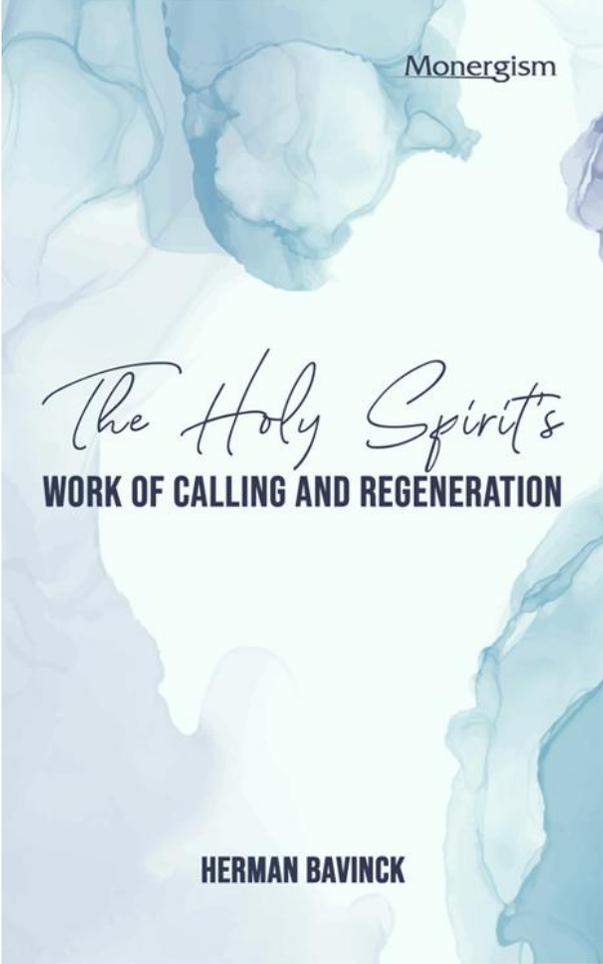


Monergism

*The Holy Spirit's*  
**WORK OF CALLING AND REGENERATION**

**HERMAN BAVINCK**

The background of the cover features a soft-focus photograph of several hands raised in prayer, palms facing upwards. The hands are rendered in a light, ethereal blue and white color palette, creating a sense of spiritual light and unity. The overall composition is centered and balanced.

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# **The Holy Spirit's Work of Calling and Regeneration**

**by Herman Bavinck**

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## **Introduction**

The Triune God produces all things in creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit. All things thus speak to us of God. God's call as law comes to all people in nature, in history, and in a variety of experiences. While insufficient unto salvation, this call upholds human existence in society and culture, despite the ubiquity of sin. Though the restricted call unto salvation comes through the word of the gospel, it may not be separated from nature and history. The Logos who became incarnate is the same as he by whom all things were made. Grace does not abolish nature but restores it. Still, the special call of the gospel does not proceed from law and invite us to obedience, but it flows forth from grace and invites us to faith.

The call to faith must be universally preached; this is Christ's command. The outcome must be left in God's hands; we are simply to obey. The gospel is to be preached to human beings, not as elect or reprobate, but as sinners, all of whom need redemption. Of course, not to each individual person can it be

said, “Christ died in your place.” But neither do those who preach a hypothetical universalism do that since they only believe in the possibility of universal salvation, conditional upon human acceptance. And this no one knows for sure. God’s offer is sincere in that he only tells us what we must do—believe. Since it is clear from history that the outcome of God’s call does not universally lead to faith, we cannot avoid the intellectual problem. It is not solved through weakening the call by expanding it for the purpose of greater inclusiveness. Acknowledging in humility the mystery of God’s will, we recognize that God’s own glory is its final purpose and believe that his Word never returns to him empty.

The call of law also prepares the way for the gospel, not in the Arminian sense of an evolution from preparatory grace to saving grace through human willing, but as the created natural foundation for salvation. God does link his work of grace to our natural lives; creation, redemption, and sanctification are the work of the Triune God in the divine economy of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is sovereign and his grace is rich and varied. Following Augustine, Reformed theology distinguishes an external or revealed call from the savingly efficacious internal call of the Holy Spirit. This distinction honors the universality of sin, the need to have the word of proclamation take root in a sinner’s heart by a special work of God, and ascribes all of our salvation to God’s mercy and activity. This change is so dramatic that it is properly called “rebirth” or “regeneration.”

The notion of rebirth is found in other religions of the Ancient East, notably in mystery religions such as Mithraism. Attempts to explain the Christian understanding of regeneration by means of the dying and rising gods of the mystery religions are not very persuasive. Even considering the paucity of our knowledge about the mystery religions, their ideas and practices come from a different religious environment and worldview. The New Testament here rather builds on the Old Testament, where the

whole people of Israel as well as individual persons are told that they need new hearts, a new birth only God can accomplish (Ps. 51:1–3). From the baptism of John through the preaching of Jesus and into the apostolic proclamation, the one consistent message is the need for μετανοια, for a radical turnabout, if one wishes to enter the kingdom of heaven. One must be “born from above” (John 3:6–8). By faith, Christ or his Spirit is the author and origin of a new life in those who are called (Gal. 3:2; 4:6) so that they are now a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). While there is a difference between the Old Testament and New Testament in language and manner of presentation, the basic truth is the same. Whether rebirth is called “circumcision of the heart,” the giving of a new heart and a new spirit, a drawing from the Father, or a birth from God, it is always in the strict sense a work of God by which a person is inwardly changed and renewed. This change is signified and sealed in baptism.

In the missionary context of the early church, the rebirth signified by baptism was a momentous and life-changing event for the believer. Moving beyond this context, as the church began baptizing infants and children, the connection between baptism and regeneration had to be modified. In Western Catholicism, regeneration was increasingly understood in terms of the infusion of sacramental grace at the time of baptism. In the Eastern church, a similar result was achieved but thought of in terms of implanting a new seed of immortality. A new quality was infused into the soul, and baptism itself became essential for salvation. Remaining in the state of grace depends on the mediation of the church and its sacraments.

It is this sacramental system that the Reformation protested, restoring a direct relationship between God and the soul through the Holy Spirit. The Word of Scripture took priority over church and sacrament. This brought its own difficulties as the Anabaptists rejected church and sacraments as means of grace and made personal faith and confession the condition for

baptism. In response, Lutherans again made regeneration dependent on baptism and, by implication, on the church, thus creating a dualism between primary regeneration, which precedes faith, and subsequent secondary renewal, which arises from faith. Reformed theologians wrestled mightily with this issue but found no solution satisfactory to everyone when it came to grounds for baptizing the children of believers. The attempt to ground it in a notion of prebaptismal regeneration satisfied some but ran aground on the reality that some who are baptized do not come to full faith as adults. Maintaining the continuity of the spiritual life proved difficult, and due to the Enlightenment, the notion of rebirth fell into disfavor and was replaced by humanistic notions of moral development, improvement, and nurture.

It was Schleiermacher who restored the idea of regeneration to theology, making it the center of his understanding of the Christian faith. For him, regeneration is the new consciousness of God's grace and human dependence on God gained by sharing in the consciousness of Christ. In the Mediating Theology, sin played a more significant role, but at bottom the new life in Christ was a participation in a new personality; there was no objective atonement for sin or Justification, only a subjective appropriation of new consciousness. Faith's content is here reduced to mystical experience.

This locus of theology, namely, soteriology, is as beset with difficulties as are the doctrines of the Trinity and of the two natures of Christ. While it is understandable that missionary proclamation begins with repentance and faith and only after that speaks of regeneration, upon reflection on Scripture and experience we come to realize that, properly speaking, regeneration must precede faith. If salvation rests in God's will and not in the human will, that order is inviolable. Augustine must be chosen over Pelagius. However, there are ethical/practical considerations too. Could overemphasis on

regeneration lead some to feel uncertain about their regeneration and thus be paralyzed in their response to the gospel call—waiting for God to regenerate them? Similarly, what about children of believers? Does the church baptize children of believers on the ground of presumed regeneration? Or, as in Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, does baptism somehow impart a seed of regeneration? The Reformed tradition distinguishes regeneration and faith, baptizes infants on the basis of covenant promises, but also acknowledges that the Holy Spirit could work sovereignly in the hearts of children apart from the preaching of the Word.

Because notions of rebirth are found outside of Scripture in the world's religions, it is important to be clear about the distinguishing features of the biblical view. Unlike Buddhism or Hinduism, rebirth does not mean reincarnation. While rebirth does apply to the Christian understanding of conversion, it is not sufficient to compare the biblical view with initiation into Greek mystery religions or even with Jewish proselytism. It is more than a change of consciousness, an enlightenment of the mind, or even a reformation of conduct, though it includes all of these. Nor should we be satisfied with the gnostic notion of redemption as the deliverance of the inner self from the “flesh” or matter. Neither rationalism nor mysticism provides us with a correct view of regeneration.

It is helpful to recognize a broader and more narrow use of the term “regeneration.” In the broadest and fullest sense, regeneration refers to the total transformation of a person; in the restricted sense, it has in view the implantation of new life that then leads to conversion and further sanctification. The active word of God here—calling—must also be differentiated from the passive reception or fruit of God's initiating work. God's call has both an external and internal component. The external proclaimed Word addresses human consciousness persuasively; human response requires an inner work of the

Holy Spirit. In Reformed thought, God's inner call logically precedes the outward call, though Word and Spirit must never be separated. The Reformed tradition also acknowledges the reality of the faith community's involvement in the external call upon its own children as a gracious work of God the Holy Spirit.

This operation of the Holy Spirit is both immediate and irresistible. The point made by Reformed theology here against the Pelagians, Arminians, and theologians of Saumur is that God's operation on the human person is independent of the will as well as the intellect. There is no room here to speak of cooperation or of God merely enlightening the mind, which then informs and changes the will. Though the term "irresistible" was used by opponents of the Reformed faith and does not sufficiently capture the Reformed view, its meaning is clear: When God freely chooses to renew a person's will, no one can withstand God. God's inner call is efficacious.

While the Augustinian and Reformed view can and does make room for human beings as created, rational, moral agents, the Pelagian and Remonstrant view cannot account for Scripture's teaching about the radical need for grace. If grace is resistible, God is deprived of his sovereignty; if the human will is capable on its own of assenting to God, then regeneration is unnecessary; and if, as the Pelagian and Remonstrant position teaches, some prevenient grace is necessary to prompt human willing, then the notion of an indifferent will remains a fiction. The only gain here is an apparent but not real one, as becomes apparent with the case of children who die in infancy. Either they are saved by sovereign grace alone without any choosing on their part, or such grace is insufficient and all infants who die before choosing are lost. The Pelagian and Arminian position is not at all merciful.

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.

## **The Call of God**

God produces both creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit. By his speech he calls all things into being out of nothing (Gen. 1; Ps. 33:6; John 1:3; Heb. 1:3; 11:3); by the word of his almighty power he again raises up the fallen world. He personally calls Adam (Gen. 3:9), Abram (Gen. 12:1; Isa. 51:2), Israel (Isa. 41:9; 42:6; 43:1; 45:4; 49:1; Jer. 31:3; Ezek. 16:6; Hos. 11:1); and by his servants he issues the invitation to repentance and life (Deut. 30; 2 Kings 17:13; Isa. 1:16ff.; Jer. 3; Ezek. 18; 33; etc.; Rom. 8:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Thess. 2:12; 5:24; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9; 5:10; etc.). Inasmuch as this call of God comes to people in and through the Son and Christ is the one who obtains our salvation, it is also especially credited to him. Just as the Father created all things through him and he is himself also the creator of all things, so he is also himself the one who calls (Matt. 11:28; Mark 1:15; 2:17; Luke 5:32; 19:10), who sends laborers into his vineyard (Matt. 20:1–7), invites guests to the wedding feast (22:2), gathers children as a hen gathers her chicks (23:37), appoints apostles and teachers (Matt. 10; 28:19; Luke 10; Eph. 4:11), whose voice has gone out to all the earth (Rom. 10:18). So, though the calling essentially originates with

God or Christ, in this connection he nevertheless employs people, not only in the narrow sense of prophets and apostles, pastors and teachers, but also including parents and relatives, schoolteachers and friends generally. There is even a voice speaking to us from all the works of God's hands, from the movements of history, and from the leadings and experiences of our life. All things speak to the believer of God. Although the call in a restricted sense comes to us also through the word of the gospel, the latter may not be separated from what comes to us through nature and history. The covenant of grace is sustained by the cosmic covenant of nature. Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace, is the same as he who as Logos created all things, who as light shines into the darkness, and who enlightens every human coming into the world. He leaves no one without a witness but does good from heaven and fills also the hearts of Gentiles with food and good cheer (Ps. 19:2–4; Matt. 5:45; John 1:5, 9–10; Acts 14:16–17; 17:27; Rom. 1:19–21; 2:14–15).

## **External Call**

Accordingly, we must first of all distinguish a real call (*vocatio realis*), which comes to humans not so much in clear language as in things (*res*), through nature, history, environment, various leadings, and experiences. The medium of this calling is not the gospel but the law, and by it, as it comes to expression in the family, society, and state, in religion and morality, in heart and conscience, it calls human beings to obedience and obligates them to do good.<sup>1</sup> This call is admittedly insufficient for salvation, because it knows nothing of Christ and his grace and therefore cannot lead anyone to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16). Even with this call, the world in its folly and darkness did not know God (John 1:5, 10; Rom. 1:21ff.; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 2:12). Still, it is a rich form of God's involvement with his creatures, a witness of the Logos, a working of the Spirit of

God of great significance for humankind. We owe it to this call that, despite the reality of sin, humankind continued to exist; that it organized itself into families, societies, and states; that there remained in it a sense of religion and morality; and that it did not disappear into a sinkhole of bestiality. All things hold together in Christ, who upholds all things by the word of his power (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3). This call also specifically serves, both in the life of peoples and in that of particular persons, to pave the way for the higher and better calling of the gospel. As Logos, by various ways and means, Christ lays the groundwork for his own work of grace. He himself first appeared publicly only in the fullness of time. When the world by its wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the folly of preaching to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21). The gospel does not come to all peoples at the same time, but over many centuries continues its progress through the world. Also, in the case of special persons it comes at the moment that God himself has providentially prepared and planned.

Now, however important this real vocation is, of a higher kind is the verbal call (*vocatio verbalis*), which comes to people not only via the revealed law but specifically through the gospel. This call, while it does not cancel out the calling that comes through nature and history, incorporates it into itself, confirms it, and indeed transcends it by far. It is, after all, a call that proceeds not from the Logos but specifically from Christ. As its real means, it does not so much employ the law as the gospel. It invites us not to obedience to divine law but to faith in God's grace. Further, it is always accompanied by a certain working and witness of the Spirit, whom Christ poured out as his Spirit upon the church (John 16:8–11; Matt. 12:31; Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 6:4). This call is not universal in the sense held by the old Lutherans who, on the basis of Matt. 28:10; John 3:16; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:23; and 1 Tim. 2:4, claimed that at the time of Adam, Noah, and Christ, the gospel had in fact been known to all peoples and had again been lost through their own fault,<sup>2</sup> but may and must

nevertheless be brought to all people without distinction. Scripture expressly commands this (Matt. 28:19) and further states that many who do not come are nevertheless called (Matt. 22:14; Luke 14:16–18). They reject the gospel (John 3:36; Acts 13:46; 2 Thess. 1:8) and are therefore guilty of the appalling sin of unbelief (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; John 3:36; 16:8–9; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 John 5:10).

## **Universal Proclamation of the Gospel**

But universalists advance against the Reformed that the latter, on their position, cannot accept such a universal call through the gospel. According to their position, after all, Christ did not die for all, but only for the elect. Their message cannot be, “Christ has made satisfaction for you; your sins have been atoned; only believe.” For the unconverted the message can only consist in the demand of the law. If they maintain the universal offer of grace, it cannot be sincerely meant on the part of God and is, furthermore, useless and ineffective.<sup>3</sup>

These objections are undoubtedly weighty and have evoked a variety of responses from the camp of the Reformed. Some got to the point where they only preached the law to the unconverted and offered the gospel only to those who had already learned to know themselves as sinners and felt the need for redemption. Others, maintaining the universal offer of grace, justified this offer by saying that Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient for all, or that Christ had also acquired numerous and varied blessings for those who would not believe in him, or that the gospel was only offered to them on condition of faith and repentance. Still others, taking a position close to universalism, taught that, on the basis of an initial universal decree of God, Christ had made satisfaction for all, or had acquired for all the legal possibility of being saved, and had brought everyone into a “salvable state,” or even that the acquisition of salvation was

universal and that its application was particular.<sup>4</sup> However much it might seem that the confession of election and limited atonement might require something else, the Reformed as a rule maintained the universal offer of grace.

And this is absolutely correct for the following reasons:

1. Scripture leaves no doubt that the gospel may and must be preached to all creatures. Whether we can square this with a particular outcome is another question. In any case, the command of Christ is the end of all contradiction. The rule for our conduct is only the revealed will of God. The result of that preaching is certain not only according to those who confess predestination but also on the position of those who only recognize divine foreknowledge. God cannot be self-deceived; for him the result of world history cannot be a disappointment. And with all due respect, it is not our task but God's responsibility to square this outcome with the universal offer of salvation. We only know that the outcome, in accordance with God's decree, is bound to and acquired by all the ways and means that have been laid down for us. And among them is the preaching of the gospel to all creatures. In that connection, we have nothing to do with the decree of election and reprobation. The gospel is preached to humans not as elect or reprobate but as sinners, all of whom need redemption. Administered by people who do not know the hidden counsel of God, the gospel can only be universal in its offer. Just as a net cast into the sea catches both good and bad fish, just as the sun shines simultaneously on wheat and on weeds, just as the seed of the sower falls not only on good soil but also on stony and dry places, so also the gospel, in its being administered, comes to all people without distinction.

2. The message of that gospel is not to all people individually: "Christ has died in your place; all your sins have been atoned for and forgiven." For even though universalists imagine they can

say this to every human being without any further qualification, upon a little reflection it is clear that also for the universalist position this is by no means the case. After all, according to them, Christ has secured only the possibility of forgiveness and salvation, for that forgiveness and salvation become real only if people believe and continue to believe that message. Accordingly, they too can only preach, as the content of the gospel, the message: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life."

Now Reformed preachers say the same thing. They too offer the gospel to all humans and can, may, and must do this. Though the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation are there, they become ours only by means of faith. Yet there is in this connection an important difference between the universalists and the Reformed, a difference that is totally to the advantage of the Reformed. In the view of the former, Christ secured only the possibility of salvation. Whether salvation actually becomes a reality for a person depends on that person herself or himself. Faith is a condition, a work, which alone turns a possible salvation into an actual salvation, and so leaves a person forever in doubt, at least till death. But, in the view of the Reformed, Christ secured full, real, and total salvation. Faith, accordingly, is not a work, a condition, an intellectual assent to the statement "Christ died for you" but an act of reliance on Christ himself, of trusting in his sacrifice alone. It is a living faith that is much simpler than it can be with the universalist view, one that much more certainly brings salvation with it than universalists consistent with their position can ever promise. The error here is solely that humans are always inclined to reverse the God-appointed order. They want to be sure of the outcome before using the means and in order to be exempt from using the means. But it is the will of God that we shall take the way of faith, and then he unfailingly assures us of complete salvation in Christ.

3. The offer of salvation on the part of God, therefore, is seriously and sincerely meant. For in that offer he does not say what he himself will do—whether or not he will bestow that faith. He has kept that to himself. He only tells us what he wants us to do: that we humble ourselves and seek our salvation in Christ alone. If it be objected that God nevertheless offers salvation to those to whom he has decided not to grant faith and salvation, then this is an objection equally applicable to the position of our opponents. For in that case, God also offers salvation to those whom he infallibly knows will not believe. It is the case after all, not only according to the Reformed but also according to all Christ-confessors, that the outcome of world history is eternally and unchangeably certain.<sup>5</sup> The only difference is that the Reformed have had the courage to say that that outcome corresponds to God's will and purpose. Although it is beyond our comprehension, God must have been able to will all that is and takes place, subject to all his virtues and perfections, or else God would no longer be God. History cannot and may not be a sparring partner for God.

4. The preaching of the gospel is neither ineffective nor useless. Indeed, if either from ignorance or incapacity God really aimed, through the universal offer of the gospel, at the salvation of all, it would be useless and vain. For how small the number is in whom this purpose is realized! In that case, it would itself harbor a contradiction, which, for the purpose of resolving it, would tempt us toward ever-greater departure from Scripture. For, if the will and purpose of God, if the atonement of Christ, is strictly universal, then the offer of salvation must also be unqualifiedly universal. And since that is evidently not the case, people gradually arrive at a variety of "solutions." Either, like the old Lutherans, they flatly contradict history and claim that the apostles already preached the gospel to all peoples, or, like many modern theologians, they assume there will be gospel preaching also on the other side of the grave;<sup>6</sup> or worse, along with rationalists and mystics, they believe that "the law of nature" or

“the inner light” is sufficient for salvation. The farther one thus, in defiance of history, expands the call, the weaker, the more bland and insipid it becomes. In quality and intensity one loses what one has seemingly gained in quantity and scope. The contrast between God’s intent and the outcome of it becomes increasingly more pronounced.

5. Although through this call salvation becomes the possession of only a few, as everyone must admit, it nevertheless retains its great value and significance also for those who reject it. For everyone without distinction, it is proof of God’s infinite love and seals the saying that he has no pleasure in the death of sinners but rather that they should turn and live (Ezek. 18:23, 32). It proclaims to all that Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for the expiation of all sins, that no one is lost because the call is insufficiently rich and powerful, that no demand of the law, no power of sin, no rule of Satan can block its application, for the free gift is not like the trespass (Rom. 5:15). Frequently, even for those who harden themselves in their unbelief, it is a source of various blessings. The enlightenment of the mind, a taste of the heavenly gift, partaking of the Holy Spirit, enjoyment of the Word of God, the experience of the powers of the age to come—these have sometimes even come to those who later fell away and held the Son of God in contempt (Heb. 6:4–6).

