prominent role as well. Partly as a consequence of the influence of Methodism in South Africa, we encounter this problem in our country in the form of the relationship between election and conversion. With his investigation in the recent past J. C. Krüger has contributed material sufficient to convince us of the relevance of this problematic. He has treated this phenomenon first in a doctrinal context and then completed the portrait in terms of church history. In the first of his studies¹⁰³ he argued properly that the Canons of Dort offers the only correct point of departure from which this issue can be approached. For, in the words of Krüger final discovery, according to the Canons of Dort the divine and the human efforts cannot be reckoned in terms of accomplishments. Emphasizing that God makes the sinner alive so that he himself can really live, proves that in this Reformed confession neither is "divine sovereignty" sidelined nor is "human responsibility" injured.¹⁰⁴ For that reason it is all the more regrettable that this issue has so frequently provided the occasion for difference of opinion within the Dutch Reformed Church and within the Reformed Church, as well as between the denominations.

In his second study, Krüger investigated the official church magazines of these two denominations throughout past decades. With respect to the Dutch Reformed Church he drew the conclusion that this church "definitely had problems with the idea of *election* and even with free will and the atonement. Clearly this Church in its official capacity held firmly to the Reformed confession of *election*, but it is also clear that there were also members and ministers who erred in terms of this doctrine and some of them were even openly Remonstrant in their views."¹⁰⁵ With respect to the Reformed Church, it appears that in this denomination "there is all manner of confusion about the practical maintenance and use of this idea of *conversion*. This must necessarily negatively influence the church's God-given mandate to grow by means of missions and evangelism."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Die verhouding van uitverkiesing tot bekering met spesiale verwysing na die Dordtse Leerreëls*. Although this dissertation was first published in 1981, it was submitted already in 1974 to the University of Pretoria.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁵ *Kerkvereniging in die lig van uiverkiesing en bekering* (1980), 88.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 110.

Despite the valuable data that Krüger's study brought to light, one must nonetheless identify it as an omission that in his study he paid so little attention to the covenant. In a subsection he did make several stimulating comments about "the differences concerning the idea of 'covenant'" (especially in the Reformed Church),¹⁰⁷ but this section offers too little data and does not function in the rest of his treatment of his topic. This is regrettable, since quite a lot could be written about imbalances in the covenant perspective of both the Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, it is a good question whether it was not exactly this imbalance that gave rise to the (naturally incorrect) dilemma between election and conversion. We are convinced that such a dilemma can be avoided only if the idea of covenant functions properly in a balance way within the life of the church. But then the covenant must be viewed correctly. The covenant is not to be identified with election. Nor does the covenant consist in conversion. Still more: the covenant is not a part or an aspect of election *plus* a part of aspect of conversion. The covenant must be viewed as the relationship between God and man, the place within which God and man meet each other. Therefore one can say that it is precisely within the structure of the covenant where the "two lines" of divine election and human conversion intersect. Only when the covenant is construed in such a way that its dipleuric existence, together with its monopleuric origin—as, for example, with Schilder—are fully acknowledged, can the idea of the covenant definitely shed new light on an old problem (also in South Africa). For the dipleuric existence of the covenant provides enough room for acknowledging human responsibility, so that it can be seen clearly that God's sovereignly gracious election can never exclude man's re-spons-ible conversion but rather makes it possible (and necessary!).

In concluding this section, we wish to return at this point to another relevant issue in connection with the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, to which we have already referred tangentially. We have in mind the current discussion in Reformed

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 107-111.

¹⁰⁸ From the massive data presented by C. van der Waal in the series of articles entitled, "Zuid-Afrikaanse stemmen over verbond en wedergeboorte I-X," in *De Reformatie* 31 (1956): p. 282f., it is evident that these two denominations chose in the 1940s for the Kuyperian view according to which the covenant is approached from the point of view of election. Here again we cannot separate this issue from positions taken in the preceding century. As far as the Reformed Church is concerned, cf. the article by Van der Waal, "D. Postma en Helenius de Cock," in *Lucerna* 5 (1958): 87-102. There was a Rev. S. D. Venter who, in vigorously opposing Rev. D. Postma, had placed so much emphasis on election that he turned against missions altogether! As far as the Dutch Reformed Church is concerned, cf. the unpublished dissertation of B. J. K. Anderson, '*n Kritiese ontleding van die materiologiese teologie van Andrew Murray*, p. 34, where Murray's lack of a Reformed covenant perspective is mentioned. Even today Murray's influence can be found in certain circles of the Dutch Reformed Church.

circles (especially in the Netherlands) about the nature of Scripture's authority. The appearance of the synodical report of the "Reformed Churches in the Netherlands" dealing with this controversy has already unleashed a storm of reactions, such that here we obviously cannot enter into every facet of this problem.¹⁰⁹ Only one aspect interests us in this context. In any reflection upon the origin of the Bible one cannot ignore the central topic of the relationship between God and man—that is to say, the covenant!¹¹⁰ Regardless of how one construes the nature of this relationship in other areas, about one matter there is consensus: Scripture did not come only from God, but also from man. As soon as this "cooperation" between God and man in the formation of Scripture must be described further, however, ways begin to part. The great issue becomes whether the human "part" in that formation is co-determinative for the message of Scripture which is nonetheless God's Word. Precisely on this issue the above-mentioned report makes a new contribution. It proceeds from a "relational" view of truth, intending thereby to avoid both an objective and a subjective view of truth. C. A. van Peursen, one of the authors of the report, stated clearly that for these authors this entailed not "a truth (objective) that must subsequently be appropriated (subjective), but both at once."¹¹¹ In general, truth always involves "man being affected by something else and [it involves] the convincing power of something else . . . which comes into existence within man and becomes visible."¹¹² Applied to the Bible this means "that God's truth does not exist apart from the activity of people who confess God's superiority and grace."¹¹³ Of course, this is not everything that is said in this report. But it is especially these formulations that gives rise to the question whether the authors should distinguish more sharply between the "bringing to light" and the "bringing into existence" of God's truth in the Bible.¹¹⁴ As witnesses of revelation, the Bible writers most certainly played an active role in connection with the former. But if the same role is assigned to men in connection with the latter, it is no longer clear how the Bible can be confessed any longer as God's authoritative revelation. This comes down to a delicate distinction. This controversial discussion does not involve the issue of whether man plays an active role, but rather the issue of where he plays an active role. This issue

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the report *God met ons . . . over de aard van het Schriftgezag* (1980). ENG?? W. H. Velema provided a good overview of the content of this report and the reaction to it, in his article, "Het rapport 'God met ons . . . over de aard van het Schriftgezag' van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland," in *Theologia Reformata*, 24 (1981): 269-288.

¹¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Heyns, *Die brug tussen God en mens. Oor die Bybel*, especially 27-46.

¹¹¹ *God met ons*, 13. ENG??

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14. ENG??

¹¹³ *Ibid.* On p. 15 we read the same: "This divine truth does not exist apart from the activity of people." ENG??

¹¹⁴ Velema, art., p. 275, calls this the "central issue" in this context.

cannot be resolved simply with the pair of ideas known as “form/content.” It would be an illegitimate division of territory to say that only the content of the Bible comes from God and only the form thereof comes from man. Perhaps we must say: “the *content* of Scripture comes from God and the *form* comes from God and man.”¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, what interests us here is the fact that a similar issue arises in the doctrine of the covenant. With respect to the covenant as well, the question is not whether man plays an active role in the covenant, but where he plays such a role. Because the covenant really is a dipleuric relationship between God and man, covenant man is God’s “partner.”¹¹⁶ But then we must insist that man is “partner” (not “soloist”!) with respect to the dipleuric continuation of the covenant, but absolutely not with respect to the monopleuric origin of the covenant.¹¹⁷

Differently than in connection with the formation of Scripture, there is in connection with the covenant under no circumstances a place for one or another “part” of man acting in the *origin* of the covenant. The place for human activity is reserved for the *functioning* of the covenant as a mutual fellowship between God and man. There man is not a zero, but he genuinely counts for something! However, if man must also play a role in connection with the origin of the covenant, for example, by agreeing with the Lord’s offer of grace, then a covenant (of grace) would never have come into existence in this sinful dispensation. Such a subjectivistic position renders the existence (origin and continuation) of the covenant once and for all impossible. Therefore, if the question were asked whether, for example, Schilder’s emphasis on the two-sidedness of the covenant cannot be connected to a “relational” view of truth in the doctrine of Scripture, the answer must be “no.” With Schilder, the emphasis on the two-sided existence of the covenant did not exclude the acknowledgement of the one-sided origin of the covenant. In fact, precisely in its two-sidedness the covenant is entirely dependent on the one-sided covenant-establishing and covenant-maintaining grace-Word of God. He, and he alone, creates this two-sidedness. So Schilder’s covenant perspective does not lead to the “new” view of Scripture, but on the contrary, exposes it as untenable. A person can indeed claim that “we with God” work in the

¹¹⁵ Heyns, *Brug tussen God en mens*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Concerning this idea that Schilder developed so broadly, Berkouwer says in his book, *Holy Scripture*, 2:370 ENG?? (without mentioning Schilder) that this is an expression “which every simple dilemma...” ENG??

¹¹⁷ Cf. the presentation of Schilder’s position in § 3.1, especially p. ???f.

covenant, for apart from him we can do nothing. But this is entirely different than claiming that this truth came into existence by “God with us.” He does this alone, “God without us”!

