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Recreation as restoration in Southern Africa: On the need for Bavinck to embrace the doctrine of *apokatastasis*

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Herman Bavinck's theology of salvation as the comprehensive restoration [*herschepping*] of creation offers a vital resource for ecotheology within Southern Africa's Dutch Reformed tradition. To maintain Bavinck's internal consistency and inform contemporary ecological imagination, this article argues that his emphatic rejection of *apokatastasis* [universal restoration] requires critical re-evaluation. Employing an internal theological critique, the study juxtaposes Bavinck's cosmic eschatology with his doctrine of eternal punishment, analysing his concepts of sin as privation [*peccatum est privatio boni*] and humanity as the cosmos's organic microcosm. The article demonstrates that the perpetual damnation of any part of humanity—the *imago Dei*—introduces a fundamental internal contradiction. A perpetually unrestored component of the human person makes the restoration of the "whole creation" logically and theologically untenable. The conclusion asserts that for Neo-Calvinist ecotheology to be truly ecological and counteract "escapist" soteriologies, it must embrace a Universalist Soteriology. This is the necessary fulfilment of *herschepping* as restoration. Such a stance reinforces Bavinck's legacy, translating his cosmic vision into a robust theological mandate for earth-keeping amid the present ecological crisis.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article contributes to ecotheology by demonstrating that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* is a non-negotiable prerequisite for a viable ecological theology. It shifts the conversation from applying existing theology to the environmental crisis toward reforming theology's internal structure. It argues that Bavinck's cosmic vision of *herschepping* is theologically hindered by his traditional stance on hell, rendering his work an insufficient foundation for a truly comprehensive cosmic restoration.

Keywords: Herman Bavinck; Dutch Reformed tradition; ecotheology; *apokatastasis*; Southern Africa.

Introduction

This article puts forward a very simple proposition: If the whole of creation is to be restored by God's redemptive work, then the whole of humanity must be restored. Every human being must eventually be saved. To put it polemically, for theology to be truly ecological, Christian theology in general and the Dutch Reformed Church with a footprint not only in South Africa but also in the broader Southern Africa, with congregations in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, must embrace the doctrine of Universal Restoration. The historic ties between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) is well known (Longwe 2021:243; Munyenyembe 2021:304–308). In particular, it must necessarily embrace a Universalist Soteriology, which is also simultaneously a Universalist Eschatology.

This article follows the understanding of ecotheology that Conradie (2012) advances:

> Christian ecotheology may be regarded as an attempt to retrieve ecological wisdom embedded in the Christian tradition, as a response to ecological destruction and environmental injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover, and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis and the critique that the root causes of the crisis are related to the impact of Christianity. (p. 1)

Soteriology and, more narrowly, the doctrine of Universal Salvation or *apokatastasis to panto*, are the specific core aspects of the Christian faith that this article seeks to reflect on – to directly

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address contemporary ecological concerns. Specifically, I want to take Conradie (2012:1) seriously when he says that, 'ecotheology … offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation'.

This article discusses Herman Bavinck, a theological figure who was, according to Conradie (ed. 2023:Preface Section), an important precursor for the development of ecotheology. He has also been influential in the development of Reformed Theology and theologians in the Dutch Reformed tradition (Conradie 2012:77). Initially, Conradie's (2012:77–112) delineation of Bavinck's notion of 're-creation' [*herschepping*] will be discussed as a possible resource for ecotheology, then Bavinck's rejection of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* will be introduced, after which I will suggest that for Bavinck – not to mention, the ecotheology within the Dutch Reformed tradition that he influenced – to maintain that salvation entails the restoration of nature, or 'saving the earth', would necessitate not the rejection of the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, but the embracing of *apokatastasis* as tautologous to the doctrine of re-creation as restoration. I end this article with a letter to Prof. Bavinck that further advances the argument that his own thought, as applied to ecotheology, necessitates embracing the doctrine of *apokatastasis*.

