

© 2008 by Nelson D. Kloosterman and J. Mark Beach

Published by
REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
2965 Leonard St., NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0599 / Fax 616-285-3246
e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org
website: www.heritagebooks.org

Originally published in Dutch as *Roeping en Wedergeboorte*
(Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1903).

This is a REFORMED EXPLORATIONS monograph,
commissioned by the faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bavinck, Herman, 1854-1921.
[Roeping en wedergeboorte. English]
Saved by grace : the Holy Spirit's work in calling and regeneration /
by Herman Bavinck ; edited, with an introduction by J. Mark Beach ;
translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-60178-052-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)
1. Regeneration (Theology) 2. Grace (Theology) 3. Reformed
Church--Doctrines. I. Beach, J. Mark (James Mark) II. Title.
BT790.B3813 2008
234--dc22

2008030170

*For additional Reformed literature, both new and used, request a
free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above address.*

From 29 March 1901 through 2 May 1902, some forty articles were published in *De Bazuin* [*The Trumpet*], essays which sought to communicate greater clarity concerning the doctrine of immediate regeneration. These articles now appear separately under a somewhat modified title. May they, also in this form, ensure that difference of insight does no injury to the unity of the Confession and to the peace of the churches.

Herman Bavinck

CONTENTS

Introductory Essay	J. Mark Beach	ix
--------------------------	---------------	----

Part I: Introduction

1. The Occasion and Rise of the Controversy		3
---	--	---

Part II: The Immediate Operation of the Holy Spirit

2. Differing Conceptions of Divine Grace		13
3. The Reformed Defense of Divine Grace against the Remonstrants		19

Part III: The Immediate Operation of the Holy Spirit and the Means of Grace

4. Augustine and the Reformed on the Means of Grace		33
5. Calling and Regeneration at the Synod of Dort		41
6. Calling and Regeneration in Other Reformed Theologians		54
7. The Reformed Conception of the Covenant of Grace and the Church		66
8. Diverse Views Concerning the Moment of Regeneration		78
9. A Weighty Counter-Argument		95
10. The Anabaptist versus the Reformed Understanding of the Order of Salvation		100
11. Holy Scripture on the Spiritual State of Adults in the Covenant ...		110
12. Calling and Regeneration and its Relation to Preaching		119

Part IV: The Relation between the Immediate
Operation of the Holy Spirit and the Means of Grace

13. The Means of Grace in General	131
14. The Word as Means of Grace in Particular	141
15. The Work of God's Word in Regeneration, Faith, and Conversion	147
16. Solution to the Controversy	160
Appendix	169
Scripture and Confession Index.....	173
Person and Subject Index	177

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY¹

HERMAN BAVINCK was born December 13, 1854, at Hoogeveen, the Netherlands. His father, J. Bavinck (1826–1909), was a prominent minister in the church of the Secession, which had seceded from the National Dutch Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*) in 1834. Herman was an extraordinarily gifted student, studying first at the Theological School of the Secession churches in Kampen, but transferring to Leiden University in order to become acquainted first hand with the modernist theology of J. H. Scholten and A. Kuenen and their more scientific approach to the discipline of theology. He earned a doctorate from Leiden in 1880, whereupon he was offered a teaching post at the newly founded Free University of Amsterdam. He declined that appointment and entered the pastorate at Franeker for a year, before accepting the appointment to teach at Kampen. Here he was to spend the next twenty years of his life, in spite of the Free University of Amsterdam again offering him a teaching position in the theological faculty in 1889. Finally, in 1902 Bavinck came to the Free University to occupy the chair of dogmatics vacated by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. He labored at the Free University until his death in 1921.²

Bavinck is often contrasted with his great contemporary and senior, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). We may briefly observe, as has been noted by others, that whereas Kuyper was a man of broad vision and sparkling ideas, Bavinck was a man of sober disposition and clear concepts. Whereas Kuyper was more speculative, tracing out intuitively grasped thoughts, Bavinck was a more careful scholar and built on and from historical givens. While Kuyper is notable for his efforts to bring reform to the church and society, applying the principles of Calvinism to the social and political concerns of his time, even helping to orchestrate the first Christian political party in the Netherlands (the Antirevolutionary Party), Bavinck's strengths resided in examining some of the inadequacies of old answers and so demonstrating the need to press forward with new proposals. Finally, while Kuyper was mainly deductive, Bavinck

¹ A different version of this essay, at some points abridged and at various points much expanded, can be found under the title "Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008).