4.6 Justice and communion

One of the most characteristic features of Schilder’s view of the structure of the covenant was his emphatic conviction that the covenant possesses a forensic character. Therefore we devoted a separate section in our analysis to this facet of his covenant perspective.¹¹⁸ We wish to begin this present section at the same point where we concluded this previous one. There we asked the question: How must one connect the forensic character of the covenant with the fellowship between God and his people, the so-called content of the covenant? That there was sufficient reason to posit this question at the end of our analytical section should be clearly obvious. The immediate occasion for that was the claim of A. C. de Jong that a detailed investigation of Schilder’s covenant perspective will need to devote special attention to the question: “In how far does Schilder reduce the covenant of grace to a forensic relationship to the exclusion of the covenant as a communion of life?”¹¹⁹ We wish to accept this challenge, for this question does indeed expose a cardinal point in our investigation. Normally the covenant is defined simply in terms of the fellowship between God and man.¹²⁰ Does Schilder’s accent on the forensic character of the covenant mean that he traveled down his own (deviating) path?

In order to be able to answer this question, we must first draw together several loose threads from our previous chapter. In our explanatory section dealing with the forensic character of the covenant (§ 3.2), we could not provide all the information relating to this subject. Several relevant citations could be discussed only after Schilder’s view of baptism had been treated (§ 3.4). There it became clear that Schilder by no means denied that in the covenant an intimate

¹¹⁸ Cf. § 3.2.

¹¹⁹ Cf. chapter 3, note 94. De Jong asked his question in connection with the claim of H. J. Spier, *Het mysterie van Gods verbond*, 30-31, that Schilder departed seriously from the grace-character of the covenant: “The gracious heart is . . . cut out of the covenant of grace.”

¹²⁰ Cf. the first two chapters of L. Van der Zanden, *De Verbondsgedachte* (1934), for example: “The covenant as the fellowship of God and man” (7ff.), and “The covenant as fellowship among men” (23ff.). It is well-known as well that Th. C. Vriezen viewed the fellowship between God and his people as “the one, all-governing main idea” of the Old Testament, as he stated already in the preface to the first edition of his *Hoofdlijnen der theologie van het Oude Testament*. ENG???

faith relationship between God and the regenerated person came into existence.¹²¹ Schilder nowhere presented this as though the forensic character and the fellowship character of the covenant were opposed to each other. They do not exclude one another, but complement one another. For this reason, from this consideration it must be said that De Jong is surely mistaken with his insinuation that Schilder described the covenant of grace “exclusively” as a forensic relationship. On the contrary, just as one can hardly speak of any opposition between God’s justice and God’s love in the doctrine of God or in the doctrine of the atonement, so too in the doctrine of the covenant such an opposition can hardly be accepted. We could refer to various striking formulations of Schilder in order to show that according to him, justice and love are not mutually exclusive: “the covenant is a *forensic* relationship that is sought through *love*”¹²²; “*justice* brings a person along in *grace*”¹²³; “the *justice* of the covenant belongs to the justice of the dispensation of *grace*.”¹²⁴ Somewhere he formulated it in an especially striking manner this way: “The gifts of divine love come within forensic relationships and with forensic guaranteed. I may tug on the hem of God’s robe. Justice and love go together.”¹²⁵ This notion of “guarantee” simultaneously clarifies something else: it would be a misunderstanding if someone would suppose that Schilder placed the forensic character of the covenant in the foreground with the exclusive feature of being able to emphasize the “sharp side” of the covenant. In his view, this forensic character was related not only to the warning threat or the obligating demand of the covenant, but also to its comforting promise: “The covenant provides me with forensic guarantees. It removes God’s favors from the realm of the accidental and places them in the forensic framework of Christ. From now on I may plead. . . .”¹²⁶ His view that all baptized children are in the covenant “with equal rights,” “equal in receiving a forensic address” [gelyk in regstoesegeggig]¹²⁷ aims at the same truth. They are privileged [bevoor-reg-te] people, for God gives them the right to call Him their God!

When one considers Schilder’s characteristic accent on the forensic character of the covenant carefully and contextually, it becomes clear that this is not the fruit of an experimental

¹²¹ Cf. the citation in chapter 3, note 161.

¹²² Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 60.

¹²³ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 61.

¹²⁴ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 100.

¹²⁵ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 143.

¹²⁶ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 129.

¹²⁷ Cf. the citation in chapter 3, note 156.

search for originality. As he himself demonstrated, this accent is well-accredited in the history of dogma.¹²⁸ Schilder could couple his view directly with that of earlier Reformed theology, but it is significant to note that this same accent appeared in the circle of those associated with the Secession of 1834 as well. In his own dogmatics¹²⁹ someone like F. M. ten Hoor—who was known to Schilder, though he nowhere mentioned him in this context—employed expressions that exhibited remarkable similarity to those of Schilder. For example, he wrote: “The covenant of grace is usually seen from both a juridical and an ethical viewpoint.”¹³⁰ In another place, he wrote: “With the covenant of grace people distinguish between the promise-connection [belofteverbintenis] and the life-communion [levensgemeenschap].”¹³¹ These two do not always come into existence simultaneously, for there are also unregenerate persons in the covenant. Ten Hoor clarified: “The concepts of imputing, imparting, and property refer to a forensic relationship that comes into existence through the covenant promise, and the concepts of appropriation, communion, and possession point to a life relationship that comes into existence through regeneration. Therefore the Reformed distinguished in connection with the covenant between promise- or juridical-connection [rechtsverbintenis] and life-communion.”¹³² On the next page, he wrote this: “The forensic relationship precedes the ethical or life relationship. . . . God supplies the promise first, and then the thing promised; first the right and then the gift.”¹³³ To give but one more citation: “If the unregenerate are really in the covenant, then it follows from this that the essence of the covenant cannot consist in being regenerate, or in the life communion, but must consist in the promise-connection.”¹³⁴ We are convinced that this formulation of Schilder regarding the forensic character of the covenant, something that one must distill and systematize from his various writings with a bit of difficulty, intended to express substantively precisely the same truth as this clear and forthright explanation of Ten Hoor.

¹²⁸ One is struck by the fact that Schilder nowhere mentioned the standard work, well-known in his day, of G. Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus* (1923). In that work, the author refers repeatedly to the influence of civil jurisprudence [staatsreg] on covenant theology—on p. 71, for example, to the school of Heborn, and on p. 181, to Hobbes.

¹²⁹ *Compendium der Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, with the subtitle: “Een leidraad voor studenten in the theologie (niet in den handel).” According to the *Christelijke encyclopedie*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, p. 512, Ten Hoor (1855-1934) was professor of dogmatics in America from 1900 onward. This undated work of his must undoubtedly have been written after 1900.

¹³⁰ Op. cit., 122.

¹³¹ Ibid, 175.

¹³² Ibid, 179.

¹³³ Ibid., 180.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 180-181.

It is fitting, however, not only to look in retrospect for lines of connection between Schilder and the positions of other theologians. This can also be shown by looking forward, to the time after Schilder's death until today. We wish to focus our attention especially on the last thirty years, which saw an intensive investigation undertaken worldwide with regard to the analogy between the biblical understanding of the covenant and extra-biblical juridical treaties.¹³⁵ From this extensive amount of information resulting from this investigation, an amount that can hardly be summarized, we wish to draw one implication. We recall the accusation, back in the 1930s, of V. Hepp that Schilder's all too juridical language leads one to think of a "national treaty covenant" rather than of the biblical covenant.¹³⁶ In response Schilder attempted to answer this contention with argument drawn from the history of dogma and from dogmatics, when he mentioned that the word "forensic" was used with affection in early Reformed theology, and that anyone objecting to that word was in fact tending toward a subjectivistic view of the covenant.¹³⁷ In the light of modern investigation we can now say that if he had lived longer, Schilder could also have used archaeological arguments. Today it can be nothing more than an insult to argue that someone's view of the covenant resembles an international treaty, as long as that view takes account of the fact that the covenant between God and his people must be compared not to a treaty between equals, but to a suzerainty treaty! Schilder's conviction that the covenant possessed a judicial character can be connected as well to the contemporary philological discussion regarding the precise meaning of the biblical words *berît* and *diathēkē*. It appears that this contemporary investigation is reaching a wide consensus that these concepts denote both a relationship and a (mutual) obligation between two covenanting parties.¹³⁸ On the one hand, the covenant possesses a legal character, but on the other hand, the communion-forming aspect constitutes an element that is just as essential.¹³⁹ This

¹³⁵ H. F. van Rooy provides a good overview of this, together with a full bibliography, in his unpublished dissertation, *'n Vergelyking van die buite-Bybelse staatsverdrae—met besondere aandag aan die Sefire-verdrae—met die struktuur van Deuteronomium* (1977). On pages 269ff, he comes to the far-reaching conclusion that, without simply identifying them, certain similarities exist between the covenant structure in Deuteronomy and the Hittite, Assyrian, and Aramean treaties. The important work of Liberated Reformed minister G. Van Rongen is also useful and practical: *Zijn vast vverbond* (1966). ENG??

¹³⁶ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 62.

¹³⁷ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 97.

¹³⁸ Van Rooy, *op. cit.*, pp. 205ff., referring to the publications of E. Kutsch, M. Weinfeld, and D. J. McCarthy, among others.