6. And this is not all. For the external call by law and gospel also reaches the goal God has in view. What God does is never futile. His word never returns to him empty; it accomplishes everything he purposes and prospers in the thing for which he sends it (Isa. 55:11). But this purpose is not only, and not in the first place, the eternal salvation of human beings, but the glory of his name. In this calling by law and gospel God continues to press his claim on his human creatures. The sinner assumes that by sinning he or she becomes free from God and his service. But it is not so. God’s claim on humans, also the most degraded ones, is inalienable and inviolable. Human beings, resigning

from the service of God, can become profoundly wretched, but they remain creatures and are therefore dependent. Sin does not make them less dependent but even more so. They cease to be children and become servants, slaves, powerless instruments used by God according to his will. God never releases his grip on us and never abandons his claims on us, on our service, and on our complete consecration. And for that reason, by nature and history, heart and conscience, blessings and judgments, law and gospel, he summons us to return to him. The call, in its broadest sense, is the preaching of God's claims upon his fallen creatures.

7. As such it maintains in each person and in the whole human race the religious and moral awareness of dependence, awe, respect, duty, and responsibility, without which humanity cannot exist. Religion, morality, law, art, science, family, society, the state—they all have their root and foundation in the call that comes from God to all people. Take it away, and what we get is a war of all against all, each person becoming a wolf against one's neighbor. The call, by law and gospel, restrains sin, diminishes guilt, and stems the corruption and misery of humankind. It is "repressive grace." It is proof that God is God, that he is indifferent toward nothing, and that not only the world beyond but also this world has value to him. Accordingly, however much people may be inclined to hide behind their powerlessness, or with Pelagius and Kant to deduce their power from their duty, also in that way they acknowledge that God's claims and our duty remain undiminished and they themselves are inexcusable.<sup>7</sup>

8. Finally, this call is not only a repressive but also a preparatory grace. Christ came into the world for judgment (κρισις), for a fall but also for a rising of many (Mark 4:12; Luke 2:34; 8:10; John 9:39; 15:22; 2 Cor. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:7–8). This call by law and gospel is also intended, through what it gives and brings about both in humanity as a whole and in individual persons, to pave the way for the coming of Christ. Reformed theologians 8 have

definitely rejected such a preparatory grace in an Arminian sense.<sup>9</sup> The spiritual life that is implanted in regeneration differs essentially from the natural and moral life that precedes it. It is brought about, not by human activity or evolution, but by a creative act of God. Some theologians, accordingly, preferred to call the activities that precede regeneration “antecedent actions” rather than “preparatory actions.” Still one can speak of “preparatory grace” in a sound sense. The expression is even eminently valuable against all Methodist trends that ignore the natural life. For the confession of preparatory grace does not imply that, by doing what they can on their own—regularly going to church, listening attentively to the Word of God, acknowledging their sins, and yearning for salvation, and so on—people can earn or make themselves receptive to the grace of regeneration on the basis of a merit of congruity. On the contrary, it implies that God is the creator, sustainer, and ruler of all things and that, even generations before they are born, he orders the life of those on whom he will in due time bestow the gift of faith. Humans did not originate on the sixth day by evolving from lower creatures, but are created by the hand of God. Still, his creation may be considered prepared by the antecedent acts of God. Though Christ himself came down from above, yet his coming had been prepared for centuries. Although nature and grace are distinct and may not be confused or mingled, God does link the two. Creation, redemption, and sanctification are, in an “economic” sense, attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit, but these three constitute the one true God, and together they accomplish the whole work of redemption. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him or her; and no one receives the Holy Spirit except those to whom the Son sends him.

For that reason we can properly speak of a preparatory grace. God himself, in many different ways, prepares for his gracious work in human hearts. He aroused in Zacchaeus the desire to see Jesus (Luke 19:3), produced distress in the crowd that

listened to Peter (Acts 2:37), caused Paul to fall to the ground (9:4), disconcerted the jailer at Philippi (16:27), and so directs the lives of all his children even before and up to the hour of their rebirth. Even if on their part they have not yet received the benefits of reconciliation and Justification and have not yet been born again and given faith, yet they are already the objects of his eternal love, and he himself already leads them by his grace to the Spirit, who alone can regenerate and comfort them. All things, accordingly, are connected by divine prearrangement to their subsequent “enlistment” and calling in the church. Conception and birth, family and lineage and people and land, upbringing and education, development of heart and mind, preservation from hideous sins, above all from blaspheming the Holy Spirit, or perhaps abandonment to all sorts of wickedness, disasters and judgment, blessings and benefits, the preaching of law and gospel, distress about sin and fear of judgment, development of conscience and the felt need for salvation: all of this is grace preparing people for rebirth by the Holy Spirit and for the role that they as believers will later play in the church. True: there is only one way to heaven, but many are the leadings of God both before and on that journey, and the grace of the Holy Spirit is abundant and free. Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Timothy were brought into the kingdom differently from either Manasseh or Paul, and each performed a different task in the service of God. Pietism and Methodism tend to ignore these leadings, limit God’s grace, and want to convert and mold everyone according to a single model. But Reformed theology respects the free sovereignty of God and marvels at the riches of his grace.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Particular Call of Grace**

Scripture and experience testify, however, that all these workings of external calling do not always and in every case lead people to a sincere faith and salvation. Hence the question

arises: What is the ultimate cause of this diverse outcome? In the Christian church, in the main, a threefold answer was given to that question. Some said that this diverse outcome was due to the human will, whether that will had received the power to accept or reject the gospel from its natural self, or from the grace of the Logos, or from the grace of baptism, or from that of the calling. According to this view, there is no distinction between external and internal, or between efficient and efficacious calling. Inwardly and essentially the calling is always and in every case the same. It is only called efficacious in terms of the outcome when a person responds to the call. After everything we have said previously about Pelagianism,<sup>11</sup> this answer does not call for a lengthy refutation. It clearly offers no solution. In practice one can indeed confine oneself to the proximate cause and attribute unbelief specifically to the human will. In that case, one is speaking truthfully (Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; Isa. 65:12; Matt. 22:2–3; 23:37; John 7:17; Rom. 9:32; etc.): the sinful will of humans is responsible for their unbelief. But even in practice all believers at all times and in all schools of thought have attributed their faith and salvation to God's grace alone.<sup>12</sup> There is nothing that distinguishes them other than that gift of grace (1 Cor. 4:7). Ultimately, therefore, this difference cannot lie in the human will. If one nevertheless insists on considering will the final cause, one is instantly faced with all the psychological, ethical, historical, and theological objections that have at all times been raised against Pelagianism. It introduces incalculable caprice and weakens sin; the decision about the outcome of world history is put in the hands of humans, the governance over all things is taken away from God; his grace is canceled out. Even if one ascribes the power to choose for or against the gospel to the restoration of grace, this does not help matters. In that case one introduces a grace that consists solely in the restoration of volitional choice, one that is nowhere mentioned in Scripture, that actually presupposes regeneration and yet has to bring it about only after the right choice has been made.<sup>13</sup> On this position one also gets stuck with all the millions

of people who have never heard of the gospel or died as infants and for that reason were never in a position to accept or reject Christ. Accordingly, the free will of humans cannot be the ultimate cause of faith and unbelief.

Another answer to the above question was therefore devised by Bellarmine. He rejected both the doctrine of Pelagius and that of Augustine, sought a path somewhere between them, and said that the efficacy of the call depended on whether it came to a person at an opportune time when the will was inclined to follow it (*congruitas*).<sup>14</sup> Agreeing with this congruism are the views of Pajon, Kleman, as well as Shedd, who considers salvation “in the highest degree probable” for everyone who makes serious and diligent use of the means of grace.<sup>15</sup> But this answer, too, is unsatisfactory. In this congruity theory there is indeed an important truth that, while ignored by Methodism, comes into its own in the Reformed doctrine of preparatory grace. But it is completely unable to explain the efficacy of the call. The reason is that it is inherently nothing other than moral suasion, which in the nature of the case is powerless to create the spiritual life that, according to Scripture, is the result of regeneration. Further, it presupposes that a human being is fit one moment and unfit the next to accept grace, thus locating sin in circumstances and weakening it in humans. In addition, it makes the ultimate decision dependent on the human will and thereby again provokes all the objections mentioned above and lodged by Bellarmine himself against Pelagianism. Finally, it links calling and conversion by a thread of congruity, which, being moral in nature, can at all times be broken by the will and hence cannot guarantee the efficacy of the call.

Augustinians, Thomists, and Reformed theologians, therefore, located the reason why in one person the calling bore fruit and in another it did not in the nature of the calling itself. The first group said that when the call was efficacious, a “triumphant delight” (*delectatio victrix*) was present, which granted not only

the capacity to act (posse) but also the will to act (velle). The Thomists spoke of a “natural predetermination” or “natural action of God” that prompted the capacity to act (posse agere), conferred by “sufficient calling,” to pass into action.<sup>16</sup> The Reformed, however, objecting to the use of these terms, took exception especially to the description of an act of God in conversion as “natural” and preferred to speak of an “external” and an “internal” call. This distinction already occurs in Augustine,<sup>17</sup> was taken over from him by Calvin,<sup>18</sup> and was further adopted in Reformed theology. Earlier this twofold calling was referred to by other terms as well, such as the “material and formal,” the “revealed” call and the call of “God’s good pleasure,” the common and the personal, the universal and the special call,<sup>19</sup> but the terms “external” and “internal” call gained the upper hand and gradually pushed out the others.

Now although this distinction does not occur in so many words in Scripture, it is based on Scripture.

1. It is already implied in the fact that all humans are the same by nature, worthy of condemnation before God (Rom. 3:9–19; 5:12; 9:21; 11:32), dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:2–3), darkened in their understanding (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:18; 5:8). They cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3), are the slaves of sin (8:34; Rom. 6:20), enemies of God (8:7; Col. 1:21), do not and cannot submit to God’s law (Rom. 8:7), are unable to think or do anything good from within themselves (John 15:5; 2 Cor. 3:5); though the gospel is for the benefit of humans, they are hostile toward it and despise it as an offense or folly (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14). Hence the difference that occurs among people after the calling is inexplicable in terms of human capacities. God and his grace alone make the difference (1 Cor. 4:7).

2. Simply the preaching of the Word by itself is not sufficient (Isa. 6:9–10; 53:1; Matt. 13:13ff.; Mark 4:12; John 12:38–40; etc.). Hence in the Old Testament already we learn of the

promised Spirit who would teach everyone and grant them all a new heart (Isa. 32:15; Jer. 31:33; 32:39; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Joel 2:28). To that end he was poured out on the day of Pentecost to witness to Christ along with and through the apostles (John 15:26–27), to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8–11), to regenerate people (John 3:5ff.; 6:63; 16:13), and to lead them to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).

3. The work of redemption, therefore, is ascribed completely, both subjectively and objectively, to God. This is not just meant in a general sense, the way we say that God works all things by his providence, but definitely in the restricted sense that by a special divine power he works regeneration and conversions. So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16). The calling is the implementation of divine election (8:28; 11:29). It is God who renews the human heart and inscribes his law on it (Ps. 51:12; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26), who enlightens the eyes of the heart (Ps. 119:18; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:9–11), opens the heart (Acts 16:14), makes his own recognize his Son as the Christ (Matt. 11:25; 16:17; Gal. 1:16), and draws people to him with spiritual power (John 6:44; Col. 1:12–13). He causes the gospel to be preached, not only in words but also in demonstration of the spirit and power (1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Thess. 1:5–6), and himself gives wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6–9). He, in short, is at work in us, enabling us both to will and to work according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13) and to that end uses a power like the power by which he raised Christ from the dead and made him sit at his right hand (Eph. 1:18–20).

4. The very act by which God accomplishes this change in humans is often called “rebirth” (John 1:13; 3:3ff.; Titus 3:5; etc.), and the fruit of it is called a new heart (Jer. 31:33), a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), his workmanship created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10), the work of God (Rom. 14:20), and his building (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:21; etc.). This is to say that what is brought

about in humans by the grace of God is much too rich and great for it to be explained in terms of the “moral suasion” of the preaching of the Word.

5. Finally, Scripture itself speaks of calling in a dual sense. Repeatedly it refers to a calling and invitation to which there was no positive response (Isa. 65:12; Matt. 22:3, 14; 23:37; Mark 16:15–16; etc.). In that case it could say that while God did everything on his part (Isa. 5:4), people in their obstinacy refused to believe and resisted God’s counsel, the Holy Spirit, and calling (Matt. 11:20ff.; 23:37; Luke 7:30; Acts 7:51). But Scripture also knows a calling from God—a realization of election—that is always efficacious. This is especially true in Paul (Rom. 4:17; 8:30; 9:11, 24; 1 Cor. 1:9; 7:15ff.; Gal. 1:6, 15; 5:8; Eph. 4:1, 4; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:9; also cf. 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3). Believers are therefore repeatedly described simply as “those who are called” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24), and “those who are called in Christ” or “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:22); that is, those who are called by God belong to Christ and live in communion with him. In addition, Paul also knows of a preaching of the gospel to those who reject it. To them the gospel is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18, 23), a fragrance from death to death (2 Cor. 2:15–16). They do not understand it (1 Cor. 2:14). As a power of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 24), it proves itself to those who are called by God according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28; 9:11; 11:28; Eph. 1:4–5).

## **Rebirth in Other Religions**

Inasmuch as the efficacious call, as Paul speaks of it, incorporates within itself the external verbal call (*vocatio verbalis externa*) and even the real calling (*vocatio realis*), we must in this connection call to mind all the work of God accomplished on his part by Word and Spirit externally and internally, mediately and immediately, suavisely and

efficaciously—to bring to birth in unspiritual human beings a spiritual person who from the very first moment receives life from him, in communion with Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This call, accordingly, is irrevocably connected with and automatically leads to that other benefit of the covenant of grace that is usually called regeneration or rebirth. The Greek word *παλιγγενεσία* or *παλιγγενεσία* does not occur for the first time in the New Testament but also elsewhere in literature and had several meanings. In Stoic philosophy, it was used for the cosmic renewal that was to begin after the conclusion of the present dispensation. Palingenesis was the term for what is otherwise called *ἀποκαταστασις τῶν πάντων* (universal restoration [Acts 3:21]), and it was thought to occur not just once but repeatedly. The Stoic school believed in a “periodic rebirth of all things.” The school of Pythagoras, however, used the word to denote the rebirth of souls from death. Following departure from this life comes the return to life, or rebirth, in other words, the transmigration of the soul or reincarnation. Aside from these two eschatological meanings, the word acquired a variety of metaphorical senses as well. Philo, for example, calls Noah and his family, who were spared in the flood, “the leaders of the rebirth and founders of the second period.” Josephus speaks of the return of the Jews from Babylonia to Palestine as a “rebirth of the fatherland.” Cicero, being restored after his exile to a position of dignity and honor, called it a rebirth; and Olympiodorus writes: “The memory is the rebirth of understanding.”<sup>20</sup>

The idea of rebirth gradually began to play a large role in the mystery cults that, coming from the East, in the early centuries of the Christian calendar penetrated the West and greatly expanded there. Common to all of them is the idea that a god or goddess dies and again awakens to a new life. In the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, Kore (Persephone) was first kidnapped by Pluto, taken to the underworld, and later returned to her mother. The same idea underlies the Phrygian, Phoenician, and

Egyptian mysteries. But that idea was not developed and argued didactically but rather enacted visually and dramatically before an audience of initiates. In the words of Rohde, the mysteries were religious pantomimes combined with sacred songs and solemn sayings.<sup>21</sup> Only by participation in a series of ceremonies, submitting to various ablutions, and eating and drinking the food and drink offered by priests could the initiates—who were usually further divided into classes—penetrate the mysteries and appropriate the divine life forces made available in these cults. This came to expression especially in Mithraism, which, rooted in Persia, passed through Phrygia to Rome and reached its acme there in the third century after Christ. At the core of the Mithraic liturgy was the killing of a bull by Mithra, represented as a youthful god. The initiate received a blood bath by letting the blood of the bull drip down on his head, lips, eyes, ears, and cheeks. He even drank the blood and then presented himself to the crowd for veneration. For, having been baptized with blood and cleansed, he was like the deity, born again forever. These mysteries, naturally, made a very diverse impression on participants and spectators. Some viewed them as little more than nature myths that visually represented the death and rebirth of the life force. Others, construing them more spiritually, saw them as the process of dying and resurrection that every human, all of humanity, and the whole world had to undergo to obtain immortality, eternal life, and divinity.<sup>22</sup>

In recent years it is being said by proponents of the history-of-religions method that Christianity is a syncretistic religion that underwent the influence of these pagan mysteries not only in the later formation of its dogmas but already in its early period of doctrinal development. We cannot, of course, treat this weighty question here,<sup>23</sup> but at least with respect to the idea of rebirth this assertion is not well grounded. In the first place, it is noteworthy that the word for rebirth (παλιγγενεσία) occurs only twice in the New Testament (Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5); and with regard to Matt. 19:28, we must remember that we do not know

how Jesus expressed in Aramaic the idea that the evangelist translated by the Greek (παλιγγενεσία). Furthermore, in the mysteries the idea of rebirth was always connected with ceremonial and even sacramental actions, but in Scripture it repeatedly occurs by itself apart from any such connection (John 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Even in Titus 3:5 the link with or allusion to baptism is uncertain. Moreover, the explanation of many practices followed in the mysteries, such as the killing of the bull in Mithraism, is still very problematic. For one thing our knowledge of the mysteries is largely based on witnesses dating from the second to the fourth century AD, when it flourished in the Roman Empire. It is therefore possible that Christianity on its part exerted influence on the interpretation of these mysteries. In any case, if early Christianity had originally been shaped under the influence of the mysteries, this must have started already in Palestine, with Paul, John, and the entire church of that time. But proof for this assumption is totally lacking. The faith of the early Christian church was centered in the person of Christ and from the beginning took an antithetic position to all pagan religions. Finally, the New Testament as a rule employs the same words that were current in the common Greek of that time. How else could the gospel have found a hearing and acceptance? But it often attributes to those words another, deeper sense and gradually makes that meaning the content of human consciousness. That is the case with words such as σωτηρία (salvation), ζωή (life), ἀπολυτρωσις (redemption) as well as with the idea of rebirth, which in Scripture is only twice rendered by παλιγγενεσία and for the rest by many other terms.

## **Regeneration: Scriptural Teaching**

The idea of rebirth has its roots in the Old Testament. The word παλιγγενεσία does not occur in the Septuagint except that Job says (14:14): ὑπομενω ἕως ἂν παλιν γενωμαι (“I would wait until

my release should come”). But materially the idea of rebirth clearly occurs already in Israelite religion. Entirely in keeping with the Old Testament dispensation, it is first of all a matter for the people as a whole. At the time of the giving of the law and later in prophecy the word is first of all addressed to all the people God has included in his covenant, and on the basis of that covenant the people are confronted with the demand that they serve the Lord with all their heart and soul (Deut. 10:10; Josh. 22:5). But as apostasy, unfaithfulness, and the hardness of people’s hearts became more and more evident in history, the prophets stressed with increasing forcefulness that an inner change had to come, not only among the people as a whole, but also in the heart of every member of that people in particular. And in that respect human beings of themselves are unable to bring it about (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; 15:16; Ps. 51:5). No more than an Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots can Israel do good, for it has learned to do evil (Jer. 13:23). The heart is deceitful above all things and lethally corrupt (17:9). A stupid man will no more get understanding than the colt of a wild ass is born human (Job 11:12). But what human beings cannot bring about in themselves or others God will do in the future. He alone can create a clean heart (Ps. 51:10–12). He will take away their stony heart and give them a heart of flesh, circumcise the foreskin of their heart, put a new spirit within them, inscribe the law in their heart, and cause them to walk in his statutes. Then Israel will be his people, a shoot of his planting, a work of his hands, that he may be glorified (Deut. 10:16; 30:1–6; Isa. 54:13; 60:21; Jer. 24:7; 31:18, 31ff.; 32:8ff.; Ezek. 11:19; 36:25ff.).

Initially John the Baptist and then Jesus required such an internal change from all who want to enter the kingdom of heaven. The people of Israel, despite all its external privileges, was nevertheless corrupt through and through. Despite its circumcision, it needed baptism, the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, in which a person is totally immersed in

order to rise again as another person to a new life (Matt. 3:2ff.). To obtain the benefits of the kingdom, a radical turnaround, a μετανοια, is needed. Those who want to enter the kingdom must break with their entire previous life, lose their life (Matt. 10:37–39; 16:25; Luke 14:26), leave behind everything (14:33), take up their cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 10:38), become a child (18:3), return to the Father with a confession of sin (Luke 15:18), and go through the narrow gate and walk down the narrow path (Matt. 7:14). Those who really do this are enabled to do so by God himself. For human beings are by nature evil (7:11). Out of their hearts come nothing but wickedness (15:19). Like a bad tree, they cannot produce good fruit (7:17ff.). Accordingly, if there is to be good fruit, the tree must be made good first, something only God can do (19:26). Children of God and citizens of his kingdom are those who have been planted by the heavenly Father (15:13), to whom the Son has revealed the Father and the Father the Son (11:25–27; 13:11; 16:17). Whereas they were spiritually dead before, they have a true life now and await eternal life (8:22; Luke 15:24; 18:30). In all Christ's teaching as we find it in the first three Gospels, though the word "rebirth" does not occur, the matter itself is clearly presented. So when in his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus says that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he or she is born anew (from above) of water and the Spirit (John 3:3–8), he is not contradicting his teaching in the other Gospels but briefly and pointedly summing up for the teacher Nicodemus what he has explained elsewhere at greater length and in more popular form. Nicodemus, we must know, was a distinguished man, a teacher in Israel, a member of the supreme council. He had heard of Jesus's miracles and on that basis regarded him a teacher sent by God. But being still in doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah, he went to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews in order to achieve certainty through a confidential interview with him. Nicodemus, accordingly, began the conversation with the admission that he viewed Jesus as a teacher sent by God and endowed by God with the capacity to do his works, and evidently wanted to go on to

ask what one must do to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus, not giving him the time to pose that question, immediately answered: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” [John 3:3 RSV]. And with that answer, he abruptly cut off all human self-effort, all Pharisaic law observance, as the way to the kingdom.

