

Reformed Dogmatics by Geerhardus Vos

Preface

The *Reformed Dogmatics* of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), here appearing for the first time in English, is a welcome publication for anyone wishing to benefit from a uniformly sound and often penetrating articulation of biblical doctrine. It will be of particular interest to those who are already familiar with the work of Vos—the father of a Reformed biblical theology. Few, if any, among them have not experienced a growing appreciation of his profound and singular insights into Scripture. F. F. Bruce’s characterization of *The Pauline* Eschatology is an apt description for his work as a whole: “indeed outstandingly great ... a rare exegetical feast.”

The *Reformed Dogmatics* stems from the period 1888–1893, when among other subjects the young Vos taught systematic theology (dogmatics) at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church, later renamed Calvin Theological Seminary. This *Dogmatiek* was first published in Dutch as a hand-written manuscript in five volumes, in 1896. It was subsequently transcribed and printed in 1910. While the 1896 version is apparently in Vos’ own hand, the transcription is almost certainly by some other person or persons. But there is no good reason to question that it was done with Vos’ full knowledge and approval. That transcription is the basis for this translation project.

While this is not a critical translation, the goal has been to provide a careful translation, aiming as much as possible for formal rather than dynamic equivalence. The accuracy of the secondary sources Vos cites or quotes—usually by referring to no more than the author and title and sometimes only to the author—has not been verified nor the exact bibliographic details provided. Explanatory footnotes have been kept to a minimum. Nothing has been deleted, no sections elided or their content summarized in a reduced form. Vos’ occasionally elliptical style in presenting material, meant primarily for the classroom rather than for published circulation to a wider audience, has been maintained. The relatively few instances of grammatical ellipsis unclear in English have been expanded, either without notation or, where the expansion is more extensive, placed within brackets.

Concerning the use of Scripture a couple of things are to be noted. Effort has been made to verify Scripture references, and occasional instances of typographical error, where the intended reference is clear, have been corrected without that being

indicated. In Vos' original, Old Testament verse references are to the Hebrew text, which varies occasionally from the numbering used in English Bibles. These references have been changed in this translation to be consistent with English versification. Also, quotations occasionally follow the Statenvertaling but are usually Vos' own translation, whether exact or a paraphrase. Accordingly, rather than utilizing a standard English translation, they are translated as Vos quotes them.

English readers will now be able to explore the relationship between the early Vos of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and his subsequent work in biblical theology, begun in the fall of 1893 when he moved from Grand Rapids to Princeton Seminary as the first occupant of its newly created chair of biblical theology. Whatever differences that comparison may bring to light, it is safe to anticipate that the end result will substantiate deep, pervasive and cordial continuity between his work in systematic theology and biblical theology. An important reference point in this regard is provided by Vos himself in his comments on the thoroughly positive, complementary relationship he as a Reformed theologian saw between the two disciplines. This point was present in his Princeton inaugural address in the spring of 1894 and echoed decades later, well after his retirement.⁶

Another interesting question concerns the antecedents of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, particularly those Vos may have considered its more immediate predecessors. Calvin is quoted most often, and there is occasional reference to various figures in late 16th and 17th century Reformed theology. However, there is no indication of current or more recent Reformed theologians who substantially influenced him and upon whose work he sees himself as building. There are only two passing references to Charles Hodge in Volume One (both dissenting!). There is no mention of Abraham Kuyper or B. B. Warfield, although Vos was personally acquainted with both and corresponded with them during his time in Grand Rapids, sometimes touching on matters theological. This silence may be explained by the fact that their major works were yet to appear.

The appearance of the *Reformed Dogmatics* will disclose substantial affinity with the *Reformed Dogmatics* of Herman Bavinck. This is to be expected, since the slightly younger Vos (by seven years) considered Bavinck a good friend as well as a close theological ally. The first volume of Bavinck's work (in Dutch), however, did not appear until 1895, after Vos' Grand Rapids period. Perhaps the later volumes of the *Reformed Dogmatics* will shed more light on the question of influences on Vos' work.

Volume One, appearing here, deals with theology proper. Subsequent volumes, scheduled to appear as the translation of each is readied, treat in order anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and in the final volume, ecclesiology and eschatology.

This project represents a collaborative effort without which it would not have otherwise been possible. Particular thanks are due to the translators for their efforts in providing base translations of the various parts of Volume One and also to Kim Batteau for some translation review. I have reviewed and revised their work and given the translation its final form.

Thanks are due to Lexham Press for its commitment in initiating and supporting this project, and to its editorial staff for their work. Special thanks to the project manager, Justin Marr, for all his time and efforts, not least his ready availability to make suggestions and answer questions about procedures. Finally, it would be remiss not to acknowledge indebtedness to the unknown person or persons responsible for the careful transcription work done over a century ago. Those labors have made this translation project immeasurably more feasible.

R. Gaffin, Jr.

August 2014

1. The Knowability of God

1. Is God knowable?

Yes, Scripture teaches this: “that we may know the One who is true” (1 John 5:20), although it also reminds us of the limited character of our knowledge (Matt 11:25).

2. In what sense do Reformed theologians maintain that God cannot be known?

a) Insofar as we can have only an incomplete understanding of an infinite being.

b) Insofar as we cannot give a definition of God but only a *description*.

3. On what ground do others deny God’s knowability?

On the ground that God is All-Being. They have a pantheistic view of God. Now, *knowing* presumes that the object known is not all there is, since it always remains distinct from the subject doing the knowing. Making God the object of

knowledge, one reasons, is equivalent to saying that He is not all there is, that He is limited.

4. What response is to be made against this view?

a) The objection that this view presents stems entirely from a philosophical view of God, as if He were All-Being. This view is wrong. God is certainly infinite, but God is not the All. There are things that exist, whose existence is not identical with God.

b) It is certainly true that we cannot make a visible representation of God because He is a purely spiritual being. But we also cannot do that of our own soul. Yet we believe that we know it.

c) It is also true that we do not have an in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of God. All our knowledge, even with regard to created things, is in part. This is even truer of God. We only know Him insofar as He reveals Himself, that is, has turned His being outwardly for us. God alone possesses ideal knowledge of Himself and of the whole world, since He pervades everything with His omniscience.

d) That we are able to know God truly rests on the fact that God has made us in His own image, thus an impression of Himself, albeit from the greatest distance. Because we ourselves are spirit, possess a mind, will, etc., we know what it means when in His Word God ascribes these things to Himself.

Gaffin, R., Jr. (2012–2014). Preface. In R. B. Gaffin (Ed.), A. Godbehere, R. van Ijken, D. van der Kraan, H. Boonstra, J. Pater, & A. Janssen (Trans.), *Reformed Dogmatics* (Vol. 1, pp. vii–2). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

2. Names, Being, and Attributes of God

1. In what does the importance of the names of God lie?

In this, that God through them draws our attention to the most important attributes of His being. This being is so rich and comprehensive that we need to have some benchmarks in order to understand the rest. God's names are not empty sounds (like the names of people), but they have

meaning and contribute to our knowledge of God.