¹³⁹ This is the conclusion of F. N. Lion Cachet, in his unpublished dissertation, *Die kontinuïteit van die Abrahamitiese verbond in die Sinaitiese verbond* (1977), pp. 78ff. P. P. A. Kotzé arrives at approximately the same conclusion in his dissertation, *Waarheid in die Johannes-evangelie met besondere verwysing na die verbondsperspektief* (1975), p. 68: "The three essential characteristics of God's covenant are (a) election—the

entire contemporary discussion about the covenant proves in the context of our study at least one thing: the problem of the relationship between justice and communion in the covenant involves not simply the trivial backwater internecine spats among Dutch Reformed people who have a unique interest in this, but involves a matter of essential and universal interest for covenant theology. Therefore we are obligated to pursue this further.

At the conclusion of § 3.2 we posited another question: Did not Schilder perhaps tend, with his accent on the forensic character of the covenant, toward a formalistic legalism? In response to this question we must observe first that Schilder himself was not unaware of this danger. Whenever the covenant between God and man is viewed, even though in the most narrow sense, as a “contract,” then legalism is not simply an imaginary danger, but a real one as well. Therefore Schilder persistently emphasized that the covenant differed radically from a contract.¹⁴⁰ In fact, he called this “contract idea” the original form of all heresy!¹⁴¹ We believe that this telling characterization testifies of a wonderful insight into what, in our previous section, we termed the dogmatic foundational problem of the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. The decisive turning point in the history of dogma (from Judaism to Christianity, from Pelagius to Augustine, from Rome to the Reformation, from the Remonstrants to Dort), at its core, hinged entirely on this one question: Is the covenant a kind of “contract” between two parties? If this question is answered affirmatively, then God’s sovereignty is thereby in fact diminished to nothing more than a “reward,” the human responsibility is elevated to nothing less than a “merit.” By contrast, however, anyone insisting that the relationship

covenant was God’s gift; (b) a covenant relationship in which the exercise of communion constitutes a bond of fellowship; and (c) the obligations accompanying the covenant as they are concretely specified in the law and the book of the covenant.” Cf. in this connection what Schrenk, *op. cit.*, had written already in 1923: “Suchen wir aber nach der aus der Forschung sich ergebenden Grundvorstellung bei der Wertung beider Begriffe, so ergibt sich einerseits die göttliche Verfügung, aber Hand in Hand mit der Betonung des gestifteten Gemeinschaftsverhältnisses.”

¹⁴⁰ In addition to the citations we have already supplied in this context, we can point as well to the following exceptionally clear exposition in his *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 2: 26-27. There he argued that every contract proceeds from the reality of sin. They are always based on distrust. “Thus a contract fixes the stipulations; so that in case of a violation . . . the performance can be *compelled* by a *higher judicatory*, or else satisfaction is rendered by a partial payment; in that case, the motto is: better that everything be performed, but if not, then partial satisfaction; if 100% is not possible, then at least some lower percentage. . . . How entirely different with a *covenant*. A covenant proceeds from trust; so it operates according to the rule: everything or nothing; either in or out. . . . for if trust is violated, then there is nothing left; then satisfaction cannot be rendered with a partial payment, a lower percentage; the covenant *curse* is the only thing left. In a contract, *business* is conducted. In a covenant, by contrast, one’s *heart* must be involved; an entity that knows no percentage.”

¹⁴¹ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by note 66.

between God and man is a “covenant” must acknowledge that God’s sovereign grace is the only foundation that continually supports this relationship. In Christ God has given “everything” to bring this relationship into existence and continually to maintain it. But this “everything” that he has given never excludes the “everything” we are obligated to give. On the contrary, his covenant faithfulness unceasingly appeals to our faith-trust and our grateful, obedient faithfulness. *We remain responsible!* If we should violate this mutual trust of the covenant, then (to use Schilder’s language) the “everything” of God’s grace turns into the “nothing” of his judgment. The covenant is not a cold judicial contract—not for Schilder. It is not a relationship between two parties who stand on equal footing with each other, one which for that reason is characterized by the mutual force of compulsion of the parties. But the covenant *possesses* a uniquely forensic character. Therefore, neither is the covenant simply a relaxed relationship where the one Party simply always gives “everything” and the other party never gives anything (i.e., “nothing”). By virtue of its forensic character, the covenant is that relationship between God and man in which the tension-filled “everything or nothing” is never relieved!

It is interesting that a student of the contemporary investigation regarding the covenant, D. J. McCarthy, also literally emphasizes that the covenant is not a contract. He appeals to this starting point when he discusses the question whether the biblical covenant can indeed be compared meaningfully to extra-biblical political treaties, since such a comparison “tends to be legalistic.”¹⁴² His answer is this: “Covenant is not contract, as we have had occasion to repeat more than once. It is personal union pledged by symbol and/or oath. The relationship comes first. . . . What is wanted [in the covenant] is a means of response which can be lived. Hence the stipulations which serve to define the already extant relationship. . . .”¹⁴³ We can wholeheartedly subscribe to what he is saying here, as long as “union” and “relationship” are understood simply to refer to “relation,” and not “communion.” We are of the opinion that it will be helpful to distinguish between these two concepts. Such a distinction can be employed profitably in arriving at a clearer description of what the covenant actually is. Using this distinction, we may say that the covenant between God and man is primarily a “relationship,” which in turn logically precedes the “stipulations” of the covenant—even though chronologically the coming-into-

¹⁴² *Treaty and Covenant* (1978), entirely at the end of his conclusions, on p. 297.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

existence of this relationship coincides with the announcement of the stipulations. But this relationship is not exclusively a “communion” relationship. By means of the stipulations the covenant is stamped as a “forensic” relationship. Genuine “communion” between God and man originate within this relationship only at the point where man responds in faith to the grace of God. Then the relationship is, so to speak, “deepened” to mutual communion, without this concurrence in communion obviating the judicial stipulations. When this distinction is maintained, one must keep in mind, however, that the original “relationship”—even apart from it being deepened to “communion”—may not be viewed as a neutral relationship without substance. Therefore one cannot operate with a simplistic form-content paradigm. For the covenant relationship is at its point of origin already a gracious relationship. Viewed in and by itself, however, it is not yet a communion relationship. Put another way: God shows his grace monopleurically and thus binds himself to the engraced sinner. But only when the engraced sinner from his side receives and enters into this grace by faith does there function a dipleuric communion relationship between God and man, and between man and God. In order to prevent misunderstanding, we would propose that it would be preferable if the covenant were not defined without nuance in terms of “communion.” It would be preferable rather to call it a “relationship” between God and man. When this relationship is further described, we should speak of the covenant’s forensic as well as its communion “character,” in order to indicate thereby the manner in which it functions.

We believe that it was precisely against the background of this twofold manner of the covenant’s existence—as a forensic relationship and a communion relationship—that Schilder could put forward a series of distinctions in the doctrine of the covenant. For example, with a view to baptism, he distinguished, with the use of the classic Form for Baptism, between “in Christ” and “through the Spirit.”¹⁴⁴ According to him, baptism seals to us a twofold promise of the covenant: the washing away of our sins through justification “in Christ,” and the daily renewing of our lives in sanctification “through the Spirit.” He coupled the first-mentioned (Christological) promise to the forensic character of the covenant. “Sanctified in Christ” is a

¹⁴⁴ Cf. chapter 3, in the text accompanied by notes 159 and 160.

forensic expression.¹⁴⁵ The last-mentioned (Pneumatological) promise is connected to the communion character of the covenant. This refers to the mystical engrafting into Christ. In a similar manner he also distinguished between “promissory address” [toezegging] ???CHECK CONSISTENCY and “personal appropriation” [toeëigening].¹⁴⁶ The promissory address involves a monopleuric act (better: word) of God. We could say that this has a “Christological” nature. But the personal appropriation involves a dipleuric action of God and man. This has a “Pneumatological” nature.¹⁴⁷ Let us suffice with one more example: in his exposition concerning self-examination, Schilder insisted that we distinguish between our “state” (forensic) and our “condition” (ethical) in the covenant.¹⁴⁸

One need not agree entirely in every respect with the further development of these distinctions. For example, the question may be asked whether the Christological and the Pneumatological moments of the divine work of salvation can in every instance be separated from each other, and whether the promise of the covenant is not objectivized too much when it is identified as a “forensic category.”¹⁴⁹ But it cannot be denied that this insight goes back to the earliest Reformed conviction that justification is something different from sanctification.¹⁵⁰ One must distinguish between these two things without separating them. Only by holding firmly to these two benefits of the covenant, and to the proper insight concerning the relationship between these two, can the church be preserved from the imbalance of either nomism (where justification is swallowed up by sanctification) or antinomianism (where sanctification is contained in justification).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Cf. § 3.4, pp. ???-???

¹⁴⁶ Cf. chapter 3, note 175.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. the distinction of P. F. Theron between “the Christological moment of representation” and “the pneumatological moment of incorporation,” in his *Die ekklesia as kosmies-eskatologiese teken*, pp. 40-47. He writes on p. 44: “Differently than with the Christological perspective, pneumatologically man (also) appears fully on the canvas.”???ENG TRANS

¹⁴⁸ Cf. § 3.4 above, pp. ???-???

