

Systematic Theology 4.2

The Mystical Union, Effectual Calling and Regeneration

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*Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption — Section
4.2: The Mystical Union, Calling, and Regeneration*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

Part One: The Doctrine of God

- The Being of God
- The existence of God
- The knowability of God
- Being and attributes
- The names of God
- Attributes in general
- Incommunicable attributes
- Communicable attributes
- The Holy Trinity
- The Works of God**
- Divine decrees
- Predestination
- Creation in general
- The spiritual world
- The world
- Providence

Part Two: The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

- Man in His Original State
- Origin of man
- Constitutional nature
- Image of God
- Covenant of works
- Man in the Covenant of Grace**
- Origin of sin
- Character of sin
- Transmission of sin
- Sin in the human race
- Punishment of sin
- Man in the Covenant of Grace**
- Name and concept
- Covenant of redemption

Nature of the covenant of grace
Its dual aspect
Its dispensations

Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

The Person of Christ
History of the doctrine
Names and natures
The unipersonality of Christ
The States of Christ
Humiliation
Exaltation
The Offices of Christ
Prophetic office
Priestly office
Necessity of the atonement
Nature of the atonement
Theories of the atonement
Purpose and extent of the atonement
Intercession
Kingly office

Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption

Soteriology

Soteriology in general
The Holy Spirit's operations
Common grace

Mystical union

External calling

Regeneration and effectual calling

Conversion
Faith
Justification
Sanctification
Perseverance of the saints

Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace

The Church

Names and history
Nature of the Church
Government
Power
The Means of Grace
Means of grace in general
The Word
Sacraments in general
Christian baptism
The Lord's Supper

Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things

Individual Eschatology
Physical death
Immortality of the soul
Intermediate state
General Eschatology
Second coming of Christ
Millennial views
Resurrection of the dead
Final judgement
Final state

The Mystical Union Calling and Regeneration

IV. The Mystical Union

The mystical union is the vital and spiritual union of Christ and believers. Through it, every saving blessing of Christ is received and applied by the Holy Spirit.

Calvin repeatedly expresses the idea that the sinner cannot share in the saving benefits of Christ's redemptive work, unless he be in union with Him,

and thus emphasizes a very important truth. As Adam was the representative head of the old humanity, so Christ is the representative head of the new humanity. All the blessings of the covenant of grace flow from Him who is the Mediator of the covenant. Even the very first blessing of the saving grace of God which we receive already presupposes a union with the Person of the Mediator. It is exactly at this point that we find one of the most characteristic differences between the operations and blessings of special and those of common grace. The former can be received and enjoyed only by those who are in union with Christ, while the latter can be and are enjoyed also by those who are not reckoned in Christ, and therefore are not one with Him. Every spiritual blessing which believers receive flows to them out of Christ. Hence Jesus in speaking of the coming Paraklete could say unto His disciples: “He shall glorify me; for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you,” John 16:14. Subjectively, the union between Christ and believers is effected by the Holy Spirit in a mysterious and supernatural way, and for that reason is generally designated as the *unio mystica* or mystical union.

A. NATURE OF THE MYSTICAL UNION.

GLOSS **Mystical union:** the intimate, spiritual union of Christ and believers, through which His life and saving benefits are received.

Lutherans generally treat the doctrine of the mystical union anthropologically, and therefore conceive of it as established by faith. Hence they naturally take it up at a later point in their soteriology. But this method fails to do full justice to the idea of our union with Christ, since it loses sight of the eternal basis of the union and of its objective realization in Christ, and deals exclusively with the subjective realization of it in our lives, and even so only with our personal conscious entrance into this union. Reformed theology, on the other hand, deals with the union of believers with Christ theologically, and as such does far greater justice to this important subject. In doing so it

employs the term “mystical union” in a broad sense as a designation not only of the subjective union of Christ and believers, but also of the union that lies back of it, that is basic to it, and of which it is only the culminating expression, namely, the federal union of Christ and those who are His in the counsel of redemption, the mystical union ideally established in that eternal counsel, and the union as it is objectively effected in the incarnation and the redemptive work of Christ.

1. THE FEDERAL UNION OF CHRIST WITH THOSE WHOM THE FATHER HAS GIVEN HIM, IN THE COUNSEL OF REDEMPTION. In the counsel of peace Christ voluntarily took upon Himself to be the Head and Surety of the elect, destined to constitute the new humanity, and as such to establish their righteousness before God by paying the penalty for their sin and by rendering perfect obedience to the law and thus securing their title to everlasting life. In that eternal covenant the sin of His people was imputed to Christ, and His righteousness was imputed to them. This imputation of the righteousness of Christ to His people in the counsel of redemption is sometimes represented as a justification from eternity. It is certainly the eternal basis of our justification by faith, and is the ground on which we receive all spiritual blessings and the gift of life eternal. And this being so, it is basic to the whole of soteriology, and even to the first stages in the application of the work of redemption, such as regeneration and internal calling.

2. THE UNION OF LIFE IDEALLY ESTABLISHED IN THE COUNSEL OF REDEMPTION. In the case of the first Adam there was not only a federal, but also a natural and organic union between him and his descendants. There was the tie of a common life between him and all his progeny, and this made it possible that the blessings of the covenant of works, if these had eventuated, could have been passed on to the whole organism of mankind in an organic way. A somewhat similar situation obtained in the case of the last Adam as the representative Head of the covenant of redemption. Like the first Adam, He did not represent a conglomeration of disjointed individuals, but a body of

men and women who were to derive their life from Him, to be united by spiritual ties, and thus to form a spiritual organism. Ideally this body, which is the Church, was already formed in the covenant of redemption, and formed in union with Christ, and this union made it possible that all the blessings merited by Christ could be passed on to those whom He represented in an organic way. They were conceived of as a glorious body, a new humanity, sharing the life of Jesus Christ. It was in virtue of that union, as it was realized in the course of history, that Christ could say: “Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me,” Heb. 2:13.

3. THE UNION OF LIFE OBJECTIVELY REALIZED IN CHRIST. In virtue of the legal or representative union established in the covenant of redemption Christ became incarnate as the substitute for His people, to merit all the blessings of salvation for them. Since His children were sharers in flesh and blood, “He also in like manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,” Heb. 2:14,15. He could merit salvation for them just because He already stood in relation to them as their Surety and Mediator, their Head and Substitute. The whole Church was included in Him as her Head. In an objective sense she was crucified with Christ, she died with Him, she arose in Him from the dead, and was made to sit with Him in the heavenly places. All the blessings of saving grace lie ready for the Church in Christ; man can add nothing to them; and they now only await their subjective application by the operation of the Holy Spirit, which is also merited by Christ and is sure of progressive realization in the course of history.

4. THE UNION OF LIFE SUBJECTIVELY REALIZED BY THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The work of Christ was not finished when He had merited salvation for His people and had obtained actual possession of the blessings of salvation. In the counsel of redemption He took it upon Himself to put all His people in possession of all these blessings, and He does this

through the operation of the Holy Spirit, who takes all things out of Christ, and gives them unto us. We should not conceive of the subjective realization of the mystical union in the Church atomistically, as if it were effected by bringing now this and then that individual sinner to Christ. It should be seen from the point of view of Christ. Objectively, the whole Church is in Him, and is born out of Him as the Head. It is not a mechanism, in which the parts precede the whole, but an organism, in which the whole is prior to the parts. The parts come forth out of Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and then continue in living relationship with Him. Jesus calls attention to this organic relationship when He says: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing," John 15:5. In view of what was said, it is quite evident that it is not correct to say that the mystical union is the fruit of man's believing acceptance of Christ, as if faith were not one of the blessings of the covenant which flow unto us from the fulness of Christ, but a condition which man must meet partly or wholly in his own strength, in order to enter into living relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith is first of all a gift of God, and as such a part of the treasures that are hidden in Christ. It enables us to appropriate on our part what is given unto us in Christ, and to enter ever-increasingly into conscious enjoyment of the blessed union with Christ, which is the source of all our spiritual riches.

This union may be defined as that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation. That it is a very intimate union appears abundantly from the figures that are used in Scripture to describe it. It is a union as of the vine and the branches, John 15:5, as of a foundation and the building that is reared on it, I Pet. 2:4,5, as of husband and wife, Eph. 5:23-32, and as of the head and the members of the body, Eph. 4:15,16. And even these figures fail to give full expression to the reality. It is a union that passes understanding. Says Dr. Hodge: "The technical designation of this union in theological language is 'mystical,' because it so far transcends

all the analogies of earthly relationships, in the intimacy of its connection, in the transforming power of its influence, and in the excellence of its consequences.”[Outlines of Theology, p. 483.] If the discussion of this aspect of the mystical union is taken up first of all in the *ordo salutis*, it should be borne in mind (a) that it would seem to be desirable to consider it in connection with what precedes it, ideally in the counsel of redemption, and objectively in the work of Christ; and (b) that the order is logical rather than chronological. Since the believer is “a new creature” (II Cor. 5:17), or is “justified” (Acts 13:39) only in Christ, union with Him logically precedes both regeneration and justification by faith, while yet, chronologically, the moment when we are united with Christ is also the moment of our regeneration and justification.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MYSTICAL UNION.

GLOSS **Organic union:** a living union: Christ is the head and source of life for His people, who together form one body.