² The most notable biography of Bavinck is R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966); also see V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921). For an analysis of aspects of Bavinck's life and especially his relationship to Abraham Kuyper, as well as the Ethical and Modernist theology that flourished in the Netherlands during the time that he labored, see Rolf Hendrik Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus*, Academisch Proefschrift, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1961), 1–147.

was mainly inductive.³ Without question, Kuyper was the more controversial of the two men, for Kuyper excelled at polemics and directed most of his theological work to a more popular audience. Bavinck, on the other hand, sought to gain a hearing for classic Reformed theology within the modern academic context, though he did write his share of popular works aimed at pastors and the laity.

In reference to Bavinck's writing, his chief work was his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* in four volumes, first published in 1895–1901, with a second and expanded edition issued in 1906–11. (The English publication of this work is now complete under the title *Reformed Dogmatics* [2003–2008], translated by John Vriend, edited by John Bolt.) Bavinck also subsequently penned two abbreviated dogmatic works. The first, *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis* [The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to Reformed Confession] (1909), was a one volume, compressed dogmatics (659 pages), and was translated into English in 1956, and is still in print under the title: *Our Reasonable Faith*. The second dogmatic work that Bavinck wrote was *Handleiding bij het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst* [Manual for Instruction in the Christian Religion] (1913), a short compendium of the previously mentioned work, consisting of some 251 pages. Other notable writings from Bavinck's pen include,⁴ first from his time as professor at Kampen: *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (1888)⁵; *De Algemeene Genade* (1894)⁶; *Beginnelsen der Psychologie* (1897); *Schepping of Ontwikkeling* (1901); *De Offerande des Lofs* (1901)⁷; *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (1901)⁸; and then from his years as professor at the Free University: *Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid* (1902); *Hedendaagsche Moraal* (1902); *Christelijke Wetenschap* (1904); *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (1904); *Paedagogische Beginselen* (1904); *Het Christelijk Huisgezin* (1908); *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1908), which comprises the Stone Lectures he delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in that year; *Calvin and*

³ See T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde theologisch tijdschrift* 22 (1921): 101; also see Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus*, 13–64; Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 130–133; Louis Praamsma, *The Church in the Twentieth Century: Elect from Every Nation*, vol. 7., trans. the author (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1981), 25–28.

⁴ For a complete and detailed bibliography of Bavinck's writings, see Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus*, 425–53.

⁵ In English, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (November 1992): 220–251.

⁶ In English, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (April 1989): 35–65.

⁷ In English, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations before and after receiving access to the Table of the Lord*, 2nd ed., trans. John Dolfin (Grand Rapids: Louis Kregel, 1922).

⁸ In English, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1980).

Common Grace (1909)⁹; and also *Modernisme en Orthodoxie* (1911); *De Opvoeding der Rijpere Jeugd* (1916); *Bijbelsche en Religieuse Psychologie* (1920). Many of Bavinck's articles were collected after his death and published under the respective titles *Verzamelde Opstellen* (1921)¹⁰ and *Kennis en Leven* (1922). The volume here translated for the first time, *Roeping en Wedergeboorte* [Calling and Regeneration] (1903), was composed during Bavinck's initial years at the Free University.

Bavinck's Book on Calling and Regeneration

This last mentioned work, to which we have given the English title, *Saved by Grace: the Work of the Holy Spirit in Calling and Regeneration*, offers in a more popular form Bavinck's treatment of God's gracious work in bringing fallen sinners to new life and salvation. This book, therefore, takes up questions with which every new generation of Reformed writers must grapple. Indeed, in dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of sinners, and in dealing with the means or instruments that the Spirit employs in order to accomplish His sovereign work, Reformed theologians have had to chart their way through a thicket of errors. On the one side is the error of undervaluing the use of means—of any kind—with the result that, in protecting God's sovereignty in performing the work of salvation, Word and sacrament, and the church's role in administering Word and sacrament, are denigrated and “the *means* of grace” becomes an empty phrase. On the other side is the error of overvaluing the use of means—the means of both Word and sacrament—with the result that divine agency in the work of salvation is transferred to means and the *means* of grace comes actually to denote the *agents* of grace.