Salvation is the whole of creation restored

As in the context of the Dutch Reformed Church, it is almost trite to aver that salvation is not only about the 'salvation of souls to go to heaven one day', but rather that, as the Dutch Reformed Church's policy document puts it (Niemandt & Meiring 2013):

> God creates and sustains everything with the aim of reaching the end destination [*eschaton*]: The kingdom of God, an intimate covenant relationship, a new, transfigured heaven and earth, where God will be all in all. p. 201 [author's own emphasis])

Alternatively, as the World Council of Churches (WCC 2013) document, 'Together towards Life: New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME)', puts it:

> God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is therefore vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense and to *affirm all life*, the whole *oikumene,* as being interconnected in God's web of life. (p. 4 [*author's own emphasis*])

The missional church conversation has likewise influenced the thinking of the CCAP more broadly (Chilenje 2019:81–109), as well as the wider ecumenical church in Malawi (ed. Glissmann 2021; Msangaambe 2021; Rajaratnam 2021). This retrieval of Bavinck for ecotheological purposes – within both the Dutch Reformed Church in the Southern African Region and the Malawian church – must be understood in light of the rediscovery of the church's missional nature and the holistic gospel currently proclaimed throughout Southern Africa.

This article will proceed from the assumption that salvation is indeed cosmic in scale and will include the earth as part of creation. It will not delve into the complex theological subtleties between creation and salvation, which have been discussed by Conradie (2013:1–49). Rather, it seeks to answer, albeit by way of an axiomatic statement, one of the pointed questions that Conradie (2013:12) poses, namely 'whether salvation should be understood as the restoration of (an aspect of) creation [*creatura*], or as the elevation of creation [*creatura*], or both'. I contend that salvation should be understood both as the restoration and elevation of creation. What I take issue with, however, is the qualification that salvation can be understood as the restoration, or elevation, of only *one aspect* of creation. The argument is that if only an aspect of creation is restored, creation as such cannot be restored.

At this point, it is worth having Bavinck (1909) himself have a significant say in his own words:

> The purpose of regeneration is to make us spiritual people, those who live and walk by the Spirit. This life is a life of intimate communion with God in Christ. Though believers are made new creatures in Christ, this does not mean that their created nature is qualitatively transformed. Believers remain fully human, fully created image-bearers of God as in the beginning. As in creation itself, no new substance enters into the world with redemption; the creature is liberated from sin's futility and bondage. Sin is not of the essence of creation but its deformity; Christ is not a second Creator but creation's Redeemer. *Salvation is the restoration of creation and the reformation of life.* Redemption is not coercive; it delivers people from the compulsion and power of sin. The new life comes from God and is born in his love. (p. 307 [*author's own emphasis*])

A few things are important to note in this passage:

- Bavinck is firmly planted within the tradition of the cosmic nature of salvation. Salvation is not to be saved from creation, but for creation itself to be restored.
- Bavinck maintains a classic understanding of sin as *privasio boni*, lacking in any substance of its own.
- He further holds to a teleological view of nature; for him, when sin is defeated, human beings and creation will be able to fulfil their created nature. As Conradie (2012) puts it:

  > At the very least, the goal is to allow that which is material bodily and earthly, to flourish once again. This will enable the 'nature of nature' to come to fruition. (p. 95)

- 'Freedom' for the creature is to realise its true nature.

If Bavinck holds the above tenets to be true, it cannot be congruent for his theological system to reject the doctrine of *apokatastasis*. And, importantly for our reflection here, to put it positively, the Neo-Calvinist tradition of which Bavinck is an exemplar would embrace the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, and it would bolster their impact on ecotheology even further.

This reflection cannot engage the totality of Bavinck's eschatology; it focuses on a very limited section of his thought regarding *apokatastasis* and juxtaposes it with his thought on

the organic unity of humanity and the restoration of creation. Engaging with Bavinck in this way also serves as an emblematic way of engaging other Neo-Calvinist theologians and their contribution to ecotheology.