From the preceding it appears that the term “mystical union” can be, and often is, used in a broad sense, including the various aspects (legal, objective, subjective) of the union between Christ and believers. Most generally, however, it denotes only the crowning aspect of that union, namely, its subjective realization by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and it is this aspect of it that is naturally in the foreground in soteriology. All that is said in the rest of this chapter bears on this subjective union. The following are the main characteristics of this union:

1. IT IS AN ORGANIC UNION. Christ and the believers form one body. The organic character of this union is clearly taught in such passages as John 15:5; I Cor. 6:15-19; Eph. 1:22,23; 4:15,16; 5:29,30. In this organic union Christ ministers to the believers, and the believers minister to Christ. Every part of

the body serves and is served by every other part, and together they are subservient to the whole in a union that is indissoluble.

2. IT IS A VITAL UNION. In this union Christ is the vitalizing and dominating principle of the whole body of believers. It is none other than the life of Christ that indwells and animates believers, so that, to speak with Paul, “Christ is formed” in them, Gal. 4:19. By it Christ becomes the formative principle of their life, and leads it in a Godward direction, Rom. 8:10; II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19,20.

3. IT IS A UNION MEDIATED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Holy Spirit was in a special capacity a part of the Mediator’s reward, and as such was poured out on the day of Pentecost for the formation of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit Christ now dwells in believers, unites them to Himself, and knits them together in a holy unity, I Cor. 6:17; 12:13; II Cor. 3:17,18; Gal. 3:2,3.

4. IT IS A UNION THAT IMPLIES RECIPROCAL ACTION. The initial act is that of Christ, who unites believers to himself by regenerating them and thus producing faith in them. On the other hand, the believer also unites himself to Christ by a conscious act of faith, and continues the union, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, by the constant exercise of faith, John 14:23; 15:4,5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17.

5. IT IS A PERSONAL UNION. Every believer is personally united directly to Christ. The representation that the life which is in the Church through Christ flows from the Church into the individual believer is decidedly unScriptural, not only in its sacramentarian but also in its pantheistic form (Rome, Schleiermacher, and many modern theologians). Every sinner who is regenerated is directly connected with Christ and receives his life from Him. Consequently the Bible always emphasizes the bond with Christ, John 14:20; 15:1-7; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17,18.

6. IT IS A TRANSFORMING UNION. By this union believers are changed into the image of Christ according to his human nature. What Christ effects in His people is in a sense a replica or reproduction of what took place with Him. Nor only objectively, but also in a subjective sense they suffer, bear the cross, are crucified, die, and are raised in newness of life, with Christ. They share in a measure the experiences of their Lord, Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:5; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:24; 2:12; 3:1; I Pet. 4:13.

C. ERRONEOUS CONCEPTIONS OF THE MYSTICAL UNION.

GLOSS Union with Christ: a real spiritual communion with Christ that preserves the believer's person and does not make believers divine.

There are several erroneous conceptions of the mystical union, against which we should be on our guard. Errors on this point should not be regarded as inconsequential and therefore unimportant, for they are fraught with danger for a true understanding of the Christian life.

1. RATIONALISTIC ERROR. We must avoid the error of the Rationalist who would identify the mystical union with the union of Christ as the Logos with the whole creation or with the immanence of God in all human spirits. This is found in the following statement, which A. H. Strong quotes from Campbell, The indwelling Christ: "In the immanence of Christ in nature we find the ground of his immanence in human nature. . . . A man may be out of Christ, but Christ is never out of him. Those who banish him he does not abandon." In this view the mystical union is robbed of its soteriological significance.

2. MYSTICAL ERROR. Another dangerous error is that of the Mystics who understand the mystical union as an identification of the believer with Christ. According to this view there is in it a union of essence, in which the

personality of the one is simply merged into that of the other, so that Christ and the believer do not remain two distinct persons. Even some of the Lutherans went to that extreme. One extremist did not hesitate to say, “I am Christ Jesus, the living Word of God; I have redeemed thee by my sinless sufferings.”

3. **SOCINIAN AND ARMINIAN ERROR.** Quite another extreme is found in the teachings of Socinians and Arminians, who represent the mystical union as a mere moral union, or a union of love and sympathy, like that existing between a teacher and his pupils or between friend and friend. Such a union does not involve any interpenetration of the life of Christ and that of believers. It would involve no more than loving adherence to Christ, friendly service freely rendered to him, and ready acceptance of the message of the Kingdom of God. It is a union that does not call for a Christ within us.

4. **SACRAMENTARIAN ERROR.** Another error to be avoided is that of the sacramentarians, represented by the Roman Catholic Church and by some Lutherans and High Church Episcopalians. Strong speaks of this as “perhaps the most pernicious misinterpretation of the nature of this union.” It makes the grace of God something substantial, of which the Church is the depository, and which can be passed on in the sacraments; and completely loses sight of the fact that the sacraments cannot effect this union, because they already presuppose it.

D. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MYSTICAL UNION.

GLOSS **Justification and union:** Christ’s righteousness is freely imputed to believers; union with Him brings its saving power into their lived experience.

1. The mystical union in the sense in which we are now speaking of it is not the judicial ground, on the basis of which we become partakers of the riches

that are in Christ. It is sometimes said that the merits of Christ cannot be imputed to us as long as we are not in Christ, since it is only on the basis of our oneness with Him that such an imputation could be reasonable. But this view fails to distinguish between our legal unity with Christ and our spiritual oneness with Him, and is a falsification of the fundamental element in the doctrine of redemption, namely, of the doctrine of justification. Justification is always a declaration of God, not on the basis of an existing condition, but on that of a gracious imputation, — a declaration which is not in harmony with the existing condition of the sinner. The judicial ground for all the special grace which we receive lies in the fact that the righteousness of Christ is freely imputed to us.

2. But this state of affairs, namely, that the sinner has nothing in himself and receives everything freely from Christ, must be reflected in the consciousness of the sinner. And this takes place through the mediation of the mystical union. While the union is effected when the sinner is renewed by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he does not become cognizant of it and does not actively cultivate it until the conscious operation of faith begins. Then he becomes aware of the fact that he has no righteousness of his own, and that the righteousness by which he appears just in the sight of God is imputed to him. But even so something additional is required. The sinner must feel his dependence on Christ in the very depths of his being, — in the sub-conscious life. Hence he is incorporated in Christ, and as a result experiences that all the grace which he receives flows from Christ. The constant feeling of dependence thus engendered, is an antidote against all self-righteousness.

3. The mystical union with Christ also secures for the believer the continuously transforming power of the life of Christ, not only in the soul but also in the body. The soul is gradually renewed in the image of Christ, as Paul expresses it, “from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” II Cor. 3:18. And the body is consecrated in the present to be a fit instrument of the renewed soul, and will at last be raised up in the likeness of Christ’s glorified

body, Phil. 3:21. Being in Christ, believers share in all the blessings which He merited for his people. He is for them a perennial fountain springing into everlasting life.

4. In virtue of this union believers have fellowship with Christ. Just as Christ shared the labours, the sufferings, and the temptations of His people, they are now made to share His experiences. His sufferings are, in a measure, reproduced and completed in the lives of His followers. They are crucified with Him, and also arise with Him in newness of life. The final triumph of Christ also becomes their triumph. Rom. 6:5,8; 8:17; II Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:10; I Pet. 4:13.

5. Finally, the union of believers with Christ furnishes the basis for the spiritual unity of all believers, and consequently for the communion of the saints. They are animated by the same spirit, are filled with the same love, stand in the same faith, are engaged in the same warfare, and are bound for the same goal. Together they are interested in the things of Christ and His Church, of God and His Kingdom. John 17:20,21; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:15; Eph. 4:2,3; Col. 3:16; I Thess. 4:18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24,25; Jas. 5:16; I John 1:3,7.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What is the meaning of the term ‘mystical’ as applied to the union with Christ? What is the relation between grace in the legal, and that in the moral sphere? How should we answer the contention that the sinner cannot become a participant in the blessings of God’s special grace until he is subjectively incorporated in Christ? What can be said in reply to the assertion that faith precedes regeneration, because it effects the union with Christ, while regeneration is the fruit of this union? Does the mystical union suppress or does it preserve the personality of man? Cf. Eph. 4:13. Do all believers derive equal benefits from this union? If this union is indissoluble, how must John 15:1-7 be understood? What is Schleiermacher’s conception of the believer’s union with Christ?

V. Calling in General and External Calling

God calls sinners through the gospel to repent and believe in Christ. This outward call is sincere and is the means by which God gathers His elect.

A. REASONS FOR DISCUSSING CALLING FIRST.

GLOSS Calling: God's summons through the gospel, inviting sinners to repentance, faith, and the salvation found in Christ.

The question of the relative order of calling and regeneration has frequently been discussed, and the discussion has often suffered from a lack of discrimination and a resulting misunderstanding. The terms “calling” and “regeneration” were not always used in the same sense. Consequently, it was possible to maintain, without inconsistency, on the one hand that calling precedes regeneration, and on the other, that regeneration is prior to calling. We shall briefly consider (1) the representations found in Scripture and in our confessional standards; (2) the order generally followed by Reformed theologians; and (3) the reasons that may be advanced in favor of a separate discussion of the external calling through the Word, as preceding both regeneration and internal calling.