The practical effect of each error is not difficult to predict or trace. In the first case people become passive, introspective, given to mysticism and quietism—as one waits for God to do his work; in the second case people forget that salvation is truly God's gracious work; Arminianism or semi-Pelagianism lurk nearby, and with it the temptation to treat Word and sacrament in a kind of *ex opere operato* fashion, i.e., by the mere faithful performance of the preaching of the gospel and the administering of baptism or the Supper, people are saved. This in turn breeds a kind of objectivism and sterile formalism, where *means* of grace accomplish, in themselves, the *work* of grace. The call to genuine faith and repentance can easily be shortchanged or ignored altogether.

⁹ This essay was composed in English, first printed in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1909) and subsequently published with a collection of three other essays in *Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. William Park Armstrong (London: F. H. Revell, 1909; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 99–130.

¹⁰ In English, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Bavinck's little book seeks to protect the church from both sets of errors. The volume itself was, as Bavinck himself explains in his short preface, first a series of forty short articles published in the periodical *De Bazuin* [*The Trumpet*] from 29 March 1901 through 2 May 1902. In taking up the question of *immediate* or *unmediated* regeneration, Bavinck was not needlessly or fruitlessly burdening the church with a technical topic of obscurantist theology. He was seeking to bring unity to the recently formed church body, The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, the *GKN*). The formation of these churches came about in 1892 through the union of two distinct reformatory movements from within the Dutch State Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*), namely the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1886.¹¹

The Churches of the Secession

The *Afscheiding* (or Secession) can be characterized as an ecclesiastical movement that attempted to effect reform within the State Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*) but came to exist as a separate denomination apart from it. The occasion for this effort to reform the church is a story in itself. For our purposes it is sufficient to assert that, fundamentally, this effort at reform sought to re-establish the church upon the foundations of the fathers, i.e., to affirm the Three Forms of Unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort) as a living and authoritative confession of the church, and that these standards govern the church along with the old Dort Church Order. More broadly and generally, the *Afscheiding* sought to thwart the decaying effects of doctrinal liberalism and to reassert biblical authority in the face of its denial by liberal critics. The acids of the Enlightenment had eaten away at the vitality and purity of the churches. The *Afscheiding* sought to bring healing and reform to what was left. In so doing, it was concerned that a genuinely reinvigorated piety mark the church in its life and fellowship.

¹¹ See L. Knappert, *Geschiedenis der Hervormde Kerk onder De Republiek en Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff & Co., 1911–12), II, 37–41, 298–313, 342–46; D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition: from the Reformation to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 79–98; Henry Beets, *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N. A.: zestig jaren van strijd en zegen* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1918), 18–50, 327ff.; idem, *The Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1946), 24–37; James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 3–33; Hendrik Bouma, *Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834–1892*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1995); J. Veenhof, “Geschiedenis van theologie en spiritualiteit in de gereformeerde kerken,” in *100 Jaar Theologie: aspecten van een eeuw theologie in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (1892–1992)*, ed. M. E. Brinkman (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1992), 9–27.

Among the principal leaders of this movement were Hendrik De Cock (1801–1842) and Anthony Brummelkamp (1811–1888).¹² Turbulent years were to follow for the Seceders, for they were persecuted from without by the state authorities and subject to disagreement and division from within by a series of doctrinal and practical disputes. In 1854 these churches reached a strong measure of concord; and that same year they founded a theological school at Kampen for the training of ministers. Herman Bavink was appointed professor of Dogmatics at Kampen in 1882.

The Churches of the Grieving

The *Doleantie* (or the Grieving) on the other hand represented the churches that had been ousted from the State Reformed Church after failing to bring reform to that ecclesiastical body during the period leading up to the mid 1880s. It was organized under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), and Kuyper's personality was very much woven into the identity of that group of churches. The *Doleantie* is perhaps best characterized as a second Secession. Both movements attempted reform within the State Church; and both failed to achieve the desired remedy.

Kuyper had founded the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, besides pursuing his own ministerial labors in the State Reformed Church, working hard in publishing articles in both the ecclesiastical and political press, and working to bring doctrinal renewal in the *Hervormde Kerk* in the face of modernism and unbelief. The *Doleantie* itself emerged from the practical question whether those who denied the Reformed faith could be admitted to membership in the State Church. When the Amsterdam Consistory (the consistory having jurisdiction over all the churches in Amsterdam and its vicinity) refused to comply with the provincial board's decision that ordered acceptance of such members, some 80 members of the consistory were deposed from office, Kuyper among them. This episode took place in 1886, and brought about the formation of a new ecclesiastical body of *Doleerende Kerken* [Grieving Churches]. This movement soon spread far beyond Amsterdam.