Also, for that reason, Jesus does not speak of being born a second time, literally anew, but of being born from above. He stresses, not that entry into the kingdom requires a second birth (although regeneration can of course be called that), but wants especially to bring out for Nicodemus that only a birth from above (v. 3), of water and the Spirit (v. 5), of the Spirit (v. 8), admits a person to the kingdom. This birth occurs in contrast to that of the flesh, for what is born of the flesh is flesh (v. 6). It is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of humans, but of God (John 1:13). For that reason it is as equally incomprehensible in origin and direction as the wind, but nevertheless possible, for it is a birth of the Spirit (3:8). After first having said in general that it is a birth from water and spirit (both without the article, v. 5), he specifically speaks in verses 6 and 8 of the Spirit (with the article) and that this Spirit, as the Spirit of God, can bring about this great work of regeneration from above. Hence, in speaking of water in verse 5, Jesus is not speaking of baptism, but describes by this term the nature of birth from above. It is a birth that has the character of a renewal, a purification, of which water is a symbol (Ezek. 36:25; cf. the combination of Spirit and fire, Matt. 3:11), and confers the existence of a new spiritual life. And that is something this birth from above can bring about, for it is a birth from the Spirit, who is God himself (John 3:6–8).

[438] The apostles, too, frequently speak of regeneration but describe it in varied terms, sometimes viewing it in a broad, and then again in a narrow sense. James (1:18) says that God of his own will brought us forth (ἀπεκύθησεν; cf. the same word in v.

15: “Sin when it is full-grown brings forth death” [RSV]), that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. This ἀποκυεῖν arises from the will of God, from whom all good and perfect gifts descend, and who offers us the greatest proof of his fatherly love in that he has brought us forth as his people. This came about by means of the word of truth (or just the truth [3:14; 5:19], or the perfect law, the law of liberty, the royal law [1:25; 2:8, 12]), which did not stop outside of or over against us so that we can only hear it, but was planted in us, is written on the tables of our hearts, according to Heb. 8:10; 10:16, and can therefore save our souls (James 1:21). And the goal of this regenerative process is that Christians should be the firstfruits of God’s creation, as the true Israel, the special possession of God, like the people of Israel who existed in the days of the Old Testament (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Isa. 43:21; Mal. 3:17; cf. 1 Pet. 1:23; 2:9) and as such the firstfruits of the kingdom that God will establish throughout his creation (cf. Rom. 8:19–23; Heb. 12:23). Peter uses the word ἀναγενναν, which was not customary in ordinary Greek (though Philo sometimes alternates παλιγγενεσις with ἀναγεννησις, and Porphyry once used the adjective ἀναγεννητικος) and which literally means “to bring forth anew.” Also, Peter attributes this rebirth to God and to his mercy (1 Pet. 1:3) and has it come about by the living and enduring word of God, which is identical with the word of the gospel preached among his readers (vv. 23, 25). But Peter differs from James in that, on the one hand, he links that rebirth to the resurrection of Christ and on the other, to the living hope. The resurrection of Christ, certainly, is the intermediate cause by which God regenerated them to a living hope (1:3). The resurrection and glorification of Christ above all took place so that their faith and hope should be in God (1:21). Believers, as living stones, are built upon him as the cornerstone (2:2–4) and live in communion with him (5:14). They learned of this resurrection of Christ from the word of the gospel, which had been preached among them in the power of the Holy Spirit, who

had been sent from heaven (1:12, 23, 25). As such a word from God, it is living and enduring (1:23).

Whether this living and enduring word of God is identical with the imperishable seed or distinct from it is hard to decide. The use of different prepositions (ἐκ σπορας and δια λογου) is not a decisive argument against the first view, for it can be adequately explained by noting that Peter first expresses the matter in figurative language and then without it. Neither does a comparison with 1 John 3:9 prove the distinction, for Peter uses the word σπορα and John σπερμα. Nor is John by any means speaking of the manner in which, or the means by which, birth from God takes place, but, as the context shows, wants to assert that being born of God and sinning are absolutely mutually exclusive. Those who are born of God do not sin and cannot even sin, because the “seed” of God, which is undoubtedly the new life principle implanted by God in their hearts, remains in them. Peter, on the other hand, aims to show that those who are born again by the living and enduring word of God are called and enabled to purify themselves by obedience to the truth and practicing sincere brotherly love among themselves (1 Pet. 1:22). That which can and must manifest itself so vigorously in life must have its origin in something living and enduring. And that is the imperishable seed of the word of God. The context therefore suggests that “seed” and “word” refer to the same thing, and this hunch is reinforced by the fact that in verses 24 and 25 there is no longer any mention of the seed, and that the flesh, which like grass is perishable, is contrasted only to the word. Now inasmuch as this rebirth is to be attributed to God, who brought it about by the resurrection of Christ and by the living word, it is a rebirth to a living hope. In Peter this train of thought is as it were a single concept. The content of the new life is hope. The life of believers is totally sustained and guided by hope. Hope characterizes their whole lifestyle. In any case it is not a static possession but living, active, and strong. It reaches out and binds believers to the heavenly inheritance (1:4–13). It

also enables them to live a holy life in accordance with Christ's example (1:14ff.). Rebirth-to-a-living-hope is simultaneously a rebirth to a new and holy life.

In the writings of Paul, rebirth is already implicit in the call of which he consistently speaks in an efficacious sense. For that reason the word occurs only once in his writings, in Titus 3:5, where he says that God saved us, not by our own good deeds, but by virtue of his own mercy "through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit," that is, by means of the washing of the rebirth and renewal effected by the Holy Spirit. Some find here an allusion or direct reference to baptism. Others believe that the apostle represents rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit in the image of a bath. The matter itself is not affected by the question, but the first idea is undoubtedly Pauline. Romans 6 is proof of this. When those who are preordained by God are called in time—efficaciously, as Paul himself had experienced it on the way to Damascus—when they, as the apostle puts it elsewhere (Phil. 3:12), have been taken hold of by Jesus Christ himself, then at that very moment they obtain faith and by that faith they receive Justification and the adoption as children (Rom. 3:22, 24; 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:26; 4:5; etc.), with the assurance of sonship by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). But this is not the only change that occurs with them. Those who are efficaciously called are also immediately, by faith, included in fellowship with Christ. They are buried, raised (Rom. 6:3ff.) and made alive with him (Eph. 2:1, 5), and conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Cor. 4:15–16; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19). Christ lives in them and they live in Christ (Gal. 2:20). But since by his resurrection Christ was made a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), one can also say that they received the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 5:5; 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2; 4:6; 5:18), that the Spirit lives in them (Rom. 8:11), and that they live in the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:2, 4–5, 9; etc.). By faith Christ or his Spirit is the author and origin of a new life in those who are

called (Gal. 3:2; 4:6) so that now they are very different, new, and spiritual people. The old has gone; all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). They have passed from death into life (Eph. 2:5; 5:14; Col. 3:1). They have been crucified to the flesh and to the world (Gal. 5:24; 6:14). They themselves no longer live, but Christ lives in them (Gal. 2:20). They are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10). They walk in newness of life, are now temples of the Holy Spirit, and are led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:4; 8:14; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 5:25; etc.). And this entire transformation takes concrete form for them in baptism. For them this is now the great turning point in their lives, the break with all their previous conduct, complete surrender to Christ and his service. But from God's side, baptism is also the seal showing that they are taken up into communion with Christ and participate in all his benefits (Rom. 6:3ff.; Gal. 6:17). So, although the word "rebirth" may occur only once in the works of Paul, materially it is implied there in the efficacious calling by which Christ unites with himself in his death and resurrection those who have been foreknown (Rom. 6:5).

Even more than in Paul, rebirth or regeneration occupies a central place in John. For what is born of flesh is flesh (3:6) and hostile to God. Those who are born only of natural descent (1:13) are of the world (8:23; 15:19) and belong to the world (14:17, 19, 22; etc.), are from below (8:23) and from the devil (8:44), do not comprehend the light of the Logos (1:5), do not receive him (1:11), love the darkness more than the light (3:19–20), do not hear what God says (8:47), do not know God (8:19; 15:21), do not see the kingdom of God (3:3), walk in darkness (12:35), hate the light (3:20), and are the slaves of sin (8:34). Neither can they see the kingdom of God (3:3), believe (5:44; 12:39), hear the Word of God (8:43), come to Christ (6:44), or receive the Holy Spirit (14:17). What is needed, therefore, is rebirth or regeneration. Such an event is a γεννηθῆναι ἀνωθεν ("being born from above": 3:3; cf. 3:31; 8:23; 19:11; of God: 1:13; 1 John 3:9; etc.) of water and Spirit (John 3:5), that is, of the Spirit (3:6,

8), whose cleansing activity is symbolized by water (cf. Ezek. 36:25–27; Matt. 3:11). It is mysterious and marvelous, so that no one knows its origin or essence (John 3:8). In John this event of rebirth, therefore, is not as directly connected with the call as it is in Paul, but viewed rather as a work of the Father, who gave his own to Christ beforehand and leads them to Christ in time. Even before his incarnation, after all, Christ worked in the world as Logos (1:1–13). As light he shone in the world, but the world did not recognize him (1:5, 9–10). He came to his own, to Israel, but his own did not receive him (1:11). But even then his coming was not totally fruitless, for as many as received him already received power to become children of God. And they were such as were born of God (1:12–13; cf. 1 John 5:1). Before people came to Christ and believed in him, they were already of God (John 8:47), of the truth (18:37). They were given to the Son by the Father (6:37, 39; 17:2, 9). He drew them to Christ (6:44), and all those who thus come to Christ, far from being rejected or lost, are preserved by him for eternal life (6:39; 10:28; 17:12). Christ came to bring into the fold those who were already his sheep given him by the Father (10:27), to impel them to hear his voice and follow him, and to gather them into one flock (10:16; 11:52). He came to give those who in a sense were already the children of God (11:52), the ἐξουσία, the right and authority, to become such children [1:12], with a view toward manifesting themselves as such, as people born of God, as τέκνα του θεου, and to show this particularly in brotherly love, in love for those who are similarly born of God (1 John 5:1).

Some scholars mistakenly trace this Johannine teaching to a gnostic dualism.<sup>24</sup> But this dualism is not intrinsic in creation, for all things were originally created by the Logos (John 1:3). The world in general is the object of God's love (3:16). God gave his Son, not to condemn the world, but to save it (3:17; 12:47). By nature all people belong to the world, which hates the light because its works are evil (3:19–20). So then it depends on faith whether a person receives eternal life (3:15–16, 36). That faith is

a “work” (ἔργον, 6:29), a coming (5:40; 6:35, 37, 44; 7:37), an act of receiving (1:11–12; 3:11ff.; 5:43), thirsting and drinking, hungering and eating (4:13–15; 6:35, 50ff.; 7:37). It does not bypass the intellect and will; in fact, only those who want to do the Father’s will can know whether Jesus’s teaching is from God or whether he speaks on his own authority (7:17). Unbelief, therefore, is also attributed to the stubborn will of people (5:40; 8:44). A person remains responsible for it (3:19; 9:41; 12:43; 15:22, 24). God sent his Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (3:16, 36; 6:47; 20:31). By faith, therefore, one receives eternal life, passes from death into life (1 John 3:14), has overcome the evil one and the world (2:14; 5:4), and possesses the anointing of the Holy One (2:20, 27). Perdition is no longer an issue, for Christ preserves his own (John 10:28–29) and the seed of God remains in them (1 John 3:9). Yet believers are still admonished to remain in Christ and in his word (John 15:4–10; 1 John 2:24), that they may manifest the new life that is given to them in doing right (2:29), in self-purification (3:3), in self-preservation (5:18), and in love for God and one’s fellow believers, for God is love (4:7–8; 5:1). For sin continues to cling to believers throughout their lives (1:8). Perfect godlikeness will be their lot only in the future (3:2).

Accordingly, in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, while there is a difference between them in language and manner of presentation, there is essentially complete agreement. Whether rebirth is called the “circumcision of the heart,” the giving of a new heart and a new spirit, “efficacious calling,” a drawing by the Father, or birth from God, it is always in the strict sense a work of God by which a person is inwardly changed and renewed. It has its deepest cause in God’s mercy; it is based on the resurrection of Christ and is brought about in communion with Christ, to whom the Word bears witness, and manifests itself in a holy life. Sometimes, as in John, the words stress that it is the principle of the new life whose consequence

is the faithful hearing and reception of Jesus's words. Sometimes the other side comes more clearly to the fore. Then it is the unfolding and development of that new life that stands out. The two are most intimately intertwined, however, and belong inseparably to the one concept of regeneration. There is one verse, however, in which the word "rebirth" is given a much broader meaning. In Matt. 19:28 Jesus says that at the "renewal of all things," when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, the twelve disciples who had left everything behind and followed him would also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The absence of all further detail is proof that the word that Jesus used in the Aramaic must have referred to something that was well known. And that was in fact the case. Old Testament prophecy, focusing on the end time, already expected a renewal of heaven and earth (Isa. 11:1–9; 65:17–25; 66:22; etc.). This expectation carried over into apocryphal literature and into the faith of the entire Jewish people.<sup>25</sup> The messianic kingdom would also bring with it a metamorphosis in nature and all earthly relations. Jesus confirms this expectation, as also the apostles do later (2 Pet. 3:10–13; Rev. 21:1, 5), and describes the change as a "rebirth." If we link this meaning with the above, it turns out that Scripture speaks of rebirth mainly in three ways: (1) as the principle of the new life planted by the Spirit of God in humans before they believe, (2) as the moral renewal of humans manifesting itself in a holy walk of life, and finally (3) as the restoration of the whole world to its original completeness. Thus rebirth encompasses the entire scope of re-creation from its very first beginning in the heart of people to its ultimate completion in the new heaven and new earth.

## **The Doctrine of Regeneration in Church History**

In the first period of the church, the conversion that was triggered by the preaching of the gospel in the world brought with it a huge external change in the life of everyone who accepted that gospel. It was accompanied by, and revealed its seriousness and truth in, a complete break with either Judaism or paganism and [involved] the act of joining a poor and unsophisticated church of Christ. Baptism cut a deep trench between the past and the present. Hence many people testified again and again to the great turnabout that took place in their lives. They rejoiced in the redemption from their earlier empty walk of life and the freedom of their being children of God, in which they had now been put by Christ. Christians felt themselves to be a unique, chosen people, a new kind of people, new creatures, who in Christ had obtained communion with God and a new and authentic life.<sup>26</sup> Rebirth was an event that they had lived through in their own lives and souls, but the moment they began to think and write about it, the explanation was inadequate. As a rule people confined themselves in their theoretical reflections to the demands of the gospel, faith, and repentance, but did not push through to the inner, hidden workings of the Spirit that lay behind them. Over against the fatalism of paganism, they highlighted the independence and freedom of humans and downplayed their corruption. The work of salvation was confined on God's part to his calling, and when people on their part listened to that call, repented, and believed, they received in baptism the forgiveness of all their past sins. From the very beginning that baptism was central. No distinction was made between the sign and the thing signified. There was little reflection on, and theorizing about, the connection between the two. It was enough for them that the cleansing of the body was at the same time a cleansing of the heart from a bad conscience. Baptism was the great turning point, the radical change, the decisive passage from a sinful past into the holy present. In some sense it was the rebirth itself.<sup>27</sup>

When, having gradually stopped being a missionary church, the church gained its members more from its own children than from among Jews and pagans and for that reason universally introduced infant baptism, people continued to maintain this close connection between baptism and regeneration but had to modify it in important ways. In the case of persons who converted to Christianity as adults, the church could maintain the requirement of preceding repentance and faith, but in the case of children born of Christian parents, this was impossible. They were therefore baptized on the basis, not of their personal faith, but of the faith of the church in whose fellowship they were born. Further, when baptism was administered to adults upon confession of faith, it was a mighty turning point on their life journey, a mortification of the old and a rising to a new and spiritual life. In the case of children, this striking significance of baptism naturally receded into the background, and the regeneration that took place in it was more or less detached from the past and the future. It was no longer a break with the old and the principle of a new life but an infusion of supernatural power that, as the children grew up, could be used for good or for ill. Finally, in looking at regeneration one could more readily focus on the negative than on the positive side of it. For since the infants were not guilty of actual sins, forgiveness, which occurs in baptism and only applies to past sins, could not bear on these either but only on original sin. However, to the extent this original sin was also viewed as guilt, or only as pollution, or even—more tenuously still—exclusively as a deficiency, the meaning of forgiveness in infant baptism shifted its focus to an infusion of a new supernatural power.

In the East, accordingly, baptismal regeneration was especially associated with the implantation of a seed of immortality.<sup>28</sup> In the West, though original sin was first viewed more seriously by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine (et al.), it gradually assumed a negative character as a result of the doctrine of the superadded gift. Hence regeneration lost its real meaning and changed into

Justification. The doctrine of regeneration in Catholicism, consequently, took the following form. To adults after the seven preparations, and to children of believers without any preparation (excepting the negative one of not posing an obstacle), the church, in the sacrament of baptism administered by the priest, imparts infused grace, both justifying and sanctifying grace. This grace delivers the baptized person from guilt and eternal punishment insofar as they rest on him or her on account of past sins, and mortifies the original pollution insofar as it restrains lust and only allows it to continue as a stimulus to sin. Concretely, it consists in a divine quality inhering in the soul, a quality that is materially identical with the superadded gift that has been lost. Hence, it fashions a person into conformity to God, incorporates one into the church as the body of Christ and hence into Christ himself, and enables him or her to perform supernaturally good works and to merit eternal life. Aside from a number of extraordinary cases, this infused grace can only be obtained through the sacrament of the church. Baptism is therefore strictly necessary for salvation and people, consequently, are absolutely dependent on the church and its priest. This is true not only at the beginning but throughout life. For not only do they need the sacrament of penance for venial sins committed later, but they can also again lose the grace received in baptism as a result of mortal sins and regain it only through the mediation of the church. Regeneration is not an enduring good but is continually dependent on human effort, both for its existence and development.<sup>29</sup>

By asserting the principle that humans are justified by grace through faith alone, the Reformation pushed the church aside as mediatrix of salvation and restored the direct connection between the soul and God, subject only to the mediation of Christ and his Word. Consequently, it gave Scripture priority over the church, and the Word priority over the sacrament. But this principle brought with it special dangers and difficulties. For the Anabaptists extended this principle to the point where

they completely rejected the church and the sacraments as means of grace, made regeneration as new life dependent on an active faith and repentance, and therefore admitted people to baptism only on the basis of a personal confession. Luther then backtracked halfway, and Lutherans later unanimously taught that the sacrament indeed presupposes faith and repentance but that, since in the case of children this cannot be expected, baptism operating through the power of the Spirit, which unites itself with the water of baptism, confers on them in advance the grace that the sacrament actually demands and presupposes. Hence, in their polemic against Anabaptists, they turned the argument around. Instead of deciding that infants, inasmuch as they cannot as yet exercise faith and repentance, had to remain unbaptized, they reasoned that they in fact had to be baptized in order to obtain faith and salvation. "Therefore they must be baptized in order that faith and salvation may follow."<sup>30</sup> According to Titus 3:5, after all, baptism is the washing of regeneration, which is especially for children because as a means of grace the Word cannot yet be effective.<sup>31</sup> The grace granted in baptism consists in the gift of faith, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, and it is entirely adequate for children who die in infancy. But in the case of children who grow up to the years of discretion, that grace is tested. For when a person does not appropriate this grace by acts of faith and repentance, it is lost. And even when, through faith and repentance, that person experiences rebirth in the sense of renewal, this new life, along with all the grace received, remains amissible to the end. Thus also for children as a rule (exceptions were made for extraordinary cases),<sup>32</sup> Lutherans on their part made regeneration dependent on baptism and, by implication, on the church. They, too, break up the continuity of the spiritual life by consistently making rebirth amissible and by positing a distinction and a dualism between the primary regeneration, which precedes faith and repentance, and the subsequent secondary regeneration (renewal). In so doing, they ran the danger of reducing the former to a power that enabled people to

believe but that left it in doubt whether they would ever in fact believe.<sup>33</sup>

The theologians of the Reformed persuasion naturally faced the same difficulty and, in addition, found no solution that was satisfactory to everyone. Like the gospel when it was preached in the beginning, and every religious movement that later surfaced within the boundaries of Christianity, the Reformation also had to turn first to adults and hence make the preaching of faith and repentance a priority. By that faith one received regeneration: the new spiritual life. “Our regeneration by faith” is the title of the third chapter of book III of Calvin’s Institutes. But by taking this route, one got into difficulties with the children of believers and their baptism. To escape them, theologians adopted a variety of approaches. They grounded the baptism of the children of the church in the faith of the parents or of the church, in the faith children would exercise in the future, or in a largely undefined covenant of grace in which children were included with their parents. Another approach, illustrated by the examples of John and Jesus, held that the Holy Spirit can work in the hearts of children before they become self-conscious and before their birth. Others based it on the reality, assumed to exist by faith in the promise of the covenant of grace, that the Holy Spirit had wrought in their hearts an established disposition of faith and hence of rebirth (in the narrow sense, as the very first life principle).<sup>34</sup> In the works of theologians, Calvin among them,<sup>35</sup> several of these lines of argument occur side by side, and not one of them is made dominant.