Bavinck on *apokatastasis*

The doctrine of *apokatastasis* has a long and multifaceted history in the Christian Tradition; space does not allow us to delve into its controversies and nuances or into its reception. A short overview will have to suffice. The roots of *apokatastasis* can be traced back to early Christian thought, with even further antecedents in antiquity – particularly through the works of Origen (c. 185–254 CE), who is often credited with systematically articulating this doctrine (Ramelli & Bauckham 2019). Origen's theology integrated the idea of universal restoration into his broader eschatological framework, suggesting that the end of all things would mirror the beginning, with all rational beings returning to their original state of unity with God. He argued that the ultimate goal of divine providence is the restoration of all creation, a view that was supported by various early church fathers, including Gregory of Nyssa and Diodore of Tarsus (Jacobsen 2021:435–444). It was Karl Barth who, in the reformed tradition, played a significant role in bringing the question to the fore in theological discussion. While he did not officially endorse the doctrine (Adams 2019):

> [*H*]is theology followed the logical path to Christian Universalism even though he rejected the conundrum of binding God to the principle of *apokatastasis*. He saw it as contravening his assertion of the freedom of God. (Karl Barth's Influence on Contemporary Christian Universalism section)

Bavinck understands the traditional doctrine in precisely these '*Origenist*' terms as the 'restoration of all things', and that 'that one day all humans and even all devils will be saved' (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016:691–714). And some of Bavinck's assertions could indicate that he would be amenable to the doctrine of the Universal Restoration of Creation. He says, for example, that (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016):

> All creatures will then live and move and have their being in God, who is all in all, who reflects all of his attributes in the mirror of his works and glorifies himself in them … Someday Christ will return visibly and then cause the whole believing community – indeed, the whole world – to participate in his glory. Not only are believers changed after his likeness (Jn 17:24; Rm 8:17–18, 28; Phlp 3:21; Col 3:4; 1 Jn 3:2), but also 'the whole creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rm 8:21). (pp. 715–719)

Despite this ostensibly cosmic and universal hope expressed by Bavinck and the passages in scripture that he quotes that point to Universal Restoration, Bavinck is emphatic in his rejection of this doctrine. Interestingly, he not only disavows the doctrine that all human beings will be saved but he also does not believe that Scripture warrants the belief that all creatures will be saved. He says (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016):

> For these texts are certainly not intended universally in the sense that all humans or even *all creatures are saved*, nor are they so understood by any Christian church. All churches without exception confess that there is not only a heaven, but also a hell. (p. 717 [*author's own emphasis*])

Bavinck (2016:691–714) also sets out the arguments for *apokatastasis* and seeks to dismiss them. In addition, he rejects the doctrine of so-called 'annihilationism', where certain human beings will cease to exist after the final judgement. The arguments in favour of *apokatastasis* that he engages with are:

- Eternal punishment is incompatible with the love of God.
- Eternal punishment is incompatible with God's justice, where infinite punishment is meted out for finite infringements.
- Eternal punishment has no value for the one being punished.
- Scripture does not teach eternal punishment but holds out the promise of universal salvation.

I shall not engage his rejoinders to the arguments above but add another objection to Eternal Punishment, vs. that eternal punishment undermines Bavinck's own bulwark of his defense of the restoration of creation. In short, it comes down to these interrelated contradictions.

The insubstantiality of sin and the nature of the human creature

The doctrines of evil and sin that have no substance, evil that will be finally defeated at the last judgement, and sin(ners) that will be punished in perpetuity cannot both be true. Bavinck (1909) is quite emphatic on this issue:

> Sin does not lie in matter, nor in nature, nor in the substance of things, but it belongs to the will of the creature; it is of ethical nature, and thus capable of being expiated, effaced, extinguished. It can be separated from the creature, so that it disappears and the creature remains intact, yea, much more, is restored and glorified. (p. 307)

Yet, in Bavinck's eschatological scheme, sin cannot be 'expiated, effaced, extinguished' and separated from the creature. Or if it can, this begs the very serious question of the nature of the recreation that Bavinck envisages. In fact, when Bavinck argues, 'when re-creation removes sin, it does not violate and suppress nature but restores it', one wonders what it would mean for a part of creation (certain creatures), that should be enabled to flourish according to their nature, to be punished, and not only spiritually punished, but punished as integrated beings of body and soul. This would surely amount to the abuse of creation. What would be an end that does not have the creature's best interest at heart, but serves quite another purpose – in this case, the supposed self-glorification and justice of God? This kind of theology of God is very similar to the abuse of nature by humans for their own ends, which has no intention of honouring the inherent nature of creation and creatures, and then to allow them to flourish according to their own ends (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016:93).