¹⁴⁹ Berkouwer reflects on this problem when, in *The Sacraments*, 247-249ENG??, he states that the issue of the covenant cannot be resolved by speaking, in connection with the promise, of a “legal relationship,” only “later . . . to appeal to the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁵⁰ In this connection, Calvin’s masterful rebuttal of Osiander’s doctrine of mystical justification remains essential reading (*Institutes* 3.11).

¹⁵¹ Cf. for an overview of the many snares scattered across this theological terrain the useful book of J. van Genderen, *Rechtvaardiging en hiliging in de theologie van deze tijd* (1966).

Schilder's covenant perspective has the advantage that on the basis of this bifocal vision of the covenant, both a subjectivistic and an objectivistic view of the covenant is overturned. When the covenant is described exclusively in terms of communion between God and man, this allows us to suppose that in such a view a dangerous subjectivism lies embedded. This is what we mean: if the covenant would consist merely of communion, the necessary consequence would be that the covenant does not originate through God's monopoleuric act of justification, but that already in its origin it would be constituted also through man's faith-activity in sanctification. The consequence of this subjective starting point is that the obligatory and the threatening moments of the covenant—demand and threat!—cannot really be seen as belonging to the essence of the covenant. Where these moments are indeed taken into account, they are then usually viewed as mere external “appearance forms” of the covenant. If the covenant originates through man's faith, however, even though this is only part of its origin, it is only logical that the covenant can be destroyed by man's unbelief. Against this unacceptable position it must be argued emphatically that the covenant relationship between God and man is more than a dipoleuric concourse of communion. Perhaps this communion cannot function apart from man's believing response. But even though the full communion cannot yet, or can no longer, function, the covenant relationship still always exists.¹⁵² Human belief or unbelief cannot add to or subtract from the existence of this relationship, in its character as a forensic relationship. Therefore the forensic stipulations of the covenant remain intact in every circumstance, even though it is true that faith (or unbelief) is indeed the reason why the sanctions of blessing (or of curse) would be applied. A Reformed covenant perspective places dynamite beneath every anthropocentric, and humanistic, view of the covenant!

On the basis of the aforementioned covenant perspective, every objectivizing tendency in the doctrine of the covenant can and must be cut off at its root. This kind of objectivism is a threat wherever justification is viewed in fact as the only benefit of the covenant. Even though a nod is given toward sanctification, this moment is objectified in such a way that the biblical imperative to pursue sanctification is identified too closely with the believing acknowledgement

¹⁵² God does not exercise genuine “communion” with “stocks and blocks,” although he naturally stands in a relationship to his entire creation: matter, plants, and animals, and in that sense also to every human being.

of the altered position that we have already attained in Christ (The Sanctified One). Karl Barth was the great exponent of this view.¹⁵³

Closer to our own home, however, there is also a danger of objectivism. It can happen, in line with Schilder's accent on the forensic character of the covenant, for example, that the covenant is viewed exclusively in terms of a forensic relationship between God and man.¹⁵⁴ This mistaken starting point must lead logically to supposing that covenant and conversion are mutually exclusive. Because man is entirely and completely incorporated into the covenant through God's monopoleuric act—so the reasoning goes—his *is* a member of the covenant and need have no further concern regarding the *quality* of his being in the covenant. This perspective must necessarily lead to a false assurance. From our analysis of Schilder's covenant perspective, it has become evident that on this point he fortunately did not pursue a narrow line of thinking, but in a balanced manner attempted to do justice to all the aspects of the covenant that need discussion. On the one hand, he continually emphasized that the covenantal forensic bond between God and us is *already* part and parcel of the covenant. This was not merely a formal prelude to the actual covenant, something that needed to follow the establishment of the covenant. But on the other hand, he was just as convinced that this forensic bond is not the *entire* covenant. For that reason he wanted to leave full room in his perspective for the covenant to function as an intimate faith-communion between God and us. Concerning this last-mentioned facet he could even say that this “grace-form” of the covenant proceeds above the position “in which we are placed in relation to God in terms of rights.”¹⁵⁵ENG TRANS?? It may have happened that in their fierce offensive against subjective, Schilder and his compatriots could have given occasion to the aforementioned objectivism. For that reason we believe that the subjective appropriation of the objective redemption in Christ will have to be accented more strongly than occurs (in general) among the Liberated Reformed.¹⁵⁶ In preaching the gospel,

¹⁵³ In his book, *Die leer van die heiligmaking by Karl Barth*, J. C. Lombard analyzes Barth's objectivism in terms of this concern, an objectivism that was in line with his view of universal election and the triumph of grace.

¹⁵⁴ Back in the church struggle of the 1940s, this accusation was leveled from the synodical side against the “objectors” (those who later became the Liberated Reformed). Cf. Schilder's reference to this, discussed above in chapter 3, note 156.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. chapter 3, note 161.

¹⁵⁶ We are choosing to employ here the traditional term “appropriation,” rather than the modern fashionable term “realization.” When Theron (*op. cit.*; cf. note 147 above) writes on p. 43: “The objective redemption ‘in Christ’ must also be subjectively realized,” this claims too much, in our view. Apart from our subjective appropriation, the objective redemption *is already* a realized reality!

preachers must constantly emphasize that the already existing covenant relationship between God and his church, as that has been sealed in baptism, by our faith and conversion—not done in our own power, but through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in us—must be “deepened” into a communion with Christ that we personally experience.¹⁵⁷ Only at that point can it be said that the covenant, as God intended it, functions as a mutual communion between Him and us.

4.7 Promise and demand

The final topic that we will critically evaluate in this concluding chapter is Schilder’s view of the relationship between the promise and the demand of the covenant. When in the previous chapter we set forth the constitutive components of the covenant in terms of Schilder’s thought, we arrived at the conclusion that he wanted nothing to do with any priority or precedence of the promise above the demand: “Demand and promise are absolutely correlative in the covenant.”¹⁵⁸ Although no one would want to deny the connection between these two components of the covenant, Schilder was sharply criticized because he had placed promise and demand on a par. Typical of the contemporary criticism is the fiery question with which H. J. Spier BESTOOK him: “Are promise and demand in the covenant indeed equal? Are they equally determined by each other? Are they equally dependent on each other? Fortunately not! The promise of God is more than the demand. For the LORD has made with us a covenant *of grace*. . . . The covenant of grace becomes legalistic when the demand is just as prominent as the promise! In this way it starts to resemble the covenant of works too much.”¹⁵⁹

Just as this appeared in earlier sections where we dealt with Schilder’s doctrine of God and doctrine of predestination, so here too we find again something of a parallelizing symmetry

¹⁵⁷ In the Netherlands one encounters this emphasis especially among (some in) the “Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken.” Cf. the following formulation of J. van Genderen (in his article on “Covenant” in *Christelijke encyclopedie* vol. 6, 2nd ed. (1961), pp. 463-464: “The covenant of grace seeks to lead us into communion with God through faith.” And: “. . . The danger of false assurance is not imaginary.” And: “. . . that there is no proper experience of the covenant apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes us share, by faith, in the redemption bestowed in Christ.”

¹⁵⁸ Cf. the conclusion of § 3.3 above. The citation appears in chapter 3, note 129, above.

¹⁵⁹ *Het mysterie van Gods verbond* [The mystery of God’s covenant] (1945), pp. 32-33. Schilder would in any case not have had much use GESTEUR HET for Spier’s unvarnished dualism between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace!

with Schilder. This immediately raises the question whether this last-mentioned view can be coupled directly to the first-mentioned, so that it can be shown that the second symmetry is the direct result of the first. J. Veenhof alludes to such a connection. When he inquired into the background of Schilder's emphasis on the forensic aspect of the covenant, he wrote: "In his thinking, Schilder proceeded quite strongly from the starting point of double predestination. At the same time, however, he wanted to maintain that the covenant and the promise of the covenant included every baptized child without distinction. This can be maintained only if you elucidate the covenant as a universal category and move the grace-character of the covenant somewhat into the shadow. . . . To the extent that Schilder placed predestination more prominently in the foreground, to that extent he also had to emphasize the universal-*obligating* structure of the covenant for everyone that much more strongly."¹⁶⁰ In our view, however, this connection is not all that self-evident. Admittedly we observe that Schilder placed promise and demand on a par especially in his later publications.¹⁶¹ But from his pre-1939 writings it appears that this topic of the correlation of promise and demand (or promise and threat) in the covenant had interested him already then.¹⁶² In our opinion, for Schilder this formulation did not involve first of all the (by others termed) realization of the eternal decree of election and reprobation by means of the temporal covenant, but rather it involved the nature of the Word of God that comes to us in the covenant: comforting, but also warning—and in both cases addressing the covenant person directly.¹⁶³ At the same time for Schilder this also involved the "integrity" of the sacraments: their genuineness does not depend on the condition of the recipients. Because the sacraments seal and confirm the Word, they can possess no other structure than the Word itself. The background of this position of Schilder, therefore, should rather be sought in the church struggle of that time. He was convinced that his opponents' emphasis on the unconditional character of the salvation promise more than once had in fact frustrated the proper functioning of the demand of the covenant.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ "Verbond en verkiezing [Covenant and election]," *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, 35 (1979-80), 49.

¹⁶¹ Cf. chapter 3 above, notes 133-135.

¹⁶² Cf. besides note 158 above (a formulation from 1939) also chapter 3 above, note 118 (a formulation from 1932). The quotation in the text of this chapter, at note 133, appears literally in the first edition of *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, (1939) 1: 108.