The last-mentioned opinion of a prebaptismal regeneration receives additional support from the thought that the moment faith and repentance are considered in connection with the deep corruption of human nature, one has to go back to a secret internal operation of the Holy Spirit from which they could arise and in light of which they could be explained. In that connection regeneration and repentance had to be distinguished, at least

logically, and the former placed before the latter. But theologians had scarcely expressed the opinion that in the case of infants regeneration precedes baptism before still other objections arose. No one dared to say that this was always and without exception the case; theologians therefore confined themselves to saying that this was usually how it happened. Moreover, one could still with some ground say this of children of the covenant who died in infancy, but the confession of election already made many people speak with caution concerning these children. And with respect to children who stayed alive and grew up, reality frequently offered a different picture from what their baptism would lead one to expect. Theologians, in any case, were forced to adopt the restriction that only elect children were as a rule regenerated before their baptism. And in view of the fact that many baptized persons only come to faith and repentance at a much later age and after years of living in bondage to sin, even this last opinion was too bold for many people. They therefore confined themselves to the general statement that regeneration could take place before, during, or at some time after, baptism.<sup>36</sup>

But beyond this, if regeneration occurred in infancy before or after baptism, in what did it consist? Most Reformed theologians maintained the continuity of the spiritual life. Rebirth in infancy, they said, planted that vital principle in the heart that was continually kept alive by God, later manifested itself in deeds of faith and repentance, and then continued in sanctification. But a fairly large group of Anglican theologians gradually began to make a distinction between “baptismal regeneration” and the later renewal that followed upon faith and repentance. By the former they meant the infusion of spiritual power that in later years enabled the baptized to believe and repent and was therefore dependent on faith and repentance for its continuation.<sup>37</sup> And when the church increasingly fell into decline and conformity to the world, many sought to rescue themselves by making a sharp distinction between an “internal”

and an “external” covenant of grace and by reducing the sacraments to signs and seals of the latter. Baptism neither secured nor presupposed regeneration but only included children in the covenant of grace to the extent that they received through it an assurance of God’s universal love and goodwill and were invited and obligated to accept the gospel and to turn to God in repentance.<sup>38</sup> In that way, just as in Methodism, Pietism, and rationalism, the relationship between regeneration and faith was again reversed. Human beings were obligated, and, according to the increasingly prevailing view, also still possessed the moral strength to believe and repent. The “you must” (“du sollst”) presupposed and demanded the “you can” (“du kannst”). By that faith a person was then regenerated and amended his or her life. In the Enlightenment, finally, people got to the point where they preferred to avoid the term “rebirth” altogether. “Enlightenment,” “culture,” “development,” “moral nurture,” and “amendment of life,” it was said, were greatly superior terms and also materially much more apt.

## **Modern Reinterpretations of Regeneration**

But after the Enlightenment had exchanged the term “rebirth” for that of moral amendment, it was picked up again by idealistic philosophy. Just as this philosophy sought to disentangle itself everywhere from the rule of the intellect and with the aid of speculative reason to track down the deeper meaning in nature and history, so it also strove to bring out the hidden idea inherent in Christian dogmas. Accordingly, words like “Trinity,” “incarnation,” “atonement,” “redemption,” and similarly the word “regeneration” or “rebirth” returned in the vocabulary of Kant and Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and later also in that of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann.<sup>39</sup> Of course, they filled these terms with a meaning that was far removed

from the view of the church. Yet this tie-in with Christian truths remains very remarkable. With respect to the term “rebirth,” what came out in it was the conviction that the moral corruption of humans was much more deep-rooted than in the intellect alone. There is in human beings “a bent toward evil,” and therefore no enlightenment and development was sufficient for their restoration; what was needed was nothing less than a radical reformation, a revolution of their minds, a total reversal in the maxims of their lives and conduct. Kant and Fichte (in his first period) considered such a revolution possible by a free intelligible act of the will. But later, when idealistic philosophy developed in a pantheistic direction, such a rebirth of humans was viewed simultaneously as their own deed and a work of God: it was a “divine transmutation.”<sup>40</sup>

Similar thoughts also occur in later philosophers<sup>41</sup> and have in recent years been developed especially by Rudolf Eucken. According to this philosopher, the spiritual life in humans nevertheless plays a unique role. It manifests itself in the ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful, which it shapes; in the norms in conformity to which it seeks to develop; and in the profuse cultural labors on which it puts its stamp. All these manifestations prove the independence, unity, and freedom of the life of the spirit vis-à-vis the mechanism of nature but at the same time demonstrate the rights of religion. For religion is not a means to happiness but the “self-preservation” and “self-assertion” of the life of the spirit in the power of God. “Religion rests on the presence of a Divine Life in man; it unfolds itself through the seizure of this Life as one’s own nature. Religion, too, subsists in the fact that man in the inmost foundation of his own being is raised into the Divine Life, and participates in the Divine Nature.”<sup>42</sup>

When Christianity acts as a religion of redemption, it by implication assumes the existence of a sharp contrast between what humans are and what they ought to be. It expresses their

inability to reach the summit by gradual self-improvement, and proclaims a transformation and elevation by an immediate intervention of the divine. And this is confirmed by the general experience of the spiritual life. For it shows “how the Spiritual Life is unable to find its necessary self-reliance in the world of ordinary experience; we have seen a breach between genuine spirituality and the world taking place; and we have seen how the effects of all this carry a new world within themselves. In spiritual things every pathway of man leads to a Yea through a Nay, and all toil is in vain without an inner elevation through the energy of an Absolute Life.”<sup>43</sup>

In theology the concept of regeneration was again restored by Schleiermacher. In his thought the concept even became the center of the redemptive order for religion. Specifically, Christianity was not a revealed doctrine, nor a moral code that enjoins activity upon us, but life, personal life in communion with God. In keeping with this, redemption consisted objectively in the impartation of the holiness and blessedness of Christ's God-consciousness, to which regeneration then corresponds subjectively, with the assumption of humans into living fellowship with Christ. When Christ encounters us and vigorously exerts his influence in us, the previously feeble and oppressed God-consciousness is raised up, reinforced, and brought to dominion in us. Within us there then arises a new religious personality who breaks with the old state, starts a new life, and develops and completes it in sanctification. Regeneration, accordingly, is “the turning point at which the earlier life as it were breaks off and the new begins.” Schleiermacher's virtue is that he again included regeneration in dogmatics, understood by it a religious-ethical process of change, and also related it to the person of Christ. But in the process he was not able to disentangle himself completely from the influence of pantheistic philosophy. This is apparent, in the first place, in the fact that, in connection with his view of sin as sensuousness and of Christ's appearance as the rebirth of the

human race, he views the rebirth of the individual as a moment, be it a very significant moment, in the process in which the human spirit, in fellowship with God, elevates itself above and frees itself from the dominion of the sensuous nature. On the other hand, this again carries within itself the consequence that Justification is made dependent on repentance. The assumption into a fellowship of life with Christ, which is regeneration, has two dimensions. On the one hand, it brings about a change in one's relationship to God, which is Justification; on the other hand it consists in a change of life and is called conversion (further differentiated into repentance and faith). The moment a person is reborn, repenting and believing, one no longer as in the past faces God as the Holy and Righteous One but experiences his love and grace and loses the consciousness of guilt and doom by which one was burdened in the past. Regeneration includes a change of consciousness and in that respect is called Justification. But in Schleiermacher's doctrine, there is no room for an objective Justification that precedes conversion, is based on the righteousness of Christ, and is accepted and enjoyed by faith alone.<sup>44</sup>

It was "Mediating Theology" (Vermittlungstheologie)<sup>45</sup> that sought to make provision for the first void by taking sin more seriously (Julius Müller) and by doing more justice to the totally unique divine nature of Christ (I. A. Dorner). But it remained nevertheless true to Schleiermacher's basic idea that Christianity had primarily introduced a new life. It worked this out by saying that what Christ's coming did for the human race, regeneration does for the individual. Christ as Logos was already the life and light of human beings and by his incarnation and further by his resurrection made this life the possession of all humanity. As the central individual he became the head of a new humanity. But this life must also be transplanted from him into the individual human being, which is what happens in regeneration. After Christ by his resurrection and ascension has himself been perfected, he by his Spirit successively guides the individual,

humanity, and the entire cosmos into communion with his divine-human life. He expands his individual life to the dimensions of a universal divine-human life. Regeneration, accordingly, though it does not constitute a transubstantiation, is nevertheless a representation of the divine human personality of Christ in us. By it the personal life of human beings is transformed into a divine-human life—life in its loftiest and fullest reality. And when God looks thus at a person in Christ, incorporated into his fellowship and a participant in his life, he pronounces him or her righteous.<sup>46</sup> In this connection some thinkers even took a theosophical direction and attributed to regeneration a substantial effect on the whole person. Luther had already stated that the real enjoyment of the flesh and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper also renews the body, and that the water of baptism prepares the body for eternal life. Originally these expressions could indeed be given a good sense, but in the circles of Pietism, particularly by Bengel and his pupil Fr. Chr. Oetinger, they were later construed very realistically. By his suffering and death, Christ—it was said—was elevated to become the prince of life, a high priest according to the law of an incorruptible life, and as such possesses the power, by his blood (which he took to heaven with him and with which he sprinkles his own), to impart spirit, life, and glory to a fallen, carnal, and unspiritual nature. Regeneration, accordingly, consists in a process in which an unspiritual, carnal, sin-corrupted, and worldly person, is totally spiritualized, divinized, and glorified in spirit, soul, and body. Serving as a means to that end is the Word, but especially the sacrament, for in the sacrament Christ himself, with his flesh and blood, is present and creates in us an entirely new person, not only spiritually but also physically. Even now already there is being formed in us “a highly refined spiritual body” that will one day manifest itself in its full glory, for corporeality is the end of God's ways and works.<sup>47</sup>

These ideas, which lived on in pietistic circles, again came to the fore in the theosophical speculations of Schelling, von Baader,

Hamberger, and also registered with a number of meditation theologians. In Rothe, regeneration begins with conversion, which is a work of divine grace but also a free human act. In conversion, human beings align themselves with God, lose their consciousness of guilt, and are not only justified but also gain a new life. Regeneration consists in a person's becoming spirit: achieving an absolute union between thought and existence, idea and nature. It starts at a certain central point in one's personality but continues, especially under the influence of the sacraments, in a process of spiritualization until a person's entire organism is spiritualized, and Christ or the Spirit completely indwells him or her.<sup>48</sup> According to Franz Delitzsch, regeneration consists in a work of Christ by which he, who by his resurrection became a life-giving spirit, transforms the antidivine being of human persons into divine being and not only changes our consciousness by faith but also imparts to us his spirit, soul, and flesh, so that around our believing ego a new human-in-process-of-becoming is formed who participates in the divine nature. Regeneration, therefore, is simultaneously an ethical and a substantial restoration of human beings.<sup>49</sup> In this view, which as such already strikes one as strange, the Reformation doctrine of Justification by faith is not given its due and is even switched onto a Roman Catholic track.

Given this defect of the Mediating Theology, which took its cue from Schleiermacher, Ritschl tried to compensate for it when he again put Justification into the limelight, conceived it as a synthetic judgment, and regarded it as a possession of the church.<sup>50</sup> Among the objections that in time were raised against his system, however, was that the individual subjects, in other words, regeneration and mysticism, did not come into their own. Justification, after all, at least the Justification that is once for all pronounced on the church in the gospel of Jesus, becomes a person's own possession when—usually in the way of a Christian upbringing—one joins the church, lets go of all distrust toward God by trusting in the person of Jesus, and in one's moral

calling makes the ultimate goal of God (the kingdom of God) one's own life task. That's really all that can be said about it, for a penitential struggle (German: Busskampf) is far from being necessary for everyone and remains an exception, and the story of how a person comes to the faith is too individual for it to be closely examined and objectively described. It should be sufficient, therefore, to say that those who join the church are justified and born again. The two are essentially identical.<sup>51</sup>

Herrmann similarly equates regeneration with the experience of Justification in the faith. In his book *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*,<sup>52</sup> he aims to eliminate all mysticism from religion. A Christian's communion with God, he argues, in no way consists in any stirrings and impressions of the emotions. If that were the case, such feelings would have to be sought out and cultivated, and the rest of life, such as one's work and occupation, would be slighted as being inferior. Furthermore, religion itself would be robbed of its content, for all mysticism is in the nature of the case monotonous. Communion with God is objectively available to us in the person of Christ. In him, and in him alone, God is present to us, comes to us, makes himself known as a God of grace who forgives sins, enters into communion with us, and effects our moral deliverance. Another kind of communion with God, apart from the historical Christ, does not exist, nor is it needed. If we let the image of Jesus have its impact on our inner lives, if in his person we experience God's forgiving love by faith, we at that very moment and as a result of it become totally new people. We are freed from feelings of guilt, fear, and dread, are assured of God's love, and calmly and courageously proceed to do our moral work. Herrmann, accordingly, does not deny that a transformation has to occur in the "natural man." On the contrary, he emphasizes personal experience and one's personal religious life as strongly as he can. But this transformation is brought about in us by looking up to Jesus, by faith in the love of God revealed in him. A different rebirth, distinct from the one just described and concurrent to it, consisting for example in our

infusion of real power in baptism, does not exist. Faith naturally carries with it rebirth, a new mind-set, and new courage. Regeneration, in fact, is nothing other than faith.<sup>53</sup>

For this reason Kaftan removes regeneration as well as Justification from the discussion of the order of salvation and restores it to the work of Christ. He thus considers regeneration as a benefit objectively prepared for the church in Christ's resurrection. It is only by faith in the resurrection that the individual person gains regeneration.

## **Regeneration: Various Views**

The relation to Justification, though very important, is definitely not the only issue that presents itself in connection with regeneration. Those who expect the problems that occur in this locus and the solutions offered for them to be significantly less numerous than those occurring in connection with the dogmas of the Trinity, the incarnation, atonement, and so forth are in for severe disappointment. The diversity of opinions is so immense that it is hard to gain a clear overview of it. In the first period, when Christianity made its debut in the world, people held to a simple sequence: faith and repentance opened the way to the benefits of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In this connection, they simply aligned themselves with the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. And even now that is still the way the public proclamation of the gospel of Christ proceeds both in the church and on the mission field. It cannot come with the demand of regeneration, but can only call adults to faith and repentance. Every new religious movement, such as the Reformation and later Methodism, therefore begins with the same invitation: as soon and as long as the gospel has to do with adults, faith and repentance are in the foreground. Calvin even made that his starting point and in the order of redemption placed regeneration after faith. Numerous theologians, in all

modalities and every period, refrained from following that pattern in the order of redemption. After treating the calling, they proceed to deal with the loci of faith and repentance.

But as soon as the church has gained an enduring place in the world and awakens to the need for reflection, two objections to this order present themselves. The first derives from the position of the children of believers, who cannot be counted as Gentiles, yet in their infancy cannot in fact believe and repent either. If they all remained alive, the difficulty could be somewhat relieved by the consideration that they would later have the opportunity to repent and believe. But this is not the case: thousands upon thousands of infants die before, during, or shortly after birth.<sup>54</sup> And not only Christian sentiment, but also the scriptural doctrine of the covenant of grace in which not only believers themselves but also their children are included, resists the idea that these children are all lost. Now if no one can enter the kingdom of heaven except by faith and repentance, one is compelled to make a distinction between faith as capacity and faith as act, between conversion in a passive and an active sense—in other words, between regeneration and repentance (faith), and in the order of redemption to have the former precede the latter.

Added to this, there was still another consideration that drove people in the same direction. As long as the church lives by the simple preaching of the gospel and remains a missionary church, it can acquiesce in the calling to faith and repentance. In that situation it confines itself to perceptible phenomena and feels no need to penetrate the underlying reasons for these phenomena. But that cannot last long. Reflection, specifically religious reflection and not just curiosity, inevitably awakens. The Christian church, after all, was convinced from the outset that the salvation it had received was a gift of God. The moment it began to try to account for this fact and to examine Scripture more deeply on this point, it could no longer simply consider

faith and repentance as human acts but had to answer the question of what lay behind these acts, whether they originated in the human will or in the grace of God. It was all the harder pressed to answer it because, both inside and outside the church, it saw so many people grow up who never came to faith and repentance. At that point there was a parting of the ways. Some people—all the followers of Pelagius of earlier and later date—maintained that after the call from God the way of salvation started with human beings, with their acts of faith and repentance, and that these acts therefore ultimately originated in their free will. But Augustine and his followers felt compelled by the witness of Scripture and their own experience to trace the acts of faith and repentance to a prior, internal, and efficacious grace of God, in other words, to regeneration. Thus, not only in the case of infants but equally in the case of adults, regeneration came to be placed prior to faith and repentance.

In reality, however, this separation was far more complex than the contrasting principles would lead one to expect. Many theologians were intent on mediation and moved in this direction by an ethical interest. For if regeneration were totally detached from faith and repentance, it apparently could only consist in a magical infusion of spiritual energy completely independent of the human consciousness and will. For this reason, numerous theologians still today, as many did in the past, place regeneration after faith and repentance and make it more or less dependent on them. In that case one naturally faces the question of how salvation can be said to be a work of God from start to finish if faith and repentance at the same time have to be free acts of human beings. One may try to resolve the difficulty by pointing out that the unconverted can still attend church, listen to the Word of God, and examine the Scriptures. They then can do their best (“do what is in them to do”), for they still possess the ability to apply themselves to grace or the possibility of refraining from active resistance. Finally, in the call or in baptism, they then receive the power to believe if they

want to. Alternatively, one could say that there is no opposition or even distinction between the divine and the human activity, since the two are one and the same thing viewed from two perspectives. It hardly needs saying, however, that all these proposed attempts at reconciliation are futile. If God and human beings are distinct though not separate, one always has to face the question: at the end of all the interactions, who makes the final decision? Who ultimately settles the issue? If it is the human person, then Pelagius is fundamentally correct and the decision concerning what is most important in human history—namely, eternal salvation—rests in human hands. If, however, the last word rests with God and his omnipotent grace, one sides with Augustine and accepts a preceding rebirth (internal grace) in which the human person is passive. In other words, by placing regeneration after faith and repentance, one does not escape the problem but wraps oneself in an insoluble contradiction.

The same thing is true if in the case of the children of believers one wants to hold on to regeneration's dependence on faith and repentance. Of course, in that case it will not do to assume a rebirth in the heart of those children accomplished by the Holy Spirit apart from all means. Neither can one say that the Holy Spirit employs the Word in moving young covenant children to faith and repentance, those who have not yet reached the age of discretion, for "this cannot be accomplished verbally with infants but only with adults who have reached the age of discretion."<sup>55</sup> On this point, accordingly, all Catholics, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and others are agreed. The last group remains consistent even to the point of rejecting infant baptism, though as a rule it assumes the salvation of children who die in infancy and in so doing weakens the doctrine of original sin. But Catholics and Lutherans looked for a solution precisely in infant baptism. While this baptism presupposes nothing, at least nothing more than external privileges (such as being born of Christian parents), it produces much: incorporation into Christ and his body. However, by taking this position they have in a

questionable way changed the character of the sacrament. For while the sacrament was instituted as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace and of participation in its benefits, baptism serves here to introduce children into that covenant and to gain for them the benefits of that covenant. In this process, baptism acquired a power that it cannot possess of itself but that is conferred on it by the Word and Spirit that mysteriously united themselves with the water of baptism. This scenario bears a much more magical character than that which the creators of it sought to escape on ethical grounds. Given this view, it is hard to see why baptism, if it really bestows grace, could not be administered to the children of unbelievers. But this is further than people were prepared to go. Of the original rule that faith and repentance need to precede baptism, Rome has even kept a memory in the doctrine that at least no obstacle is to be posed to the reception of supernatural grace.

Lutherans meanwhile maintained that while the young children of believers do not bring faith to their baptism and were not baptized on the basis of their parents' faith, the Holy Spirit nevertheless worked that faith in their heart by baptism in union with the Word so that they accepted Christ and obtained the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Inasmuch as they accorded logical priority to faith and made regeneration second, they insisted that faith, produced in the heart of children by the Holy Spirit, was an active faith and not an inactive, bare disposition. Naturally they did not deny that in the life of children faith operates differently than in adults. The children's faith was active not with respect to its external activities but to internal activities and the qualities of faith. As such, it was still a faith that put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), received the kingdom of heaven (Mark 10:15), and participated in regeneration and salvation (John 3:5), and so forth.<sup>56</sup> We may not be able to picture this activity of faith in children, any more than that of adults when the latter are in an unconscious state. Still, this is not a sufficient reason to deny an active faith to children. This attempt on the

part of Lutherans thus to remain faithful to the old order of redemption also in connection with infant baptism was, however, gradually abandoned. It proved psychologically difficult to maintain [belief in] an active faith in the case of young children. And since the regeneration granted in baptism still always remained amissible and was frequently lost as a result of unbelief when the children grew older,<sup>57</sup> regeneration actually came down to a combination of the powers of believing.<sup>58</sup>

For all these reasons Reformed theologians gradually came to make a distinction between regeneration and faith (conversion). In the early period [of the Reformation] they also occasionally based the baptism of infants on the faith of the parents or the church, or on their future faith (Calvin, Beza). But soon they pulled back from this position and arrived at the unanimous confession that the children of believers were as much included in the covenant of grace as their believing parents—not only by means of or after, but already before baptism. Thus the Holy Spirit could grant them the grace of regeneration equally well as adults, for regeneration also occurs among adults apart from their will and before faith. There was disagreement over the time at which this regeneration took place in the children of believers. But they agreed that the Holy Spirit could also work in the hearts of children aside from the calling through the Word, and that he did this consistently in the children of believers who died in childhood. They also agreed that the Holy Spirit also frequently did this in the case of children who were born in the church, grew up in it, and later joined it by a personal confession. Therefore, in general the children of believers should, in accordance with the judgment of charity, be regarded as elect and regenerate until from their “talk” or their “walk” the contrary was evident. Hence both in the case of adults and children, regeneration in the restricted sense preceded—if not temporally than certainly always logically—faith and repentance.