2. *What is the meaning of the name Elohim?*

“He who is to be feared,” “the One who is full of majesty.” The ending *im* is a plural ending. The singular is *Eloah* and appears first in the later books of the Bible as a poetical form. The plural ending does not point to an earlier polytheistic conception, but signifies the plenitude of power and majesty there is in God.

3. *What are the meanings of the names El and Adonai?*

El means “the Strong One,” “the Mighty One.” *Adonai* means “Ruler,” “Lord”; originally, “my Ruler,” “my Lord.”

4. *Give the meaning of the name Eljon.*

It means “the Exalted One,” namely “above all other so-called gods”; cf. Gen 14:18.

5. *What is the meaning of the name El Shaddai?*

“The Mighty One,” “the Sovereign One.”

6. *What is the derivation and what is the meaning of the name Jehovah?*

Very early the Jews thought that Leviticus 24:11, 16 forbade them to pronounce the holy name of God. They always replaced it with *Adonai*. Later, when vowels were added to the Hebrew text, the vowels of *Adonai* were used. Thus, the pronunciation “Jehovah” came into existence. We cannot ascertain with certainty what the original pronunciation was, but most probably the pronunciation was *Jahweh*. However, we are already so used to the sound of Jehovah that it would almost be irreverent to change it at this stage. According to Exodus 3:14, Jehovah is a covenant name and signifies: (a) self-existence; and (b) God’s immutability and faithfulness.

Elohej

7. *What does the name Jehovah Zebaoth affirm?*

It means “the God [or the Lord] of Hosts.” This name was first used in the time of Samuel. In that connection, one has thought that it indicates Jehovah as *Captain of Israel’s battle array* (Psa 44:10). However, in Scripture, two other things are also called “hosts,” namely the stars and the angels (Deut 4:19; Job 38:7). Thus along with the meaning mentioned above, included also in the name is *this*: God all-powerfully rules over angels and stars, and Israel should not fear them as the heathen do.

8. *Has God made Himself known to us only through His names?*

No, also through His attributes. God’s attributes are the revealed being of God Himself insofar as it is made known to us under certain circumstances.

9. *What two questions arise for us in connection with God’s attributes?*

- a) In what relation do they stand to His being?

- b) In what relation do they stand to each other?

10. What do the ancients teach concerning God's being?

- a) As has been noted above, we cannot give a definition of God's being. After all, every definition presupposes a higher concept of genus and a distinction between a concept of genus and a concept of species, as well as a composition of the two. Now there is nothing higher than God, and God is simple, without composition.
- b) There is no distinction in God between essence and existing, between essence and being, between essence and substance, between substance and its attributes. God is *most pure* and *most simple* act.

11. May we make a distinction in God between His being and His attributes?

No, because even with us, being and attributes are most closely connected. Even more so in God. If His attributes were something other than His revealed being, it would follow that also essential deity must be ascribed to His being, and thus a distinction would be established in God between what is essentially divine and what is derivatively divine. That cannot be.

12. May we also say that God's attributes are not distinguished from one another?

This is extremely risky. We may be content to say that all God's attributes are related most closely to each other and penetrate each other in the most intimate unity. However, this is in no way to say that they are to be identified with each other. Also in God, for example, love and righteousness are not the same, although they function together perfectly in complete harmony. We may not let everything intermingle in a pantheistic way because that would be the end of our objective knowledge of God.

13. From what other matters in God must we clearly distinguish His attributes?

- a) From God's names, derived from the relation in which He stands to what is created. Thus, He is called Creator, Sustainer, Ruler (we call these predicates or descriptions).
- b) From the personal qualities that are unique to each person of the Holy Trinity and whereby they are distinguished from one another, e.g., begetting, being begotten, and being breathed (these are called properties, "particularities").

14. In how many ways have theologians attempted to make a classification of God's attributes?

- a) They have been classified in three ways according to which, it is thought, one must arrive at knowledge of the attributes:
1. The way of causality
 2. The way of negation
 3. The way of eminence

However, this is not so much a classification of attributes as of ways in which *natural theology* has attempted to establish God's attributes.

- b) Another classification is *affirming* and *negating* attributes. Pure negations only tell us what God is *not* and are therefore not attributes in the fullest sense of the word. When we consider this more closely, these so-called negative attributes mostly include something

affirming, so the distinction disappears. For example, God's eternity says more than that He has no beginning and no end. It also says that for Him everything is an indivisible present, etc.

- c) A third classification divides into *absolute* and *relative* attributes, or what comes down to the same thing, *inherent* and *transitive* attributes. However, strictly speaking, all God's attributes are absolute. In other words, the ground for them resides in His being, apart from the existence of the world, although we must admit that we could not conceive of some of them in action (e.g., grace and mercy) if the world did not exist. On the other hand, there is no attribute in God that is not in a certain sense transitive, that is, which He has not revealed. We cannot claim that we know everything in God, but what we know, we only know because God has revealed it to us, because He has communicated and disclosed it to us.
- d) In the fourth place, there are some who want to differentiate between *natural* and *moral* attributes. Moral attributes are, e.g., goodness, righteousness. The remaining attributes that lack this quality are called natural. Against this distinction, there are two objections.
 - 1. The word natural is ambiguous. It could give occasion here for thinking that God's moral attributes do not belong to His nature, His being.
 - 2. In addition, the error could arise as if in God the moral is separated from the natural and the latter is a principle of lower order in God.
- e) Fifth, we have Schleiermacher's classification along the same lines as his system. He divides according to the different ways in which our feeling of dependence expresses itself in response to God's attributes. This feeling does not arouse resistance within us against God's eternity, omnipotence, etc. Such attributes form one class. But against God's holiness, righteousness, etc., this feeling arouses resistance. These form a second group. This resistance has been removed by Christ, and the attributes with which we come into contact through Christ are summed up in a third group.
- f) The most common classification, which we also follow, distinguishes between *incommunicable* and *communicable* attributes.
 - 1. To the incommunicable attributes belong:
 - a. Self-existence
 - b. Simplicity
 - c. Infinity
 - d. Immutability
 - 2. To the communicable attributes belong:
 - a. Spirituality and personality
 - b. Understanding
 - c. Will
 - d. Power
 - e. God's Blessedness

15. What must be noted regarding an objection raised against this ancient division into communicable and incommunicable attributes?

It has been said that the differentiation is relative, that is, that the incommunicable attributes when viewed from another perspective are communicable and vice versa. For example, God's eternity is infinite in relation to time; in man there is a finite relation to time. Thus, there is an analogy between God and man. Conversely, there is only limited goodness and righteousness in

us; in God both are perfect. Thus, there is an infinite distance. Each attribute, one says, is at the same time incommunicable and communicable according to one's perspective.

This view is entirely wrong. God's eternity says much more than that He stands in an infinite relation to time. It says that He is wholly exalted above it. Clearly, there is not a shadow or trace of this in man. God's eternity is indeed incommunicable, not only in degree but also in principle.

16. What else do we observe about incommunicable and communicable attributes in relation to each another?

That the former determine the latter. For example, God is infinite and possesses understanding. Now, we are able to connect infinity with understanding and say God possesses infinite understanding. We could do this as well with all the other attributes. The two sets are at no point separated from each other; they penetrate each other.