*The Union of 1892 and the Problems Leading to
the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905*

The union of 1892 between the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie* was preceded by suspicion and difficulties. Some members of each group looked askance at the other, and some leaders in the *Afscheiding* distrusted Kuyper and disliked elements of his theology. Of particular concern in the union talks was the status of the theological school at Kampen and the theological faculty at the Free University of Amsterdam. Each

¹² Other leaders included Hendrik Peter Scholte, Simon Van Velzen, Albertus C. Van Raalte, and G. F. Gezelle.

school was allowed its place and its identity, and students could be trained for ministry at either school. The union was accomplished in 1892 and adopted the name *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (*GKN*) [The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands]. This union, unfortunately, proved to be less than harmonious from the start. Immediately some ministers and congregations of the *Afscheiding* left the union, returning to the churches that had not joined the merger, namely the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk* [The Christian Reformed Church]. Meanwhile, within a decade of the union, some particular theological views of Kuyper had created enough disagreement and ecclesiastical rancor as to move Bavinck to enter the fray.

Bavinck's book, written shortly after he had taken up the chair of dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1901 (as Kuyper's successor) was a mildly "anti-Kuyperian" work—that is, Bavinck stands, if ever so gently, against Kuyper on this particular point. (Bavinck had also previously completed the first edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics* in four volumes [1895–1901].) The controversy, surrounding some features or accents of Kuyper's theology on regeneration and baptism, escalated. For example, L. Lindeboom, Bavinck's colleague at Kampen, asserted that Kuyper taught views not demanded by the Reformed confessions. It became clear that the matter would require synodical adjudication. In 1905 the Synod of Utrecht offered what might be termed "compromise" declarations or "pacifying" conclusions on four issues under discussion, though in each case Kuyper's particular views, far from being vindicated, are mildly censured.¹³

The committee that took up this matter included members of each group, "A" churches and "B" churches (*Afscheiding* and *Doleantie* respectively).¹⁴ The presider of the committee was H. H. Kuyper, a fervent advocate of his father's views. That Utrecht sought to maintain unity among the churches is reflected in the committee's explanation of its work—two quotations in particular illuminate the mind-set of the committee, wherein they recommend that Synod not offer a definitive judgment on the disputed points. They explain that such was

¹³ For an English translation of the Conclusions of Utrecht, see the Appendix.

¹⁴ This divided mindset of "A" churches and "B" churches continued to plague the *GKN* in its subsequent history, culminating in theological controversy that ended in the fracturing of those churches in 1944, with the deposition of Klaas Schilder and others. At the risk of over simplifying the matter, "A" churches, in general, wanted to preserve the theological heritage of the Secession, though doctrinal disagreement on covenant and baptism marked that heritage, while "B" churches, reflecting Kuyper's theological accents, emphasized the theological heritage of prominent strands of seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theology. The Conclusions of Utrecht 1905, sought to argue that both camps were within confessional boundaries and each "side" ought to guard against one-sidedness and allow the full revelation and accents of Scripture to be given their due. See the appendix for the full text of the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905; cf. E. Smilde, *Een Eeuw van Strijd over Verbond en Doop, met een woord vooraf van Prof. Dr. K. Dijk* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1946), 279–319.

... neither necessary nor desirable, because the differences involved, provided one guards carefully against all exaggeration, do not touch on a single essential point of our confession, a single fundamental dogma of our Church, but only concern a difference of understanding, a difference of presentation, a difference in terminology. Your committee regrets that some strong expressions, the use of unusual terms, and the emphasis on certain doctrinal formulations have given occasion for the action which presently disturbs our church. But it regrets equally that the impression is given to our church that this is a struggle against an actual departure from the precious confession made by our fathers, by which purity of doctrine is endangered and a new doctrine introduced into the Church. But for anyone who knows history it is plain that the disputed points may be found wholly or in part in the leading teachers of our Church, such as Calvin, Beza, Ursinus, de Brès, Gomarus, Voetius, Comrie, Holtius, etc., and that our churches in the golden age of Reformed theology never dreamed of accusing these men of departure from the Confession. . . .

The committee was of the conviction that the different views and the ensuing debate on the disputed points reflected a human trait to veer off into one-sidedness, which reveals a failure to maintain Scripture's full portrait.