# The Nature and Extent of Regeneration

Even greater than the differences over the order and time is the disagreement existing in dogmatics over the nature of rebirth or regeneration. As stated above,<sup>59</sup> the word “rebirth” is also used outside of Scripture and in very different senses. Sometimes it was used to denote the doctrine of metempsychosis (reincarnation), which, coming perhaps from India, penetrated Greece and found ardent advocates in Pythagoras and his school. When, from the end of the eighteenth century onward, the literature of India became known in Europe, Oriental wisdom began to exert strong influence on Western thought. Buddhism and theosophy penetrated Christianity, and along with them the doctrine of metempsychosis was welcomed by many, under the name “rebirth,” as noble divine wisdom.<sup>60</sup> But this Indian rebirth has nothing in common, other than the name, with the Christian doctrine of rebirth. Whereas Scripture means by rebirth an internal, spiritual, and moral transformation that only indirectly influences the body, Buddhism construes it as a countlessly repeated incorporation of souls in a series of different bodies without it effecting any change in the soul itself. And to Buddhists, this repeated reincarnation is not an object of hope and eager expectation but, on the contrary, an object of fear and dread from which they seek to free themselves by the suppression of their consciousness and will.<sup>61</sup> This doctrine of metempsychosis, accordingly, does not belong in this section but will be treated later, in the doctrine of the last things.<sup>62</sup> That is also the case with the meaning of the word “rebirth” (παλιγγενεσια), which occurs, among other places, in Matthew 19:28. The world renewal referred to there can most certainly be described with the word “rebirth” and is also closely associated with the internal, spiritual rebirth of believers, but is nevertheless distinct from it. It is no longer implied in the word “rebirth” as it

is ordinarily used today and will be discussed later in the locus of eschatology.<sup>63</sup>

The Greeks, furthermore, spoke of initiates in the mysteries as the “born-again,” and the Jews similarly described proselytes. This usage seems also to have been followed by Christian authors when they repeatedly applied the word “rebirth” to the act of converting to Christianity and specifically to baptism, the rite in which this passage became visible to all.<sup>64</sup> In this connection one cannot tell either whether, and to what extent, the meaning of the word included an inner renewal of the heart. In the early years of the church the sign and the thing signified always went hand in hand and were not so clearly differentiated as was the case later. In any case, the internal change also automatically implied an external, visible turnabout, the abandonment of Judaism or paganism, and the act of joining the Christian church by baptism. Even today such an objective sense is occasionally attached to “rebirth.” Bishop Waterland, for example, said that regeneration is not “a change of mind” but “a change of stand,” so that even Simon Magus, though he remained in “the gall of bitterness,” could be called “regenerate.”<sup>65</sup> Ritschl, too, spoke of a “state” or “stand” of rebirth [“Stand der Wiedergeburt”].<sup>66</sup>

Akin to this is the view of regeneration held by those who regard the human will as not at all corrupted, or merely weakened, by sin. In that case, as in the thinking of Pelagius, no internal grace is needed or, as in the case of the semi-Pelagians, only an ancillary, cooperating kind of grace. And regeneration, accordingly, need not consist in a renewal of the faculties of intellect and will, in an infusion of new dispositions, but only concerns the operations of those faculties. This was the view of regeneration presented by Socinians, Remonstrants, and rationalists. They were even more or less averse to the word, emphasizing, when they continued to use it, that it was a “figurative way of speaking, whose elements are not to be

pressed, unless we want to fall into many absurdities.”<sup>67</sup> Rebirth is a figurative expression for the “reformation of life as previously lived, according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus”; it only relates to the habits and actions of life. Actually regeneration and conversion are one and the same thing, viewed in the former case from God’s perspective and in the latter from the human perspective.<sup>68</sup>

According to others, regeneration consists in a renewal of the human consciousness. But here again we must distinguish two distinct tendencies. Reformed theologians, like their Catholic and Lutheran counterparts, taught that regeneration not only brought about a change in the actions but especially also in the faculties of a person. As a result of the psychological view that the will always and automatically follows the latest pronouncement of the practical intelligence and with a view toward maintaining the moral nature of humans also in conversion, John Cameron [1580–1625], who for a short while was a professor at Montauban, adopted the view that in regeneration the enlightenment of the mind was sufficient since in consequence the will would automatically be guided in the right direction.<sup>69</sup> The Reformed in the Netherlands almost unanimously opposed this view and stuck with the pronouncement of the Synod of Dort that in regeneration the Holy Spirit not only enlightens the mind but also infuses new qualities into the will.<sup>70</sup> Still, Cameron exerted great influence on the school of Saumur (Amyraut, Cappellus, Pajon) and by his ideas laid the groundwork for the later rationalism.<sup>71</sup> Here, accordingly, regeneration is equated with the illumination that precedes faith. It is also possible, however, to equate regeneration with the renewal of the consciousness that arises from faith or coincides with it. Luther, for example, saw regeneration one moment as the gift of faith and another as the change effected in the consciousness by faith and consisting in comfort, joy, peace, and so forth. “Where the forgiveness of sin is, there is life and blessedness.”<sup>72</sup> This terminology is also

followed in the Lutheran confessions: one moment regeneration is a benefit distinct from Justification and then again the two are equated.<sup>73</sup> Ritschl and his disciples appealed to the latter meaning of the word “regeneration” when they accepted no other rebirth than that which originates by faith. In the Christian, a new life begins with the birth of faith. This faith brings with it a fundamental transformation of the mind, a life in the power of God in place of the incapacity that prevailed till then.<sup>74</sup> And not only the Göttingen school promoted this doctrine but others as well, especially H. Cremer, E. Cremer, and Althaus, who, having adopted it, defended it with vigor.<sup>75</sup>

Overlooked here, however, is the fact that Luther and his followers often speak of regeneration in a different sense and distinguish it from Justification. When they do, it is not just an elevation and renewal of the consciousness resulting from the exercise of faith but specifically an infusion of spiritual energies preceding faith. Catholics in this connection spoke of “infused grace.”<sup>76</sup> Lutheran theologians spoke of “the gift of spiritual life,” “a generous bestowal of the powers of believing and of saving faith,” or “the illumination of our mind and the arousal in our heart of trust,”<sup>77</sup> and the Reformed express themselves along similar lines. But they stressed even more vigorously that not just the actions and not even the faculties alone but also the whole person with all one’s capacities, soul and body, heart, intellect, and will, is the subject of regeneration. Regeneration, therefore, consists in dying to the “old man” that must not only be suppressed but also killed and in the rising of a totally new person created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.<sup>78</sup>

But it struck many that not even this concept of regeneration is deep enough. According to Gnosticism, true redemption consists in the deliverance of the inner self from the bonds of matter. On account of its corruptibility, the body is not susceptible to redemption, and also the soul, which is most intimately bound

up with the body, cannot be purged of its many defects. Redemption, therefore, has a bearing only on the spirit (πνευμα) and is obtained by humans, first of all, through knowledge, but second, also by means of the mysteries, among them particularly a threefold baptism with water, fire, and spirit. These mysteries free the spirit, protect it from evil angels, impart to it heavenly and divine powers, and make it a partaker of the divine nature. Rebirth, accordingly, is at the center of doctrine and cultic worship but is at the same time, as it is in the pagan mysteries, transmuted into a physical process.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in Neoplatonism people sought a most intimate union with the deity by way of purification, illumination, and contemplation; the soul (or the spirit), we are told, is by nature divine but is oppressed by the external world (matter, observation, conceptual imagery, and so forth) and hindered from becoming one with the deity. But when it frees itself from all earthly ties, suppresses all its conceptual images, kills consciousness and will, and turns inward to its own deepest being, it finds God himself there and enters into full communion with him. On this sublime level there is no longer any barrier between God and the soul. The soul has become pure luminosity, spiritualized and divinized. All distinction and separation is gone: God and the soul are one.<sup>80</sup>

These ideas, which are essentially characteristic of all mysticism, also penetrated the Christian church, primarily through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. In part they were taken over and standardized by Rome in the doctrine of the superadded gift, of habitual grace, and of the vision of God in terms of being (per essentiam); and they return in all mystics in Protestantism as well as in Catholicism. Of course, by that time they have all been given a Christian coloring, elaborated by some in a more theistic direction, by others in a more pantheistic direction. But in all cases, they insist on claiming a higher knowledge of God and a more intimate fellowship with God than those that are attainable by the ordinary believer. According to this position,

regeneration becomes an essential participation in the divine nature, a substantial union of the soul with the deity. This reality is expressed in various ways: God voices his eternal word in the soul; he brings forth his Son in us; Christ himself is born in us, just as he was once conceived in Mary; he is born and brought forth in us just as the Son was eternally born of the Father; God so accomplishes the creation of the new creature that he gives up Adam's flesh and blood into death and offers a new heavenly flesh and blood in its place; Christ changes us, not by reparation but by annihilation; he does not bestow another set of qualities but another nature and another being; and to be born again is to become truly Spirit.<sup>81</sup>

When regeneration is thus traced back from the actions to the faculties, and from the faculties to the soul itself, and from the soul to its essence and substance, it naturally and necessarily has to take place in the unconscious. Now in the past, in psychology and hence also in the locus on regeneration, little notice was taken of the unconscious. Factually it was assumed, for the benefit of regeneration was also granted to small children before they became self-conscious. The Holy Spirit, it was said, could also work in their hearts apart from the Word preached. And "although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received unto grace in Christ."<sup>82</sup> Moreover, against the Anabaptists it was stated that believers did not have to know, and could not always know, the time of their regeneration.<sup>83</sup> Rebirth as such, it was said, was not a matter of experience but of faith. "This birth is neither seen nor apprehended but only believed."<sup>84</sup> But ever since Leibniz "the unconscious" has become of great significance both in philosophy and in psychology. The term, however, is unclear and can be taken to mean very different things. If we leave out of account, as being irrelevant here, those workings of our biological, physiological, and negative functions that occur

completely outside of our consciousness and can be known only by intentional scientific research, there still remain essentially two areas that may be treated under the heading of the unconscious.

In the first place, one can list under this heading all those impressions, ideas, passions, desires, and so forth, that at any given moment are not present in our consciousness but that, surrounding it on all sides or more or less dimly hidden beneath the threshold of it, may return to it on some occasion or other by recollection, association, and so forth. Belonging to this storehouse are all those impressions we have accumulated since our early childhood, as well as all those skills and abilities we have acquired by long practice and training. In the second place, the unconscious may also be associated with all those intuitions that strike the consciousness like lightning, have such weighty significance in the lives of geniuses, heroes, prophets, and seers, and also assert themselves in clairvoyance, somnambulism, telepathy, and a wide range of occult phenomena. In the opinion of many people, these phenomena point back to mysterious forces hidden in the human mind or to another spiritual world with which humans are, or can be, in touch.

Depending on whether the unconscious was viewed in the former or the latter sense, modern psychologists of religion presented a different version of regeneration or conversion. In the first case, regeneration was said to occur when concepts, impressions, experiences, and so forth sometimes dating back to one's earliest years, gradually or suddenly returned to one's consciousness as a result of some shocking event, drove out the up-until-then-dominant conceptions and desires, and brought into existence a whole new world of thoughts and ideals. In that case regeneration essentially meant a transformation of one's consciousness. But others found this explanation unsatisfactory, not because it was contradicted by the facts, but because it would deprive religious phenomena of all their validity and

value. Hence they assumed the presence in these phenomena, specifically in conversion, of the operation of an objective supernatural factor that guarantees not indeed the form but the content of these phenomena. All people, after all, interpret the experiences they have in their own way, in their own language and concepts. But the experience itself arises from contact, from a connection, with the supreme reality we call God. And from that connection there comes to people new energy, a new, broader, and richer life. They feel united with that Being, who works throughout the universe and saves both themselves and all the world.

Both explanations of regeneration (conversion) appear to be new and original but are reminiscent of those that have been given to it throughout the centuries, by rationalism on the one hand and mysticism on the other. The former is more deistic, the latter more pantheistic. The former explains everything in terms of the working of the word; the latter goes back behind the word and speaks of the spirit. In the former, regeneration has a purely moral character; in the latter, it is the revelation of a supernatural power. Both interpretations, however, bring out the serious weaknesses inherent in the psychology of religion. If, in accordance with its original intent, this science seeks to be totally unbiased and does not wish to be guided by any a priori conviction, it can, at least to some extent, observe and describe the religious phenomena in question, but it cannot penetrate their inner nature, nor, in the absence of any norm, pronounce itself on their validity and value. It remains embarrassed and powerless as it faces the question of truth. It may perhaps clarify a good many things psychologically, but it has no answer based on logic. Inasmuch as it cannot be content with such a negative outcome—since every science after all is in pursuit of truth—in pursuing its investigations it very soon comes into conflict with the impartiality it initially adopted, views the phenomena in light of certain religious or philosophical convictions, and attempts to offer an explanation that is composed on the basis of

these rather free, subjective, and arbitrary premises. Consequently, and by way of example, conversion then becomes a phenomenon that is on a level with various other alterations of human consciousness, or, equally arbitrarily, is explained in terms of the unconscious inward operation of some supernatural factor. But what conversion really is and, similarly, what faith, prayer, Justification, religion, and so forth really are, neither the psychology nor the philosophy of religion can tell us. Only Scripture can.<sup>85</sup>

## **Regeneration: An Attempt at a Definition**

When we note the many related concepts (calling, illumination, conversion, renewal, purification, sanctification, and so forth), in the midst of which regeneration plays its role in holy Scripture, and observe the many divergent views concerning it occurring in theology, it seems a precarious undertaking to want to furnish a definition of it that can claim general approval. Yet such an attempt does not seem to be impossible.

The theosophical and the eschatological view of regeneration can at once be set aside, since the former does not belong in Christianity and the latter will automatically, based as it is on Matt. 19:28, be considered in the doctrine of the last things.<sup>86</sup> This leaves us actually with only three remaining meanings of the word.

In the first place, one can use it to describe the transformation that begins in the human consciousness as a result of the believing acceptance of the gospel, by which it is relieved of all feeling of guilt and fear and filled with comfort, peace, and joy. This is indeed a great and wonderful transformation and regeneration of human consciousness. Not only Luther and the Lutheran confessions sometimes speak of regeneration in those

terms; this terminology also occurs occasionally among Reformed theologians. Polanus, for example, says that regeneration consists in “mortification” and “vivification,” and that the latter again has two parts: the “gladdening of the conscience” and “spiritual governance.”<sup>87</sup> Yet it is not advisable to describe this change in consciousness with the term “regeneration.” For (1) this is, at least nowadays, an uncommon use of the word; (2) the thing expressed by it will automatically come up in connection with Justification; and (3) one can easily foster by it the misunderstanding that regeneration actually coincides with Justification and ought not to be distinguished from it.

If for these reasons we also reject this meaning of the word “regeneration,” one can still construe this term in a broad as well as a more restricted sense. In the early years of the Reformation, theologians commonly used the word in the broad sense.<sup>88</sup> In that case, regeneration included the total renewal of a person as the renewal was brought about by and out of faith and coincided with repentance (*resipiscentia*, μετανοια, not penitence in the medieval sense). The result was that one moment “regeneration” and another time “conversion” was described as existing in two parts, the mortification of the “old man” and the rising of the “new.”<sup>89</sup> But various causes, already summed up earlier,<sup>90</sup> converged to prompt theologians to view regeneration in a restricted sense and to have it precede faith and repentance. The progress of regeneration after and by faith was then usually given another name (repentance, renewal, sanctification). This terminology gradually spread to the point where today almost nobody identifies regeneration with sanctification. The restricted sense of the word became established, and this makes sense: the word does not include the growth and development of the new life but suggests the genesis or origin of that life. Accordingly, when dogmatics restricts the term to the implantation of the spiritual life, it is giving it a more restricted sense than that in which Scripture usually speaks of

“regeneration” (or “birth from above” or “birth from God”) and must therefore be on its guard not to cite it by its sound alone. This is no objection, however, since the dogmatician uses the language of confession in reference to every doctrine and must base his use of it, not on the sound of words, but on divine revelation.

Regeneration in the restricted sense further requires a distinction between the activity of God by which he regenerates, and the fruit of that activity in the person who is being regenerated; in other words, between active and passive regeneration. In reality both things are closely interconnected and are frequently summed up in the one word “regeneration.” But differentiation is indispensable for a correct understanding here. Regeneration in the active sense, the regenerative activity of God, is only another name for the call: the efficacious call of God. And the connection between the calling in this sense (active regeneration) and regeneration in the passive sense is the same as that between the Father’s speaking and our learning from him (John 6:45), between the Father’s drawing and our following (6:44), between the Father’s granting and our accepting (6:65), between the efficacious offer and our passive acceptance of salvation, between the sowing and what is sown.<sup>91</sup> So in regeneration we must first focus our attention on the activity of God (a subject already discussed in part above in connection with “calling” and to which the following now needs to be added).

Just as “calling” is partly external and partly internal, so the action of God in regeneration includes both a moral and a “hyperphysical” (a provisional term to be explained later) operation.<sup>92</sup> The first-mentioned operation occurs by the agency of the Word, is aimed at the human consciousness (not only theoretical but above all practical reason with the conscience) and through it at the human will. In the preaching of the gospel to adults, especially on the mission field, the

external call is therefore anterior to regeneration, although it may coincide with it in time. Now Pelagians of all stripes recognize no activity of God in regeneration other than this moral suasion. They deem it sufficient for adults because, in their view, the human will is either not at all affected or only weakened by sin, and therefore can, if it wants to, obey this moral suasion. In addition, insofar as it concerns children, this moral suasion is unnecessary because original sin is either totally denied or considered a nonculpable defect.<sup>93</sup>

Among the proponents of this view are indeed those who speak not only of the word of the gospel, the image of Jesus in the Gospels,<sup>94</sup> and so forth but also of the Spirit and his activity and even in a sense have the latter precede the Word. But when speaking of the “Spirit,” they have in mind the holy spirit of community that indwells believers as a body,<sup>95</sup> or the objective divine power (Potenz) in which God imparts himself,<sup>96</sup> or the life orientation and life force that emanated from Jesus’s person and work—as it did from other great men—and continues on in history;<sup>97</sup> but they no longer believe in the Holy Spirit as he participates with the Father and the Son in the same divine being, yet as a person is distinct from them,<sup>98</sup> and therefore they no longer have any room left for a special divine activity in regeneration. The Christian church, however, has consistently—and all the more vigorously as it gained more insight into the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit—assumed a special divine activity in regeneration. Just as, to the extent it became more firmly persuaded of the necessity of internal grace, it confessed all the more decisively and joyfully the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>99</sup> The one thing is inseparably connected with the other. If God is triune, then in addition to a work of the Father in creation and a work of the Son in redemption, there has to be a special divine work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. The Christian church, based as it is on the foundation of the trinitarian dogma, therefore unanimously confessed an “infused” grace. However, whereas Roman

Catholics and Lutherans in the case of infants linked this infusion of grace (regeneration) to baptism, the Reformed learned to see by the light of Scripture that the children of believers are included in the covenant of grace, not by but even before baptism, not on account of their parents by virtue of their natural birth, but with their parents by virtue of divine compassion. In their case, accordingly, regeneration could take place and, in their view, often did take place without the external calling by the Word. External and internal calling, Word and Spirit, the moral and the “hyperphysical” activity of God in regeneration, therefore, in reality frequently diverged rather widely.

It is remarkable, nevertheless, that the Reformed, in their polemics with the Anabaptists, consistently tried to maintain the connectedness of the two and in their confessions, catechisms, and dogmatic manuals, remained steadfastly faithful to the order of calling and regeneration. Even Maccovius, who locates active Justification before regeneration and has faith and passive Justification follow it, nevertheless deals—under the heading of the royal office of Christ—with the external means by which he exercises his government, and has active Justification take place in the gospel (Gen. 3:15) that is made known to us by the Word.<sup>100</sup> And they [Reformed theologians] had good grounds for maintaining this order.

1. When the children of believers are regenerated in infancy, before they are able to hear the word of the gospel, this is always true only for the children of believers; that is, for such children who from their conception and birth are included in the covenant of grace. This covenant of grace, accordingly, precedes their regeneration. It is objectively made ready for them as a gracious ordinance of God. It consists, independently of them, in the gospel and the sacraments; and they are passively incorporated in it and baptized at this time as members of that covenant. The sacrament of baptism would not be a sacrament if

it were not attached as a sign and seal to the Word. The internal calling by which the children are regenerated therefore remains closely tied in with the Word, even though the children themselves do not yet have any glimmering of it.

2. When in dogmatics the person and work of Christ (soteriology) has been treated, one cannot immediately begin in soteriology with regeneration, but must first in some fashion deal (in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit: the covenant of grace, the church, the means of grace, the external rule of Christ, the calling, and so forth) with the way in which and the means by which the objective salvation in Christ is made known in the world and passed down from generation to generation. For if regeneration were objectively detached from the Word, one would not only no longer be able to make any judgments about the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit,<sup>101</sup> but might also draw the obvious conclusion that actually Christ's person and work are not necessary to salvation, and that God may equally well regenerate the sinner aside from Christ by the Holy Spirit alone. At most Christ then remains necessary only to reveal God's name and glory in the world of human consciousness.

3. It is not correct to say without qualification that regeneration is effected by the word of God, that is, by God's power. For although the expression "word of God" not infrequently has that meaning,<sup>102</sup> in 1 Pet. 1:23–25 the apostle obviously has in mind the word of the Lord that had been proclaimed among his readers, and the word by which regeneration is effected—even if one links it only with internal calling—is not after all the word of God in general, not his word in creation and providence, but his word in re-creation, that is, the word that in Christ he speaks in our hearts by his Spirit. In other words, the Spirit who works regeneration is specifically the Spirit of Christ, who has been acquired by Christ and, after Christ himself had completed his work on earth and ascended into heaven, was sent into the church and now lives and works

in it and takes everything from him. This bond is only retained if in one way or another one remains faithful to the order of calling and regeneration, for otherwise the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit end up on two separate parallel tracks.

4. In addition to these arguments, there are still a number of other considerations that, though secondary, are not without significance. When some Reformed theologians preferred to place regeneration before or during baptism, not only in the case of children who die in infancy but also of covenant children who remain alive, this was not a dogma fixed somewhere by the church, but a judgment of charity according to which the church had to view and treat its young children until the contrary was evident from their lives. Complete certainty was and is not obtainable here. In reference to the external call, it must be remembered, furthermore, that it certainly does not occur only as a consequence of public preaching or even by reading and studying Holy Scripture, but also takes place in the simple words spoken in the home by father and mother and heard by the child, and no one can say when and how this word can begin to influence the mind of the children. One must further consider that, though the internal calling or regeneration in order undoubtedly always precedes the saving hearing of the Word of God, as Maccovius 103 correctly asserted, but certainly not always the external hearing, nor the moral influence exerted by the Word on the heart and the mind. God can open human hearts before but also during the hearing of his Word (Acts 16:14). He can make Ezekiel prophesy over dead bones that they shall live (Ezek. 37:14ff.); make Lazarus, upon hearing the voice of Jesus calling him, come out of his grave (John 11:43–44); and call into existence the things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17). And, finally, one should keep in mind that the purpose of calling in general is absolutely not only to bring to faith and repentance those who are born again but also has meaning for all people. There is a universal, a general, and a special call. But this beautiful confession cannot come into its own if the calling is

placed after regeneration and is associated only with the regenerate.