17. What is God's self-existence?

That attribute of God by which He is the self-sufficient ground of His own existence and being. Negatively expressed, *independence* says only what God is *not*. Self-existence is precisely the adequate affirmation here. Proof texts: Acts 17:25; John 5:26.

18. What is God's simplicity?

That attribute of God whereby He is free of all composition and distinction. God is free:

- a) Of logical composition; in Him there is no distinction between genus and species.
- b) Of natural composition; in Him there is no distinction between substance and form.
- c) Of supernatural composition; in Him there is no distinction between slumbering capacity and action. Proof texts: 1 John 1:5; 4:8; Amos 4:2; 6:8.

The Socinians and Vossius deny this attribute in order better to escape the Trinity, that is, the oneness in being of the three Persons.

19. What is God's infinity?

That attribute whereby God possesses within Himself all perfection without any limitation or restriction.

It is further distinguished into:

- a) Infinite perfection
- b) Eternity
- c) Immensity

20. Is the concept of infinity negating or affirming?

It has been claimed that it is purely negating and therefore has no content. This is not correct. Certainly it is true:

- a) That we cannot form a graphic image of the infinite or of an infinite thing. Beholding is always limited, and what is limited does not comprehend the infinite.
- b) That we cannot make a concept of the infinite with our thinking. Thinking also is always

limited; thus it is inadequate for comprehending the infinite.

Nevertheless, it remains true that we must hold with conviction that:

- a) Behind the finite we comprehend, the infinite exists. It is with the infinite God as it is with space. However far we proceed in our imagination, we know that we have not yet arrived at the end, that we could still take one more step.
- b) This infinity for God Himself is not something indeterminate as it is for us, but He Himself perfectly encompasses and governs it. However inconceivable this may be for us, in God it is a reality.

21. Is God's infinity limited by the existence of other things that are not God?

No, for to be infinite does not mean to be everything, although the pantheists claim the latter.

22. Where does Scripture teach us God's infinite perfection?

In Job 11:7–9 and Psalm 145:3.

23. What is God's eternity?

That attribute of God whereby He is exalted above all limitations of time and all succession of time, and in a single indivisible present possesses the content of His life perfectly (and as such is the cause of time).

24. How many concepts of eternity are there?

Two:

- a) A more popular concept: Eternity as time without beginning and without end.
- b) The more abstract and more precisely defined concept: Eternity is something that lies above time and differs entirely from time.
- c) Both belong together and serve to supplement each other. According to the first, time in itself would be the original, and eternity only an extension of time. The latter taken to an extreme brings us to the pantheistic error that time is only an alteration of eternity. But both exist, eternity in God, time in the world. Scripture has both descriptions of eternity: Psalm 102:12; 90:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:8.

25. What question presents itself to us here?

How God can have knowledge of temporal things, without, with this knowledge, time, as it were, penetrating God's thinking and thereby His entire being? In other words: How does God relate to time?

26. What must the answer to this be?

- a) That we may not follow those who deny a real existence to time and space and think that they are merely subjective forms in which man represents things. So Kant and many others. Time and space are objective and real.
- b) That it is difficult to decide whether time and space are independent entities or modes of existence, or are relations of things to each other, or an entirely different kind of reality,

or something about which we can say nothing further. These questions belong to the realm of metaphysics. God's Word does not give a further explanation.

- c) That time and space as realities are also realities for God, the existence of which He knows.
- d) That, however, a great difference remains between the relationship in which we stand to these realities and in which God stands to the same realities. We have time and space not only as real outside us, but they are also created in our mind as forms for representation, so that our inner life is governed by them and we cannot be rid of them. We can only see in space and think in time. For God it is entirely different. His divine life does not unfold or exist in those forms. He is exalted above them and just that fact makes His eternity His omnipresence. He knows the finite as existing in time and space, but He does not know and see it in a temporal or spatial manner.

27. Is it right to say that all "occurring" takes place in time and that thus there must also be passage of time in God?

No, for we know that there is causing and being caused, thus a real occurring, outside of time, namely, in the generation of the Son and the spirating of the Holy Spirit.

28. What do you understand about God's immensity?

That perfection of God whereby He is exalted above all distinction of space, yet at every point in space is present with all His being and as such is the cause of space.

29. Wherein lies the distinction between immensity and omnipresence?

Both express the same thing but from two different perspectives. The first teaches how God is exalted above space and the second how He nevertheless fills space at every point with His whole being.

30. How should we not think of this omnipresence of God?

Not as extension over space; "God is entirely within all and entirely outside all," as one theologian has stated.

31. In how many ways can existing beings be considered in relation to space?

In a three-fold way:

- a) Material bodies exist in space in a delimited way. They are completely delimited and encompassed by space.
- b) Pure spirits, which are created, exist in space in a determinate way, that is, although they themselves have no extension unlike material bodies, they are still determined by space and its laws. Our soul cannot function everywhere.
- c) God, lastly, is in space in an effecting way, that is, space is sustained by the upholding power of His providence, as He has created it in the beginning and He wholly fills it.

32. Is God omnipresent with only His power and knowledge or also with His being?

The older Socinians, Vorstius, and some Anabaptists claimed the first. The latter is the case, as demanded by the infinity of God's being.

33. Is God present everywhere in the same way?

No, He reveals His presence in a different way in heaven than in the place of the lost, and differently on earth than above.

34. How do you prove God's immensity from Scripture?

From the following: Ephesians 1:23; Jeremiah 23:23–24; Psalm 139:7–12; Acts 17:24–28.

35. What is the answer to the objection that the infinity of space limits God's infinity?

- a) That we have no ground for claiming space is infinite. It is true that we cannot imagine an end to space, but that is due to our own limitation.
- b) Admitting that space were infinite, even then it need not limit God's infinity. That God is infinite does not mean that He *is all*. Since they fall into different spheres, the two infinities need not limit each other.
- c) If space were infinite, it would not be independent of God. God alone is self-existent; also note His immensity.

36. What is God's immutability?

That perfection in God whereby He is exalted above all becoming and development, as well as above all diminution, and remains the same eternally.

37. Why is it necessary to emphasize this attribute?

Because pantheism teaches that within God there is development, indeed, that the development of the world is nothing other than the process whereby God comes to self-consciousness. Martensen, a Christian theologian tainted by pantheism, says, for example, "God's immutability is not the immutability of the lifeless, for he is only as in eternal fruitfulness *he becomes of himself*. His eternity is therefore not a stagnant eternity like the eternal mountains, or a kind of crystalline eternity like the eternal stars, but a living eternity, continuously blossoming in unfading youthfulness." Beautiful language, but a God-dishonoring thought!

38. How are the creation of the world and God's actions in time to be brought into agreement with His immutability?

We must believe that all these deeds do not effect any change in God, since they do not require time in Him, although naturally their realization falls within time.

39. How can we further distinguish God's immutability?

One can speak of:

- a) An immutability of being.
- b) An immutability of essential attributes.

- c) An immutability of decrees and promises.

40. Prove this from Scripture.

See James 1:17; 1 Timothy 1:17; Malachi 3:6.