¹⁶³ Cf. chapter 1 above, especially note 130, and chapter 3 above, the text accompanied by notes 192-194.

¹⁶⁴ As an extreme example of this position we can point to someone in our own land who "plowed" with Dutch "heifers" (H. H. and A. Kuiper, Jr., and G. Ch. Aalders), when he declared as his firm conviction: "Faith is not a demand, but is merely the path in which the promise is fulfilled." Or: "Faith and conversion are in fact benefits of the covenant and not demands." We refer to P. J. S. de Klerk, *Belofte en eis van die genadeverbond* [Promise and

Once again it can hardly be denied that this typical Schilderian symmetry is nonetheless problematic. Even the mitigating historical circumstances mentioned above provide no excuse for the rather crass formulation that the promise and the demand of the covenant are precisely equal. If Schilder intended this literally and logically, then we may properly ask whether in this parallelism any room remains for the proverbial and evangelical “not yet” of God’s grace. We think, therefore, that perhaps here again there is a misunderstanding at work, analogous to what in our previous section we indicated as the mistaken identification of “relationship” and “fellowship.” In the struggle surrounding the Liberation [Vrymaking], the opposing parties accused each other back and forth. The one group (the “synodicals”) supposedly permitted the promise of the covenant to swallow up the demand of the covenant. The other group (the “objectors”) supposedly surrendered the promise of the covenant to the demand. But is this a genuine dilemma that can be avoided only by envisioning promise and demand in all circumstances as completely equal?

We cannot accept that anyone would argue with full seriousness that promise and demand are absolutely equal. There must be a third alternative here—not in the sense of a mediating path, but as an exit leading us away from terminological confusion. This exit becomes visible when it becomes clear that the concept of “promise” is used in more than one sense. Used in its primary sense, “promise” is the same as what used to be called the “substance” of the covenant. In this “primeval promise” the sovereign God Himself came with the fullness of His grace to man, and He proclaimed: “I am your God!”¹⁶⁵ This primary promise of the covenant is undoubtedly more important than any demand that follows it. One can say that this promise logically (not necessarily chronologically) precedes the demand. For it is by speaking this promise that God called into being the covenant between Him and man in a completely monopleuric manner. For that reason every demand of the covenant rests upon and flows forth

demand in the covenant of grace] (1949), pp. 10-11. The same “fear” of recognizing the demands of the covenant as *demands* appears in the unpublished treatment of K. S. Van Wyk de Vries, *Die vraagstuk van die inwendige en uitwendige genadeverbond* [The problem of the internal and external covenant of grace]. In the copy we had at our disposal, held in the library of the Potchefstroom University, every place where “demand of the covenant” was printed, the word “demand” is scratched through with ink and replaced with “calling of the believer in the covenant”!

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Schilder’s remark about this “one, primeval-promise of God, the one covenant substance” in the text of chapter 3 above, at note 133.

from this promise in its primary sense. Within the covenant that originated in this way—as a forensic relationship—God then began to “stipulate.” He makes his promise: “I will be a God unto you,” and he posits his demand: “You must be a son (or a people) unto Me.” Concerning this promise, in a secondary sense, it can indeed be said that it is equal to and simultaneous with the demand as its inseparable mirror image. One can introduce yet a further distinction. One may speak even of a tertiary sense of “promise,” within the covenant as a communion relationship. This takes the form of a promised reward: “If you keep my covenant, I will bless you.” This tertiary promise cannot be placed simply on the same level as the demand of the covenant. Rather, it must be connected to the threat of punishment in the covenant, something Schilder called an “appendix” to the demand, just as the promise of reward is an “appendix” to the promise. In short: one may speak of “demand,” even as one may speak of “promise,” in secondary and tertiary senses, but not in a “primary” sense, unlike with “promise.” Otherwise the covenant would indeed be no different from a contract between two equal parties. If the promise and the demand of the covenant can be viewed without qualification as equal, then we would need to replace the classic Reformed understanding of the sacrament of baptism as sealing to us and our children “the promise of the gospel” with something like sealing “the promise and the demand of the covenant.” But then the personal promise of the covenant is reduced to a mere “proclamation of the ‘general’ assurance that whoever believes is saved.”¹⁶⁶ For that reason Schilder even(!) never dared to propose such a change.

It was especially in connection with baptism that Schilder applied his understanding of the correlation between promise and demand. In this context he even spoke of “promise” in a twofold sense. When he defended his plea for a “Reformed doctrine of conditionality,” something that in his view differed radically from the Remonstrant use of the term “condition,” he employed the classic distinction between “unconditional” and “conditional” promises.¹⁶⁷ Without entering into the entire issue at this point, we must admit that Schilder’s analysis of the Remonstrants is not above criticism. Berkouwer argued that the actual mistake of the Remonstrant position was not an imbalanced doctrine of merit, but a fallacy regarding the function of faith, as though faith possessed the power to turn the “possibility” of the new

¹⁶⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, p. 193. A. König does not avoid this danger completely when, in his *Stydgesprek oor die kinderdoop* (no. 1)—admittedly in a popular context—states repeatedly (pp. 28, 60, 61) that baptism is “a guarantee that if you believe in God you are saved.”

¹⁶⁷ Cf. chapter 3, pp. ??-??.

covenant into the “reality” of the new covenant.¹⁶⁸ This is a crucial moment in Berkouwer’s exposition of the doctrine of infant baptism. He objects vigorously against viewing baptism (that is, infant baptism) as a half-truth that must later be completed by one’s profession of faith. The relationship between baptism and faith may not be viewed as a superficial blending of objective and subjective factors. The doctrine of the sacraments (and thus also infant baptism) involves the correlation between promise and faith, in the sense of the *involvement* of these two moments with one another.¹⁶⁹ In connection with the issue of infant baptism, then, we encounter over against Schilder’s correlation of promise and demand Berkouwer’s correlation of promise and faith. By the nature of the case, these two correlation ideas function on different levels. The correlation maintained by Schilder rests upon both actions (or words) proceeding from God. He makes the promises and He posits the demands of the covenant when He signifies and seals in the sacrament of baptism the coming into existence of the covenant. And in Berkouwer’s understanding of the correlation, the promise is indeed a word [woord] from God, but faith is the response [antwoord] from man. At any rate, for both theologians the same issue is at stake: how, within the covenant, God’s grace must be related to human responsibility. For that reason it would be illuminating to investigate these two ideas of correlation a bit further.

Much has been written by now concerning Berkouwer’s method of correlation and the interpretation thereof.¹⁷⁰ It is clear that Berkouwer did not employ “correlation” in its proper sense. The co-relation between revelation and faith was for him not a closed relation, wherein the two constitutive components mutually determine and limit each other. For that reason he did not feel threatened by the accusation that his notion of correlation reduced the full content of

¹⁶⁸ *The Sacraments*, p. 249ENG?? Berkouwer stated that if Schilder had seen this problem more clearly, “he would logically have had to come, in my opinion, to a revision of his perspective concerning *the nature of conditionality* of God’s promise.” On the preceding page, however, Berkouwer himself rejected the notion that all of God’s promises are simply unconditional: “. . . in the nature of God’s speaking, the “if” character of this speaking must be fully acknowledged.”ENG??

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 238.

¹⁷⁰ G. W. de Jong provides an excellent objective exposition of it in his book, *De theologie van dr. G. C. Berkouwer. Een structurele analyse* (1971), especially pp. 7-66. W.D. Jonker identifies the most significant relevant literature in his essay, “Dogmatiek en Heilige Skrif,” in *Septuagesimo anno* (1973), p. 104. In the recent past a dissertation was written about this issue (in part), viz., J. C. de Moor, *Towards a biblical theological method. A structural analysis and a further elaboration of Dr. G.C. Berkouwer’s hermeneutic-dogmatic method* (1980). Cf. also S. Meijers, *Objectiviteit en existentialiteit* (1979), pp. 234ff. NDK: Buytendach volume on form/content in view of Scripture.

Scripture to an existential minimum.¹⁷¹ He used the term “correlation” with an improperly broad sense of the word, as a relation wherein the two poles are mutually involved and may not be separated from each other. One can only appreciate Berkouwer’s theological contribution at this point, in particular his wrestling with the (co-)relation between God and man. But the question remains whether the correlation idea can really serve to clarify here—with regard to the problems which infant baptism occasions—and whether the idea does not rather lead to greater confusion. This question becomes more pressing when one observes the obvious snare in which someone like J. A. Heyns is caught when, in following Berkouwer, he seeks to maintain at all costs the correlation between promise and faith, also with respect to infant baptism. When he treats this subject, he (properly) rejects the so-called dilemma of having to choose between infant faith or presupposed regeneration as the possible basis for infant baptism. But he then in seeking a (illogical) solution for the problem he moves in the same direction when he observes that these infants being baptized a children of believers, concluding: “in other words, they are elect and regenerated [sic] . . . *before God* these children are also believers. . . . Could not baptism be the sign and seal of this faith?”¹⁷² In the same context, Heyns recalls that the “correlation of faith and baptism” remains valid for one’s entire life. “As children grow up, baptism as it were grows with them, so that their baptism becomes an adult baptism!”¹⁷³

Something of this same “ambiguity” can be shown as well in the study of P. W. Marais dealing with infant baptism, in which he explicitly takes as his starting point the correlation of baptism and faith.¹⁷⁴ On the one hand he says, in connection with covenant and *regeneration*, that “it is correct that the children of covenant parents must be viewed as regenerated. . . .”¹⁷⁵ But on the other hand he warns, in connection with covenant and *conversion*, against formalism,

¹⁷¹ Especially H. Berkhof criticized Berkouwer on this point, in his essay “De methode van Berkouwers theologie,” in *Ex auditu verbi* (1965), pp. 37-55.