## **Immediate and Irresistible**

For all these reasons the Reformed unanimously held on to the linkage between external and internal calling and hence also to the order of calling and regeneration.<sup>104</sup> They opposed the notion that the division of the call into an external and an internal one was a “division into two separate species” and viewed it as a “division of the whole into its parts and members.”<sup>105</sup> Just as, by taking this position, they turned against the Anabaptists on the one hand, so against Pelagians of all sorts they took the position that the external call and moral suasion by the Word is insufficient for salvation and has to be followed by a special operation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.<sup>106</sup>

This operation of the Spirit was, first of all, called an immediate one. With this term they did not, however, intend to negate what they had earlier said about the connection between the external and internal call, but rather to define their position against two alternative currents. First of all, against the Remonstrants, who held the working of God’s Spirit to be a purely moral one, a working whose fruit was dependent on human assent and compliance. Posted between God’s activity and its effect in the human heart (which is regeneration) is thus the free human will. Over against that position the Reformed said that the operation of God’s Spirit in regeneration is immediate; in other words, that God’s Spirit itself directly enters the human heart and with infallible certainty brings about regeneration without in any way being dependent on the human will. Second, by adopting the term “immediate,” they sided against Cameron and the theologians of Saumur, who deemed the “enlightenment of the intellect” to be sufficient in regeneration and believed that this

enlightened intellect then so impacts the will that, by virtue of its character, it must necessarily follow the intellect. Accordingly, what we have here is an immediate operation of God's Spirit in the human intellect but not in the human will. Over against this Saumurian position the Reformed generally claimed that the Holy Spirit not only impacted the human will through the intellect, but also that it penetrated the will directly and there instilled new habits immediately.<sup>107</sup>

In the second place, if the operation of God's Spirit in regeneration is absolutely independent of the human will, it may be called "irresistible." Augustine already stated: "Aid must be given to the weakness of the human will in order that divine grace may be inexorably and invincibly effective."<sup>108</sup> Materially the Augustinians and Thomists among Catholic theologians, such as the Jansenists, also agreed with this position, for they assume an essential distinction between "sufficient" and "efficacious" grace, seeing the former as conferring the capacity and the latter as conferring the actual willing and accomplishing, and hence taught an infallible activity of efficacious grace.<sup>109</sup> But Rome firmly rejected this doctrine. At Trent it stated that when the human heart has been touched by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, "neither is man himself utterly without doing anything while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet he is not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in his sight."<sup>110</sup> And to remove all doubt and uncertainty concerning the sense of this pronouncement, it declared at the [First] Vatican Council: "Faith in itself is a gift of God, even if it does not work through love; and an act of faith is a work pertaining to salvation. Through this act man freely renders obedience to God Himself by consenting to and by cooperating with His grace, when he could resist it."<sup>111</sup> By that decree the infallible operation of grace is factually denied and the decision about whether a person will be saved or not is made a matter of the human will. From ancient times, that was the

teaching of Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, which in the Molinistic and Congruistic systems of the Jesuits won out over Augustine and Thomas and found acceptance also among the Anabaptists, Socinians, the later Lutherans (et al.),<sup>112</sup> and in the Netherlands by the Remonstrants.<sup>113</sup>

The term “irresistible grace” is not really of Reformed origin but was used by Jesuits and Remonstrants to characterize the doctrine of the efficacy of grace as it was advocated by Augustine and those who believed as he did. The Reformed in fact had some objections to the term because it was absolutely not their intent to deny that grace is often and indeed always resisted by the unregenerate person and therefore could be resisted. They therefore preferred to speak of the efficacy or of the insuperability of grace, or interpreted the term “irresistible” in the sense that grace is ultimately irresistible. The point of the disagreement, accordingly, was not whether humans continually resisted and could resist God’s grace, but whether they could ultimately—at the specific moment in which God wanted to regenerate them and work with his efficacious grace in their heart—still reject that grace. The answer to this question, as is clearly evident from the five articles of the Remonstrants, is most intimately tied in with the doctrine of the corruption of human nature; with election (based or not based on foreseen faith); the universality and particularity of Christ’s atonement; the identification of, or the distinction between, the sufficient call (external) and the efficacious call (internal); and the correctness of the distinction between the will of God’s good pleasure and the revealed will in the divine being. Whereas the Remonstrants appealed to Isa. 5:1–8; 65:2–3; Ezek. 12:2; Matt. 11:21–23; 23:37; Luke 7:30; John 5:34; and Acts 7:51, and to all the exhortations to faith and repentance occurring in Scripture, the Reformed theologians took their cue from the picture Scripture offers of fallen humanity as blind, powerless, natural, dead in sins and trespasses (Jer. 13:23; Matt. 6:23; 7:18; John 8:34; Rom. 6:17; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1; etc.), and

from all the forceful words and images with which the work of grace in the human soul is described (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3, 5; 6:44; Eph. 2:1, 6; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:3; etc.). So they spoke of the efficacy and invincibility of God's grace in regeneration and articulated this truth in a confession at the Synod of Dort.<sup>114</sup>

Third, the activity of God in regeneration was also described as a "physical operation." But there was much controversy over the correctness of this description. People were agreed that the adjective "moral" or "ethical" was too weak and wide open to misunderstanding as well. Just as on the point of human incapacity people had objected to calling it "moral incapacity,"<sup>115</sup> although this incapacity was in no way rooted in the substance of human nature, so in connection with the work of God's Spirit in the human heart, people could not confine themselves to the term "moral." This word, after all, had been used by the Remonstrants to indicate that the operation of grace was dependent on human consent and compliance and therefore resulted only externally in a change of the actions of the will, a reformation of life. And people could be even less content with the word "moral" when later, in the Reformed churches themselves, Cameron and his pupils Amyraut, Testard, Daillé, and Blondel described "particular" or "subjective" grace (which they distinguished from "universal" or "objective" grace) as an "ethical" or "moral" grace and in so doing paved the way for the congruist doctrine of Pajon and Placaesus.<sup>116</sup> But then exactly what was the correct description was hard to say. The Synod of Dort stated that "regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead and the making alive ... is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches."<sup>117</sup> And theologians speak of a "physical" or "hyperphysical," a "real" or "effective," a "persuasive" or

“effective,” a “supernatural” or “divine” working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>118</sup> But whatever word was used, the intent was clear: the working of grace in regeneration is not “simply natural” because it has to do with a rational, moral being, who, however corrupted by sin, nevertheless remains a human being and therefore has to be restored in keeping with that human nature. Neither is this working “simply ethical,” for it is not dependent on the consent of humans but, with divine power, penetrates their inmost being and re-creates them, in principle, according to the image of God. It is therefore in a class of its own, simultaneously ethical and natural (supernatural), powerful and most pleasing.

## **The Remonstrant Objection**

Against this confession of God’s omnipotent and infallibly effective grace in regeneration, the Remonstrants cite a series of Scripture verses that contain all sorts of admonitions and threats and are addressed to the heart and conscience, the mind and the will, of humans. But against this Scripture “proof,” the Reformed are nevertheless consistently in a more favorable position than their opponents. For if one proceeds from the free will and wants to maintain it before all else as the most precious good, one cannot possibly do justice to all those texts that unmistakably teach God’s efficacious and insuperable grace. On the other hand, if one proceeds along theological lines and seeks above all to secure the rights of God, one will still always have room left for the content of the Scripture verses that consistently address and treat humans as rational, moral beings. This is how humans were created by God, this is how they are upheld by his providence, and this is how they are renewed and saved in re-creation. But this is precisely what is denied by the Remonstrants. Their primary objection is always that the doctrine of efficacious and insuperable grace introduces a “natural” coercion into the spiritual life, militates against the

nature of rational beings, renders humans totally passive, and undermines moral freedom and responsibility. Pelagianism, accordingly, is always out to maintain the resistibility of the calling and to let regeneration, conversion, sanctification, preservation, and so forth, depend on a decision of the will. Regenerated and justified are only those persons who voluntarily and antecedently meet some condition—believes, repents, is disposed to keep God’s commandments, and so forth.

In so doing, Pelagianism immediately wraps itself up in countless insoluble difficulties. If humans are by nature capable of meeting those conditions, they are in fact so good that there is no need whatever for regeneration in a scriptural sense. In that case, a moral upbringing and self-improvement are more than sufficient. If humans have to receive the power to accept or reject the gospel in advance by the prevenient grace conferred in baptism or calling, then here too a kind of irresistible grace precedes believing, for preparatory grace is granted to all without their knowledge or consent. Then regeneration actually does occur before the decision of the human will, for “functioning follows being” (*operari sequitur esse*). The act follows the ability to act. The will enabling persons to accept the gospel, according to the Gospel of John, is a renewed and regenerate will existing prior to the act of acceptance. In that case, however, it is impossible to understand how, after all this, a “free” act of volition is still possible. The will, after all, thanks to the good power conferred on it without its consent, has already been determined for good, and is so determined precisely in the same measure as it received the power to make a good choice. The more one construes the will as being weakened by sin, the more power one accords to it in prevenient grace, the more, and to the same degree, its indifferent freedom ceases to exist. In addition, it is unfathomable why such an act of free will is still necessary. For if God has to renew human beings beforehand and irresistibly to the extent that they can choose for the gospel, what purpose does the maintenance of the

indifferent freedom of the will still serve other than again to frustrate God's grace, to render his covenant of grace as shaky and unstable as the covenant of works was before the fall, and to picture Christ as being even more powerless and loveless than Adam? For he has accomplished and acquired everything, but when he wants to apply it, his power and his love bounce off the human will, a will, mind you, that has even been endowed with new energies! Merely to rescue a pseudofreedom attributed to humans, God is deprived of his sovereignty, the covenant of grace of its firmness, and Christ of his royal power.

This would be somewhat understandable if something were gained by it, but in reality one loses everything. Not only is the indifferent freedom of the will saved only in appearance, but in the case of infants this whole doctrine proves inadequate and even merciless. We have to make a choice here: either the grace granted to children is sufficient for salvation and, if they die in infancy, opens the gates of heaven—and in that case they are saved without any contribution of their own and without having made a choice of their own—or it is not sufficient, but in that case all infants who die before they can make a choice are lost, and of the children who grow to maturity, thousands upon thousands apostatize by their own freewill choices.

Pelagianism in its various forms seems to be merciful, but in essence this attitude is nothing other than the mercy of the Pharisee, who does not trouble himself about publicans. In order to save freedom of the will in the case of a few thousand adults—and then only in appearance—it is prepared, proportionately speaking, to abandon millions of infants to damnation. In the final analysis, it remains a riddle what Pelagianism can have against God glorifying his efficacious grace in the lives of sinners.

If it raised the question why God would only grant his grace to many and not to all, it would find a well-disposed response

everywhere. Who has not felt that question rising in his or her own mind and has not been profoundly moved by it? But that question comes back in either case and is answered neither by Pelagius nor by Augustine. All without distinction must rest in the good pleasure of God. Those who confess God's sovereignty are by no means in a less favorable position than the defenders of free will. For, as was shown above, external grace, in the Reformed view, grants to all who live under the gospel at least as much grace as, in the Pelagian view, is granted to them in so-called "sufficient grace," and is judged sufficient by them for making a free choice for or against the gospel. The doctrine of the internal calling does not deprive the external calling of any blessing or benefit that according to Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, or Remonstrants is bestowed in it by God. According to the Reformed view, all those who are externally called remain objectively in the same condition as that in which they are according to other confessions. The Reformed only claim that all that abundant grace for and in humans, if it is not specifically the grace of regeneration, is insufficient to move people to a free and decisive acceptance of the gospel. What is needed to believe in Christ, according to the clear teaching of the Gospel of John, is nothing less than a rebirth, a working of God's power on a par with raising Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:19–20). All lesser grace, however rich and wonderful it may be, is insufficient. A grace that does not regenerate people yet restores their will to the point where they can opt for the gospel is nowhere taught in Scripture and is also a psychological absurdity. Even if their response were wrong (hence a "no"), it would produce absolutely no detrimental change in the condition of those who, according to the confessions of all Christians, will finally perish on account of their unbelief.

In any case the Reformed have the edge over the proponents of free will. The advantage is that God's counsel will stand, that his covenant of grace will not waver, that Christ is the true and

perfect Savior, that goodness will one day triumph infallibly over evil. What serious objections could possibly be raised against that position? If, without our knowledge, we can share in Adam's condemnation—a fact that nobody can deny—why could we not much more, without our knowledge, be received into God's favor in Christ? Certainly this grace is not one that involves force. To speak for a moment in strong language: if this grace did not by virtue of its very nature exclude force and God actually used force, who would in the end have the right or even the desire to complain if by this action he or she were snatched out of eternal perdition and transferred into eternal life? Who would agree with the man who complained that someone had rescued him from mortal danger without respecting his freedom of choice? But it is not so: in the internal calling and regeneration, there is no coercion on the part of God. Not a single godly person, even if one had been snatched like a piece of kindling from the fire, has ever spoken of coercion in connection with the work of grace. It would likely have been their wish that God had more forcefully broken sin in them and made them partakers of salvation and blessedness without their having to travel such a long road of struggle and grief. But that is not how God acts in the work of grace: all coercion is alien to its essence. There is no more reason to speak of coercion here than in connection with a person's birth. It is indisputably the case that the differences among people—in gender, class, privileges, physical strength, gifts of intellect and heart (and so forth)—are not first of all caused by their conduct but come along with their conception and birth. Who has a right to complain if he or she has been apportioned less than others? Who can boast if he or she has been entrusted, not with one or two, but with five or ten talents? Who are so foolish as to throw away the gifts bestowed on them over others, the inheritance that their parents have left them, the treasures of culture available to them at birth because they received them apart from their consent and knowledge, out of pure grace?

If one should wish to call this unequal apportionment in the natural or spiritual domain a kind of physical coercion or dare to charge it with being unjust, one must adopt the theory of Origen and of present-day theosophists that originally all souls were the same and that all diversity is due to the varying behaviors and actions of people. In that perspective only the law of karma prevails in the world, the law of reward based on performance, as it was also set forth and elaborated by nomistic Judaism. But the Christian religion is diametrically opposed to this view. Jesus did not pronounce blessed the self-righteous but the poor in spirit and the meek. He came not to call the righteous but publicans and sinners to repentance, to seek and to save what is lost. The grace of God in Christ, grace that is full, abundant, free, omnipotent, and insuperable, is the heart of the gospel.

## **Becoming Spiritual Persons**

Earlier we made a distinction between active and passive regeneration. Up until now we dealt with the former; now the latter is the focus of discussion. What, in the human soul, is regeneration as such? What is it that is effected and brought forth by the regenerative activity of God in the human heart? Scripture describes this product of the re-creating grace of God with various words and images. It describes it as a circumcised heart (Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:29), a pure heart and a firm spirit (Ps. 51:17), a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone (Jer. 31:33ff.; Ezek. 11:19; 36:25), a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), God's workmanship (Rom. 14:20; Eph. 2:10), a new self (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10 NRSV), a new life (Rom. 6:11; Eph. 2:5; Col. 3:3), and so forth. Noteworthy also is that Scripture pictures regeneration as transforming a human into a spiritual person. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). By regeneration a "natural" human becomes a "spiritual" human (1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 6:1). Believers are together built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices (1

Pet. 2:5). They have spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9) and as spiritual people they discern all things without being subject to anyone else's scrutiny (1 Cor. 2:15). They sing spiritual songs (Col. 3:16) and no longer bear the image of the first man, who was from the earth, a man of dust, and became a living soul; but bear the image of the second who became a life-giving spirit and is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:45–49). They will therefore one day receive a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) that will be like the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). They love the law that is spiritual (Rom. 7:14) and serve in the new life of the Spirit, not under the old written code (Rom. 7:6; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6). All this cannot mean that humans by nature possess only a soul and a body and by regeneration acquire a spirit (πνευμα) as a new component of their being, for also the natural human possesses a spirit (πνευμα) in a psychological sense (Gen. 41:8; 45:27; Zech. 12:1; Luke 23:46; John 11:33; Acts 7:59; 17:16; 1 Cor. 2:11; 5:3; 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; 12:9, 23; etc.). “Spirit” and “soul” are used interchangeably in Scripture. In one place a human is defined as a body and soul, in another as a body and spirit. Sometimes psychological activities and feelings are attributed to the spirit and at other times to the soul. The act of dying is sometimes described as a giving up of the soul, at other times as a giving up of the spirit.<sup>119</sup> But although humans possess a pneuma in a psychological sense, before regeneration they are still “natural” humans who possess no other life than that which they received by way of conception and birth from their parents and which is animated and controlled by sin. To lose this life and to acquire a spiritual life, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus, leaving everything behind to be Jesus's disciples—in a word, to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3, 5).

This Spirit is the Spirit of God, for like humans, God also has a Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11). By that Spirit God created and upholds the world (Gen. 1:2; Pss. 33:6; 104:30), distributes gifts and powers (Exod. 31:3; Judg. 6:34; 14:6), sends and anoints the prophets

(Isa. 48:16; 59:21; Ezek. 37:1) and renews and sanctifies his people (Pss. 51:10; 143:10; Isa. 11:2; 28:6; 32:15ff.; Ezek. 36:27; 39:29; Zech. 12:10). Christ was conceived by that Spirit, and with that Spirit he was abundantly anointed. By that Spirit he accomplished all his work. Consequently he so completely acquired that Spirit that he himself can be called the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 15:45), that henceforth the Spirit of God is the Spirit of his Father, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 10:20; Rom. 8:2, 9; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; Gal. 3:2; 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 3:13), and that he can be fully imparted by Christ to his church (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:4, 33, etc.).

In that early period [of the church] this Spirit, whom all believers receive either in baptism (Acts 2:38) or by the laying on of hands before (9:17) or after baptism (8:17; 19:6), was primarily the author of a wide array of extraordinary gifts and powers, such as glossolalia, prophecy, manifestations, revelations, and miraculous healings, which frequently filled bystanders with fear and amazement (2:7, 37, 43; 3:10; 4:13; 5:5; etc.). But from the very beginning he was, and was gradually recognized—especially by Paul—as being the author of the new Christian life in its totality, of all the benefits that Christ had acquired and were imparted to his church. Jesus himself already stated that the Spirit was the author of regeneration, of the conviction of sin, and of consolation (John 3:3, 5; 15:26; 16:7–11). Immediately after being poured out on the day of Pentecost, he became the giver of boldness in public speech (Acts 4:8, 31), of the power of faith (6:5; 11:24), of consolation and joy (9:31; 13:52). And later, when the extraordinary gifts decreased, his presence and working were especially perceived in that he brought people to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), assured believers of their status as children of God, guided all believers (Rom. 8:14–16; Gal. 4:6), poured the love of God into their hearts (Rom. 5:5), and renewed and sanctified them (1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2). He caused them to bear spiritual fruits

(Gal. 5:22–23), faith, hope, and above all love (1 Cor. 13). He sealed them for the day of promise (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), indwelt their bodies so that the parts of their bodies became instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19) and therefore also made their bodies share in the life that was already granted to them by Christ in the present and would one day be fully manifested in the resurrection (Rom. 8:11; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:42ff.).

Accordingly, having received that Spirit, believers have become very different. They have become new, spiritual people. They are, and live, in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:25), walk according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4), set their minds on the things of the Spirit (8:5), pray in the Spirit (8:26), rejoice in the Spirit (14:17), live under the law of the Spirit (8:2), are led by the Spirit (8:14; Gal. 5:18), and are assured by him of their adoption as children, of the love of God, of peace with God, and of their future glory. Their full adoption as children and the perfect revelation of the new life still awaits them at Christ's appearing (Rom. 8:23; Col. 3:4). But even now already they have received the spirit of adoption as children (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5) and are partakers in that new spiritual and eternal life that flows in upon them from the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:4–11; 8:10; 2 Cor. 4:10). By that Spirit they are in fact most closely united with Christ. To be in the Spirit is the same as being in Christ, and the idea that the Spirit indwells someone can also be expressed by saying that Christ is in someone, for Christ only dwells in our hearts by his Spirit (Eph. 3:16–17; 6:10), and those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to him (Rom. 8:9). The new life is the life of the Spirit but just as much the life of Christ in us (Rom. 6:8, 23; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:4; Phil. 1:21). Believers have been crucified, have died, been buried and raised, set at God's right hand, and glorified with Christ (Rom. 6:4ff.; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12, 20; 3:3; etc.). They have put on Christ, have been formed in his likeness, reveal in their bodies the suffering as well as the life of Christ, and are perfected in him. In a word, "Christ is all

and in all” (Rom. 13:14; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:24; 2:10; 3:11), and they are “one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17). In Christ, by the Spirit, God himself dwells in them (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19).

The life that originates in rebirth can, from the human perspective, be called a life of faith (Gal. 2:20), but objectively it is the life of the Spirit, the life of Christ, the life of God in the believer, and therefore supernatural and miraculous in its origin and essence. Just as the wind blows where it chooses, without letting any human prescribe its course, and just as its sound is heard, but no one can tell where it comes from or where it is headed, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8). The working of the Spirit in regeneration is free, superior to any human attempt at defining its limits, untraceable by and unfathomable to human knowledge. In Christ and by the Spirit, God himself is the origin of the new life (John 1:13; 5:21, 25; Eph. 1:17–19). Just as at the creation the light flashed on only at God’s word of power, so it is he who shines in our hearts in order to make known his glory in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Equally marvelous is the spiritual life in its essence and functioning, for as long as Christ who is the origin and content of it is in heaven with God, so long also the life of believers will remain hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3)—hidden, that is, from the world and still hidden to some extent from believers themselves. Their life is—and on earth cannot be other than—a life of faith. So Christians in their spiritual existence, are a work, a creation, something fashioned by God (Rom. 14:20; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10), born, not of the world but from above, from God, a marvel to others, a miracle above all to themselves.