41. What is the first of the communicable attributes?

God's spirituality.

42. What does Scripture mean when it calls God Spirit?

The Hebrew and Greek words that mean "spirit" are both *wind*. From this starting point we discover the following:

- a) Wind is that power among material powers that seems to be the most immaterial and invisible. We feel it but we do not see it (John 3:8). When God is called Spirit, it therefore means His immateriality (John 4:24).
- b) Wind or breath is the mark of life and thus stands for life or in place of enlivening power. Thus it is the case that God's spirituality also means His *living activity*. As Spirit God is distinguished from man, indeed all that is created, that is flesh, that is powerless and inert in itself. Spirit is thus what lives and moves *of itself*. Jeremiah 17:5; Isaiah 31:3.
- c) Wind as the spirit of life or the breath of life belongs with something else enlivened or activated by it. God can also in this sense be called Spirit insofar as He is the enlivener and source of life for the creature. That is so both in a natural sense as well as in a spiritual sense. That agrees with the fact that man can be called flesh in a twofold sense, both insofar as he naturally has no power of life in himself and insofar as he is spiritually dead and cut off from God. In the latter sense, the word takes on its bad meaning, which it has throughout the entire Scripture. Psalm 104:30; 2 Corinthians 5:16.
- d) The spirituality of God implies that He is a rational being, with understanding, will, and power.

43. Whereby does the doctrine of God's spirituality acquire a practical significance?

Through the use of images in Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches (cf. Rom 1:23).

44. What else does God's spirituality involve?

That God's being also exists as personal. However, we should consider that God's being may not be called personal in the abstract but only in His threefold existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God personality is not one but three. There are not four but only three persons in the Godhead.

45. Do not infinity and personal existence exclude each other?

Almost the whole of modern philosophy claims that they do and therefore will not acknowledge any communicable attributes or personality in God. This claim is based on the idea that an "I" cannot exist without a "not-I" and that the nature of infinity excludes such an opposite.

The answer to this:

- a) That God is not all that exists and that therefore in His thinking He can most certainly place other things vis-à-vis Himself without canceling out His infinity.
- b) That personal consciousness is not caused by the consciousness of another outside us, but completely the reverse; the former makes the latter possible. Only where there is personal consciousness can one distinguish something else from one's self.
- c) That in us, human beings, consciousness of personality is certainly awakened and developed by contact with the world outside us, but that we may not make this a rule for God. He is wholly independent from all that is outside Him.
- d) That within God's being itself there is a distinction that should explain completely how there can be consciousness of personal existence in God apart from other things. The Father is indeed conscious not to be the Son, and the Son not to be the Father, and the Holy Spirit not to be the Father and not to be the Son. And these three do not limit each other but together are the one, infinite God.

46. What do we consider concerning God's understanding?

His knowledge and His wisdom.

47. What is God's knowledge?

That perfection by which, in an entirely unique manner, through His being and with a most simple act, He comprehends Himself and in Himself all that is or could be outside Him.

48. What distinguishes divine knowledge from that of human beings?

- a) It occurs by a most simple act. Human knowledge is partial and obtained by contradistinction. God arrives immediately at the essence of things and knows them in their core by an immediate comprehension.
- b) It occurs from God's being outwardly. With us the concept of things must first enter our cognitive capacity from outside us. God knows things from within Himself outwardly, since things, both possible and real, are determined by His nature and have their origin in His eternal decree.
- c) In God's knowledge, there is no cognition that slumbers outside His consciousness and only occasionally surfaces, as is the case for the most part with our knowledge. Everything is eternally present before His divine view, and in the full light of His consciousness everything lies exposed.
- d) God's knowledge is not determined through the usual logical forms, by which we, as by so many aids, seek to master the objects of our knowledge. He sees everything *immediately*, both in itself and in its relation to all other things.

49. Is God's knowledge the same as His power?

Some have claimed this. Augustine said, "We see the things that you have made because they exist; they exist, on the other hand, because you see them." In the same sense, Thomas Aquinas speaks of God's knowledge as the "cause of things." Likewise, many Reformed and Lutheran theologians. Against this idea we note:

- a) That it is certainly true that every act of will in God and every expression of His omnipotence is accompanied by knowledge, and thus one may speak of an effectual knowledge.
- b) That this, however, will always be a figurative way of speaking that may not lead us to identify the knowledge and power of God.
- c) That God's knowledge and power must be distinguished is clearest from the fact that they have different objects. God *knows* all that is *possible*. His power is active only with respect to all that is real, and in a very different sense.

50. *How does one distinguish God's knowledge with reference to its objects?*

- a) Into *necessary* knowledge and a *free* knowledge.
- b) Into a knowledge of *simple comprehension* and a knowledge of *vision*.

51. *What is meant by the distinction between necessary and free knowledge?*

The objects of necessary knowledge are God Himself and all that is possible. It is called necessary, because it is not dependent on an expression of will in God. God is as He is, an eternal necessity reposing in Himself; also what is or is not possible is determined with equal necessity by God's perfect nature. One should note, however, that this necessity does not lie in a compulsion above God but in God's being itself.

The objects of *free* knowledge are all actual things outside God, that is, that actually have been, still are, or will be. It is called free because the knowledge of these things as existing depends on God's omnipotent decree and was by no means an eternal necessity.

One should note that the objects of free knowledge are simultaneously objects of necessary knowledge, but then not as actual but as purely possible.

52. *What is meant by the distinction between a knowledge of simple comprehension and a knowledge of vision?*

It is the same as the previous distinction. The knowledge of simple comprehension extends to all that is possible; the knowledge of vision, to all that is actual in the sense described above.

53. *In which two respects, however, is the knowledge of simple comprehension distinguished from necessary knowledge?*

- a) God is clearly the object of necessary knowledge but not of the knowledge of simple comprehension. Yet, the latter, as the name indicates, comprises only that which is *purely possible*.
- b) Actual things are also objects of necessary knowledge insofar as they are likewise possible. It seems that they must be excluded from the knowledge of simple comprehension because we are dealing here with a simple comprehension, that is, a comprehension that excludes all that is actual.

54. *Why are these classifications of the objects of God's knowledge important?*

Because they include a protest against the pantheistic identification of God and the world. By these distinctions, we confess that for God more is possible than exists in reality, that His power and thoughts extend beyond the world, that the latter is the product of His free will.

55. What is so-called middle knowledge?

It is something that Jesuits, Lutherans, and Remonstrants introduce between necessary and free knowledge.

By this is meant the knowledge that God possesses of certain things that would occur independently of God by the free determination of human will, provided that certain conditions would be fulfilled beforehand. For example, God gives to some His Word and the Holy Spirit, but not to others. We conclude from this His omnipotence in granting the means of grace. No, the proponent of middle knowledge responds, God knew which persons would convert themselves by a free determination of will when these means are presented to them, and therefore He brings these means only to them.