1. THE BIBLICAL REPRESENTATION. The Biblical order is chiefly indicated in a few well known passages. There is first of all the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14. While Ezekiel prophesied over the dry bones of the house of Israel, the breath of life came into them. This passage refers to the civil restoration and the spiritual revival of the house of Israel, and probably also contains a hint respecting the resurrection of its dead. It represents the prophetic word as preceding the origin of the new life of the people of Israel. Naturally, this does not yet mean that the former was causally related to the latter. . . . A very instructive passage is found in Acts 16:14, which speaks of

the conversion of Lydia. During the preaching of Paul the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to give heed to the things that were spoken by the apostle. It is clearly intimated that the opening of the heart is preceded by the external, and is followed by the internal calling. The unity of the twofold calling is clearly seen. . . . The statement of Paul in Rom. 4:17 is also frequently quoted in this connection, but can hardly be considered relevant, because it does not refer to either the external or the internal calling by the preaching of the Word of God, but either to the creative fiat of God, by which things are called into being, or to His command issued to things that are not, as though they were, and reaching even the dead. . . . Another passage is found in James 1:18, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” It can hardly be doubted that the word of truth mentioned here is the word of preaching, and the assumption is that this word precedes the new birth and is in some sense instrumental to it. . . . And, finally, there is a well known passage in I Pet. 1:23, in which the apostle speaks of believers as “having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth.” In view of verse 25 the word here referred to can hardly be anything else than the word of the gospel preached among the readers. This word of Peter too implies that the word of preaching precedes regeneration and is instrumentally connected with it. In view of these passages the conclusion is perfectly warranted that in the case of adults external calling by the preaching of the word generally precedes regeneration. Whether they also warrant the assertion that internal calling is prior to the implanting of the new life, is a question that need not be considered at this point.

2. THE VIEW REPRESENTED IN OUR CONFESSIONAL STANDARDS. Our confessional standards also imply that in the case of adults the preaching of the word precedes regeneration, but it should be borne in mind that they do not use the word “regeneration” in the limited sense in which it is employed to-day. The Belgic Confession says in Art. XXIV: “We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the

operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin.” Faith is wrought in man by the hearing of the Word and, in turn, works regeneration, that is, the renewal of man in conversion and sanctification. The Canons of Dort contain a somewhat more detailed description in III and IV, Articles 11 and 12: “But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illumines their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit He pervades the innermost recesses of the man; . . . And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead; a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is nowise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that, after God has performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted,” etc. In these articles the words “regeneration” and “conversion” are used interchangeably. It is quite evident, however, that they denote the fundamental change in the governing disposition of the soul as well as the resulting change in the outward manifestations of life. And this change is brought about not merely, but at least in part, by the preaching of the gospel. Consequently this precedes.

3. THE ORDER GENERALLY FOLLOWED BY REFORMED THEOLOGIANs. Among the Reformed it has been quite customary to place calling before regeneration, though a few have reversed the order. Even Maccovius, Voetius, and Comrie, all Supralapsarians, follow the usual order. Several considerations prompted Reformed theologians in general to place calling before regeneration.

a. Their doctrine of the covenant of grace. They considered the covenant of grace as the great and all-comprehensive good which God in infinite mercy

grants unto sinners, a good including all the blessings of salvation, and therefore also regeneration. But this covenant is inseparably connected with the gospel. It is announced and made known in the gospel, of which Christ is the living center, and therefore does not exist without it. Where the gospel is not known the covenant is not realized, but where it is preached God establishes His covenant and glorifies His grace. Both the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the covenant precede the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, and the believer's participation in the salvation wrought by Christ.

b. Their conception of the relation between the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. The Anabaptists failed to do justice to this relation. Christ and His redemptive work are presented to us in the gospel. And it is from Christ, as the Mediator of God and man and as the meritorious cause of our salvation, that the Holy Spirit derives everything which He communicates to sinners. Consequently, He joins His work to the preaching of the gospel and operates in a saving way only where the divine message of redemption is brought. The Holy Spirit does not work apart from the Christ presented in the gospel.

c. Their reaction against the mysticism of the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists proceeded on the assumption that regeneration effected not merely a renewal of human nature, but an entirely new creation. And this being so, they regarded it as impossible that anything belonging to this natural creation as, for instance, the human language in which the Word of God is brought to man, could in any way be instrumental in communicating the new life to sinners. As they saw it, regeneration eo ipso excluded the use of the Word as a means, since this was after all only a dead letter. This mystical tendency was strongly opposed by Reformed theologians.

d. Their experience in connection with the spiritual renewal of adults. While it was a settled opinion that covenant children who die in infancy are reborn and therefore saved, there was no unanimous opinion as to the time when those who grew up became partakers of the grace of regeneration. Some

shared the opinion of Voetius that all elect children are regenerated before baptism, and that the new life can, even in adults, remain concealed for many years. The great majority, however, were loath to take that position, and held that the new life, if present, would reveal itself in some way. Experience taught them that many gave no evidences of the new life until after they had heard the gospel for many years.

4. REASONS FOR A SEPARATE DISCUSSION OF EXTERNAL CALLING AS PRECEDING REGENERATION.

a. Clearness of presentation. External and internal calling are essentially one; yet they can and should be carefully distinguished. A dispute may arise respecting the one that does not directly concern the other. It may be doubted, whether internal calling logically precedes regeneration in the case of adults, while there is no uncertainty whatsoever in this respect concerning the external calling through the gospel. Hence it may be considered desirable to treat of the external calling first, and then to take up the discussion of internal calling in connection with that of regeneration.

b. The preparatory nature of external calling.. If we proceed on the assumption that the *ordo salutis* deals with the effective application of the redemption wrought by Christ, we feel at once that the external calling by the Word of God can, strictly speaking, hardly be called one of its stages. As long as this calling does not, through the accompanying operation of the Holy Spirit, turn into an internal and effectual calling, it has only a preliminary and preparatory significance. Several Reformed theologians speak of it as a kind of common grace, since it does not flow from the eternal election and the saving grace of God, but rather from His common goodness; and since, while it sometimes produces a certain illumination of the mind, it does not enrich the heart with the saving grace of God.[Cf. references above, pp. 304 f. and also a Marck, *Godgeleerdheid*. XXIII. 3.]

c. The general nature of external calling. While all the other movements of the Holy Spirit in the *ordo salutis* terminate on the elect only, the external calling by the gospel has a wider bearing. Wherever the gospel is preached, the call comes to the elect and the reprobate alike. It serves the purpose, not merely of bringing the elect to faith and conversion, but also of revealing the great love of God to sinners in general. By means of it God maintains His claim on the obedience of all His rational creatures, restrains the manifestation of sin, and promotes civic righteousness, external morality, and even outward religious exercises.[Cf. Bavinck, *Geref. Dogm.* IV, pp. 7 f.]

B. CALLING IN GENERAL.

GLOSS *Vocatio verbalis*: the verbal call of God, which comes to people through the preaching of His Word.

Since external calling is but an aspect of calling in general, we shall have to consider this briefly before entering upon a discussion of external calling.

1. THE AUTHOR OF OUR CALLING. Our calling is a work of the triune God. It is first of all a work of the Father, I Cor. 1:9; I Thess. 2:12; I Pet. 5:10. But the Father works all things through the Son; and so this calling is also ascribed to the Son, Matt. 11:28; Luke 5:32; John 7:37; Rom. 1:6(?). And Christ, in turn, calls through His Word and Spirit, Matt. 10:20; John 15:26; Acts 5:31,32.

2. VOCATIO REALIS AND VERBALIS. Reformed theologians generally speak of a *vocatio realis*, as distinguished from the *vocatio verbalis*. By this they mean the external call that comes to men through God's general revelation, a revelation of the law and not of the gospel, to acknowledge, fear, and honour God as their Creator. It comes to them in things (*res*) rather than in words: in nature and history, in the environment in which they live, and in the experiences and vicissitudes of their lives, Ps. 19:1-4; Acts 16:16,17; 17:27;

Rom. 1:19-21; 2:14,15. This call knows nothing of Christ, and therefore cannot lead to salvation. At the same time it is of the greatest importance in connection with the restraint of sin, the development of the natural life, and the maintenance of good order in society. This is not the calling with which we are concerned at present. In soteriology only the *vocatio verbalis* comes into consideration; and this may be defined as that gracious act of God whereby He invites sinners to accept the salvation that is offered in Christ Jesus.

3. DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF THE VOCATIO VERBALIS. The *vocatio verbalis* is, as the term itself suggests, the divine call that comes to man through the preaching of the Word of God. According to Roman Catholics it can also come to man through the administration of baptism. In fact, they regard the sacrament as the most important means in bringing man to Christ, and ascribe a decidedly subordinate significance to the preaching of the gospel. Not the pulpit, but the altar is central with Rome. In course of time considerable difference of opinion became apparent on the question, why the gospel call proves efficacious in some cases and not in others. Pelagius sought the explanation for this in the arbitrary will of man. Man has by nature a perfectly free will, so that he can accept or reject the gospel, as he sees fit, and thus either obtain or fail to obtain the blessings of salvation. Augustine, on the other hand, ascribed the difference to the operation of the grace of God. Said he: "The hearing of the divine call, is produced by divine grace itself, in him who before resisted; and then the love of virtue is kindled in him when he no longer resists." Semi-Pelagianism sought to mediate between the two and to avoid both the Augustinian denial of free will and the Pelagian depreciation of divine grace. It assumed the presence of the seeds of virtue in man, which of themselves tended to bear good fruit, but held that these needed the fructifying influence of divine grace for their development. The grace necessary for this is given to all men gratuitously, so that they are with the aid of it able to accept the gospel call unto salvation. The call will therefore be effective provided man, aided by divine grace, accepts it. This became the prevailing doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Some later Roman