Given the fact that Bavinck assumes that, as bearers of the divine image, human beings have 'natures' that can come to fruition when God, out of love, removes the impediments of sin, it cannot also be true that human beings freely choose eternal destruction and damnation. This is compounded by the fact that Bavinck would not subscribe to an Arminian view of salvation, where it is within our purview to freely choose our own salvation or damnation (Burger 2009:Herman Bavinck section).

The other problem that Bavinck has is, on the one hand, according to Burger (2009), he maintains:

> Humanity is an organic unity, not an aggregate of unrelated individuals. God wanted no separate individuals, but an entire organism of humanity as his image and likeness. God made a covenant with Adam, the covenant of works, and in him with all other human beings. (Herman Bavinck section)

But on the other hand, this organic unity is destroyed if some creatures enjoy the saved, recreated word, while others are condemned to be damned, to be 'total wrecks'. How can it be that if humanity is an organic whole, and that this whole can be saved, if everything and everyone, as parts of this whole are not saved? Surely the restoration of creation must necessarily entail the restoration of humanity as an 'entire organism … as his image and likeness'.

In this way of framing the relation between creation and *apokatastasis,* the following assertion of Bavinck (1909) holds true:

> The foundations of creation and redemption are the same. The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made. The first-born from the dead is also the first-born of every creature. The Son, whom the Father made heir of all things, is the same by whom he also made the worlds. (pp. 188–189)

The main thrust of this argument is not only to indicate the internal inconsistencies in Bavinck's account, or salvation as the restoration but also to insist on the rejection of the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, although it has that aim as well. The crucial import of these reflections is that Bavinck's rejection of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* diminishes the contribution of his theology to ecological concerns. Indeed, the implications of this argument – should it withstand scrutiny – serve as a *pars pro toto* challenge to the broader Reformed theological framework. The logic here is that if even Bavinck's sophisticated 'grace restores nature' motif cannot sustain a limited scope of salvation (as restoration!), then the traditional Reformed doctrine of the eternal damnation of some (most?) is fundamentally incompatible with a truly non-escapist, holistic ecotheology.

The reasons should be self-evident. In Bavinck's eschatology, only a part of creation is restored. He reserves a definitive and non-negotiable place in this (partially) restored creation to a place akin to the rubbish site Gehenna, where there will be an 'eternity of hellish punishment' (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016:704). Some of God's creatures, who are not only spiritual but material, will not be allowed to be restored to their true nature to flourish, but will be consigned to become 'total wrecks', lacking in any sense the fullness of life Christ promised to believers (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016:711). And although Bavinck (2016:709) cautions against too realistic a portrayal of this place of ruin, he nevertheless quite closely follows the biblical metaphors (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016):

> The fire there is unquenchable (Mt 3:12), that the worm does not die (Mk 9:48), that the smoke of torment goes up forever (Rv 14:11) and continues day and night for all eternity (Rv 20:10), and that as eternal pain it contrasts with the eternal life of the righteous (Mt 25:46). (p. 709)

It is, therefore, questionable if Bavinck's theology, with his insistence on the eternal perpetuity of hell, can truly serve as an antidote to 'escapist' soteriologies, for instead of spiritual beings escaping 'matter' in the eschatology that he rightly rejects, we have some integrated creatures escaping (or being evacuated?) to an integrated piece of eschatological real-estate of eternal bliss, and other creatures equally being confined to a ghetto of integrated (body and soul), eternal torture.

Despite this somewhat facetious way of putting it, tragically, such an eschatological picture is in deep continuity with the (ecological) hell that humans and other creatures need to endure every day. In fact, Bavinck is explicit on the continuity of hell in this creation and after the re-creation (eds. Bavinck & Bolt 2016):

> For aside from Scripture there is no stronger proof for the existence of hell than the existence of this world, the world from whose misery the features of the [*biblical*] picture of hell are derived. (p. 712)