56. What must be said against this conception?

- a) That knowledge, indifferent to whatever kind or origin, presupposes absolute certainty. Only what is certain and sure can be known.
- b) That, therefore, whatever is free and uncertain in itself cannot be the object of knowledge, nor can it be a particular kind of knowledge.
- c) That the opponents have only invented this knowledge in order to unite God's foreknowledge with their free will. And that they seek to unite two things here that logically exclude each other. Freedom of action in a Remonstrant sense and advance knowledge of that action are not compatible.
- d) Some have appealed to God's eternity in order to defend the knowledge of absolutely free actions. They say that God stands wholly above time, that the future is always present for Him, and therefore that He can know it despite its absolute freedom.

This is certainly true, but God's eternity, to which they appeal here for help, is simply overthrown by this doctrine of absolutely free will, withdrawn from God's decree. If in this way God must expect an increase in His knowledge of things outside Himself, if He must, as it were, wait if He thus must take up within Himself the influence of the temporal, then this destroys His eternity. The doctrine of middle knowledge denies precisely what could make it comprehensible.

57. Is not such middle knowledge taught in 1 Samuel 23:9–12 and in Matthew 11:22–23?

No, in the first case David is simply told what the consequence would be given the present attitude of the people among whom he found himself if he remained in the town. In Matthew 11:22–23, we have a hyperbolic mode of speech used by Jesus to indicate the hardening of His contemporaries.

58. How far does the knowledge of God extend?

It comprises all things great and small, free and necessary, past, present, and future. Therefore, it is called *omniscience*.

59. What is the relation between God's decree, His free knowledge, and the free actions of men?

God's decree grounds the certainty of His free knowledge and likewise the occurring of free

actions. Not foreknowledge as such but the decree on which it rests makes free actions certain.

60. How do you describe the wisdom of God?

That perfection of God by which He uses His knowledge for the attainment of His ends in the way that glorifies Him most.

61. How can one demonstrate God's knowledge and wisdom from Scripture?

From Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 139:16; Proverbs 15:11; 1 Timothy 1:17.

62. In how many different senses can the word "will" be understood?

It can have three meanings:

- a) All morally determined attributes, insofar as these are active powers that can operate in a twofold direction. In this sense, holiness, righteousness, etc. belong to the will.
- b) The *capacity* to make a decree or a plan, and such a decree or plan *itself*. In this sense, the will (never the understanding) is the capacity by which God decrees or is the decree of God itself.
- c) The capacity by which God executes a decree of His will by a manifestation of power outwardly. In this sense, God's will is most closely connected with His active might.

63. Is there a particular reason for classifying the following attributes of God under His will?

Yes, for while in us rational attributes lie for the most part below our consciousness and thus hardly resemble a conscious volition, in God they are entirely different. All His rational perfections, such as His holiness, righteousness, etc., lie in the full light of His consciousness, that is, they are a conscious inclination of His nature. Clearly, conscious inclination is *will* in the wider sense of the word. Thus, the older theologians were entirely correct when they dealt with holiness and righteousness, etc., under the attributes of God's will.

64. How can one describe God's will?

That perfection of God by which in a most simple act and in a rational manner He goes out toward Himself as the highest good and toward creatures outside Him for His own sake.

65. Is then God's will (speaking reverently) a selfish will?

We could say this in a good sense. In man, selfishness is evil because the highest good lies outside himself. In contrast, God is the all-sufficient one, who delights in the highest good within Himself.

66. Can we say that God's will and understanding are the same?

No, against this identification others have rightly observed that God is clearly *omniscient* and *omnipotent*, but not *omni-volitional*.

67. Must one also distinguish between God's will and His active power?

- a) God's omnipotence as the capacity to do, including what He does not actually do, is naturally distinguished from God's will. God does not will all that lies within the scope of His omnipotence.
- b) But also between God's will and His active power one must make the greatest distinction. Certainly, God's decree, in which His will is active, is not the same as the powerful execution of His decree.
- c) Still, we need to keep in view that God's active power has much more the character of a bare willing than our active power. With us, too, all exercising of power begins with willpower. That, however, is accompanied by various things that have no place in God as a pure spiritual being. God's simple will is powerful enough to call a thing into being. One needs to consider, however, that in saying this, one takes the word *will* as meant in question 62 under c, and not as it is under a and b. Scripture itself says that by God's will things are and are created.

68. *How do we further distinguish God's will?*

- a) Into *necessary* and *free* will. The first has reference to God Himself, the second to things existing outside of Him.
- b) Into *absolute* and *conditional* will. This distinction, established by some older theologians, was rightly rejected by later ones. God's will is not conditional, but only the object willed by Him can be conditional in its nature, that is, dependent on something else. God does not will the one thing because He wills the other, but He certainly wills that there will be the one for the sake of the other.
- c) Into *antecedent* and *consequent* will. When the Reformed used this distinction, they did not mean anything other than that there is a logical order in God's decrees and that He makes one thing subject to another as a means to an end. They were certainly very conscious that things do not have their capacity to serve as means apart from God but that that capacity is derived from God's will. God wills A with an antecedent will and is not then forced to choose B with a consequent will, but omnipotently makes B an effective means for reaching A.

With this distinction the Lutherans and Remonstrants intend something entirely different. For them the *antecedent* will is a general rule established by God in indeterminacy, the *consequent* will a determinate application of it after God has first taken note of free human choice. By an antecedent will, God decrees to save all who believe. Then He sees who the believers are and then decrees with His consequent will to give them salvation. This, of course, is rejected by all the Reformed.

69. *Which distinction is of much greater importance?*

The distinction between the *secret* will of decree and the *revealed* will of precept.

70. *Are there also other names in use for this distinction, and why are they less suitable?*

Also spoken of is a will of good pleasure and a will of sign. God's *preceptive* will, however, also expresses His good pleasure, and sometimes His *decretive* will is brought to our attention by a sign. So, these terms express less accurately what is meant (Matt 11:26, εὐδοκία; Rom 12:2,

θέλημα ... εὐάρεστον).

71. What do we understand, respectively, by the will of decree and the will of precept?

The *will of decree* is God's free determination of all that will come to pass and how it will occur. The *will of precept* is the rule laid down by God for rational beings to direct their conduct accordingly.

72. What difficulty does this distinction cause?

Many things that God forbids occur, and many things that He commands do not occur. Therefore, the will of decree and the will of precept seem to directly oppose each other.

73. Can all attempts to remove this difficulty be considered successful?

- a) Some have denied that the existing will has the character of a will, and they wish to degrade it to merely a prescription. One must observe, however, that in God's prescriptions His holy nature speaks and that in fact they are founded upon a strong desire in God. More precisely, the problem here is this: How can there be two desires in God, one that wills the good and abhors the evil, and one that leaves the good unrealized and permits the evil to appear?
- b) Some have distinguished between the *existence* of an action and the *manner* of its existence (the action equals the material and the formal). God's preceptive will, it is said, has reference only to the latter. That is true. But His decretive will also has reference to the latter, and in that respect both wills thus again stand side by side unreconciled.
- c) Still others thought that everything was settled when they pointed out how God's decretive will also includes making known His preceptive will. When A sins, then God's decretive will has determined it, and His preceptive will has forbidden it. But now one needs to consider that God's decretive will also comprises that God would forbid it. So, they think, the will of precept is joined with that of the decree, and all is resolved in a higher unity. However, this resolution is pure illusion. Both wills now fall under the decree but such that they have become only outwardly parallel but are not internally in harmony. The question is clearly how God can decree to permit something that He must at the same time by virtue of His holiness decree to forbid.