Catholics, of whom Bellarmin was one of the most important, brought in the doctrine of congruism, in which the acceptance of the gospel call is made dependent on the circumstances in which it comes to man. If these are congruous, that is, fit or favorable, he will accept it, but if not, he will reject it. The character of the circumstances will, of course, largely depend on the operation of prevenient grace. Luther developed the idea that, while the law worked repentance, the gospel call carried with it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in the Word, and therefore the call is in itself always sufficient and in its intention always efficacious. The reason why this call does not always effect the desired and intended result lies in the fact that men in many cases place a stumbling block in the way, so that, after all, the result is determined by the negative attitude of man. While some Lutherans still speak of external and internal calling, they insist on it that the former never comes to man apart from the latter. The call is essentially always efficacious, so that there is really no room for the distinction. Luther's strong insistence on the efficacious character of the gospel call was due to the Anabaptist depreciation of it. The Anabaptists virtually set aside the Word of God as a means of grace, and stressed what they called the internal word, the "inner light," and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. To them the external word was but the letter that killeth, while the internal word was spirit and life. External calling meant little or nothing in their scheme. The distinction between external and internal calling is already found in Augustine, was borrowed from him by Calvin, and thus made prominent in Reformed theology. According to Calvin the gospel call is not in itself effective, but is made efficacious by the operation of the Holy Spirit, when He savingly applies the Word to the heart of man; and it is so applied only in the hearts and lives of the elect. Thus the salvation of man remains the work of God from the very beginning. God by His saving grace, not only enables, but causes man to heed the gospel call unto salvation. The Arminians were not satisfied with this position, but virtually turned back to the Semi-Pelagianism of the Roman Catholic Church. According to them the universal proclamation of the gospel is accompanied by a universal sufficient

grace, — “gracious assistance actually and universally bestowed, sufficient to enable all men, if they choose, to attain to the full possession of spiritual blessings, and ultimately to salvation.”[Cunningham, Hist. Theol. II, p. 396.] The work of salvation is once more made dependent on man. This marked the beginning of a rationalistic return to the Pelagian position, which entirely denies the necessity of an internal operation of the Holy Spirit unto salvation.

C. EXTERNAL CALLING.

GLOSS External calling: the general gospel invitation heard outwardly; it commands faith and repentance and promises salvation to believers.

The Bible does not use the term “external,” but clearly speaks of a calling that is not efficacious. It is presupposed in the great commission, as it is found in Mark 16:15,16, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” The parable of the marriage feast in Matt. 22:2-14 clearly teaches that some who were invited did not come, and concludes with the well-known words: “For many are called, but few chosen.” The same lesson is taught in the parable of the great supper, Luke 14:16-24. Other passages speak explicitly of a rejection of the gospel, John 3:36; Acts 13:46; II Thess. 1:8. Still others speak of the terrible sin of unbelief in a way which clearly shows that it was committed by some, Matt. 10:15; 11:21-24; John 5:40; 16:8,9; I John 5:10. The external call consists in the presentation and offering of salvation in Christ to sinners, together with an earnest exhortation to accept Christ by faith, in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

1. THE ELEMENTS COMPRISED IN IT.

a. A presentation of the gospel facts and of the doctrine of redemption. The way of redemption revealed in Christ must be set forth clearly in all its relations. God's plan of redemption, the saving work of Christ, and the renewing and transforming operations of the Holy Spirit, should all be interpreted in their mutual relations. It should be borne in mind, however, that a mere presentation of the truths of redemption, no matter how well done, does not yet constitute the gospel call. It is not only fundamental to it, but even constitutes a very important part of it. At the same time it is by no means the whole of that call. According to our Reformed conception the following elements also belong to it.

b. An invitation to accept Christ in repentance and faith. The representation of the way of salvation must be supplemented by an earnest invitation (II Cor. 5:11,20) and even a solemn command (John 6:28,29; Acts 19:4) to repent and believe, that is to accept Christ by faith. But, in order that this coming to Christ may not be understood in a superficial sense, as it is often represented by revivalists, the true nature of the repentance and the faith required should be clearly set forth. It must be made perfectly clear that the sinner cannot of himself truly repent and believe, but that it is God who worketh in him "both to will and to work, for His good pleasure."

c. A promise of forgiveness and salvation. The external call also contains a promise of acceptance for all those who comply with the conditions, not in their own strength, but by the power of the grace of God wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. They who by grace repent of their sins and accept Christ by faith receive the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and of eternal salvation. This promise, it should be noticed, is never absolute, but always conditional. No one can expect its fulfilment, except in the way of a faith and repentance that is truly wrought by God.

From the fact that these elements are included in external calling, it may readily be inferred that they who reject the gospel not merely refuse to believe certain facts and ideas, but resist the general operation of the Holy Spirit,

which is connected with this calling, and are guilty of the sin of obstinate disobedience. By their refusal to accept the gospel, they increase their responsibility, and treasure up wrath for themselves in the day of judgment, Rom. 2:4,5. That the above elements are actually included in the external calling, is quite evident from the following passages of Scripture: (a) According to Acts 20:27 Paul considers the declaration of the whole counsel of God as a part of the call; and in Eph. 3:7-11 he recounts some of the details which he had declared unto the readers. (b) Examples of the call to repent and believe are found in such passages as Ezek. 33:11; Mark 1:15; John 6:29; II Cor. 5:20. (c) And the promise is contained in the following passages, John 3:16-18,36; 5:24,40.[Cf. also the Canons of Dort II, 5,6; III and IV, 8.]

2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTERNAL CALLING.

a. It is general or universal. This is not to be understood in the sense in which it was maintained by some of the old Lutheran theologians, namely, that that call actually came to all the living more than once in the past, as, for instance, in the time of Adam, in that of Noah, and in the days of the apostles. McPherson correctly says: “A universal call of this kind is not a fact, but a mere theory invented for a purpose.”[Chr. Dogm. p. 377.] In this representation the terms “general” or “universal” are not used in the sense in which they are intended, when it is said that the gospel call is general or universal. Moreover, the representation is at least in part contrary to fact. External calling is general only in the sense that it comes to all men to whom the gospel is preached, indiscriminately. It is not confined to any age or nation or class of men. It comes to both the just and the unjust, the elect and the reprobate. The following passages testify to the general nature of this call: Isa. 55:1, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; some ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price,” cf. also verses 6,7. In connection with this passage one might conceivably say that only spiritually qualified sinners are called; but this certainly cannot be said of Isa. 45:22, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the

ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.” Some also interpret the familiar invitation of Jesus in Matt. 11:28, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” as limited to such as are truly concerned about their sins and really repentant; but there is no warrant for such a limitation. The last book of the Bible concludes with a beautiful general invitation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take of the water of life freely,” Rev. 22:17. That the gospel invitation is not limited to the elect, as some hold, is quite evident from such passages as Ps. 81:11-13; Prov. 1:24-26; Ezek. 3:19; Matt. 22:2-8,14; Luke 14:16-24.

The general character of this calling is also taught in the Canons of Dort.[II, 5; III and IV, 8.] Yet this doctrine repeatedly met with opposition by individuals and groups in the Reformed Churches. In the Scottish Church of the seventeenth century some denied the indiscriminate invitation and offer of salvation altogether, while others wanted to limit it to the confines of the visible Church. Over against these the Marrow men, such as Boston and the Erskines, defended it. In the Netherlands this point was disputed especially in the eighteenth century. They who maintained the universal offer were called preachers of the new light, while they who defended the particular offer, the offer to those who already gave evidence of a measure of special grace and could therefore be reckoned as among the elect, were known as the preachers of the old light. Even in the present day we occasionally meet with opposition on this point. It is said that such a general invitation and offer is inconsistent with the doctrine of predestination and of particular atonement, doctrines in which, it is thought, the preacher should take his starting point. But the Bible does not teach that the preacher of the gospel should take his starting point in these doctrines, however important they may be. His starting point and warrant lie in the commission of his King: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:15,16. Moreover, it is an utter impossibility that anyone, in preaching the gospel, should limit

himself to the elect, as some would have us do, since he does not know who they are. Jesus did know them, but He did not so limit the offer of salvation, Matt. 22:3-8,14; Luke 14:16-21; John 5:38-40. There would be a real contradiction between the Reformed doctrines of predestination and particular atonement on the one hand, and the universal offer of salvation on the other hand, if this offer included the declaration that God purposed to save every individual hearer of the gospel, and that Christ really atoned for the sins of each one of them. But the gospel invitation involves no such declaration. It is a gracious calling to accept Christ by faith, and a conditional promise of salvation. The condition is fulfilled only in the elect, and therefore they only obtain eternal life.

b. It is a bona fide calling. The external calling is a calling in good faith, a calling that is seriously meant. It is not an invitation coupled with the hope that it will not be accepted. When God calls the sinner to accept Christ by faith, He earnestly desires this; and when He promises those who repent and believe eternal life, His promise is dependable. This follows from the very nature, from the veracity, of God. It is blasphemous to think that God would be guilty of equivocation and deception, that He would say one thing and mean another, that He would earnestly plead with the sinner to repent and believe unto salvation, and at the same time not desire it in any sense of the word. The bona fide character of the external call is proved by the following passages of Scripture: Num. 23:19; Ps. 81:13-16; Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18-20; Ezek. 18:23,32; 33:11; Matt. 21:37; II Tim. 2:13. The Canons of Dort also assert it explicitly in III and IV, 8. Several objections have been offered to the idea of such a bona fide offer of salvation. (1) One objection is derived from the veracity of God. It is said that, according to this doctrine, He offers the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those for whom He has not intended these gifts. It need not be denied that there is a real difficulty at this point, but this is the difficulty with which we are always confronted, when we seek to harmonize the decretive and the preceptive will of God, a difficulty which even the objectors cannot solve and often simply ignore. Yet we may not assume that the two are really

contradictory. The decretive will of God determines what will most certainly come to pass (without necessarily implying that God really takes delight in all of it, as, for instance, in all kinds of sin), while the preceptive will is man's rule of life, informing him as to what is well pleasing in the sight of God.

Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that God does not offer sinners the forgiveness of sins and eternal life unconditionally, but only in the way of faith and conversion; and that the righteousness of Christ, though not intended for all, is yet sufficient for all. (2) A second objection is derived from the spiritual inability of man. Man, as he is by nature, cannot believe and repent, and therefore it looks like mockery to ask this of him. But in connection with this objection we should remember that in the last analysis man's inability in spiritual things is rooted in his unwillingness to serve God. The actual condition of things is not such that many would like to repent and believe in Christ, if they only could. All those who do not believe are not willing to believe, John 5:40. Moreover, it is no more unreasonable to require repentance and faith in Christ of men than it is to demand of them that they keep the law. Very inconsistently some of those who oppose the general offer of salvation on the basis of man's spiritual inability, do not hesitate to place the sinner before the demands of the law and even insist on doing this.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXTERNAL CALLING. The question may be asked, why God comes to all men indiscriminately, including even the reprobate, with the offer of salvation. This external calling answers more than one purpose.

a. In it God maintains His claim on the sinner. As the sovereign Ruler of the universe He is entitled — and this is a matter of absolute right — to the service of man. And though man tore away from God in sin and is now incapable of rendering spiritual obedience to his rightful Sovereign, his wilful transgression did not abrogate the claim of God on the service of His rational creatures. The right of God to demand absolute obedience remains, and He asserts this right in both the law and the gospel. His claim on man also finds expression in the

call to faith and repentance. And if man does not heed this call, he disregards and slights the just claim of God and thereby increases his guilt.

b. It is the divinely appointed means of bringing sinners to conversion. In other words, it is the means by which God gathers the elect out of the nations of the earth. As such it must necessarily be general or universal, since no man can point out the elect. The final result is, of course, that the elect, and they only, accept Christ by faith. This does not mean that missionaries can go out and give their hearers the assurance that Christ died for each one of them and that God intends to save each one; but it does mean that they can bring the joyful tidings that Christ died for sinners, that He invites them to come unto Him, and that He offers salvation to all those who truly repent of their sins and accept him with a living faith.

c. It is also a revelation of God's holiness, goodness, and compassion. In virtue of His holiness God dissuades sinners everywhere from sin, and in virtue of His goodness and mercy He warns them against self-destruction, postpones the execution of the sentence of death, and blesses them with the offer of salvation. There is no doubt about it that this gracious offer is in itself a blessing and not, as some would have it, a curse for sinners. It clearly reveals the divine compassion for them, and is so represented in the Word of God, Ps. 81:13; Prov. 1:24; Ezek. 18:23,32; 33:11; Amos 8:11; Matt. 11:20-24; 23:37. At the same time it is true that man by his opposition to it may turn even this blessing into a curse. It naturally heightens the responsibility of the sinner, and, if not accepted and improved, will increase his judgment.

d. Finally, it clearly accentuates the righteousness of God. If even the revelation of God in nature serves the purpose of forestalling any excuse which sinners might be inclined to make, Rom. 1:20, this is all the more true of the special revelation of the way of salvation. When sinners despise the forbearance of God and reject His gracious offer of salvation, the greatness of their corruption and guilt, and the justice of God in their condemnation, stands out in the clearest light.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: In what cases do the Reformed assume that regeneration precedes even external calling? How do they connect external calling up with the doctrine of the covenant? On what grounds did the Arminians at the time of the Synod of Dort assert that the Reformed churches could not consistently teach that God seriously calls sinners indiscriminately to salvation? How do Roman Catholics conceive of the calling by the Word? What is the Lutheran conception of calling? Is it correct to say (with Alexander, *Syst. Theol.* II, pp. 357 ff.) that the Word by itself is adequate to effect a spiritual change, and that the Holy Spirit merely removes the obstruction to its reception?

VI. Regeneration and Effectual Calling

Regeneration is God's work of giving new spiritual life to the sinner. By His effectual call, the Holy Spirit brings God's people to faith in Christ.

A. THE SCRIPTURAL TERMS FOR REGENERATION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS.

GLOSS **Regeneration:** God's re-creating work by which new spiritual life is implanted and begins to show itself in the sinner.

1. **THE TERMS THAT COME INTO CONSIDERATION.** The Greek word for "regeneration" (*palingenesia*) is found only in Matt. 19:28 and Titus 3:5; and only in the last named passage does it refer to the beginning of the new life in the individual Christian. The idea of this beginning is more commonly expressed by the verb *gennao* (with *anōthen* in John 3:3), or its compositum *anagennao*. These words mean either to beget, to beget again, or to bear or give birth, John 1:13; 3:3,4,5,6,7,8; I Pet. 1:23; I John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18. In one passage, namely, Jas. 1:18, the word *apokueo*, to bear or bring forth, is

employed. Furthermore, the thought of the production of a new life is expressed by the word *ktizo*, to create, Eph. 2:10, and the product of this creation is called a *kaine ktisis* (a new creature), II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15, or a *kainos anthropos* (a new man), Eph. 4:24. Finally, the term *suzoopoieo*, to make alive with, to quicken with, is also used in a couple of passages, Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13.

2. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE TERMS. These terms carry with them several important implications, to which attention should be directed. (a) Regeneration is a creative work of God, and is therefore a work in which man is purely passive, and in which there is no place for human co-operation. This is a very important point, since it stresses the fact that salvation is wholly of God. (b) The creative work of God produces a new life, in virtue of which man, made alive with Christ, shares the resurrection life, and can be called a new creature, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them,” Eph. 2:10. (c) Two elements must be distinguished in regeneration, namely, generation or the begetting of the new life, and bearing or bringing forth, by which the new life is brought forth out of its hidden depths. Generation implants the principle of the new life in the soul, and the new birth causes this principle to begin to assert itself in action. This distinction is of great importance for a proper understanding of regeneration.

B. THE USE OF THE TERM “REGENERATION” IN THEOLOGY.

GLOSS Monergistic: worked by God alone; in regeneration the spiritually dead sinner does not co-operate in producing new life.

1. IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY. In the mind of the early Church the term “regeneration” did not stand for a

sharply defined concept. It was used to denote a change closely connected with the washing away of sins, and no clear distinction was made between regeneration and justification. As identified with baptismal grace, the former was understood especially as a designation of the remission of sin, though the idea of a certain moral renovation was not excluded. Even Augustine did not draw a sharp line here, but did distinguish between regeneration and conversion. To him regeneration included, in addition to the remission of sin, only an initial change of the heart, followed by conversion later on. He conceived of it as a strictly monergistic work of God, in which the human subject cannot cooperate, and which man cannot resist. For Pelagius, of course, “regeneration” did not mean the birth of a new nature, but the forgiveness of sins in baptism, the illumination of the mind by the truth, and the stimulation of the will by divine promises. The confusion of regeneration and justification, already apparent in Augustine, became even more pronounced in Scholasticism. In fact, justification became the more prominent concept of the two, was thought of as including regeneration, and was conceived of as an act in which God and man co-operate. Justification, according to the common representation, included the infusion of grace, that is, the birth of a new creature or regeneration, and the forgiveness of sin and the removal of the guilt attaching to it. There was a difference of opinion, however, as to which of these two elements is the logical prius. According to Thomas Aquinas the infusion of grace is first, and the forgiveness of sins is, at least in a certain sense, based on this; but according to Duns Scotus the forgiveness of sin is first, and is basic to the infusion of grace. Both elements are effected by baptism *ex opere operato*. The opinion of Thomas Aquinas gained the upper hand in the Church. Up to the present time there is a certain confusion of regeneration and justification in the Roman Catholic Church, which is, no doubt, largely due to the fact that justification is not conceived as a forensic act, but as an act or process of renewal. In it man is not declared but made just. Says Wilmers in his *Handbook of the Christian Religion*: “As justification is a spiritual renewal and regeneration, it follows that sin is really

destroyed by it, and not, as the Reformers maintained, merely covered, or no longer imputed.”

2. BY THE REFORMERS AND IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES. Luther did not entirely escape the confusion of regeneration with justification. Moreover, he spoke of regeneration or the new birth in a rather broad sense. Calvin also used the term in a very comprehensive sense as a designation of the whole process by which man is renewed, including, besides the divine act which originates the new life, also conversion (repentance and faith) and sanctification.[Inst. III. 3,9.] Several seventeenth century authors fail to distinguish between regeneration and conversion, and use the two terms interchangeably, treating of what we now call regeneration under vocation or effectual calling. The Canons of Dort also use the two words synonymously, [III and IV. 11,12.] and the Belgic Confession seems to speak of regeneration in an even wider sense.[Art. XXIV.] This comprehensive use of the term “regeneration” often led to confusion and to the disregard of very necessary distinctions. For instance, while regeneration and conversion were identified, regeneration was yet declared to be monergistic, in spite of the fact that in conversion man certainly co-operates. The distinction between regeneration and justification had already become clearer, but it gradually became necessary and customary also to employ the term “regeneration” in a more restricted sense. Turretin defines two kinds of conversion: first, a “habitual” or passive conversion, the production of a disposition or habit of the soul, which, he remarks, might better be called “regeneration”; and, secondly, an “actual” or “active” conversion, in which this implanted habit or disposition becomes active in faith and repentance. In present day Reformed theology the word “regeneration” is generally used in a more restricted sense, as a designation of that divine act by which the sinner is endowed with new spiritual life, and by which the principle of that new life is first called into action. So conceived, it includes both the “begetting again” and the “new birth,” in which the new life becomes manifest. In strict harmony, however, with the literal meaning of the word “regeneration” the term is sometimes employed in an even more limited

sense, to denote simply the implanting of the new life in the soul, apart from the first manifestations of this life. In modern liberal theology the term “regeneration” acquired a different meaning. Schleiermacher distinguished two aspects of regeneration, namely, conversion and justification, and held that in regeneration “a new religious consciousness is produced in the believer by the common Christian spirit of the community, and new life, or ‘sanctification,’ is prepared for.” (Pfleiderer.) That “Christian spirit of the community” is the result of an influx of the divine life, through Christ, into the Church, and is called “the Holy Spirit” by Schleiermacher. The Modern view is well stated in these words of Youtz: “Modern interpretation inclines to return to the symbolical use of the conception of Regeneration. Our ethical realities deal with transformed characters. Regeneration expresses thus a radical, vital, ethical change, rather than an absolutely new metaphysical beginning. Regeneration is a vital step in the natural development of the spiritual life, a radical readjustment to the moral processes of life.” [A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics, Art. Regeneration.] Students of the Psychology of Religion generally fail to distinguish between regeneration and conversion. They regard it as a process in which man’s attitude to life changes from the autocentric to the heterocentric. It finds its explanation primarily in the sub-conscious life, and does not necessarily involve anything supernatural. James says: “To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.” [Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 189.] According to Clark, “Students have agreed in discerning three distinct steps in conversion: (1) A period of ‘storm and stress,’ or sense of sin, or feeling of inward disharmony, known to theology as ‘conviction of sin’ and designated by James as ‘soul sickness.’ (2) An emotional crisis which marks a turning point. (3) A succeeding relaxation attended by a sense of peace, rest, inner harmony, acceptance with God, and not infrequently motor

and sensory reflexes of various sorts.”[The Psychology of Religious Awakening, p. 38.]

C. THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF REGENERATION.

GLOSS **New birth:** the beginning and manifestation of the new spiritual life which God gives to His people.

Relative to the nature of regeneration there are several misconceptions which should be avoided. It may be well to mention these first, before stating the positive qualifications of this re-creative work of God.

1. MISCONCEPTIONS. (a) Regeneration is not a change in the substance of human nature, as was taught by the Manichæans and in the days of the Reformation by Flacius Illyricus, who conceived of original sin as a substance, to be replaced by another substance in regeneration. No new physical seed or germ is implanted in man; neither is there any addition to, or subtraction from, the faculties of the soul. (b) Neither is it simply a change in one or more of the faculties of the soul, as, for instance, of the emotional life (feeling or heart), by removing the aversion to divine things, as some evangelicals conceive of it; or of the intellect, by illuminating the mind that is darkened by sin, as the Rationalists regard it. It affects the heart, understood in the Scriptural sense of the word, that is, as the central and all-controlling organ of the soul, out of which are the issues of life. This means that it affects human nature as a whole. (c) Nor is it a complete or perfect change of the whole nature of man, or of any part of it, so that it is no more capable of sin, as was taught by the extreme Anabaptists and by some other fanatical sects. This does not mean that it does not in principle affect the entire nature of man, but only that it does not constitute the whole change that is wrought in man by the operation of the Holy Spirit. It does not comprise conversion and sanctification.

2. POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF REGENERATION. The following positive assertions may be made respecting regeneration:

a. Regeneration consists in the implanting of the principle of the new spiritual life in man, in a radical change of the governing disposition of the soul, which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, gives birth to a life that moves in a Godward direction. In principle this change affects the whole man: the intellect, I Cor. 2:14,15; II Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:18; Col. 3:10; the will, Ps. 110:3; Phil. 2:13; II Thess. 3:5; Heb. 13:21; and the feelings or emotions, Ps. 42:1,2; Matt. 5:4; I Pet. 1:8.

b. It is an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man, intellectually, emotionally, and morally. The assertion that regeneration is an instantaneous change implies two things: (1) that it is not a work that is gradually prepared in the soul, as the Roman Catholics and all Semi-Pelagians teach; there is no intermediate stage between life and death; one either lives or is dead; and (2) that it is not a gradual process like sanctification. It is true that some Reformed authors have occasionally used the term "regeneration" as including even sanctification, but that was in the days when the *ordo salutis* was not as fully developed as it is to-day.

c. It is in its most limited sense a change that occurs in the sub-conscious life. It is a secret and inscrutable work of God that is never directly perceived by man. The change may take place without man's being conscious of it momentarily, though this is not the case when regeneration and conversion coincide; and even later on he can perceive it only in its effects. This explains the fact that a Christian may, on the one hand, struggle for a long time with doubts and uncertainties, and can yet, on the other hand, gradually overcome these and rise to the heights of assurance.

3. DEFINITION OF REGENERATION. From what was said in the preceding respecting the present use of the word "regeneration," it follows that regeneration may be defined in two ways. In the strictest sense of the word we

may say: Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. But in order to include the idea of the new birth as well as that of the “begetting again,” it will be necessary to complement the definition with the following words: . . . “and the first holy exercise of this new disposition is secured.”

D. EFFECTUAL CALLING IN RELATION TO EXTERNAL CALLING AND REGENERATION.

GLOSS Effectual calling: the Holy Spirit’s powerful inward application of the gospel, bringing those called to faith and salvation.

1. ITS INSEPARABLE CONNECTION WITH EXTERNAL CALLING. The calling of God may be said to be one, and the distinction between an external and an internal or effectual calling merely calls attention to the fact that this one calling has two aspects. This does not mean that these two aspects are always united and always go together. We do not aver with the Lutherans that “the inner call is always concurrent with the hearing of the word.” [Valentine, Chr. Theol. II, pp. 197 f.] It does mean, however, that where the inner call comes to adults, it is mediated by the preaching of the Word. It is the same Word that is heard in the external call, and that is made effective in the heart in the internal calling. Through the powerful application of the Holy Spirit the external call passes right into the internal. [Bavinck, Roeping en Wedergeboorte, p. 215.] But while this calling is closely connected with the external call and forms a unit with it, there are certain points of difference: (a) It is a calling by the Word, savingly applied by the operation of the Holy Spirit, I Cor. 1:23,24; I Pet. 2:9; (b) it is a powerful calling, that is, a calling that is effectual unto salvation, Acts 13:48; I Cor. 1:23,24; and (c) it is without

repentance, that is, it is a call that is not subject to change and that is never withdrawn, Rom. 11:29.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERNAL CALL. The following characteristics should be noted:

a. It works by moral suasion plus the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit. The question arises, whether in this calling (as distinguished from regeneration) the Word of God works in a creative way, or by moral suasion. Now there is no doubt about it that the Word of God is sometimes said to work in a creative manner, Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6,9; 147:15; Rom. 4:17 (though this may be interpreted differently). But these passages refer to the word of God's power, to His authoritative command, and not to the word of preaching with which we are concerned here. The Spirit of God operates through the preaching of the Word only in a morally persuasive way, making its persuasions effective, so that man listens to the voice of his God. This follows from the very nature of the Word, which addresses itself to the understanding and the will.[Bavinck, *Roeping en Wedergeboorte*, pp. 217,219,221.] It should be borne in mind, however, that this moral suasion does not yet constitute the whole of the internal call; there must be in addition to this a powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, applying the Word to the heart.

b. It operates in the conscious life of man. This point is most intimately connected with the preceding. If the word of preaching does not operate creatively, but only in a moral and persuasive way, it follows that it can work only in the conscious life of man. It addresses the understanding, which the Spirit endows with spiritual insight into the truth, and through the understanding influences the will effectively, so that the sinner turns to God. The internal calling necessarily issues in conversion, that is, in a conscious turning away from sin in the direction of holiness.

c. It is teleological. Internal calling is of a teleological character, that is, it calls man to a certain end: to the great goal to which the Holy Spirit is leading

the elect, and, consequently also to the intermediate stages on the way to this final destiny. It is a calling to the fellowship of Jesus Christ, I Cor. 1:9; to inherit blessing, I Pet. 3:9; to liberty, Gal. 5:13; to peace, I Cor. 7:15; to holiness, I Thess. 4:7; to one hope, Eph. 4:4; to eternal life, I Tim. 6:12; and to God's kingdom and glory, I Thess. 2:12.

3. THE RELATION OF EFFECTUAL CALLING TO REGENERATION.

a. The identification of the two in seventeenth century theology. It is a well known fact that in seventeenth century theology effectual calling and regeneration are often identified, or if not entirely identified, then at least in so far that regeneration is regarded as included in calling. Several of the older theologians have a separate chapter on calling, but none on regeneration. According to the Westminster Confession, X. 2, effectual calling includes regeneration. This view finds some justification in the fact that Paul, who uses the term "regeneration" but once, evidently conceives of it as included in calling in Rom. 8:30. Moreover, there is a sense in which calling and regeneration are related as cause and effect. It should be borne in mind, however, that in speaking of calling as including, or as being causally related to, regeneration, we do not have in mind merely what is technically termed internal or effectual calling, but calling in general, including even a creative calling. The extensive use in Post-Reformation times of the term "calling" rather than "regeneration," to designate the beginning of the work of grace in the life of sinners, was due to a desire to stress the close connection between the Word of God and the operation of His grace. And the prevalence of the term "calling" in the apostolic age finds its explanation and justification in the fact that, in the case of those who were in that missionary period gathered into the Church, regeneration and effectual calling were generally simultaneous, while the change was reflected in their conscious life as a powerful calling from God. In a systematic presentation of the truth, however, we should carefully discriminate between calling and regeneration.

b. Points of difference between regeneration and effectual calling.