If on the one hand men lay more emphasis on the sovereignty of God, on the eternity and immutability of God's decrees, on the omnipotent working of God's grace, and on the stability of the Covenant of Grace; while on the other hand men fix their attention more on the guilt of man, on the application of God's decrees in time, on the means which God uses in the work of grace, and on the personal appropriation of the blessings of the Covenant; both presentations find their ground in Scripture, they serve to complement each other in warding off all one-sidedness, and the elimination of one of these lists of propositions in the interests of the other would do damage to the knowledge of God, to the salvation of our souls, and to the practice of piety. Our Reformed Churches have therefore at all times and in all lands maintained *libertas profetandi* with respect to these differences. Thereby they have demonstrated how, in the defense of the Confession, a breadth of insight and approach serves to guard the churches against one-sidedness and to keep the way open to further developments in theology.¹⁵

The Four Issues in Dispute at Utrecht 1905

Specifically, four issues were in dispute: (1) the debate between supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism; (2) justification from eternity; (3) immediate regeneration; and (4) presupposed regeneration (*vis-à-vis* infant baptism).

¹⁵ Both quotations are taken from John Kromminga, *Christian Reformed Church History (Class notes)* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, n.d.), 29–30. The copy I am quoting from was issued in 1983.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1

The Occasion and Rise of the Controversy

1.1 The Purpose of This Study

AMONG REFORMED churches nowadays there is a difference of opinion of no small consequence concerning the order in which the benefits of the covenant of grace relate to one another and follow each other, in the mind of God as well as in their application to humanity.¹

It is generally well known that in place of the ancient and usual representation of the order of salvation, another perspective has been proposed in recent years, one that at various points diverges from, and even conflicts with, the earlier view most generally prevalent.

Indeed, this newer representation of the order of salvation-benefits has found rather sudden and complete acceptance among many people. Despite this, because of weighty objections, others have been unable to agree with this newer view, and have seen it as conflicting with Scripture and Confession.²

¹ Ed. note: See the Editor's "Introductory Essay" for the background to this debate, pages ix–lvi; also see Bavinck's thorough discussion of the order (or way) of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002–2008), III, 484–595, where he sets forth the Reformed approach to this question and its concern to champion salvation as wholly a gift of divine grace, the church itself empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel to the nations. Over against the errors of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, as well as mysticism, pietism, and rationalism, Bavinck demonstrates how the Reformed emphasized the centrality of communion with Christ as the presupposition of the order of salvation, and how the work of salvation and its application to the elect in history is grounded in the eternal intratrinitarian *pactum salutis* or counsel of peace between the Father and Son, with the Holy Spirit being the agent sent forth to administer this grace to sinners. By the turn of the century the diversity of viewpoints on the relationship between calling and regeneration had provoked discord within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, as reflected in Bavinck's citation of various incidents of opposition. See footnote 2 below.

² Trans. note: We have moved to this footnote the following material from the body of Bavinck's original text as not having immediate interest to a North American audience;

One can even say that this difference of opinion about the order of salvation-benefits was the basis for the ongoing brotherly quarrel about Maccovius and his theology.³ People opposed the dry scholastic method of the Franeker professor, but far more than that—for no one objects to a genuinely scientific treatment in dogmatic theology—they resisted the substantive presentation of the truth as set forth by Maccovius in his teaching. Especially his teachings regarding supralapsarianism, justification from eternity, immediate regeneration, and the like, met with objection.⁴ Moreover, it seems that, though on the one hand these views seemed well protected by the armor of Maccovius, these views were nonetheless also opposed and rejected for the very reason of being associated with him.

All these points of dispute regarding the order of salvation seem to be under discussion even more vigorously throughout the churches, and they occasion difference of sentiment. When one visits a church, or receives letters from some church members, where the atmosphere is heavy with legitimate conscientious objection and serious concern, then the reality cannot be camouflaged that in all these doctrinal differences hardly any agreement has been reached at all.

however, this material does show the nature of the disharmony that was in evidence during this period: “Rev. ten Hoor developed several of these objections already when he wrote in the *Vrije Kerk* [*Free Church*] an evaluation of the *Encyclopaedie* [Arrangement and Explanation of Theological Subjects] of Dr. Kuyper. The Consistory in Bedum thought these objections were so weighty that they submitted an appeal to the deputies for relations with the Theological Faculty of the Free University, which appeal was then discussed at the Synod of Middelburg in 1896, but was dismissed on the basis of formal and material considerations.

The appellants, however, were not convinced that they were mistaken, as became evident when Rev. T. Bos devoted several articles in the *Vrije Kerk* to the issues in question—articles that were published separately by Mr. Donner of Leiden under the title, ‘Nine Doctrinal Subjects, Simply Explained and Defended for Reformed People.’