74. Does Scripture also distinguish between a twofold concept of will in this matter?

Yes, "to will" sometimes means the natural inclination or intent of the soul and sometimes the determination of the decree. (Compare above, question 62, a) and b); Matthew 27:43, θέλω; and Psalm 22:9, ὕψι).

75. Can we sufficiently solve the difficulty here for our thinking?

No, because it comes down fundamentally to the problem of permitting sin and is identical to that problem. With our limited insight into God's ways, this question is not capable of a solution. All we can do is to guard against looking for the difficulty at a point other than where it lies.

76. Where then does the difficulty really lie?

In this, how in His decree God can permit things that violate and offend His rational attributes.

77. What needs to be said regarding this difficulty?

We must not forget that included within God's rational attributes there is one that can remove this temporal violation and offence, namely His punitive righteousness, so that, as it were, in the end the balance is once again restored. By this, however, we have not explained how it agrees with God's absolute holiness that He first decrees this removal in order then to maintain it.

78. Wherein may we not seek the difficulty?

We may not imagine that God would do us an injustice if He conducts Himself toward us in this double manner by decree and command. We do not find a rational problem here concerning the relation between God and the creature. If someone thinks of having discovered something like this, then it is the result of humanizing God. If we order someone to do something, then we are at the same time obliged to do everything in our power to advance the fulfillment of this order. If we neglect to do this, then we sin against a brother. The same thing cannot be said of God. He has no obligation at all with His decree to act for the realization of His command beyond what pleases Him. Just as little does His truthfulness demand that He decree and command the same thing. In the above-mentioned case, we would not only transgress against our brother through lovelessness, but also through deceitfulness. This, too, we cannot transfer to God.

79. How are we to evaluate the case when the Lord prophesied to Hezekiah, "You will die of this disease," and nevertheless healed him?

The prophecy was not a revelation of God's decretive will that would later be changed, but was simply an announcement of the fact that the illness was deadly in its nature. Hezekiah was healed by a miracle. God's decretive will was clearly that He should be healed. God speaks in human idiom. When we say, "He will die of this illness," we mean the same thing.

80. How are we to evaluate Abraham's case where he was first commanded to sacrifice Isaac, and this command was later withdrawn?

Here God commands something that He does not will. The great problem, however, was just how God can decree something that He does not approve. In Abraham's case, one could at most find a difficulty concerning God's truthfulness. How can God say to Abraham, "It is my will that you sacrifice your son," while in reality it was not His will? One must so understand this that God did not really say to Abraham, "It is my positive will that it come to pass (will of decree), but it is my will of precept prescribed for you," that is, "I demand of you that you should feel commanded to do it."

81. Do all the earlier theologians give the same scope to the concept of God's holiness?

No, there are those who include all the rational attributes under holiness, e.g., love, grace, mercy, etc. Others identify righteousness and holiness, e.g., Cocceius.

82. Is it necessary to take the concept of holiness in such a broad sense?

No, for although holiness stands in the closest relation to the remaining rational attributes, it is not to be identified with them. Also, the close connection in which these attributes stand to each other is already sufficient to point out that they are called attributes of the will, and that God's will is presented as having God Himself as the first object and having all the other objects for the sake of His will.

83. What is the original concept of holiness?

The root **שָׁדָד** originally means, "to be set apart," "to be separated." God is therefore called, "the Holy One," because He exists in Himself and nothing can be compared to Him. The metaphysical gap that exists between Him and the creature is therefore expressed by the concept of holiness. A very clear Scripture is 1 Samuel 2:2, "There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides You; there is no rock like our God" (see Exod 15:11; 1 Sam 6:20).

84. Is the concept of holiness exhausted by this?

No, this is already clear from the fact that God can also communicate a likeness of His holiness to the creature. Of course, God can never give up His eternity. From this it is therefore apparent that the concept as described above needs supplementing. This supplement must be sought in the following: God is holy not only insofar as He is the eternal One, but also insofar as in His dealings with His creatures He claims everything for Himself and makes it subservient to His purposes, sets it apart, hallows it.

85. How is this second element in the concept of holiness distinguished from the first?

By accenting the rational significance of God's holiness. God is not only distinguished from all that exists outside Him, but He also knows Himself, seeks Himself, and loves Himself as the supreme embodiment of rational perfection. And from this determination of God toward Himself, it follows that He also makes the creature subservient to Himself and separates it for Himself. For the creature being holy means "consecrated to God."

86. What results from this consecration of the creature to God?

That sometimes the appearance can arise as if God's holiness is synonymous with His grace. When God sets a person or a nation apart for Himself, He at the same time takes them into His special favor. Grace follows consecration, for in being dedicated to God lies the beatitude of the creature; compare Psalm 103; Hosea 11:8; Psalms 22:4; 33:21; and the name "the holy One of Israel" in Isaiah 43:14 and other such places.

87. How then can we describe the holiness of God?

As that attribute of God by which He seeks and loves Himself as the highest good and demands as reasonable goodness from the creature to be consecrated to Him.

88. Can one rightly call God's love the central attribute of His being according to which all the others must be classified?

No, because all attributes are God's being. What is more, theologians who venture to make God's love the central attribute do this at the expense of other attributes, e.g., holiness, as if God were nothing other than pure self-sacrificing love. Scripture teaches us that there is such self-sacrificing love in God, but at the same time it teaches that there is more than this love and that it also is subordinate to the highest law of the rational life of God, namely, that in the first place He wills Himself and glorifies Himself.

89. Does the attribute of love need to be understood rationalistically as an insight into and approval of the excellent attributes of the object that is loved?

No, love has its rational sense within itself and does not lose that sense even when it extends to the most unworthy object. Scripture ascribes to God such a love for lost sinners who did not have anything in themselves that would arouse God's approval and His good pleasure.

90. What distinguishes God's love from His holiness?

Holiness has reference to God's love of Himself as the highest good. Thus, it is God's self-determination. Love, on the other hand, has reference to the disposition of God's good pleasure toward what lies outside of Him, or to the affection of the three Divine Persons for each other as well.

91. How has one attempted to make an argument for the Trinity from the attribute of love?

It has been pointed out that love demands a personal object that is distinct from the person who loves. This is true, but one should observe that in this way we do not yet come to the conclusion that there are precisely three persons in the Godhead.

92. Is self-love permitted in the creature in the same way that it is in God's holiness?

- a) God can and must love Himself as the highest good. The creature may not aim at making itself the highest good and final purpose of its aspirations. In us absolute self-love is forbidden; indeed, strictly taken, so is absolute love for another creature where the honor of God would be left aside.
- b) Still, one may speak of self-love in a good sense. The obligations, through whose fulfillment we must glorify God, must vary in nature. There are some that call us to self-sacrifice, others that we must have a regard for self-preservation. Ill-considered self-sacrifice can become sin. Nobody may hate his own flesh. Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

93. In what ways does God reveal His love toward His creatures?

By (a) His goodness; (b) His grace; (c) His lovingkindness; (d) His mercy or compassion; (e) His longsuffering.