Regeneration in the strictest sense of the word, that is, as the begetting again, takes place in the sub-conscious life of man, and is quite independent of any attitude which he may assume with reference to it. Calling, on the other hand, addresses itself to the consciousness, and implies a certain disposition of the conscious life. This follows from the fact that regeneration works from within, while calling comes from without. In the case of children we speak of regeneration rather than calling. Furthermore, regeneration is a creative, a hyper-physical operation of the Holy Spirit, by which man is brought from one condition into another, from a condition of spiritual death into a condition of spiritual life. Effectual calling, on the other hand, is teleological, draws out the new life and points it in a God-ward direction. It secures the exercises of the new disposition and brings the new life into action.

c. The relative order of calling and regeneration. This is perhaps best understood, if we note the following stages: (1) Logically, the external call in the preaching of the Word (except in the case of children) generally precedes or coincides with the operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the new life is produced in the soul of man. (2) Then by a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will. In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to the salvation of his soul. This is regeneration in the most restricted sense of the word. In it man is entirely passive. (3) Having received the spiritual ear, the call of God in the gospel is now heard by the sinner, and is brought home effectively to the heart. The desire to resist has been changed to a desire to obey, and the sinner yields to the persuasive influence of the Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is the effectual calling through the instrumentality of the word of preaching, effectively applied by the Spirit of God. (4) This effectual calling, finally, secures, through the truth as a means, the first holy exercises of the new disposition that is born in the soul. The new life begins to manifest itself; the implanted life issues in the new birth. This is the completion of the

work of regeneration in the broader sense of the word, and the point at which it turns into conversion.

Now we should not make the mistake of regarding this logical order as a temporal order that will apply in all cases. The new life is often implanted in the hearts of children long before they are able to hear the call of the gospel; yet they are endowed with this life only where the gospel is preached. There is, of course, always a creative call of God by which the new life is produced. In the case of those who live under the administration of the gospel the possibility exists that they receive the seed of regeneration long before they come to years of discretion and therefore also long before the effectual calling penetrates to their consciousness. It is very unlikely, however, that, being regenerated, they will live in sin for years, even after they have come to maturity, and give no evidences at all of the new life that is in them. On the other hand, in the case of those who do not live under the administration of the covenant, there is no reason to assume an interval between the time of their regeneration and that of their effectual calling. In the effectual call they at once become conscious of their renewal, and immediately find the seed of regeneration germinating into the new life. This means that regeneration, effective calling, and conversion all coincide.

E. THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

GLOSS **Spiritual death:** human inability in sin: apart from God's renewing grace, people cannot turn themselves to God.

1. THIS NECESSITY IS DENIED BY MODERN LIBERAL THEOLOGY. The necessity of regeneration, as this is understood by the Christian Church, is naturally denied in modern liberal theology. It is not in accord with the teaching of Rousseau, that man is by nature good. Any radical change or complete turnabout in the life of a man who is essentially good, would be a

change for the worse. Liberals speak of salvation by character, and the only regeneration of which they know is a regeneration conceived as “a vital step in the natural development of the spiritual life, a radical readjustment to the moral processes of life.” (Youtz.) Many teach a series of ethical renewals. Emerson says: “The character thus gained and proven and held fast is redemption. There is no other worthy definition of the word. It is the redemption of man’s lower self by the domination of his higher self. It is the spiritual redeeming the material, the divine that is in every man redeeming the animal.”[Unitarian Thought, p. 193.]

2. IT FOLLOWS FROM WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES CONCERNING THE NATURAL CONDITION OF MAN. Holiness or conformity to the divine law is the indispensable condition of securing divine favor, attaining peace of conscience, and enjoying fellowship with God. Heb. 12:14. Now the condition of man by nature is, according to Scripture, both in disposition and act, exactly the opposite of that holiness which is so indispensable. Man is described as dead through trespasses and sins, Eph. 2:1, and this condition calls for nothing less than a restoration to life. A radical internal change is necessary, a change by which the whole disposition of the soul is altered.

3. IT IS ALSO EXPRESSLY ASSERTED BY SCRIPTURE. Scripture does not leave us in doubt about the necessity of regeneration, but asserts this in the clearest terms. Jesus says: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” John 3:3.[Cf. also the verses 5-7.] This statement of the Saviour is absolute and leaves no room for exceptions. The same truth is clearly brought out in some of the statements of Paul, as, for instance, in I Cor. 2:14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”; Gal. 6:15: “For in Christ Jesus neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” Cf. also Jer. 13:23; Rom. 3:11; Eph. 2:3,4.

F. THE EFFICIENT CAUSE OF REGENERATION.

GLOSS Efficient cause: the agent who brings a thing about; regeneration is the direct work of the Holy Spirit.

There are only three fundamentally different views that come into consideration here, and all the others are modifications of these.

1. **THE HUMAN WILL.** According to the Pelagian conception regeneration is solely an act of the human will, and is practically identical with self-reformation. With some slight differences this is the view of modern liberal theology. A modification of this view is that of the Semi-Pelagian and Arminian, who regard it as, at least in part, an act of man, co-operating with divine influences applied through the truth. This is the synergistic theory of regeneration. Both of these views involve a denial of the total depravity of man, so plainly taught in the Word of God, John 5:42; Rom. 3:9-18; 7:18,23; 8:7; II Tim. 3:4, and of the Scripture truth that it is God who inclines the will, Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:13.

2. **THE TRUTH.** According to this view the truth as a system of motives, presented to the human will by the Holy Spirit, is the immediate cause of the change from unholiness to holiness. This was the view of Lyman Beecher and of Charles G. Finney. It assumes that the work of the Holy Spirit differs from that of the preacher only in degree. Both work by persuasion only. But this theory is quite unsatisfactory. The truth can be a motive to holiness only if it is loved, while the natural man does not love the truth, but hates it, Rom. 1:18,25. Consequently the truth, presented externally, cannot be the efficient cause of regeneration.

3. **THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The only adequate view is that of the Church of all ages, that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of regeneration. This means that the Holy Spirit works directly on the heart of man and changes its spiritual

condition. There is no co-operation of the sinner in this work whatsoever. It is the work of the Holy Spirit directly and exclusively, Ezek. 11:19; John 1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:13. Regeneration, then, is to be conceived monergistically. God alone works, and the sinner has no part in it whatsoever. This, of course, does not mean, that man does not co-operate in later stages of the work of redemption. It is quite evident from Scripture that he does.

G. THE USE OF THE WORD OF GOD AS AN INSTRUMENT IN REGENERATION.

GLOSS **Immediate regeneration:** the view that the Holy Spirit directly implants new life, while ordinarily accompanying the preaching of the gospel.

The question arises, whether the Word of God is used as a means in regeneration or not; or, as it is frequently put, whether regeneration is mediate or immediate.

1. THE PROPER IMPORT OF THE QUESTION. Careful discrimination is required, in order to avoid misunderstanding.

a. When the older Reformed theologians insisted on the immediate character of regeneration, they often gave the term “immediate” a connotation which it does not have to-day. Some of the representatives of the school of Saumur, as Cameron and Pajon, taught that in regeneration the Holy Spirit supernaturally illumines and convinces the mind or the intellect in such a powerful manner that the will cannot fail to follow the prevalent dictate of the practical judgment. He works immediately only on the intellect, and through this mediately on the will. According to them there is no immediate operation of the Holy Spirit on the will of man. In opposition to these men, Reformed theologians generally stressed the fact that in regeneration the Holy Spirit also

operates directly on the will of man, and not merely through the mediation of the intellect. To-day the question of mediate or immediate regeneration is a slightly different, though related, one. It is the question of the use of the Word of God as a means in the work of regeneration.

b. The exact form of the question ought to be carefully noted. The question is not, whether God works regeneration by means of a creative word. It is generally admitted that He does. Neither is it, whether He employs the word of truth, the word of preaching in the new birth, as distinguished from the divine begetting of the new man, that is, in securing the first holy exercises of the new life. The real question is, whether God, in implanting or generating the new life, employs the word of Scripture or the word of preaching as an instrument or means. The discussion of this matter often suffered in the past from the lack of proper discrimination.

2. CONSIDERATIONS THAT FAVOR A NEGATIVE ANSWER. Dr. Shedd says: "The influence of the Holy Spirit is distinguishable from that of the truth; from that of man upon man; and from that of any instrument or means whatever. His energy acts directly upon the human soul itself. It is the influence of spirit upon spirit; of one of the trinitarian persons upon a human person. Neither the truth, nor a fellow-man, can thus operate directly upon the essence of the soul itself." [Dogm. Theol. II, p. 500.] The following considerations favor this view:

a. Regeneration is a creative act, by which the spiritually dead sinner is restored to life. But the truth of the gospel can only work in a moral and persuasive way. Such an instrument has no effect on the dead. To assert its use would seem to imply a denial of the spiritual death of man; which, of course, is not intended by those who take this position.

b. Regeneration takes place in the sphere of the sub-conscious, that is, outside of the sphere of conscious attention, while the truth addresses itself to

the consciousness of man. It can exercise its persuasive influence only when man's attention is fixed on it.

c. The Bible distinguishes the influence of the Holy Spirit from that of the Word of God, and declares that such an influence is necessary for the proper reception of the truth, John 6:64,65; Acts 16:14; I Cor. 2:12-15; Eph. 1:17-20. Notice particularly the case of Lydia, of whom Luke says: "She heard us (ekouen, impf.), whose heart the Lord opened (dienoixen, aor., single act), that she attended (prosechein, inf. of result or purpose) unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

3. SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT SEEM TO PROVE THE CONTRARY.

a. In James 1:18 we read: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." This passage does not prove that the new generation is mediated by the Word of God, for the term here used is *apokuesen*, which does not refer to begetting, but to giving birth. They who believe in immediate regeneration do not deny that the new birth, in which the new life first becomes manifest, is secured by the Word.