Following him, came Mr. Huisman of Appingedam with a volume of 337 pages, in which he compared several fundamental truths of the Christian religion—examined in terms of God’s Word, the Confessions, Calvin and others of our Reformed fathers—with the views of Dr. Kuyper.

“Recently the pen was taken up yet again by Mr. J. H. Wessels of Utrecht, in order to investigate and evaluate on the basis of God’s Word the existing difference of opinion regarding the doctrine of the covenant.

“At the same time, articles were placed in the magazine of Prof. Lindeboom, entitled ‘What Does Scripture Say?’, by Mr. J. of M., articles which attempted to adduce proofs from Reformed theology for the claim that calling precedes regeneration.

“At the ministers’ conference held last year in Zwolle, the question of immediate regeneration was also discussed, and provided occasion for a lively debate.”

³ Ed. note: Johannes Maccovius (1578–1644) studied at Franeker and became professor of theology at that institution in 1615. He is remembered for his extreme and polemical advocacy of supralapsarianism against Sibrandus Lubbertus and for the censure he received at the Synod of Dort for his speculative and philosophical approach to theology. He was also censured while a professor for his dubious lifestyle and morals. His chief works are *Collegia theologica* (1623) and *Loci communes theologici* (1650).

⁴ Ed. note: These would be the very topics treated synodically in the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905. See the appendix, at the end of this work.

On the one side, people doubt whether anyone in our churches is teaching that, generally speaking, the regeneration of elect infants occurs before baptism, and they believe that surely such a view cannot be defended with certainty on the basis of Holy Scripture. At the same time, on the other side, many complain that much contemporary preaching of the Word seems almost to suggest that there are no unregenerate in the church any longer. It seems as though even when a person has continued living for years in an unconverted state, he must still be considered to be regenerated.

It seems that especially the objections being registered by the latter group are increasing in weight and in number. Ministers are no longer preaching discriminately—so goes the complaint of many nowadays. The godless are no longer being warned that they will fare badly. Sermons are no longer being preached with an urgency that communicates the message that anyone who is not regenerated by water and the Spirit will not see the kingdom of God. Preaching no longer lays it upon the listener's heart that it will profit nothing, though we have the name of Christian and are physically alive, if we are still dead in sins and trespasses. Many are convinced that to teach that baptism presupposes regeneration and that all who are baptized are to be considered regenerated inevitably robs the ministry of the Word of its essence and its power. Their overwhelming fear is that this teaching will lead many to build their houses on sand and to deceive themselves all the way into eternity.

Whether or not these objecting brothers and sisters are right, it cannot be denied that their reservations are very serious and arise among many believers from a pious conscience.

For that reason, all those complaints deserve to be heard with meekness. They are not coming strictly from the old "A" groups only, but just as frequently from the churches that since 1886 became reformed and are known mostly as "B" churches.⁵ Moreover, these complaints involve truths of very deep significance for theology and church, for the administration of the Word and Sacrament, for doctrine and life, for theory and practice.

Of all those truths, the doctrine of immediate regeneration occupies a central place, especially in Reformed theology.⁶ In the closest possible connection to this teaching lies the relationship between Word and Spirit, between Scripture and church, between doctrine and life, between mind and heart. This teaching involves the most important question, namely, in which way and in which order the Holy Spirit applies the benefits obtained through the suffering and dying of Christ.

⁵ Ed. note: See the Editor's "Introductory Essay" regarding "A" churches and "B" churches, page xiv, footnote 14.

⁶ Ed. note: See the Editor's "Introductory Essay," pages xxxiii–xlvi, for a definition and brief explanation of the meaning of the terms "immediate" and "mediate" regeneration. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, IV, 80–84.

We intend to shed light on this doctrine in the following chapters, in a manner as objective, non-partisan, and straightforward as possible. We do so in the quiet hope that the historic Reformed presentation of this doctrine, not the particular view of one or another group, may receive the endorsement of all the brothers and sisters in our churches, and will help bring an end to our differences, or at least help reduce them.

1.2 The Supralapsarian Position

The order of the benefits of divine salvation, as formulated recently by many speakers and writers, which is now encountering objection, can be summarized briefly as follows.

God has from eternity purposed and determined, so it is formulated by advocates of the one side, to glorify His attributes of mercy and justice by means of the eternal salvation of a portion of His rational creatures, and by means of the eternal condemnation of another portion.