¹⁷² *Dogmatiek*, p. 343.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 344. Cf. also his statement on p. 340 of the same volume: “Therefore baptism is also a sign and seal of an already present faith, and not an anticipation of a future faith—certainly an anticipation of and stimulus toward a future *strengthened* faith.” Clearly, according to Heyns, the correlation of faith and baptism (in various ways) must be maintained!

¹⁷⁴ *Die korrelasie van doop en geloof in die kinderdoop, met spesiale verwysing na Augustinus* (unpublished dissertation, 1968). This title clearly betrays the influence of Berkouwer via his disciple W. D. Jonker, who served as Marais’ promotor/mentor. Moreover, this study is one of the (many) clear examples in Reformed theology in South Africa which summarily accepts as correct the Dutch “synodical” position, without meaningfully engaging the “Liberated” arguments. Marais’ chapter on covenant and infant baptism (pp. 190-216) contains not a single reference to Schilder, though names like Kuyper, Aalders, and Ridderbos appear repeatedly.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

saying that no guarantee of heavenly salvation exists “apart from the heart being changed.”¹⁷⁶

The contradiction in this position is clear. Is “regeneration” then not yet “a change of heart,” or is it only half a change of heart, the other half to be completed at “conversion”?¹⁷⁷

Questions arise, then, from the inconsistencies of approaching infant baptism from the correlation of promise and faith. Equally problematic is the argument that infant baptism, to be a real baptism, must be placed on the same level as adult baptism, as though only in this manner justice can be done to the connection between baptism and faith.¹⁷⁸ Often this position proceeds from the starting point that in the New Testament, adult baptism was the original baptismal practice, and that the practice of infant baptism supposedly developed only later.¹⁷⁹ This traditional view, however, ignores the fact that even adult baptism never occurs on the basis of faith, but exclusively on the basis of the death of Christ whereby the new covenant became effectual. When O. Weber claims: “Precisely for this reason *every* baptism is *infant* baptism,”¹⁸⁰ he has penetrated to the heart of the matter involved in this discussion. No one can deny that a connection between baptism and faith exists, also with regard to infant baptism. But appealing to a “correlative” connection here will inevitably give the impression of a forced argument. Everyone agrees that an objectivistic view of baptism must be avoided, but then the attraction of a subjectivistic view of baptism can similarly be resisted on a principial basis. And this can be done only when it is made absolutely clear that the assurance sealed by baptism may not in any way be grounded in the person.

In light of the foregoing, it merits consideration whether the correlation of promise and faith (Berkouwer), particularly in connection with baptism, could not profitably be replaced with

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁷⁷ It goes without saying that in Schilder’s position naturally regeneration does not exclude conversion. Baptism *promises* (among other things) regeneration, but it does not *seal* it. Therefore a person cannot be regenerated (except covenant children who die in infancy, Canons of Dort I.17) apart from a believing response to the demand of the covenant.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 246ENG??: “that a principial distinction does not exist between *infant baptism* and adult baptism.”

¹⁷⁹ Even Schilder stated incautiously, in *Christelijke religie* (lecture notes), p. 111: “It is not the case that infant baptism was original and that the baptism of adults came thereafter; adult baptism was original and infant baptism was linked to it and thus appeared in the second place.” The fact that Paul composed his baptismal passages (Rom. 6:3ff. and others) chiefly against the background of adult baptism proves nothing in this case. The so-called household passages (cf. G. de Ru, *De kinderdoop en het Nieuwe Testament*, pp. 170ff.) testify to the contrary. From the very beginning, infant baptism existed alongside adult baptism. Paul did not need to discuss infant baptism separately, since the early Christian church had no difficulty with it.

¹⁸⁰ *Grundlagen der Dogmatik*, 2: 677ENG??

the correlation of promise and demand (Schilder). *This* understanding of correlation minimally offers the advantage that the term can be used in its proper sense: within the covenant, promise and demand are not only mutually involved, but the actually mutually define and delimit each other. It also offers the advantage that we may proceed from the objective certainty of the spoken Covenant word at baptism, without this necessarily having to lead to objectivism.¹⁸¹ It may be true that in reaction against the subjectivistic tendencies of his opponents, Schilder occasionally tended to go in the opposite direction, although he usually expressed himself more carefully.¹⁸² In our opinion, he should have stated more clearly that faith is not just *obedience to the demand* of the covenant, but faith is also a *gift of the covenant*. Even so, the great advantage of the correlation of promise and demand is that in addition to safeguarding the invincible Word of God, it also allows full room for the responsibility of the baptized person, but the in a responsible manner. With the view which inclines somewhat toward permitting the covenant to be identified with the promise alone, apart from the demand—for example, by talking only about the “salvation covenant”—the member of the covenant can all too easily hide behind the abstraction that all of God’s promises will always be fulfilled without regard to faith or unbelief. This understanding leads to an unbiblical false security. But because the promises, as covenant promises, are linked inseparably to the demands, as covenant demands, these promises are not simply “predictions.”¹⁸³ That which God promises arouses and requires our faith [Wat God be-loof, wek en vereis ons ge-loof]. The former is not fulfilled apart from the latter. In the same way the *demands* of the covenant, by the nature of the case, sharpen the responsibility of the member of the covenant. But here as well one must keep in view the truth that this involves covenant demands, requirements that can never be separated from the covenant promises. Therefore these demands are not unqualified “conditions” needing to be satisfied, or even able to be satisfied, in one’s own power. They are serious commands of God Almighty that are borne by and function within his covenant of grace.

¹⁸¹ It cannot be denied that among some Liberated Reformed there was a tendency toward objectivism. When Rev. D. van Dijk (cited by Spier, *op. cit.*, p. 51) states that “apart from faith” a person can know that he is a member of the covenant, then baptism is isolated from baptism to such a degree that the promise of the covenant is in fact reduced to a bare objective truth, which can be completed only through the subjective agreement to the demand of the covenant. On the one hand, such a perspective minimizes the power of the promise, and on the other hand, it ascribes too much power to faith—and thereby ultimately falls into . . . subjectivism!

¹⁸² Here we recall two important statements of Schilder, which we provided in the text of chapter 3, accompanied by notes 131 and 161: “the Covenant God is embedded within all the promised goods”; and, the sacrament is not only “obsignative,” but also “exhibitive.” CHECK PREVIOUS TRANS??

¹⁸³ “Promises that are fulfilled are different from *predictions* that *occur*,” argued A. König, throughout his book, *Jesus Christus die Eschatos*. Cf. p. 551: index of subjects, s.v. “promise-fulfillment [belofte-ervulling]”

In our contemporary situation, also in South Africa, the doctrine of infant baptism is being attacked from more than one side. Throughout the preceding centuries, serious and probing reflection concerning the fundamental basis of this doctrine has occurred in the Netherlands. For that reason, we would do ourselves an injustice if we did not acquaint ourselves with this stream in Dutch Reformed theology, of which Schilder was a representative. At the baptismal font we will be tested as to whether we are thinking in a Reformed, that is a Scriptural, way about God's sovereignty and human responsibility. For there resounds the word that is simultaneously a comforting and a warning Covenant word: "everything or nothing!"

Finally, we must make a comment or two in this section with regard to Schilder's view that the "sanctions" of promised reward and threatened punishment must also be considered as "extras" in addition to the usual promise and demand of the covenant. Schilder nowhere developed this paradigm to any extent. Moreover, it would be difficult to catalogue every promise or demand of the covenant in Scripture according to the classifications of "ordinary" or "extra" promises and demands. Therefore we are concerned here not with the detailed aspects of his view, but rather with the intention undergirding it and the theological importance of the issue itself.

For the existence of covenant sanctions, Schilder could appeal to, among others, a theologian like Herman Witsius.¹⁸⁴ In another place he agrees with W. Geesink when the latter employed the term "sanctions" in the sense of "confirmation" or "enforcement" (cf. our expression, "to sanction").¹⁸⁵ For Schilder, then, the term "sanctions" does not signify necessary measures for compelling the performance of covenant stipulations. But the concept is nevertheless closely related to his conviction that the covenant possesses a forensic character. Perhaps this accent should be viewed as Schilder's most characteristic contribution with regard to the covenant. In the history of modern Reformed theology, his name will be forever tied to this mostly neglected topic in the doctrine of the covenant. Probably no one else has reflected so

¹⁸⁴ Cf. chapter 3, note 102.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. chapter 3, note 55. Cf. Geesink's claim in his *Gereformeerde Ethiek*, 1: 556-557, that "theonomy" lends religion its "sanction." "This sanction (from Latin, *sancire*, sanctify, enforce) refers to the threat of punishment in case of transgression or the promise of reward in case of performance, connected by the gods or by God to this ordinance.

much and so penetratingly as Schilder has about especially the sanction of threatened punishment.