This paints a bleak vision of the new earth that can scarcely 'encourage(s) us to care for this earth' (Conradie 2011:101). To put, perhaps, a finer point on the discussion and to proffer a version of annihilationism where some people are not punished in perpetuity, but simply cease to exist, does not, in itself, ameliorate the inconsistency of Bavinck's position, precisely because of his insistence on the 'organic unity' of humanity referred to above. I have written about this from a more pastoral perspective elsewhere (De Bruin 2023), but the same logic of David Bentley Hart (2019) in his meditation on the nature of persons in his book, *That All Shall Be Saved,* applies, precisely because human beings, and one could argue from an ecological perspective, the whole of creation is an organic unity, to lose a portion, of human beings – for them to be destroyed – is for the 'organic' unity of humanity and also creation to be destroyed. For humanity – even creation in its organic form to be saved, it would be true to say that no *one*, and no *thing* would be saved unless everything and everyone is saved. If everyone and everything are related and constitutive in the 'web of life', to put it differently, *apokatastasis to panto* [the restoration of everything] are also and equally *apokatastasis to panton* (the restoration of everyone).

A letter[1] to Prof. Herman Bavinck

Inspired by Conradie's letter to you (2012), I have also dared to write to you:

> No doubt, you will find the strident tone of my reflections above impertinent. Were you still in the academic writing business, I'm sure your rejoinder, if you had been so kind as to read this article, would have been incisive. You have also not set out to be an ecological theologian in the first place, and to expect your theology to bear directly on these concerns, so in a certain sense it is unfair to expect your theology to do so. I find your notion of salvation as the restoration of creation utterly compelling. And under the guidance of Prof. Conradie, I agree that it can be a resource for us in our endeavours to engage with ecotheology in the Dutch Reformed Church in Southern Africa. As by now you would have noticed, I do find your emphatic rejection of the doctrine of apokatastasis, that the whole of creation as inimical to this project. (pp. 112–119)

If I may be so bold as to point out the fairly obvious point, namely that human beings are part of creation. This is an insight that ecological theology has imprinted on our discourse around anthropology. The lack of commitment to this truth has undoubtedly led to an (Schlesinger 2018):

> [*I*]mproper anthropocentrism has caused untold harm, as human beings misunderstand their unique status within the created order, and appeal to it as justification for exploitative relationships with the earth's resources. (p. 343)

Yes, we are ethical creatures, and that places a burden and responsibility on our shoulders that other creatures perhaps do not share, and so we are capable of sinning and falling short of the glory of God. But there is a dimension to the fact that we are part of creation, which should not be overlooked. We are indeed made from the 'dust of the earth', and we are beings with souls, no doubt, but I am sure that you would agree that we are no less material beings, part of material creation, the same as animals, mountains, rivers and trees. As you so eloquently put it (Bavinck 2004):

> Among creatures, human nature is the supreme and most perfect revelation of God. And it is that [*revelation*] not just in terms of its pneumatic side, but equally in terms of its somatic side; it is that precisely as human, that is, as psychic, nature. In the teaching of Scripture God and the world, spirit and matter, are not opposites. There is nothing despicable or sinful in matter. The visible world is as much a beautiful and lush revelation of God as the spiritual. (p. 556)

So, my critical question here is the following: Would it not entail an ecological tragedy if some of the somatic, visible, lush and beautiful revelations of God's splendour were to be consigned to hell? The place that is presumably not part of creation will be restored, and would not the recreated creation be immeasurably poorer for it?

Perhaps you will agree, especially if you take into account what you have written in *Our Reasonable Faith* (Bavinck 1956):

> Because every creature is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, since all things are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, therefore the rejection of any creature were ingratitude to God, a misjudgement or under-evaluation of his goodness and his gifts. Our warfare may be conducted against sin alone. (p. 10)

If your intention was 'to think God's thoughts after him and to trace their unity' (Bavinck 2003:25), is it not reasonable to expect that in the fullness of time, when the warfare against sin will have been waged and decisively won, God will not reject any of his good creatures?

Moreover, it will not be possible for us, or for God, to reject any of his good human creatures without rejecting the whole of creation.

What I mean is this: Although it is indubitably true that human beings are part of creation, that is not the whole story. As you have written (Bavinck 2004):

> Among creatures, only man is the image of God, God's highest and richest self-revelation and consequently the head and crown of the whole creation, the imago Dei and the epitome of nature, both *mikrotheos* [microgod] and *mikrokosmos* [microcosm].