94. What is God's goodness and what is it sometimes called?

It is His love toward personal and sentient creatures in general and can also be called *Amor Dei*

generalis, “God’s general love.”

95. What is the grace of God?

The undeserved love of God toward sinful beings who lie under the judgment of His righteousness.

96. Which two elements does the concept of grace contain?

- a) That it is unmerited. In a certain sense, one may say of all God’s demonstration of favor that it is undeserved. By the presence of sin, however, it becomes especially apparent that the creature has no claims. Thus, grace in a narrower sense is favor toward sinners, that is, favor so great that it even overcomes the obstacles of sin and of righteousness.
- b) Naturally connected with this element is the second, namely, that when God’s love works in sinners, it is a monergistic principle. If in its origin God’s love toward sinners is without obligation and freely acting, it must therefore be sovereignly divine in its outworking, that is, an undivided work of God. For the first aspect, compare Romans 4:4, 16; for the second, 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 4:7.

97. What is grace called in Hebrew and Greek?

The Hebrew word is חֵן; the Greek is χάρις.

98. What is God’s lovingkindness?

The love of God insofar as it, as a special tenderness, seeks to lead the sinner to conversion. It is called חַסְדֵּךְ, Numbers 14:19 and Psalm 31:17; χρηστότης, χρηστός, Romans 2:4; πραύτης, ἐπιείκεια, 2 Corinthians 10:1.

99. What is God’s compassion or mercy?

God’s love and pity toward sinners, who are considered as wretched. It is called רַחֲמֵיךָ, οἰκτιρισμός, ἔλεος, σπλάγχνα. The mercy of God flows from free antecedent love; cf. Ephesians 2:4–5: “rich in mercy *because* of the great love with which he has loved us.”

100. What is God’s long-suffering?

God’s love to those who deserve punishment, demonstrated in postponing punishment and in calling to conversion. It is called אֲרֻחַי, μακροθυμία, Psalm 103:8; 2 Peter 3:15.

101. How may we describe God’s righteousness?

As the natural disposition of His being not only to maintain Himself against every violation of His holiness but also to show in every respect that He is holy (Psa 7:12; Acts 17:31).

102. What is the difference between the holiness of God and His righteousness?

These two attributes are most closely connected to one another, yet they are not to be identified with each other. The difference is mainly twofold:

- a) We call holiness the rational goodness of God as He possesses that in Himself, without our understanding that goodness as moving outside of Himself. On the other hand, righteousness is specifically that attribute of God's being that compels Him to make His holiness a power outside of Himself.
- b) Holiness is, as we have seen, God's determination toward Himself. It is, as it were, a centripetal property, by which God moves toward Himself, toward the center of His being. On the other hand, righteousness is more a centrifugal property, by which God works from Himself outwardly, although this also occurs to reveal and maintain His holiness.

103. What results from this righteousness of God?

That every rational creature must serve as a means to reveal God's righteousness and therefore represents a certain worth for God. Thus, the righteousness of God toward man and the righteousness of man toward God can be named with the one and same word; both run parallel (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21–22; 5:17, 21; 8:10, etc.). In all these places, the righteousness of God is used as a predicate that can be imputed to man. The righteousness of God for man consists in this, that he meets the demands that God establishes and must establish for him.

104. Why is righteousness of such great importance for a devout life?

Because it is just that attribute of God that highlights most sharply the dependence of the creature on God insofar as it makes that dependence a means to carry out the right of God. Hence, the aversion that every one-sided ethical conception of religion has for this concept of righteousness. If one places God and man next to each other as having equal rights, then it is out of the question to speak of God's righteousness. As soon as a deeply devout life awakens, then a hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of God is also present again.

105. Does it depend on God's discretion whether or not He will exercise His righteousness?

No, this is a claim of the Scholastics of the Middle Ages, the Socinians and the Remonstrants, but it is contradicted by Scripture.

106. Is it necessary for God's righteousness to reward goodness?

No, Scripture teaches that all reward is not *ex condigno*, according to worthiness, or *ex congruo*, in proportion to, but only *ex pacto*, from a free agreement that God has established with the creature. Naturally, when once God's grace has chosen this mode—that He wills to reveal His approval of good by reward—then righteousness demands that He also keep this promise. Besides, if we have done all that we were indebted to do, we are still unworthy servants.

107. Which diverging concepts of righteousness are there besides the one being developed here?

- a) The concept founded on the theory of improvement. Righteousness would then be the form that God's love assumes toward the transgressor when it would improve him. This is the theory found in the case of the Pelagians, Socinians, and universalists.
- b) The concept founded on the theory of deterrence. Righteousness is then the form that

God's love assumes when it seeks to deter other people from misdeeds by the suffering of the transgressor. This is the theory of most jurists, such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Leibniz, Grotius. These all make Scripture subservient for promoting moral good as an end in itself. However, there are also those who take moral good itself in a utilitarian sense and therefore use terror as a means of promoting bliss.

108. What objection is there against the theory of improvement?

- a) There are two different kinds of suffering—punishments and corrections. Only the latter can count as a means for improvement, and Scripture clearly differentiates it from the first. Proponents of this theory must therefore show that *all suffering* possesses the character of correction. This they cannot do, for Scripture teaches that we first become children of God when we are justified by the punitive suffering of our surety (Gal 4:4–5).
- b) In many cases punishment removes all possibility of improvement for the offender. This theory has no place for the death penalty, the *jus talionis* warranted by Scripture.
- c) Even where this is not the case, one cannot claim that physical evil of itself has the tendency to improve someone. Just as often it results in hardening. Punishment only improves when one feels how it is deserved. But this presupposes that righteousness is exercise according to what is deserved and not only for improvement. This means that the theory of improvement can only be maintained with the help of our theory.
- d) The theory has a superficial view of physical evil, of pain. That pain has a beneficial side is true. But God could just as well have reached the same goal, which He now reaches by pain, in other ways if there had been no pain. Indeed, as we think away the punishment of sin, all pain as a means of prevention would have been superfluous. Thus God uses a means to repentance that entails misery without needing to do so. This is cruelty in God.
- e) The general consciousness of man says that evil must be punished apart from all its consequences. The sentiment for righteousness is much more in danger of degenerating into bloodthirstiness rather than into real philanthropy. This shows us its original significance.

109. What objection is there to the deterrence theory?

- a) It makes one person entirely a means for another, at least if it wants to maintain the good right of the death penalty or lifelong imprisonment. This, however, cannot be, for considered apart from God, every human being is important in himself, which does not allow him to be reduced to a bare means.
- b) It deprives those who are punished of exactly what it wants to cultivate in others, namely obedience to the law. The theory leads to forming a quantitative concept of virtue. It is concerned with the greatest virtue for the greatest possible number, and to this end some are sacrificed.
- c) In reality this theory, too, is based on the forensic. Only when the punishments of sinners are merited and legitimate will they truly exercise a reforming influence. If they only lead to ceasing from evil for fear of punishment, they do not promote true morality. In order for this theory to be maintained, it must incorporate the concept that virtue has worth only insofar as it promotes human happiness. That is, it is eudemonistic in nature. So, it is to be judged with eudemonism.