b. Peter exhorts believers to love one another fervently in view of the fact that they have been "begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God, which liveth and abideth." I Pet. 1:23. It is not correct to say, as some have done, that "the Word" in this verse is the creative word, or the second person in the Trinity, for Peter himself informs us that he has in mind the word that was preached unto the readers, vs. 25. But it is perfectly in order to point out that even *gennao* (the word here used) does not always refer to the masculine begetting, but may also denote the feminine giving birth to children. This is perfectly evident from such passages as Luke 1:13,57; 23:29; John 16:21; Gal. 4:24. Consequently, there is no warrant for the assertion that Peter in this passage refers to the initial act in regeneration, namely, the begetting. And if it refers to regeneration in a broader sense, then

the passage offers no difficulty whatsoever in connection with the matter under consideration. The idea that it refers to the new birth here, is favored by the fact that the readers are represented as having been born again out of a seed that was evidently already implanted in the soul, cf. John 1:13. It is not necessary to identify the seed with the Word.

c. The Parable of the Sower is sometimes urged in favor of the idea that regeneration takes place through the Word. The seed in this parable is the word of the kingdom. The argument is that the life is in the seed and comes forth out of the seed. Consequently, the new life comes forth out of the seed of the Word of God. But, in the first place, this is over-shooting the mark, for it will hardly do to say that the Spirit or the principle of the new life is shut up in the Word, just as the living germ is shut up in the seed. This reminds one somewhat of the Lutheran conception of calling, according to which the Spirit is in the Word so that the call would always be effective, if man did not put a stumbling-block in the way. And, in the second place, this is pressing a point which is not at all in the *tertium comparationis*. The Saviour wants to explain in this parable how it comes about that the seed of the Word bears fruit in some cases, and not in others. It bears fruit only in those cases in which it falls in good ground, in hearts so prepared that they understand the truth.

4. THE RELEVANT TEACHINGS OF OUR CONFESSIONAL STANDARDS. The following passages come into consideration here: Conf. Belg., Articles XXIV and XXXV; Heid. Cat., Q. 54; Canons of Dort, III and IV, Articles 11,12,17; and, finally, the Conclusions of Utrecht, adopted by our Church in 1908. From these passages it is perfectly evident that our confessional writings speak of regeneration in a broad sense, as including both the origin of the new life and its manifestation in conversion. We are even told that faith regenerates the sinner.[Conf. Belg., Art. XXIV.] There are passages which seem to say that the Word of God is instrumental in the work of regeneration.[Conf. Belg., Art XXIV, and especially Art. XXVI; Canons of Dort III and IV, Articles 12,17.] Yet they are couched in such language that it still remains doubtful,

whether they actually teach that the principle of the new life is implanted in the soul by the instrumentality of the Word. They fail to discriminate carefully between the various elements which we distinguish in regeneration. In the Conclusions of Utrecht we read: “As far as the third point, that of immediate regeneration, is concerned, Synod declares that this expression can be used in a good sense, in so far as our churches have always confessed, over against the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Church, that regeneration is not effected through the Word or the Sacraments as such, but by the almighty regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; that this regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, however, may not in that sense be divorced from the preaching of the Word, as if both were separated from each other; for, although our Confession teaches that we need not be in doubt respecting the salvation of our children which die in infancy, though they have not heard the preaching of the gospel, and our confessional standards nowhere express themselves as to the manner in which regeneration is effected in the case of these and other children, — yet it is, on the other hand, certain that the gospel is a power of God unto salvation for every one who believes, and that in the case of adults the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the gospel.” [The following Reformed theologians teach immediate regeneration; Synopsis Purioris Theologie (of the Leyden Professors), 31:9; Maastricht, Godgeleerdheid VI. 3,26; Brakel, Redelijke Godsdienst I, p. 738. These three authorities, however, apparently use the term “immediate” in a different sense. Further: Turretin, Opera XV. 4,23 f.; Shedd, Dogm. Theol. II, pp. 500, 506; Hodge, Syst. Theol. III, p. 31; Kuyper, Dict Dogm., De Salute, p. 74; Bavinck, Roeping en Wedergeboorte, pp. 219 ff.; Vos, Geref. Dogm. IV, pp. 46 ff.]

H. DIVERGENT VIEWS OF REGENERATION.

GLOSS Synergistic: involving co-operation between God and man; Berkhof contrasts this with God’s sole work in regeneration.

1. THE PELAGIAN VIEW. According to the Pelagians man's freedom and personal responsibility implies that he is at all times just as able to desist from sin as to commit sin. Only acts of conscious volition are regarded as sin. Consequently, regeneration simply consists in moral reformation. It means that the man who formerly chose to transgress the law, now chooses to live in obedience to it.

2. BAPTISMAL REGENERATION. This is not always represented in the same way.

a. In the Church of Rome. According to the Roman Catholic Church regeneration includes not only spiritual renewal, but also justification or the forgiveness of sins, and is effected by means of baptism. In the case of children the work of regeneration is always effective; not so in the case of adults. These can gratefully accept and utilize the grace of regeneration, but can also resist it and make it ineffective. Moreover, it is always possible that they who have appropriated it will lose it again.

b. In the Anglican Church. The Church of England is not unanimous on this point, but represents two different tendencies. The so-called Puseyites are in essential agreement with the Church of Rome. But there is also an influential party in the Church which distinguishes two kinds of regeneration: the one consisting merely in a change of one's relation to the Church and the means of grace; and the other, in a fundamental change of human nature. According to this party only the former is effected by baptism. This regeneration includes no spiritual renewal. By means of it man merely enters into a new relation to the Church, and becomes a child of God in the same sense in which the Jews became children of God through the covenant of which circumcision was a seal.

c. In the Lutheran Church. Luther and his followers did not succeed in purging their Church from the leaven of Rome on this point. On the whole the Lutherans maintain, in opposition to Rome, the monergistic character of

regeneration. They regard man as entirely passive in regeneration and incapable of contributing anything to it, though adults can resist it for a long time. At the same time some teach that baptism, working *ex opere operato*, is the usual means by which God effects regeneration. It is the usual, but not the only means, for the preaching of the Word may also produce it. They speak of two kinds of regeneration, namely, *regeneratio prima*, by which the new life is begotten, and the *regeneratio secunda* or *renovatio*, by which the new life is led in a God-ward direction. While children receive the *regeneratio prima* by means of baptism, adults, who receive the first regeneration by means of the Word, become partakers of the *regeneratio secunda* through baptism. According to the Lutherans regeneration is amissible. But through the grace of God it can be restored in the heart of the penitent sinner, and that without rebaptism. Baptism is a pledge of God's continued readiness to renew the baptized and to pardon his sins. Moreover, regeneration is not always accomplished at once, but is often a gradual process in the life of adults.

3. THE ARMINIAN VIEW. According to the Arminians regeneration is not exclusively a work of God, nor exclusively a work of man. It is the fruit of man's choice to co-operate with the divine influences exerted by means of the truth. Strictly speaking, the work of man is prior to that of God. They do not assume that there is a preceding work of God by which the will is inclined to the good. Naturally, they also believe that the grace of regeneration can be lost. The Wesleyan Arminians altered this view in so far that they stress the fact that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, be it in co-operation with the human will. They do assume a prior operation of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, awaken, and draw man. However, they also believe that man can resist this work of the Holy Spirit, and that, as long as he does this, he remains in his unregenerate condition.

4. THE VIEW OF THE MEDIATING THEOLOGIANS. This is cast in a pantheistic mold. After the incarnation there are no two separate natures in Christ, but only a divine-human nature, a fusion of divine and human life. In

regeneration a part of that divine-human life passes over into the sinner. This does not require a separate operation of the Holy Spirit whenever a sinner is regenerated. The new life has been communicated to the Church once for all, is now the permanent possession of the Church, and passes from the Church into the individual. Communion with the Church also insures participation of the new life. This view ignores the legal aspect of the work of Christ entirely. Moreover, it makes it impossible to hold that any one could be regenerated before the divine-human life of Christ came into existence. The Old Testament saints cannot have been regenerated. Schleiermacher is the father of this view.

5. THE TRICHOTOMIC VIEW. Some theologians constructed a peculiar theory of regeneration on the basis of the trichotomic view of human nature. This view proceeds on the assumption that man consists of three parts, — body, soul, and spirit. It is generally assumed, though there are variations on this point, that sin has its seat only in the soul, and not in the spirit (pneuma). If it had penetrated to the spirit, man would have been irretrievably lost, just as the devils, who are pure spiritual beings. The spirit is the higher, divine life in man, destined to control the lower life. By the entrance of sin into the world the influence of the spirit on the lower life is weakened very much; but by regeneration it is strengthened again and harmony is restored in the life of man. This is, of course, a purely rationalistic theory.[Cf. Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*.]

6. THE VIEW OF MODERN LIBERALISM. The liberal theologians of the present day do not all have the same view of regeneration. Some of them speak in terms that remind one of Schleiermacher. More generally, however, they sponsor a purely naturalistic view. They are averse to the idea that regeneration is a supernatural and recreative work of God. In virtue of the immanent God every man has a divine principle within him and thus possesses potentially all that is necessary unto salvation. The one thing that is necessary, is that man become conscious of his potential divinity, and that he

consciously yield to the guidance of the higher principle within him. Regeneration is simply an ethical change of character.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What other terms and expressions does the Bible use to designate the work of regeneration? Does the Bible sharply distinguish between calling, regeneration, conversion, and sanctification? How do you account for it that the Roman Catholic Church includes even justification in regeneration? How do regeneration and conversion differ? Is there such a thing as prevenient grace, preceding and preparing for regeneration? What is active, as distinguished from passive, regeneration? Does man's passivity in regeneration last for any length of time? Does not the view that the Word of God is not instrumental in effecting regeneration, make the preaching of the Word seem futile and quite unnecessary? Does it not lead to the verge of mysticism?