Even when one would assume that humanity is not in the first place an organic metaphysical organic unity where the unity is substantial and individuals are accidental, but that the organic unity of humanity is of an ethical nature, it is even more so the case that humanity as organism cannot be divided between the saved and the dammed without destroying the whole.

As you have so eloquently written about the organic whole of humanity, the real, optimal condition – the very health – of an organism is structured around three interdependent criteria.

Firstly, this state requires a central, animating vital principle that governs and regulates all functions from its core. Secondly, it is essential that the organism's parts, animated by this centre, maintain complete cooperation and integrity, refraining from either isolating themselves or arrogating undue importance. Each member must strictly confine itself to its proper and actualised function – the foot serving as the foot, and the hand as the hand – avoiding both egoistic self-assertion and detrimental isolation. Finally, this system ensures that all members, unified by the central vital principle, work in concert towards a singular goal, conceiving of themselves as instruments dedicated to achieving the overarching task of life (Bavinck 2004:556).

To use a Pauline frame, would it be possible for the human organism, with an amputated foot, to be an organism at all? After all, it would no longer be able to 'achieve the one task in life' of working together in one life principle?

If it is true that 'sin loosens and atomises' as Brock and Sutanto (2023:Bavinck and organic anthropology section) suggest, and that 'love binds', do you not think that the love of God that 'is fellowship' will bind 'the organism of redeemed humanity together, uniting it under a single

1.While Bavinck (1854–1921) is a historical figure, the following section is presented as a hypothetical 'letter to the author'.

head, and maturing it towards an eschatological telos'? And then not only a part of humanity that is separated from the rest (therefore, destroying the whole), but the whole of humanity – redeemed.

It goes further than that. You are also of the opinion that humanity is fundamentally defined as 'soul' because its spiritual dimension is intrinsically structured for and bound to a physical body, a distinct arrangement from that of angels. Consequently, the human intellectual and spiritual life is ineluctably linked to sensory and external faculties, meaning that an individual can ascend to higher forms of understanding only from the foundation provided by the lower, material components. It is through this material existence, as a sentient and embodied being, that humanity finds its relationship to the animal kingdom. Therefore, the human being is aptly described as a rational animal, a thinking creature, a composite existence positioned between the purely spiritual realm of angels and the purely material world of animals, possessing a kinship with both yet fundamentally distinct from each. This dual nature enables humanity to unite and reconcile the visible with the invisible, and heaven with earth, and it is precisely in this integrated and mediating capacity that the image and likeness of God is manifested (Bavinck 2004:556).

You are also of the opinion that all creation is a tangible expression of God's thoughts, with every creature bearing the faint imprints or 'vestiges' of the divine. However, these vestiges – which are dispersed throughout both the spiritual and material realms – are uniquely gathered, organically integrated, and profoundly elevated within humanity. In this unique role as a microcosm, the human being clearly constitutes the image and likeness of God. Essentially, the entire created order progresses, culminates, finds its completion, and achieves its unity, ultimate purpose, and supreme distinction in humanity.

Therefore, the very condition of being the image of God necessitated that humanity serve as a comprehensive recapitulation of the entirety of nature (Bavinck 2004:577).

Is it then not clear that for the whole of nature to be organically recapitulated in the organic unity of humanity as the image of God, that all of humanity should be made whole and saved? In fact, you say as much when you aver that (Bavinck 2004):

> *Only humanity in its entirety – as one complete organism*, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation – only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God. (p. 577 [*author's own emphasis*])

Surely, if humanity is comprised of the 'substratum of lower orders' and if it is a 'unity of the material and spiritual world, a mirror of the universe, a connecting link, compendium, the epitome of all of nature, a microcosm', creation cannot be restored. And if a creation that is still marred and broken and littered with wrecks is all that we can hope for, what strength can we have to be loving to our earth and fellow human beings?

To put it in a positive register, your vision of salvation as the restoration of creation – a vision I deeply admire – finds its fullest expression not in a partial redemption, where some of God's good creatures are cast aside, but in a cosmic renewal where all are reconciled and restored. This is the vision of the sovereign love of God that, I believe draws us all into restoration.

Yours in faith
Dieter de Bruin

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Dieter de Bruin: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Visualisation, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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