110. Must the exercise of punishment be understood as a purely commercial

transaction?

No, it may not. There is a manifold difference between paying a financial debt and punishment for guilt, as the doctrine of the atonement will show. Punishment is the restoration of a relationship, of the status of sinners in relation to God, not taking back something that first was taken from God.

111. What is the pantheistic and philosophical concept of the righteousness of God?

In this point of view, righteousness is merely a term used to express that, in the impersonal ground of the universe, there must be a cause that sin and misery appear to be linked to each other.

112. Are there also those who take a mediating point of view between the pantheistic opinion and ours?

Yes, some concede that God is personal, but limit the punishment of sin to its natural consequences. From this, however, the preposterous view could result that a rational and tenderhearted person is punished the most severely, a hardened sinner the lightest.

113. How can you prove that our understanding of righteousness is correct?

- a) Such consciousness of right and wrong is inborn in every human being.
- b) The spiritual experience of the regenerate bears witness to this. They all side with God in what is right as one designates it.
- c) This consciousness of righteousness is not a product of evolution but something natural. It already has a name in the oldest languages. The rites and ceremonies of all religions testify to this.
- d) God's holiness demands the existence of such righteousness. Everywhere in Scripture it is presented under the symbol of fire. That is, it must glow and be active outwardly.
- e) It is impossible to maintain the concepts of "must" and obligation in their full force if they do not have the concept of punishment to support them.
- f) The doctrines of the atonement and of justification, as Scripture develops these, rest entirely on this attribute of divine righteousness.

114. How do theologians further distinguish the righteousness of God?

- a) *Justitia dominica* or "the righteousness of rule." This indicates that in governing the world God gives a reliable expression of the rectitude of His being. It describes God's relationship to sin as first *originating* as a relationship that *is* just.
- b) *Justicia judicialis* or "judicial righteousness." This indicates that God in His judgment over rational beings speaks justly and therefore demonstrates His relationship to sin as a *given fact* as a relationship that *does* justly.

115. What is included in God's "ruling righteousness"?

- a) That He is exonerated of collaboration in the origin of evil as such. God's activity with respect to evil is only a permitting activity.

- b) If God nevertheless permits evil and it does not originate outside His decree, then it seems as if the presence of sin and the majesty of the law would never have made such a deep impression on people as is now the case.
- c) The same is true of God's love. It only appears to the fullest in its greatness now that it is tested and has triumphed in the most terrible of all crises, the crisis of sin.
- d) We may not go as far as maintaining that the contrast between good and evil is a necessary factor in the divine economy.

116. How do you further divide the “judicial righteousness” of God?

Into

- a) *legislative righteousness* that expresses itself toward sin and the good as merely future or possible.
- b) *executive righteousness* that expresses itself toward sin and the good as actually present, and then
 1. as punitive or avenging righteousness;
 2. as remunerative or rewarding righteousness.

One may not say, however, that either reward or punishment is a *necessary* form of revelation of divine righteousness.

117. Which proof texts can you supply for righteousness?

Exodus 22:5–6; Romans 2:6ff.

118. What is the understanding of the attribute of divine truthfulness?

- a) *Metaphysical* truthfulness. God agrees with His own understanding, and therefore in opposition to idols is the only true God (Jer 10:11).
- b) *Ethical* truthfulness. God reveals Himself as He actually is.
- c) *Logical* truthfulness. God causes the concepts that we must necessarily form of things, in keeping with the structure of our cognitive capacities, to agree with reality (see Num 23:19; Titus 1:12–13).

119. Is there emotion or feeling in God?

Not in the sense of an intense transitory movement of emotion, something passive, whereby the will retreats into the background (compare *affectus* from *afficere*, “to be affected”). Certainly, however, in the sense of an inner divine satisfaction that accompanies the energetic expression of His will and His power and His understanding.

120. What is meant, for example, by God's wrath?

Not a sudden surge of passion but an evenly strong yet lasting and rational impulse of God's holy will. Only with us human beings is a sudden surge of emotion possible. In the New Testament God's wrath regularly means the decree of God to punish in the Day of Judgment those who remain unrepentant. Θυμός is the disposition of wrath in God; ὀργή its active result outside of God.

121. What is the zeal of God?

The jealousy of the love of God with respect to His covenant people who are betrothed to Him (Exod 20:5).

122. What is the repentance of God?

By it is indicated anthropomorphically that He is mindful of man's deviation, in all its antithetical sharpness, from his destiny (Num 23:19; Gen 6:6).

123. What is God's power?

The capacity to put His will into effect outwardly. As *omnipotence* it is the capacity to accomplish what is not in conflict with God's own being.

124. Is God's power limited by the reality of what exists?

No, this would be a pantheistic thought. God is able to do more than He actually does.

125. Is God's power the same as His will?

No, at least not if will means God's good pleasure or His decree. Certainly, however, if we take will as the expression of will (not *voluntas*, but *volitio*).

126. What are the objects of God's power?

- a) God Himself, insofar as He governs His own being.
- b) All that is possible, insofar as God would be able to realize it.
- c) All that is actual, insofar as it is in fact realized.

127. What is the distinction between power and strength?

We have taken the word "power" here in the sense that "strength" generally has, that is, the capacity to act. In the contrast just mentioned, however, power generally means "authority," "competence," "the right to act," "sovereignty." This, however, is more a matter of a relationship of God to the creature than an attribute of God Himself.

128. For distinguishing the power of God, what does one call power that concerns what is possible and power that concerns what is actual?

- a) Necessary power (*potentia necessaria*).
- b) Free power (*potentia libera*).

129. What other distinction do theologians make concerning the power of God?

That between:

- a) *Absolute* power, that is, that capacity by which God intervenes in the course of the world directly, without making use of second causes.
- b) *Ordaining* power, that is, that capacity of God that works in the once established manner of natural causes. Pantheistic philosophy naturally also rejects this distinction. It will

know of nothing other than *potestia ordinata*.

130. Is it a correct expression to say that God cannot do the impossible?

No, for the impossible cannot exist, not even partially in concept, and therefore insofar as it is logically impossible, it is not an object. Eternal rational truths are rightly eternal because they are true in the thinking of God. What conflicts with these, conflicts with the being of God Himself. God cannot deny Himself. The ideal of power is not absolute indifference, which is also exalted above itself, but a self-determined reasonable and rational freedom.

131. Which proof texts can you supply for God's power?

Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26.

132. What is God's blessedness?

It is the inner sense of His perfection and His glory. It is called μακάριος as the one blessed.

133. What, in distinction, is God's glory?

The revelation of the perfections of God outwardly like brilliant light. In Hebrew, כְּבוֹד, הוֹד (Psa 24:8); in Greek, δόξα (1 Tim 1:11; 6:15–16).¹

¹ Vos, G. (2012–2014). *Reformed Dogmatics*. (R. B. Gaffin, Ed., A. Godbehere, R. van Ijken, D. van der Kraan, H. Boonstra, J. Pater, & A. Janssen, Trans.) (Vol. 1, pp. 3–37). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.