Even though this topic surely need not be developed in precisely the same way that Schilder developed it,¹⁸⁶ it can hardly be denied that this involves an essential facet of the biblical revelation regarding the covenant. Therefore Schilder's recalling us to consider the sharp side of the covenant will continue to exercise its prophetic power, also in our age when people's view of God has been diminished to that of a "loving heavenly Father." The mere fact that in many cases, it sounds sacrilegious, even to church members, simply to mention the wrath of God—whereas this is a Scriptural concept in both Old and New Testaments¹⁸⁷—confirms the truth of this claim.

4.8 Continuing significance

We have traveled a relatively long route, together with many side paths, in order to investigate the possibilities of relating Schilder's position and contemporary theological discussion. No one realizes more clearly that the author himself that much more could be said. But a stop must be made at some point. We believe in any case that we could provide sufficient evidence that the issues with which Schilder was involved in his own day are still relevant today. Since the covenant is such a central place in dogmatics, the topics related to it will always retain their relevance! We have also attempted to answer, in the previous section of this chapter, the question whether Schilder's own characteristic contribution is still valuable for today's discussion. In that context various important aspects of his covenant perspective have surfaced. We wish here to summarize in a logical and systematic way the most important of these aspects, with the goal of determining the continuing significance of Schilder's contribution regarding the covenant.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. our rejection of Schilder's parallelizing of God's eternal love and hatred, in § 4.2 above.
¹⁸⁷ The well-known passages are Deut. 32:35, Rom. 12:19, and Heb. 10:30.

Before doing so, however, we say a bit about Schilder's place in the history of "covenant theology."¹⁸⁸ G. Puchinger states in one of his articles about Schilder: no one, not even his opponents, may deny him a place in the Reformed tradition. He deserves "a continuing, important place in the history of mid-twentieth century Reformed theology."¹⁸⁹ R. H. Bremmer calls him one of the "most important dogmaticians of recent times."¹⁹⁰ Could we expand this value judgment regarding the theology of Schilder in general to include especially his covenant theology as well? The history of covenant theology among the "Reformed Churches" in the Netherlands has run a tragic course. Early on, it had been a bone of contention for more than a century, an issue about which no unanimity could be achieved. Today those ancient differences seem to be locked up for good in the closets of the theological archives. Contemporary covenant theology no longer seeks affinity with positions from the past.¹⁹¹ Amid those two eras stands the figure of someone like Professor Dr. K. Schilder. It was especially he who showed convincingly that Reformed theology in his day had not yet been finished with its work. Like few others, with his publications he stimulated reflection regarding these issues. But following his deposition and the church split resulting from that, this entire discussion actually stopped. Of course, one might celebrate that result and adopt the position that the development of Reformed covenant theology ended up in a cul-de-sac, so that we in our day can reflect about the covenant entirely *de novo*. With this position, however, the danger is great that at certain points one can end up with a completely unreformed covenant theology. Anyone who ignores the mistakes made in the past will repeat the same mistakes today! By contrast, recognizing the essential importance of a Reformed covenant theology for all of theology—past, present, and future—can do nothing less than pick up the thread again from (at least also) Schilder. The great accomplishment of this Reformed theologian was that, on the one hand, where possible he maintained the bond with the past, and on the other hand, he had an eye for the questions coming to us from modern

¹⁸⁸ We use the phrase "covenant theology" here in lieu of a better phrase. It is regrettable that there is no technical term with respect to the covenant, such as "soteriology" (something different from the *doctrine* of salvation) or "harmartiology" (something different from the *doctrine* of sin). Perhaps one could speak of "federology." The theologically (scientific) treatment of a particular doctrine is something different from the (confessional) doctrine itself.

¹⁸⁹ *Theologische Persoonlijkheden*, pp. 150-151.

¹⁹⁰ *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, p. 391. Schilder is mentioned together with G. C. Berkouwer, Th. L. Haitjema, and J. G. Woelderink.

¹⁹¹ J. Veenhof, "Verbond en verkiezing," in *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, 35 (1979-1980): 50: "In the most recent document regarding baptism, 'Samen door een doop,' ('s-Gravenhage-Kampen, 1979), compiled by a work group of Dutch Reformed [hervormde] and Reformed [gereformeerde] ministers, not once is the entire issue involved in those days [of the Liberated Reformed] even mentioned."

developments in theology. In this way, on the basis of his confessional starting point, he could demonstrate that Reformed theology contains perpetually fruitful possibilities for a meaningful interaction with and confrontation of newer theology. It all depends on how we employ our starting point. About this starting point we need not be ashamed—not even in South Africa!

If one studies Schilder's contribution regarding the covenant intensively, so that the fundamental features of his covenant perspective come into focus, his thought displays an impressive character. It is true that Schilder himself did not develop these fundamental features with equal systematic thoroughness. But his thinking is systematic. For that reason, many of his views stimulate a person to reflect further in the same direction. This leads to the question whether this impulse can be used in a meaningful way for giving shape to a contemporary covenant theology. In developing such a covenant theology, more than one of Schilder's fundamental positions can be included. In view of the preceding sections of this chapter, it is unnecessary to describe these "building blocks" any further. Rather, at this point we wish to try to provide an answer to the question how the "building" itself should look.

Any essay dealing with the covenant will have to work with more exegetical thoroughness than would have been serviceable in this study. The dogmatician does not have the same task as the Old and New Testament theologian, but he cannot begin at a different point than they do. He must go further than they do, however, and systematically *think through* and *draw together* the results of exegetical study together with the fundamental lines of biblical history of revelation in relation to the problems before which we stand today. When proceeding self-consciously from the biblical understanding of the covenant, the topic of the history of the covenant must be moved from the background to the foreground. Stated strongly, one could begin a theological exposition of the covenant elsewhere, for example, in terms of God's eternal decree. For like every other *opera ad extra* of God, the covenant also originates there. But if this path is chosen, accidents can easily occur. Surely this is one of the most important continuing benefits of Schilder's contribution regarding the covenant, that at this point he resisted the attraction of rationalism, when he took the history of the covenant as the starting point of his covenant perspective.

When one deals seriously in his covenant theology with the biblical history of revelation, he immediately faces the question as to where he must begin in terms of the historiography of the covenant. Must he begin with Abraham, or with Noah (where the word “covenant” appears for the first time in the Bible), or can he begin with Adam before the Fall? Schilder’s characteristic approach of “beginning at the beginning” has opened our eyes to the truth that the “covenant of works” may not be neglected, without severely damaging almost every other doctrine in theology. But then this primordial covenant may not be viewed and interpreted as an isolated phenomenon all by itself. The Bible itself, with all that it teaches, does not warrant such an approach. Rather, the covenant of works must be treated in its relationship of continuity with the covenant of grace. This implies that one can and may speak of two covenants (or two distinct phases of the covenant). But these two need not be placed over against each other in a scholastic manner. The connection that the Bible establishes between the first and the second Adam—once again a “duet”!—is too strong to permit that. This bond does not run, however, simply in one direction, from the beginning straight to the end. The Bible also presents the line of thought that moves from the end back to the beginning (Gen. 22). Therefore one can theorize about the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace “forward” as well as “backward,” or “back and forth.”

Another subject with which recent theology confronts us today is the question whether the Bible speaks of one covenant or of many covenants. One could dismiss this question as a mistaken dilemma. For in this case, the “many” does not necessary exclude the “one.” Nevertheless, in the light of modern biblical studies with their view of differing, even mutually contradictory theologies in the Bible, the question remains warranted whether today we can still make use of “the covenant” as a foundational theological concept. In our opinion, a faith-decision must be rendered at this point. On the basis of this decision it will need to be demonstrated that the results of the aforementioned biblical studies come into conflict not only with a certain mistaken view of faith, but also with the biblical faith itself. This is so not because “faith” and “science” inevitably need to relate to each other in tension, but because each “science” can logically be traced back to one or another “faith.” In this respect, the persistent defense, by Schilder and others, of the unity of all of Scripture can provide a great service. This faith-decision involves no archaic and outdated starting point, but rather it involves the bond, which in principle cannot be surrendered, with the one holy, universal, and (especially) apostolic

church. The nineteenth century has been called “the century of the Scripture,” in contrast to the twentieth century, which is thought to be “the century of the church.” But it seems as though in the closing decades of the twentieth century, once again the Scripture has come to occupy the center of theological interest. Important decisions are made at the point of one’s doctrine of Scripture, for all of theology is involved there: the doctrine of God, anthropology . . . and especially the doctrine of the covenant. To understand the origin of Scripture, one must understand the covenant relationship between God and man. To see clearly the unity of Scripture, one must maintain the unity of the covenant. In this context, Schilder’s characteristic contribution regarding the continuity of old and new covenant appeals so strongly to us. This feature constitutes a subject that can profitably be systematized still further.