Finally, we must add that, though the life of the Spirit is most certainly a gift to each believer in particular, at the same time it is from the very beginning a life of intimate communion. The calling proceeds from God (Rom. 8:30). It is the Father who reveals his Son in our hearts (Matt. 11:25; 16:17; Gal. 1:16) and

by his Spirit bestows conversion, faith, and regeneration (John 3:3, 5; 16:8–11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 3:3; 1 Thess. 1:6; Titus 3:5; cf. Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:8; and Phil. 1:29, where, however, no mention is made of the Spirit). But to those who believe, God now further grants the Spirit of consolation, the Spirit of adoption as children, of sanctification (John 14:16–17; Gal. 3:14), just as the Spirit has also been poured out upon the whole church, specifically on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Now this Spirit, whom all believers receive as a permanent possession, is a Spirit of communion—not a community spirit, as Schleiermacher believed, which could equally well be the product as the principle of community—for the Holy Spirit who dwells in the church is the Spirit of God or of Christ and comes from above, is poured out, sent, bestowed, given (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33; Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 3:5; 4:6; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13) and received by believers (Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2, 14; 1 John 2:27). At the same time, however, he is a Spirit of community who not only brings believers individually into communion with Christ and with God but also incorporates and confirms them mutually in that communion. They are all baptized into one body by one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), all have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:18), are together one body and one Spirit (Eph. 4:4), are built together on one foundation into a spiritual house, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:5), and enjoy the same fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 2:1). It is the Spirit of Christ who by his Word speaks continually to the churches (Rev. 2:7ff.) and who, along with the bride of Christ, prayerfully looks forward to his return (22:17).<sup>120</sup>

[448] Surveying this work of the Spirit from Gen. 1 to Rev. 22 and specifically focusing on his regenerative activity, we need not refute the opinion that regeneration is totally or in part a human achievement and exists solely in the moral improvement

of one's life and conduct. Scripture speaks of this salvific benefit in language that is much too strong for us to interpret it purely as an internal change or even as a modification in the focus of one's will and the goal of one's life. If life were no more than an adaptation of internal to external relations ([Herbert] Spencer), or if, in keeping with the assumption of modern psychology, the soul did not exist and there were only psychic phenomena as the product or concomitant of physiological changes, there would be no room for regeneration, or the word would serve to denote only a reconstruction of relations or ideas. The revival of vitalism proves that mechanical theory does not explain life, and while modern psychology may confine itself to the study of psychic phenomena, it is never able to stop there and always returns to a bearer (substrate, subject, or whatever one may call it) of those phenomena, either materialistically to matter, or pantheistically to a substance underlying both thought and extension, or theistically to a principle of life that is distinct from mechanical and chemical forces and has from ancient times as a rule been designated with the word "soul." Life is sui generis, which in the nature of the case we cannot look at from the inside but exists and makes itself known to us in certain specific phenomena (self-movement, self-nourishment, self-propagation). This is also how Scripture speaks of life; but it also refers to another kind of life, the life that is characteristic of the life of creatures, specifically of humans by virtue of their conception and birth. It is a life that can only be obtained and enjoyed in communion with God; includes peace, joy, and salvation; and transcends sin, corruption, and death. It is life that is real and true, blessed and eternal, a life that alone is worthy of the name and can be lived in time and impermanence. But like all life, so a fortiori this highest form of life is not a chemical article, a product of human labor, a fruit of slow and long evolution, but a product only of a creative act of God, a special supernatural operation of God's Spirit.

Thus speaking of the new life, Scripture remains faithful to itself and to its teaching concerning the originally created and fallen humanity. Humans, who originally were the image of God, lived and experienced blessedness in communion with God, lost that life, and were subject in soul and body to corruption. Sin began with an act but penetrated the very nature of humans and corrupted them totally. It may not be a substance, but it is not merely an act either. It is an inner moral corruption of the whole person, not only of one's thoughts, words, and deeds but also of one's intellect and will; and again not only of these faculties but also of the human heart, from which all iniquities flow, of the central inner core, the root of one's existence, the human self. And for that reason, according to Scripture, regeneration consists and can exist in nothing less than the total renewal and re-creation of human beings. If humans are radically evil, then, for their redemption, a rebirth of their entire being is indispensable. A tree must first be made good if it is ever to bear good fruit, for "functioning follows being."

## **Re-formation, Not Re-creation**

At the same time, according to Scripture, regeneration does not exist either in a totally new second creation. In not a single respect does it introduce any new substance into the existing creation. The re-creation does not do this, if we take it in an objective sense and think in that connection of the person of Christ and the work of salvation accomplished by him. For Christ, though conceived by the Holy Spirit, assumed his entire, complete human nature from the flesh and blood of Mary and did not bring it with him from heaven. But neither does re-creation do this in a subjective sense in regeneration, for the people in question are and remain the same persons who were once darkness (Eph. 5:8); dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1); robbers, misers, and so forth (1 Cor. 6:11); and are now washed, sanctified, and justified. The continuity of the self, their entire

human nature with all its capacities and powers, is maintained. Finally also the re-creation that will take place in the renewal of heaven and earth (Matt. 19:28) is not the destruction of this world and the subsequent creation out of nothing of another world but the liberation of the creature that is now subject to futility. Nor can it be otherwise, for God's honor as Savior hinges precisely on his reconquest from the power of Satan of this human race and this world. Christ, accordingly, is not a second Creator, but the Redeemer and Savior of this fallen creation, the Reformer of all things that have been ruined and corrupted by sin. Neither, for that matter, is sin a substance, but consists in lawlessness (*ἀνομία*); it is an actualized privation (*privatio actuosa*) that has indeed violated the form (*forma*) of the entire created world but did not and could not destroy its substance or essence. Hence, when the re-creation removes sin from creation, it does not deprive it of anything essential, nothing that was essentially and originally characteristic of it (though it was "by nature") and belonged to its essence. For sin is not part of the essence of creation; it pushed its way in later, as something unnatural and contrary to nature. Sin is deformity. When re-creation removes sin, it does not violate and suppress nature, but restores it.

Similarly, it does not introduce a new "substance" into a human nature. Regeneration does not consist in an infusion of a new heavenly substance, nor in a communication of the divine human life of Jesus or of the divine life itself such that our spiritual life would be made substantially or essentially homogeneous with it and in a real sense divinized or eternalized. Neither does it consist in a physiological change of our body effected by the implantation of the germ of our spiritual resurrection body. All this is excluded in Scripture by the fact that communion with God and with Christ is always effected and remains in effect by the Spirit: not in a magical or "natural" fashion but in a spiritual and personal way. Those who view the Holy Spirit purely as a supernatural force that descends upon

humans, controlling and impelling them as it were from without, run the danger of regarding regeneration as a pantheistic or theosophical change. But the confession of the Trinity protects us from such a view. It knows of no other union than a union of persons, even if such a union is as close as that between a vine and a branch, between the head and the parts of a body, between a husband and a wife. Regeneration, in a word, does not remove anything from us other than what, if all were well, we should do without, and it restores to us what we, in keeping with the design of our being, should have but lost as a result of sin. In principle it restores us to the likeness and image of God.

But if, on the one hand, regeneration is not merely a reformation of life and conduct and, on the other, not an infusion of some new substance, then what is it concretely? Here, too, as with any other dogma, it is easier to reject an error than constructively to unfold the truth, for in all that God reveals, we finally encounter an impenetrable mystery at the point where the eternal touches the temporal, the infinite the finite, the Creator the creature. That is how it is in the realm of nature but even more so in the realm of grace. No personal experience, no mystical contemplation, no study of the life of godliness, no psychology of religion, pushes aside the curtain of phenomena and situates humans face to face with the Eternal One. On earth that which lies behind the phenomena remains, for others and for ourselves, an object of faith; the spiritual life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). But if we let ourselves be guided by the testimonies of Scripture, we can nevertheless say, with an appropriate degree of modesty, that the whole person is the subject of regeneration. Not only are their deeds and conduct, their life's purpose and direction, their ideas and activities changed, but also humans themselves are transformed and renewed in the core of their being. To describe this process Scripture refers to the heart "from which flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23), in one's consciousness as well as in the emotions and will. If, as Jesus says (Matt. 15:19), it is from the heart that

all evil and incomprehension flows, then that is the center where the change called regeneration must occur. Involved in it are all the constituents, capacities, and powers of human beings, each in accordance with its own nature, not only the lower and not only the higher functions, not only the intellect and will, not only the soul or the spirit, but also the whole person, soul and spirit, intellect, will and emotions, consciousness and feeling share in the blessing of regeneration. Not even the body is excluded from it. Granted, theosophy was on a wrong track when it associated regeneration with an infusion of heavenly powers and an implantation of the germ of the future pneumatic resurrection body, but this should not keep us from extending regeneration also to the body. Paul expressly states that the Holy Spirit also dwells in the body as his temple (1 Cor. 6:19), that the resurrection of the body has to follow because of the Spirit who dwells in it (Rom. 8:11), that spiritual persons make the different body parts into instruments of righteousness (6:13), that the life of Jesus also becomes visible in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), and that glorification is closely tied in with calling and Justification (Rom. 8:29–30; 2 Cor. 3:18). But just as the body is not the seat of sin, but its instrument, so it shares—indirectly—in regeneration and serves as organ of the soul. “The body is regenerated through the medium of the rational soul, for regeneration does not occur in something inanimate.”<sup>121</sup>

Now if regeneration is neither an actual creation (an infusion of substance) nor a merely external moral amendment of life, it can only consist in a spiritual renewal of those inner dispositions of humans that from ancient times were called “habits” or “qualities.”<sup>122</sup> These new “habits” are distinguished, on the one hand, from the Holy Spirit, who effects them but does not coincide with them; they serve, on the other hand, as intermediaries between the essence (or substance) of the human soul and body and the activities that, as people mature and receive the enlightenment of Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit, spring from those “habits” in the intellect, the emotions,

and the will. Hence, though these are new qualities that regeneration implants in a person, they are nevertheless no other than those that belong to human nature, just as health is the normal state of the body. They are “habits,” dispositions, or inclinations that were originally included in the image of God and agreed with the law of God and whose restoration liberates the fallen, sinful human nature from its darkness and slavery, its misery and death. They cannot be described in more beautiful language than what is used in the confession of Dort: “When God carries out his good pleasure in his chosen ones, he, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.”<sup>123</sup>

Regeneration, accordingly, works so little with coercion that it is truer to say that it liberates people from the compulsion and power of sin: it “is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing.” In addition, the Holy Spirit confers on these infused qualities a lasting character: though they are not inherently inamissible and do not owe their permanence to the will of humans, they derive their stability from the communion of the Holy Spirit, who created them, continually preserves and confirms them, and elevates the life that was infused in regeneration to a level above sin, corruption, and death. From its earliest beginnings the spiritual life is eternal life, and the seed that remains in the regenerate is imperishable.

This has been denied by all who make the regeneration that is granted to the children of believers in their youth dependent for its continuity on a decision of the will that they must make later and leads to the distinction between a first and a second

regeneration, between baptismal regeneration and a later spiritual renewal that again depends on the persons themselves. One cannot even stop here but must, in the interest of consistency, proceed to the acceptance of a series of rebirths, all of which can be lost and regained. Hollaz, for example, tried to argue that regeneration can be nullified three, four, or more times and yet regained.<sup>124</sup> By taking that position, we are absolutely misjudging the love of God, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Spirit, as well as the nature of the spiritual life. For this life is essentially distinct from all natural life. It is born of God, flows down to us from the resurrection of Christ, and is from the beginning effected, maintained, and confirmed in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For that reason it cannot sin or die, but lives, works, and grows, and in due time manifests itself in deeds of faith and conversion.

From Reformed Dogmatics (4 Vol.) by Herman Bavinck

## ENDNOTES

1 Synopsis purioris theologiae, disp. 30, 2, 3; P. van Mastricht, Theoretico-practica theologia (Utrecht: Appels, 1714), VI, 2, 15; H. Witsius, The Oeconomy of the Covenants between God and Man, 3 vols. (New York: Lee & Stokes, 1798), III, 5, 7–15; J. Marck, Compendium theologiae christianae didactico-elencticum (Groningen: Fossema, 1686), 17, 10; B. de Moor, Commentarius ... theologiae, 6 vols. (Leiden: J. Hasebroek, 1761–71), III, 386–87.

2 Formula of Concord in The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. R. Kolb and T.J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 481–660. Ed. note: A careful check of the passages cited here by Bavinck in the

Scripture index of The Book of Concord (= Kolb and Wengert below) failed to locate this specific reference. Joseph T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 8th ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1898), 709; ed. note: This specific reference is to Formula of Concord, “Solid Declaration,” art. 11, pars. 24–28 (Kolb and Wengert, 644–45); J. Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, ed. E. Preuss, 9 vols. (Berlin: G. Schlawitz, 1863–75), VII, ch. 7; J. A. Quenstedt, *Theologia*, III, 465–76; cf. also the Remonstrants and others in C. Vitringa, *Doctrina christiana religionis*, 8 vols. (Leiden: Joannis le Mair, 1761–86), III, 167.

3 See also J. Arminius, *Opera theologica* (Leiden: Godefridum Basson, 1629), 661ff.; *The Confession or Declaration of the Ministers or Pastors Which in the United Provinces Are Called Remonstrants concerning the Chief Points of Christian Religion* (1622; repr., London: Francis Smith, 1676), c. 7; ed. note: This is available via Early English Books Online and will henceforth be cited as Remonstrant Confession. S. Episcopus, *Apologia pro confessione sive declaratione sententiae eroum, qui in Foederato Belgio vocantur Remonstrantes, super praecipuis articulis religionis Christianae: Contra censuram quatuor professorum Leidensium* (1629). Ed. note: The *Apologia* can be found in S. Episcopus, *Opera*, III, 88–89, 187–205; idem, *Antidotum*, ch. 9, in *Opera theologica*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Johan Blaeu, 1650–65), II, 2, 38; P. van Limborch, *Theologia christiana* (Amsterdam: Arnhold, 1735), IV, 3, 12–18.

4 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* III, 460 (#405).

5 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, 377 (#242).

6 W. Schmidt, “Die Universalität des göttlichen Heilswillens und die Particularität der Berufung,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 60/1 (1887): 1–44.

7 On the nature and fruits of external calling, cf. the literature on common grace: H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 301ff. (##85ff.); III, 216ff. (##347ff.); W. Twisse, *Guilielmi Twissi opera theologica polemico antiArminiana* (Amsterdam, 1699), I, 660ff.; J. Trigland, *Opuscula* (Amsterdam: Marten Jansz. Brandt, 1639–40), I, 430ff.; II, 809ff.; F. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam: J. Jansson, 1664), I, 97ff.; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. 30, 40–46; G. Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648–69), II, 256; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, VI, 2, 16; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), XV, qu. 2, and also XIV, 14, 51; H. Witsius, *The Oeconomy of Covenants between God and Man*, II, 9, 4; III, 5, 20; J. H. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 2 vols. (Zurich: J. H. Bodmer, 1700), XXI, 9–11; J. Alting, *Opera omnia theologica*, 5 vols. (Amsterdam: Borst, 1687), 187; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, III, 1071; C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), II, 641ff.; W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1888–94), I, 451; II, 482ff.; R. S. Candlish, *The Atonement: Its Reality, Completeness, and Extent* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1861), 169ff.; A. Robertson, *History of the Atonement Controversy in Connection with the Secession Church* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1846).

8 Canons of Dort, I, 4; J. Trigland, *Antapologia* (Amsterdam: Joannam Janssonium et al., 1664), ch. 25ff.; J. Maccovius, *Loci communes* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1658), 699ff.; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, VI, 3, 19–28; H. Witsius, *The Oeconomy of Covenants between God and Man*, III, 6, 9.

9 Remonstrant Confession and *Apologia pro confessione*, XI, 4.

10 Preparatory grace is treated in W. Musculus, *Loci communes theologiae sacrae* (Basel: Heruagiana, 1567), 24; P. Martyr

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11 H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 374ff. (##241ff.); III, 506–12 (##414–15), 564–69 (#427b).

12 *Ibid.*, II, 377–79 (#242).

13 F. H. R. Frank, *System der Christlichen Wahrheit*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. in 2 (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1884), II, 325.

14 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 515 (#416).

15 W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogm. Theol.*, II, 511–28.

16 On Augustinians and Thomists, see H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 514 (#416).

17 Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, ch. 8.

18 Calvin, on Rom. 10:16; *idem*, “Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto” (1547), sess. 6, in *Calvini opera*, VII (CR, XXXV), 480; *idem*, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xxiv.8.

19 A. Polanus, *Syntragma theologiae christianae*, 5th ed. (Hanover: Aubry, 1624), VI, ch. 32; C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 156.

20 H. Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, trans. D. W. Simon and W. Urwick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1895); s.v. *παλιγγενεσια*; P. Gennrich, *Die Lehre von der Wiedergeburt* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1907), 3, 4; Bartlett, “Regeneration,” in *DB*, IV, 214.

21 E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelenkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1898).

22 F. V. M. Cumont, *Die orientalischen Religionen im römischen Heidentum*, trans. Georg Gehrich (Leipzig: Teubner,

1910), 80–82; W. Staerk, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Berlin: G. J. Göschen, 1907), I, 99ff.; J. Felten, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Regensburg: Manz, 1910), II, 542–53; P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 39–41.

23 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 270–74 (#361).

24 J. H. Scholten, *Het Evangelie naar Johannes* (Leiden: Engels, 1864), 89ff.; H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Freiburg i.B. and Leipzig: Mohr, 1897), II, 468ff.

25 F. W. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1880), 38off.

26 See, e.g., Barnabas 6, 11; Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 19–20; idem, *To the Magnesians* 1, 9; idem, *To the Smyrneans* 4; 1 Clement 29, 58.

27 Barnabas 11; 2 Clement 6; Shepherd of Hermas, *Mandate* 4.3. By restricting the matter of forgiveness given in baptism to past sins, it became very difficult to learn what to do with sins committed after baptism. This issue will be dealt with later. For now, cf. K. Lake, “Zonde en Doop,” *Theologisch Tijdschrift* 43 (1909): 538–44.

28 P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 95; R. H. Hofmann, *Symboliek of stelselmatige uiteenzetting van het onderscheidene Christelijke kerkgenootschappen en voornaamste sekten* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1861), 187.

29 The Council of Trent, sess. VI, 4ff.; Roman Catechism, II, ch. 2, qu. 25ff. Ed. note: The post-Vatican II edition titled *The Roman Catechism* (trans. Robert I. Bradley, SJ, and Eugene Kevane [Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1985]) drops the enumeration of the introduction so that ch. 1 begins the section on baptism. In this annotation, the proper reference would be II,

ch. 3, qu. 26ff.; H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 514–17 (#416).

30 J. Gerhard, *Loci theol.*, 1.XX, 195.

31 *Ibid.*, 1.XX, 186.

32 *Ibid.*, 1.XX, 236.

33 H. F. F. Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 7th ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1893), 54.

34 In this connection compare the history-of-dogma study of G. Kramer, a doctoral student in theology at the Free University, on the connection between baptism and regeneration, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*, introduced by A. Kuyper (Breukelen: De Vecht, 1897). This study, though very important, is overly controlled by the attempt to turn Reformed theologians as much as possible into proponents of a prebaptismal regeneration. Admittedly this view is cautiously expressed from time to time by some Reformed theologians, but it is certainly not shared by all.

35 Occasionally Calvin says that the children of believers are already made holy by a supernatural grace before baptism (*Institutes*, IV.xvi. 31), that the seed of faith and repentance is present in them by a hidden operation of the Holy Spirit (*ibid.*, IV.xvi.20), that the grace of regeneration comes to them by virtue of the promise, and that baptism follows by way of a seal (G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*, 145). But it cannot be said with certainty precisely what the force of these expressions is. Caution is needed, for Calvin also says that his own baptism was of no benefit to him so long as he neglected the promise offered to him in baptism (*Institutes*, IV.xv.17); that though God is not dependent on external means, he ordinarily binds us to them (*ibid.*, IV.i.5, 16, 19); that for those who hear the gospel, the word of God is the “only seed of spiritual

regeneration” (ibid., IV.xvi.18); that infant baptism requires no greater force than that it confirms the covenant of grace and that the further meaning of the sacrament follows later (ibid., IV.xvi.21); that for adults God’s word is the incorruptible seed of rebirth, but “when we are not old enough to be taught, God keeps his own timetable of regeneration” (ibid., IV.xvi.31). Also see P. J. Kromsig, “Iets over Calvijns doopsbeschouwing,” *Troffel en Zwaard* 8 (1905): 102–6.

36 Reformed theologians unanimously agreed on the following points: (1) that the benefits of the covenant of grace were usually distributed by God in connection with the means of grace; hence regeneration is in connection with the Word; (2) that God, however, is not bound to these means, and hence he could also take an unusual route and regenerate and save especially young children without the Word; (3) that he, as a rule, worked that way in the case of children of believers who were taken by death before reaching the age of discretion; (4) that the baptized children of believers who were part of the life of the congregation had to be considered elect and regenerate until the contrary was evident from what they said and did; and (5) that this, however, was a judgment of charity, which must indeed be the rule for our attitude toward these children but cannot claim to be infallible. On the other hand, from the very beginning there was disagreement over whether the children of believers, to the extent that they were elect, were regenerated already before, or in, or only after baptism. Some—like Martyr, à Lasco, Dathenus, Alting, Witsius, Voetius, Maastricht—tended to favor the first view. But the majority—Calvin, Beza, Musculus, Ursinus, de Brès, Acronius, Cloppenburg, Walaeus, Maccovius, Bucanus, Turretin, Heidegger, and others—left the question undecided. See also the work of G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*. There is disagreement about the position in the liturgical form for baptism [of the Dutch Reformed Church]; see G. Oorthuys, “Het gebed vóór den doop in ons doopsformulier,” *Troffel en Zwaard* 10 (1907): 351–74.