In order to reach this goal that had been established from before all things, God decided first to create such rational creatures, then to permit them together to fall into sin, and finally to bring to redemption the elect portion of humanity through Christ, and to prepare for eternal condemnation the other reprobate portion that was on the path of sin.

According to this view, supralapsarianism—which corresponds with the order required by this line of thinking, namely, that the establishment of the goal precedes the establishment of the means—deserves preference over infralapsarianism. It is indeed a harsh truth; but even if it might not be confessional, it is quite certainly scriptural.

As people occasionally formulate the matter, supralapsarianism is comparable to a physician who must inform the patient with a fatal disease of that fact, which in this case refers to the non-elect needing to be told the truth of their reprobation. It is like the judge who must inform the criminal convicted of a capital crime of his death sentence. Such a physician and judge must do this, of course, with tenderness in his heart, filled with sadness and moved by pity. That pertains, however, merely to the form and the manner, but not to the substance itself. Supralapsarianism is the announcement of the truth of reprobation to the reprobate.

Similarly, the announcement of the gospel is nothing else than making known to the elect their eternal salvation, bringing to light that which has existed already from eternity.

1.2.1 *Eternal justification and immediate regeneration*

For, as this view sees it, election and justification occur together.⁷ The elect are justified initially not within time, but from eternity. Abra-

⁷ Ed. note: It should be noted that not all supralapsarians held to “justification from eternity,” though Abraham Kuyper and many of his followers embraced this doctrine, following Maccovius and certain eighteenth-century Reformed theologians. This doctrine was

ham, for example, was justified already before the foundation of the world. Within time he was justified only before the court of his own conscience and received personal knowledge of his justification.

This eternal justification, therefore, necessarily includes the Holy Spirit's regeneration within time. Among the elect who live under the administration of the covenant, this regeneration occurs as a rule very early in life, according to some. Most often the first seed of new life is implanted already in the mother's womb or immediately after birth. It is even possible—although this cannot be said with certainty—that someone is regenerated at the very same moment he is born. Just as with circumcision, so baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration.

Therefore this regeneration is possible before birth or immediately at birth, although one must distinguish between an immediate and a mediate operation of the Holy Spirit. According to the judgment of those who advocate this order of salvation, the *immediate* operation consists in the Holy Spirit implanting the seed of new life within the heart of the elect apart from or prior to the Word, whereby they are transferred from death to life. Some argue the claim that this immediate regeneration must precede the Word, since a deaf person cannot hear, a dead person cannot rise, a natural man cannot give ear to the summons of the gospel unto faith and repentance.

But if an elect person is regenerated in this manner, immediately, only by the Holy Spirit, apart from the Word, then God will see to it that sooner or later such a person will become acquainted with the gospel. Because he is regenerated he can now hear the gospel that is coming to him, can obey its summons, and can be rendered capable of faith and repentance. Upon the regenerated person who can hear, the Holy Spirit works *mediately, with and through the Word that is preached*.

1.2.2 *Immediate regeneration without immediate conversion*

But this is not yet to say concerning an elect person who was regenerated before or at the moment of birth, that when such a person becomes aware and hears the gospel, he also instantaneously accepts it in faith and turns to God with a true heart.

No, as this view teaches emphatically, the seed of regeneration can remain hidden in the heart without germinating, until a person is thirty, fifty, or even seventy years old. Many years can pass between regeneration and conversion.⁸ Even though in the first moments of their existence

controverted among the Reformed and received a “mixed” reception in the late nineteenth century by the revitalized Calvinism that Kuyper helped to form and to consolidate. Kuyper defends this doctrine, for example, in his book *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries; with explanatory notes by Henri De Vries, with an introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 367–371. See the critique of this view by Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 517–520.

⁸ Trans. note: Throughout this translation the Dutch word “bekeering” has been rendered, depending on the context, as either “repentance” or “conversion.”

the elect are regenerated unto eternal life, they can nevertheless continue for a very long time unconverted and unbelieving—yes, they can even live in terrible sin and surrender to various forms of unrighteousness. Nevertheless, in His time the Lord brings to light, by means of the effectual internal calling, that reality which perhaps many years before had been worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect immediately and apart from the Word.

1.2.3 *Regeneration precedes calling*

Therefore, regeneration precedes calling, often within time, but in any case, in that order. Where there is no life, there is no possibility of faith and repentance in response to the summons of the gospel. For the regenerate who can hear, effectual calling makes the Word of God to be spirit and life.