When such subjects as these, all of which are related to the history of the covenant, are discussed in a contemporary covenant theology, the entire business needs to be supplemented with a discussion of the relationship between covenant and counsel of peace. At this point every theologian encounters virtually insurmountable problems. But the degree of difficulty provided by this relationship may not cause it to be pushed aside for the sake of convenience. In the light of God’s reliable revelation, every formulation about the eternal counsel of God will need to be given exegetical warrant. Such an unfettered investigation can help us avoid dismissing this subject out of hand as though it were merely a scholastic preoccupation. To caricature any reflection regarding God’s decree as “curiosity” and for that reason to eliminate it from contemporary theology, is to surrender the Reformed doctrine of the covenant into the hands of a one-dimensional historicism. Although Schilder’s view of the relationship between the “decree” and the “act” of God will need to be revised at particular points, it is to his credit that he did not avoid this subject but treated it as a matter established on theology’s agenda. At the same time it is regrettable that in connection with this, he did not develop the relationship between covenant and election more extensively. In terms of systematic theological reflection, this latter subject belongs with the former. Because so much confusion exists regarding the far-reaching subject of covenant and election, it can be examined whether these two entities must be subjected to a comparison in order to bring to light the similarities and the differences between the two. Such a comparison is possible, for according to Scripture “election” is not just a decree of God, but even more, just as with “covenant,” an act of God in history.

The next important subject in the doctrine of the covenant that will need to be set forth in a contemporary covenant theology is the structure of the covenant. Our exposition of Schilder's views in this connection led to the conclusion that the covenant should preferably be described as the relationship between God and man—not simply as communion between God and man. This relationship can be developed further in a number of directions. Schilder's strong emphasis on the genuine bilaterality of the covenant provides interesting material for evaluating contemporary relational thinking. At this point the doctrine of the covenant overlaps in large measure the doctrine of God and anthropology. Since the covenant is the relationship between God and man, both “poles” of this relationship must be kept clearly in view, if one is to obtain a proper view of the relationship itself.

With respect to the doctrine of God, Schilder's strongly tautological tendency (from Boethius's definition of the eternity of God) can hardly be followed. On the other hand, his warning against ascribing to God any “chief attribute” (for example, love) is as relevant as ever. With respect to anthropology, Schilder's view of man as image of God—in covenantal perspective!—surely merits further consideration. Schilder's analysis of the bilateral nature of the covenant enables one to understand the covenant as a living, dynamic relationship between God and man. Such an understanding is in our opinion closer to the biblical revelation regarding the covenant than the impersonal, static covenant perspective proposed in the past in some Reformed circles.

The next cornerstone of Schilder's covenant theology that must be cemented into a contemporary thinking is his conviction that the covenant possesses a forensic character. We view this facet as one of his most characteristic contributions, and at the same time one whose continuing significance is obvious. As we have already shown in a previous section of this chapter, it is very meaningful to pay attention to this forensic character (alongside the communion character) of the covenant. Especially this facet in Schilder's thinking that according to him never permits the covenant to be viewed as a sedative. Naturally it is precisely this forensic character that provides the covenant with the greatest measure of security that a sinful person could need. But this is not the only thing involved in the covenant! The covenant is preeminently the place where the sovereign God genuinely treats a person as a fully responsible being. Therefore the motto of “everything or nothing” can be viewed as the constitution of the covenant. The Covenant God binds himself to this rule when he graciously supplies “everything”

in the covenant. We may and can rely believingly on that. But he expects the same from those who belong to the covenant. They too must show their love and trust toward him by being obedient in “everything.” Otherwise “nothing” of the comfort of the covenant remains. Then only the judicial sanctions of the forensic application of the covenant become effectual. That we are dealing here with a foundational pillar of the covenant structure is confirmed by, among other things, the results of modern archaeological investigation. For this reason as well, a contemporary covenant theology will not be able to ignore this contribution of Schilder.

Of course, by emphasizing the forensic character of the covenant, the equally important communion character of the covenant may not be pushed to the background. But with respect to this aspect, human responsibility may never be lost from sight. Communion is not an inevitable benefit of the covenant that every member of the covenant may count on. In our opinion, an important proof of Schilder’s balanced insight into the covenant problematic is provided by the fact that he embedded this integral element of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant within his covenant perspective. At the same time, we are convinced that this aspect, within a systematic exposition of the doctrine of the covenant, will need to enjoy greater attention than Schilder devoted to it. Probably as a consequence of the polarized positions in the church struggle, he wrote remarkably little about the so-called order of salvation. But this aspect of the covenant may not be neglected; it must simply be properly explained. For this is a central biblical concept, namely, that our redemptive-historical judicial position in Christ must be deepened in the covenant as the redemptive-experiential [heilsordelik] work of the Holy Spirit leading to an intimate communion relationship between Christ and us.

In a similar fashion other contributions of Schilder with respect to the covenant can be built into a contemporary covenant theology. Especially with regard to the subject of covenant and church, something we have touched upon only incidentally in this study, Schilder certainly offers a unique contribution of lasting significance—at least in terms of several aspects of that subject. At this point, however, we wish to conclude the summary of the continuing significance of Schilder’s contribution regarding the covenant with reference to the subject of covenant and baptism. The number of issues relating to infant baptism is virtually inexhaustible. In that connection, this subject is of essential importance for the continuation of the church as a Reformed church. One is struck by the fact that in our day, for many who have objections against

the doctrine of the church, infant baptism practically draws the boundary line between church and sect. This fact underscores once again the importance of the doctrine of the covenant, for apart from the biblical covenant perspective, infant baptism can never be justified. The increase in the number of church groups that acknowledge only adult baptism generates the question as to why in many instances the church seems a bit embarrassed by the criticisms coming from modern Anabaptists. Certainly there is no simple answer to be given to this question. But must not one of the reasons for this be that in fact the subjectivistic Kuyperian doctrine of “presupposed regeneration” enjoys among us such widespread endorsement? Because at this point Schilder has provided a clear alternative, his position regarding infant baptism surely merits wider recognition.

Finally, the question must be answered whether K. Schilder can be viewed as a “great” theologian. His greatness did not entail the exercise of continuing worldwide influence. But what actually makes a theologian great? Is it not his contribution to the meaningful administration of the Word in the church? Measured by this standard, Schilder was undoubtedly great. Aside from his extensive theological writing, he definitely influenced the preaching of the “Reformed Churches” whom he served. Even today, in this circle one can hear characteristic Schilderian accents: the connection between Old and New Testaments with a wealth of prophetic perspective; the logical construction of a sermon organized by a theme statement; the unabashed confessional orthodoxy. But above all these, we hear the strongly covenantal starting point. Through his Word at baptism the LORD God addresses his sure promises to the congregation. But this Word demands much in return as well. For the God who supplies everything in Christ also requires everything from man. His covenant with us presses upon us responsibility toward Him. For the covenant is the most powerful motivation imaginable for a radical conversion and for living a life in the awareness of one’s calling. Therefore the Word of this covenant always places the congregation again with seriousness and earnestness before the ultimate decision in human life: for or against God. Inside or outside the covenant. Life or death. “Everything or nothing!”

It is worth our every effort to study the theology that serves as the background and seedbed for such preaching.

SUMMARY

“EVERYTHING OR NOTHING” – K. SCHILDER ON THE COVENANT

by

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Various factors gave rise to the choice of Dr. K. Schilder's view of the covenant as the subject of this study. One reason is that at present this reformed theologian is virtually unknown in South Africa. This is all the more strange in view of the fact that a few decades ago such a furor was created by his views that it led to a schism of the church in the Netherlands. Although other aspects of Schilder's theology have at times been the subject of scrutiny, his view of the covenant has never before been properly systematized, analyzed, and evaluated. The primary thesis of this study is that Schilder's view represents a legitimate – though neglected – variation of 20th century Reformed thinking.

The actual investigation of Schilder's view of the covenant is preceded by a biographical and church-historical [discussion]. From this it becomes clear that he participated keenly in the exciting ecclesiastical developments in the Netherlands in the period between the two world wars. His work is characterized by his defense of Reformed doctrine against Kuypertian “conservatism” as well as against Barthian “modernism.” In this he aligned himself with the reformational movement of his time, out of which – amongst others – also originated the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea (Dooyeweerd). Schilder was an uncompromising man. His

motto was “everything or nothing.” This radical trait also reveals itself in his theology, especially in his teaching on the covenant.

The analysis of Schilder’s view of the covenant commences with a longitudinal section on the history of the covenant. Over against Kuyper as well as Barth, he emphasized that the covenant is an historical reality, although it has its basis in the eternal counsel of peace. On certain points Schilder inclines to a supralapsarian viewpoint, but broadly speaking he differentiated between the covenant and the counsel of peace, or covenant and election, respectively. Because of the emphasis placed on the history and the unity of the covenant, the continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace plays a dominating role in his view of the covenant. Parallel to this is his conception of the continuity between the old and new covenants, or Old and New Testaments. In this connection he made an important contribution to the redemptive-historical method of exegesis.

A cross-section of the covenant subsequently reveals Schilder’s conception of the structure of the covenant. He emphasized the bilateral mode of existence of the covenant without denying its unilateral origin. His development of the idea that man is God’s fellow-worker brought to light a basic motif in his covenantal view: man’s responsibility may never be belittled in any way. With regard to the covenant, the motto “everything or nothing” holds true. The same basic motif, *inter alia*, leads to his characteristic emphasis on the legal character of the covenant. Next to the traditional promise and demand of the covenant, Schilder also views the sanctions of reward and vengeance as constitutive components of the covenant.

The study is concluded with an evaluation of Schilder’s contribution with regard to the covenant. Possible connecting lines between Schilder’s views and the present day discussion concerning the covenant – in the Netherlands as well as in South Africa – are traced. This leads to the discovery that many of the themes which occupied him, as well as the viewpoints he had regarding them, are still relevant today.