37 According to G. Voetius, *Select. disp.*, II, 409, certain British theologians (Davenant, Ward, et al.) taught that baptism conferred grace on all children because they were not able to pose an obstacle to it. But children received this grace, consisting in the forgiveness of sins and regeneration, according to their ability to receive it as little children, not in accordance with adult rationality. Accordingly, it did not lead them with infallible certainty to salvation, but obligated and empowered them to believe and repent at a later age. Hence these theologians made a specific distinction between sacramental regeneration and spiritual regeneration. In Tractarianism, this view was revived by Gosham, Denison, Pusey, Newman, and others. Cf. J. C. Ryle, *Knots Untied*, 11th ed. (London: William Hunt, 1886), 132–96; J. Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (1842; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 230ff.; R. Buddensieg, “Traktarianismus,” in *PRE3*, XX, 46–47.

38 In the early years, the “internal” and “external” covenants of grace were not yet very clearly distinguished—in any case, not in these words. Hoping to be able to unite the covenant of grace with election, theologians regarded the fact of children being born within the circle of the covenant of grace as presumptive proof of their election and held to the judgment of charity. But materially the distinction was present from the beginning, in fact already in Calvin (cf. G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*, 119). Among the grounds for infant baptism, the following were also important: that the children of believers belong to the covenant; that they are holy, separated from the world; that they are baptized on the basis of the faith of the parents or of the church; and that belonging to the covenant of grace is sufficient ground for baptism (*ibid.*). Added to this is that the benefits the children of believers receive were viewed and described in very different ways. It was said that the children belonged to the covenant of grace, to the church, to the body of Christ; that they were holy in an objective or also a

subjective sense; that they were offered or granted grace, or the promise, or the adoption, or the right to grace; and that they had or could have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of regeneration, the seed of regeneration, the disposition for the faith, the seed of faith and repentance (G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*, 143, 161, 166, 169, 171, 172, 204, 223, 237, 255, 259, 319, 333). When in the conflict over predestination the distinction between the internal and external covenant of grace was formalized, many authors soon made use of it in their defense of infant baptism (see Donteclock, Damman, Trigland, Gomarus, Maccovius, Voetius, H. Alting; in G. Kramer, *Het verband van doop en wedergeboorte*, 250, 265, 267, 268, 270, 274, 279, 281, 324, 325, 330). In the eighteenth century some theologians took another step in this direction and viewed baptism exclusively as a sacrament of the external covenant (cf. ch. 10, below, “The Spirit’s Means of Grace: Baptism”).

39 The doctrine of redemption held by all these philosophers has already been briefly described in H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 540–55 (##423–26).

40 F. W. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 4 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), IV, 332; idem, “Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände” (*Werke*, I/7, 388). Profound also is Goethe’s saying in the poem “A Holy Longing”: “And as long as you do not possess it / this: die and be reborn / You are only a troubled guest on the dark earth” (translation of Henry Hatfield, Goethe, *a Critical Introduction* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963], 118).

41 Cf. H. Lotze, *Mikrokosmos*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1872–78), III, 361ff.; ed. note: ET: *Microcosmos*, trans. E. Hamilton and E. E. Constance Jones (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1886); M. Carrière, *Dezedelijke wereldorde*, trans. P. C. van

Oosterzee (Utrecht: Kemink, 1880), 328; I. de Bussy, *Ethische Idealisme* (Amsterdam: J. H. de Bussy, 1875), 39ff.

42 R. Eucken, *The Truth of Religion*, trans. W. T. Jones (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), 206.

43 *Ibid.*, 240; cf. also, *idem*, *Hauptprobleme der Religionsphilosophie der Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1907), 83ff.; 95ff.

44 F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacIntosh and J. S. Steward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 106–9; J. H. T. Weerts, "Schleiermachers Lehre von der Wiedergeburt in ihrem Verhältnis zu Kants Begriff des intelligibelen Charakters," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 20 (1909): 400–415.

45 Ed. note: Mediating theology, inspired by Schleiermacher, proceeded from the subjectivity of faith and attempted to join Christian faith with the modern scientific worldview of its "cultured despisers." Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 49 (#9), 127 (#39), 166 (#51), 519–20 (#135), 522–24 (#136).

46 Cf. H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. W. Urwick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 360ff.; F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 8th ed. (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1908), II, 921ff., 945ff.; L. Schöberlein, *Prinzip und System der Dogmatik* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1881), 652, 811. In that case, the emphasis lies, as it did in ancient times in Greek theology, more on the person than on the work of Christ, more on his incarnation than on his atoning death, more on what he is than on what he does. The same idea controls many Anglican theologians. Cf. Ch. Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: Murray, 1909); Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 380–85 (#387).

47 J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1877), on Hebrews 12:24; F. C.

Oetinger, *Die Theologie aus der Idee des Lebens abgeleitet und auf sechs Hauptstücke zurückgeführt* (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1852), 284ff.; Cf. A. Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus in der reformierten Kirche* (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1880), III, 79ff.; P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 186ff.

48 R. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, 2nd rev. ed., 5 vols. (Wittenberg: Zimmermann, 1867–71), 742–76.

49 F. Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, trans. R. E. Wallis, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1875), 381–417. Related ideas on rebirth also occur, in varying degrees, in J. T. Beck, *Vorlesungen über christliche Glaubenslehre*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1896–97), I, 250ff.; \*Rocholl, “Spiritualismus und Realismus,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 9 (1898); \*Rocholl, “Umkehr zum Idealismus,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 15 (1904): 622ff.; K. Lechler, *Die biblische Lehre vom heiligen Geiste*, 3 vols. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1899–1904), I, 79ff.; II, 360ff.

50 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 590 (#432).

51 A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Clifton, NJ: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), III, 170ff., 590ff.; idem, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 3rd ed. (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1886), 36ff., 46ff.; cf. also P. Conrad, “Begriff und Bedeutung der Gemeinde in Ritschls Theologie,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 84/2 (1911): 230–92.

52 W. Herrmann, *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1908), 276ff., 280ff.

53 J. Kaftan, *Dogmatik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 54–55.

54 Although in recent decades mortality rates are regularly going down for all age groups and in all civilized countries, in

the Netherlands the rate in 1908 for infants less than one year old was still 12.48 per 100 born alive, and for children 1–4 it was 15.4 per thousand. See a study on infant mortality made by H. W. Methorst, “Eenige cijfers betreffende de sterfte van kinderen beneden het jaar in Nederland,” *Economist* 58 (Sept. 1909): 665, as well as the article “Sterblichkeit,” in Meyers kleines Konversations-Lexicon, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1892–93).

55 J. Gerhard, *Loci theol.*, 1.XX, 186.

56 *Ibid.*, 1.XX, 227.

57 Quenstedt, *Theologia*, III, 146; D. Hollaz, *Examen theologicum acroamaticum* (Rostock and Leipzig: Russworm, 1718), 883.

58 H. F. F. Schmid, *Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutheranischen Kirche*, 340, 342; C. Vitranga, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 222ff.; Right into our own times, Lutherans have been divided over the nature and role of regeneration. Luther himself sometimes had regeneration follow upon faith, in the sense that faith itself was the rebirth, and at other times had it precede faith, inasmuch as regeneration in paedobaptism coincided with the gift of faith. In the Augsburg Confession, we are sometimes told (art. 20) that we receive the Holy Spirit by faith, hence that regeneration follows faith, and then again (art. 5) that the Holy Spirit works faith and, hence, that regeneration precedes it. No agreement was achieved. In the orthodoxy and pietism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the two views came to be opposed to each other. And this opposition continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ritschl stressed justification, Schleiermacher regeneration. In the works of some, the focus is on personal faith (conversion, moral change), which can only be exercised consciously, and baptism is reduced to a sacrament of calling, approximately in the same way later Reformed folk saw

in it only a sign and a seal of the external covenant of grace. Thus Ritschl, Herrmann, Kaftan, Kirn, Häring, Cremer, Althaus, Kähler, and others. In this connection, some, like Dieckmann, Wendt, and Schmidt, vigorously defended free will. Schmidt, for example, states that for “those who do not want to be saved, there is nothing that can help them, not even the Holy Spirit”; W. Schmidt, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols. (Bonn: E. Weber, 1895–98), II, 431. Others, by contrast, brought regeneration into the foreground and had it take place in baptism. Thus Martensen, Beck, Rocholl, Hofmann, Thomasius, Frank, Lütgert, Hardeland, von Oettingen, et al. In this connection, one again encounters a difference in that some construe baptismal regeneration as being so weak as to necessitate a later personal rebirth (Thomasius, Martensen), while others see subsequent conversion as no more than the appropriation of an antecedent regeneration in baptism (Kahnis, von Oettingen, Frank). Lütgert (*Gottes Sohn und Gottes Geist: Vorträge zur Christologie und zur Lehre vom Geiste Gottes* [Leipzig: A. Deichert (G. Böhme), 1905]) defines the contrast as follows: “One is not regenerated by faith but becomes believing as a result of regeneration.” In Ebrard, a free personal conversion precedes regeneration as the subjective condition, for in it the two are distinguished thus: conversion denotes the change in one’s conscious spiritual life, but regeneration denotes nothing less than a mysterious, mystical impartation of the substance of Christ to the substantial center of the human being (J. H. A. Ebrard, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. [Königsberg: A. W. Unser, 1862–63], II, 308, 314). In this way, Ebrard attempts to maintain the mystical character of regeneration and at the same time to eliminate all magical components from it (Ebrard, *Chr. Dogm.*, II, 323ff., 332ff.). The physical view of regeneration proposed here by Ebrard, an event by which the nature of humans is changed, is rooted in theosophy and, despite its rejection in the Formula of Concord, “Solid Declaration,” II, 81 (Kolb and Wengert, 559–60; Joseph T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher*, 607), occurs in many neo-Lutherans such as Delitzsch,

Martensen, Thomasius, Höfling, Luthardt, et al. Cf. above, 62–63 (#441).

59 See above, 44–46 (#436).

60 Sometimes its proponents try to represent reincarnation also as a Christian doctrine that Jesus himself taught; cf. C. Andresen, *Die Lehre von der Wiedergeburt auf theistischer Grundlage*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Gräfe & Sillem, 1899).

61 P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 275–355; J. S. Speyer, *De Indische Theosophie en hare Beteekenis voor Ons* (Leiden: Van Doesburgh, 1910), 86–93.

62 Ed. note: See below, 705 (#575; = Last Things, 146).

63 Ed. note: See below, ch. 18 (= Last Things, ch. 7).

64 J. C. Suicerus, *Thesaurus ecclesiasticus* (Amsterdam: J. H. Wetsten, 1682), s.v. ἀναγεννησις.

65 C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, 597, 529.

66 A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, III, 590.

67 Thus the Remonstrants at the Hague Conference, according to C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 227.

68 See the various quotations from Socinian and Remonstrant writings in *ibid.*, III, 225–29; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, IV, 782–84; Cf. *Canons of Dort*, III–IV, 3. Also, cf. the views, akin to those of the Remonstrants, of the theologians of the New Divinity School in America, Emmons, Finney, and Taylor, in C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, 7–15.

69 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Roeping en wedergeboorte*, 70ff.

70 Canons of Dort, III–IV, art. 12, “Rejection of Errors IV.” In this connection one can again differentiate between the faculties that are transformed in regeneration or conversion. Depending on whether sin is located more in the intellect, the emotions, or the will, and, accordingly, viewed more as darkness, passion, or aversion from and hostility to God, the emphasis in re-creation is on the enlightenment of the mind, the regulation of the emotions, or the renewal of the will. The picture also differs depending on the way conversion itself is experienced, in keeping with one’s personal sinful state. Even one’s psychology exerts its influence. Melanchthon, for example, in the early period spoke only of the mind and heart (affections) and barely mentioned the will. It was included in and subject to the emotions. As a result, conversion consisted mainly in the infusion of new emotions. Later, when he spent more time with Aristotle and adopted his psychology, he distinguished the will from the emotions, placed the will outside of and above them, gave it a measure of power to regulate and guide them, and even came to the point where he gave it the power, in conversion, to cooperate with God’s grace (synergism). Cf. E. F. Fischer, *Melanchthons Lehre von der Bekehrung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1905), 19ff., 47ff., 97ff.

71 A. Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformirten Kirche*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Orell, Fuessli, 1854–56), II, 235ff.

72 Cf. F. Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed. (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1906), 754ff., 766, 782.

73 Joseph T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher*, 98, 108, 109, 115, 528, 613, 615; ed. note: These specific references are to the following Lutheran documents: Apology of the Augsburg Confession, art. 4, pars. 61–67 (Kolb and Wengert, 130–31); *ibid.*, art. 4, pars. 111–28 (Kolb and Wengert, 139–40); *ibid.*, art. 4, pars. 121 (Kolb and Wengert, 145); Formula of Concord,

“Epitome,” art. 3 (Kolb and Wengert, 495–96); *ibid.*, “Solid Declaration,” art. 3, pars. 16–28 (Kolb and Wengert, 564–66).

74 W. Herrmann, *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*, 267; O. Kirn, “Wiedergeburt,” in *PRE3*, XXI, 246–56, esp. 255.

75 H. Cremer, *Taufe, Wiedergeburt, und Kindertaufe*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1901); E. Cremer, *Rechtfertigung und Wiedergeburt* (Gütersloh: Evangelischer Verlag der Rufer, 1907); P. Althaus, *Die Heilsbedeutung der Taufe im Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1897); \*R. Steinmetz, “Zusammenhang von Taufe und Wiedergeburt,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 13 (1902); E. Wacker, *Wiedergeburt und Bekehrung in ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis nach der Heiligen Schrift* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1893); Cf. P. Rutz, “Taufe und Wiedergeburt mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kindertaufe,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 12 (1901): 585–620; O. Scheel, *Die dogmatische Behandlung der Tauflehre in der modernen positiven Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1906).

76 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 514–17 (#416 and the literature cited there).

77 H. F. F. Schmid, *Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutheranische Kirche*, 340–42.

78 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.5; A. Polanus, *Synt. theol.*, 466ff.; G. Voetius, *Select. disp.*, II, 432ff.; J. Maccovius, *Loci comm.*, 750ff.; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, VI, 3, 6–18; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. 32, 13, 18–19; H. Witsius, *The Oeconomy of the Covenants between God and Man*, III, 6, 4; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, IV, 781; Cf. also, *Canons of Dort*, III–IV, 11.

79 G. Krüger, “Gnosis, Gnosticismus,” in *PRE3*, VI, 733–34; P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 92ff.

80 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 528–31 (#420).

81 See quotes from Eckhart, Tauler, et al. in P. Gennrich, *Wiedergeburt*, 112–20; from Weigel, *De fratres roseae crucis*, Barclay, Deurhof, Pontiaan van Hattem in C. Vitranga, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 229–31, as well as the works of Erbkam, Goebel, H. Heppe (*Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformirten Kirche* [Leiden: Brill, 1879]), and Ritschl. Related ideas occur in the Christian theosophists (cf. above, 66–73 [##442–43]) and in the proponents of conditional immortality. According to Edward White (*Life in Christ*, 3rd rev. ed. [London: Elliott, Stock, 1878], 117): “The very object of redemption is to change our nature, not only from sin to holiness, but from mortality to immortality, from a constitution whose present structure is perishable in all its parts to one which is eternal, so that those, who are partakers of the blessing, pass from death to life, from a corruptible nature into one which is incorruptible in all its parts, physical and spiritual.” Flacius, on the other hand, cannot be put in this category. He did indeed call original sin “the substance of humans” (H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 106–10 [#324]), and if he had meant what this expression implies, he would have had to define also regeneration as an infusion of substance. But over against Strigel, who called sin an “accident,” he wanted to bring out sharply that before God our fallen “substance” and “nature” is a “sin, i.e., something on account of which God is angry with me.” This does not yet make the expression defensible, but his opponents certainly made too much of it. Cf. *Formula of Concord*, esp. “Epitome, I, Negative Theses” (Kolb and Wengert, 89–91); G. Kawerau, “Flacius,” in *PRE3*, VI, 82–92, esp. 88. Many Lutherans, also in the Netherlands, therefore, sided with Flacius. Cf. Dr. J. W. Pont, *De Luthersche kerken in Nederland* (Baarn: Hollandia, 1908), 14, 22.

82 Ed. note: The language Bavinck cites here is taken from the traditional Dutch Reformed liturgy for administering infant

baptism. See Psalter Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), “Liturgical Forms and Resources,” p. 957.

83 J. Calvin, Institutes, III.iii.2.

84 Luther in W. Herrmann, Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott, 278.

85 Many objections against the empirical psychology of religion have been developed in detail in the work of Dr. J. G. Geelkerken, De empirische godsdienstpsychologie (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1909), 273ff.

86 Ed. note: See below, 705 (#575; = Last Things, 146).

87 A. Polanus, Synt. theol., 468.

88 Cf. H. Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, III, 579–84 (#430).

89 Cf. A. Polanus, Synt. theol., 468; and the Heidelberg Catechism, Q 88.

90 Cf. H. Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, III, 579–84 (#430); see above, 55–59 (#440).

91 W. Ames, Marrow of Theology, trans. and ed. J. D. Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), I.26.7ff. (pp. 157–60); G. Voetius, Select. disp., II, 452, 463ff.; J. H. Heidegger, Corpus theologiae, XXI, 61.

92 G. Voetius, Select. disp., II, 449; Cf. H. Bavinck, Roeping en wedergeboorte, 88.

93 P. van Limborch (Theol. christ., IV, 12, 2), accordingly, equates the external with the internal calling: “The internal call is not the power of the Spirit operating apart from the Word but

by the Word and is always present in the Word, so that the calling is in truth one and the same thing but may be called external and internal depending on the viewpoint.”

94 Thus, esp. W. Herrmann, *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*, 45ff. On p. 147 he says, “We must therefore totally reject the idea that God can draw near to the individual soul by letting himself be found in Christ.” On this basis, there is no need for an operation of God’s Spirit in a person. Cf. K. F. Nösgen, *Das Wesen und Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1905–7), 189–94.

95 F. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 123ff., 170ff.

96 F. A. B. Nitzsch, *Lehrbuch der evangelischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.B.: J. C. B. Mohr, 1892), 439.

97 M. W. T. Reischle, *Leitsätze für eine akademische Vorlesung über die christliche Glaubenslehre* (Halle a.S.: Niemeyer, 1899), 105ff.; O. Kirn, *Grundriss der evangelischen Dogmatik* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1905), 105; H. Schultz, *Grundriss der evangelischen Dogmatik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), 91, 103.

98 Reischle (*Leitsätze für eine akademische Vorlesung*, 54), for example, speaks of Father, Son, and Spirit as of three sides or operational modes of God.

99 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 311ff. (#227).

100 J. Maccovius, *Loci comm.*, 647ff., 676.

101 Cf. Formula of Concord, “Solid Declaration,” art. II, ##48–73 (Kolb and Wengert, 553–58); Joseph T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher*, 602.

102 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 401–2 (#108).

103 J. Maccovius, *Loci comm.*, 710–24.

104 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv; A. Polanus, *Synt. theol.*, 448ff.; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. 30; J. H. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, II, 205ff.; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XV; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, IV, 463–65, 469; C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 169, 170–232; cf. also Kleyn, *De zoon Gods onder de wet en het leven van Christus onder de wet* (Sneek, 1901), 57. One must remember, however, that though Reformed theologians regarded this order as the usual one, they nevertheless always also left room for an extraordinary calling: *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. 30, 15, 33; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XI, 1, 10.

105 C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 157.

106 Cf. above, 41–44 (#435).

107 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Roeping en wedergeboorte*, 68–74.

108 Augustine, *On Admonition and Grace* XII, 30; cf. J. Pohle, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, II, 457ff.; J. B. Heinrich and K. Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie*, 2nd ed., 10 vols. (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1881–1900), VIII, 438ff.; C. Pesch, *Praelectiones dogmaticae*, 9 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1902–10), V, 154ff.

109 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 514–17 (#416).

110 Decree of the Council of Trent, VI, 5.

111 Documents of the Vatican Council I, III, 3.

112 Cf. C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 171–217.

113 Remonstrant Confession, art. 17; S. Episcopius, *Apologia pro confessione*, art. 17; idem, *Op. theol.*, III, 88–89, 187–205; P. van Limborch, *Theol. christ.*, IV, c. 13–14.

114 Canons of Dort, III–IV; cf. *Acta Synodi nationalis: In nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi (Dortrechtii: Isaaci Joannidis Canini, 1620)*, 218–24, and the judgments on the third and fourth article of the Remonstrants (pp. 53–219). In addition, see, F. Gomarus, “De gratia conversionis,” *Op.*, I, 85–126; J. Trigland, *Antapologia*, c. 27ff., 365ff.; F. Spanheim, *Dubia evangelica* (Geneva: Petri Chovet, 1655–58), III, 1182ff.; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, VI, 3, 20; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XV, qu. 4–6; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, IV, 496–534; C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 171–217.

115 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 119–25 (#327).

116 C. Vitringa, *Doctr. christ.*, III, 175–80.

117 Canons of Dort, III–IV, 12.

118 J. Maccovius, *Loci comm.*, 696; F. Spanheim, *Opera*, 3 vols. (Lyon: Cornelium Boutestein, 1701–3), III, 1183; P. van Mastricht, *Theologia*, VI, 3, 9, 26; H. Witsius, *The Oeconomy of the Covenants between God and Man*, III, 6, 4; F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XV, 4, 18; B. de Moor, *Comm. theol.*, IV, 496ff.

119 Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 555 (#291).

120 Cf. *ibid.*, II, 272–79 (##216–17); and III, 495–508 (##411–14) and the literature cited there. Add to this also M. Kähler, “Das schriftmässige Bekenntnis zum Geiste Christi,” in *Dogmatische Zeitfragen: Alte und neue Ausführungen zur Wissenschaft der christlichen Lehre*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1907–13), 193–233.

121 J. Maccovius, *Collegia theologica*, 3rd ed. (Franeker: Joannis Fabiani Deuring, 1641), 410.

122 J. Edwards, *Religious Affections* (1746; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 206 (part III, 1), spoke of “principles of nature,” but added “for want of a word of more determinate signification”; cf. J. Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 258ff.

123 Canons of Dort, III–IV, art. 12.

124 D. Hollaz, *Examen theologicum acroamaticum*, 883; M. Schneckenburger and E. Güder, *Vergleichende Darstellung des lutherischen und reformirten Lehrbegriffs*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1855), I, 233ff., 285–439.