The Word is not thereby creating anything new, but merely bringing to light what is already there. The Word acquaints the regenerated person with the new life that the Holy Spirit bestows upon him. The Word itself is not a seed of regeneration, as others claim with an appeal to 1 Peter 1:23, but the Word merely makes the seed of regeneration, that first seed of the new life, develop. Under the moistening dew of the Holy Spirit, the Word cultivates new life unto deeds of faith and repentance, makes this new life self-aware, and makes it bear fruit unto the glory of the Lord's name. The Word serves to make manifest those who are regenerated, both unto themselves and unto others.

Among the human race, therefore, the dividing line runs not between believers and unbelievers, since many regenerated persons can live for years in unbelief, but it runs between the regenerate and the unregenerate. Here on earth it is not faith, but regeneration that draws the line properly between the elect and the reprobate portions of humanity.

Both segments exist sharply alongside and over against each other. From regenerated humanity proceed another awareness, another insight, another perspective and evaluation of all things, another art and science.⁹ For what has been implanted in the regenerate as a seed gradually surfaces within their consciousness. Even as faith and repentance develop from regeneration, so too the new life manifests itself gradually in its proper character and nature in every domain of human knowledge and activity. The regenerated person feels a different content impinging upon his consciousness. He sees and thinks and acts differently than the unregenerate, because he shares a different life.

⁹ Ed. note: See, for example, Abraham Kuyper's *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries, with an introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), § 49, pp. 155–176.

1.2.4 *The church as organism*

Therefore, finally, according to this formulation of the doctrine, the church as organism precedes the church as institution. The church as organism consists of reborn people who manifest their new life throughout the entire broad terrain of creation, in family, state, and society, or in science and art, and the like. Thus the church as institution is absolutely not the *whole* manifestation of the new life of the regenerate; rather, it occupies a very modest place that is limited on every side. It does not stand above family, society, and state, but among and alongside them, with a temporary, transitory, and clearly defined task.

That task consists in this: equipped by God with the means of grace, the church as institute transforms, under the operation of the Holy Spirit, the life of regeneration into deeds of faith and repentance. It presupposes the church as organism, which is regeneration, which is worked by the Holy Spirit apart from the Word before the heart is aware and which is therefore already presupposed at baptism. The church as institute calls the regenerate, who can now hear, unto faith and repentance.

As institute, thus, the church focuses upon only the regenerate. There is indeed an external call to the unregenerate, but this serves only to remove from them any excuse. The internal, effectual calling, which is paired with the external calling, is directed only to the regenerate. To these their calling is made known together with salvation, in which they share already from eternity; to the others, the church as institute merely declares judgment.

1.3 Three Key Questions

To distinguish is to learn. In the discussion of the doctrine of immediate regeneration it is of highest importance to take this seriously to heart. To neglect this entangles one in various difficulties and brings others into confusion, rather than clarifying their insight.

In connection with this doctrine, three questions need to be kept distinct.

First, in what manner does the Holy Spirit work within the human heart? Does He remain outside at a distance, and does He work in the human heart merely along those ordinary pathways to which we are bound in our interaction with other people, along the paths of understanding and volition, by word and example? Or does the Holy Spirit descend into the human heart such that nothing stands between Him and the inner being of the human person, and does He work within a person directly and irresistibly?

From this first question a second is to be distinguished. If the latter is the case, namely, if the Holy Spirit is present within a person immediately and performs His work directly, does not this direct operation exclude the use of means? If the operation of the Holy Spirit within the

heart is immediate, does that not entail the claim that the use of means is superfluous, unprofitable, yes, even mistaken and detrimental?

Finally, a third question arises: If the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart does not make the use of means superfluous or detrimental, how must we conceive of the connection that exists between the immediate operation of the Spirit and the function of the means?

The answer to the first question draws the boundary between those who confess sovereign grace and those who defend free will. The answer to the second question distinguishes those who maintain the power of the means of grace, from all so-called enthusiasts who consider the means of grace superfluous or denigrate them to empty signs. And the answer to the third question distinguishes between the Reformed on the one hand, and on the other hand the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and others who restrict grace to, and confine it within, the means of Word or sacrament. The combination of the threefold answer assures the confessors of the Reformed religion a unique, distinct place among the churches of Christendom.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ed. note: Bavinck takes up and answers the first question in chapters 2 and 3 (pages 13–29); the second question in chapters 4–12 (pages 33–128); and the last question in chapters 13–16 (pages 131–167).